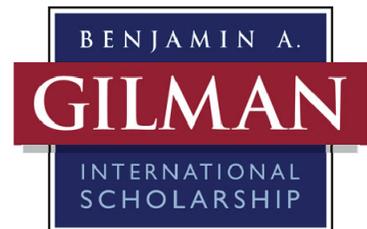


RAINA BROOKS, SOUTH AFRICA, 2009

Agnes Scott College
Georgia



Studying abroad in Cape Town was an absolutely amazing experience! Ever since high school, I knew that I wanted to study abroad. I was unaware of the fact that Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) majors generally did not study abroad, until I was bombarded with that reality during a study session with some fellow STEM majors. They assured me that unless I changed my major, I would not study abroad. After hearing this, I became even more determined to make it happen.

My wonderful study abroad advisor helped me find the time to study abroad and also introduced the Gilman International Scholarship to me. I am so happy she did! With the

Gilman Scholarship, I was able to study abroad without having to think about the financial burden my family and I would incur and was able to fully enjoy my time abroad.

While abroad, my priority was to become immersed in the culture. Doing a home-stay allowed me to get a closer look into the life of South Africans. I enjoyed many South African dishes and also explored parts of Cape Town that I would otherwise not have. I volunteered as a mentor to four bright, tenth grade girls at a high achieving math and science high school. I also volunteered as a tutor to several girls at the Ark City of Refuge, which services unemployed and homeless women and children. Lastly, I joined a religious organization, which soon became my great big family. I still keep in contact with people from my church and with the girls I mentored. They are all in university now and I could not be more proud! These opportunities allowed me to get a glimpse into the South African culture and allowed me to feel as if I was South African. These enriching experiences were hands-down what made my study abroad experience life changing.

While abroad, I realized that although working is important, it is equally as

important to enjoy life. I also realized how much I enjoy volunteering and helping others. I have become an avid volunteer since returning home! In Atlanta, I served as an After-School Volunteer and later as a Family Literacy Volunteer at an organization called Refugee Family Services. I will soon begin volunteering as an ESL Conversation Partner with an organization called World Relief in North Carolina.

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In addition to changes in my personal life, my career and academic goals have also changed. After graduating, I worked in clinical research at Emory University for almost two years. I am currently working as a Student Services Contractor at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. I decided to pursue a MPH in Epidemiology, which will equip me with skills that I can use in the U.S. as well as abroad.

FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I shared my experience publicly at Agnes Scott College’s “Black Student Perspectives,” of which I had the honor of serving as both a panelist and the host. I shared what life was like as a STEM major, black woman, and volunteer in South Africa. I also

talked about my home-stay experience, involvement in organizations and the importance of cultural immersion. I mentioned that with help from the Gilman International Scholarship, I actually took out less money in loans than I had in all my years of studying at

Agnes Scott. The event was a success! I spoke to several students who stated that they were inspired and were strongly considering studying abroad after attending.