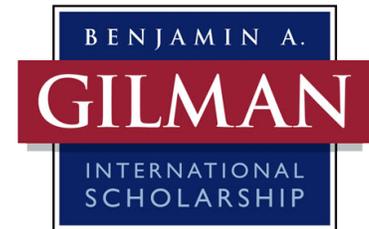


## ERICA SWALLOW, CHINA, 2006

New York University  
New York



**P**rior to my study abroad experience as a Gilman Scholar in China, I had never visited another country outside of the United States. While I was eager to travel, my family wasn't economically able to support my aspirations to visit new places and learn about the world through travel. However, the Gilman Scholarship broadened my horizons and changed the course of my life dramatically. Without it, I would not have made my first trek abroad and certainly would not be the woman I am today.

As a Gilman Critical Need Language Award recipient, I also had the

opportunity to study Mandarin, which I continued studying for an additional three semesters after returning home. Many undergraduate business majors think that studying abroad, especially in a country with drastically different business practices, will throw off their coursework. I decided to challenge this school of thought by double majoring in International Business and Marketing, while also tacking on enough China-related courses to nearly fulfill two minors in East Asian Studies. I helped my peers see that it is not only possible to study abroad as a Business major, but it is also a huge asset to have diverse international and cultural experiences, no matter where you are working.

Studying Mandarin gave me deep insight into Chinese culture, which has continued to fascinate me, prompting me to return to China for a number of programs, including IMUSE (Initiating Mutual Understanding through Student Exchange) – a collaboration between

Harvard University, Peking University, and Tsinghua University students – and FACES, the Forum for American/Chinese Exchange at Stanford.

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The Gilman Scholarship has changed me as a person. Since studying abroad, I have visited 14 countries, spoken internationally in a handful of countries as a digital media expert, and built my career around the flexibility and ability to work from nearly anywhere. I can experience the joy of learning and growing from anywhere in the world.

### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I helped organize a fashion show for charity, in which all of the proceeds were donated to China Care, an organization that helps disabled Chinese orphans receive life-saving surgeries.

At the benefit fashion show, I spoke to the audience about my time abroad and how it transformed my life. I shared my story as a Gilman

Scholar who had been empowered for the first time to study abroad as a direct result of the scholarship.

My project encompassed forging a relationship with the Chinese Mei Society, which hosts an annual fashion and talent show, and recruiting volunteers to dedicate their time and efforts towards the show. In the end, we raised enough money to help an infant receive a

cleft palate surgery. The project inspired me to continue my work with China Care NYU for the duration of my time at school, of which, my chapter saved the lives of six children. It is amazing how studying abroad broadens the mind and inspires the soul to do world-changing things.