

MERITA BUSHI, INDIA, 2012

Macalester College
Illinois

BENJAMIN A.

GILMAN

INTERNATIONAL
SCHOLARSHIP



I had the fortunate opportunity of spending the fall semester of my junior year studying in Pune, India with the support of a Gilman Scholarship. I spent the semester taking courses that strengthened my academic focus. Activities such as going on field trips to view environmental and public health initiatives in action while understanding film analysis and memorizing dance routines challenged me in numerous ways. I was able to continue my cultural immersion outside of the classroom with a home stay arrangement.

The final component that made my semester unique and rewarding was an internship that aligned perfectly with my interests in the rural-urban divide, public health, non-profit operations, and geography. I worked with a rural health center right outside of Pune and gathered spatial information to include in their health and demographic surveillance system and mapped the data for further analysis. Along the way, I learned about non-profit operations and the international networks that were forming to enable this to work.

Academically, this strengthened my desire to pursue a future in public health, specifically using geographic information systems. My experiences in India also led me to think critically about what it meant to live and work abroad and fundamentally changed the lens through which I viewed the world. I learned that what we see and how we interpret it is entirely based on our perspectives and so it is

important to be aware of our biases. This is a lesson I knew before going abroad but did not fully understand or internalize until my time in India.

“As a Gilman Scholarship Recipient, I was able focus and enjoy my studies abroad without having to think about the financial burden my family and I would incur.”

My time abroad also gave me a new understanding of what is required to gain cultural competence. Professionally, I believe the lessons I have taken from India will translate well with my future endeavors. Upon graduation, I hope to return to school and pursue a Master in Public Health in order to work with a community-based organization that is intentional about delivering health care in a culturally competent way.

FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

When proposing my project, my goal was to solve a present problem I saw forming on my campus, the lack of discussion about the socioeconomic diversity of students. I realized that this issue often times resulted in false perceptions as

students did not think a semester abroad was possible. To address this lack of information, my project focused on giving presentations and targeted information as well as creating spaces where this conversation could take place on campus.

Through these discussions, I was empowering these students to believe that their study abroad aspirations were attainable despite their socio-economic status.