

COURTNEY “NIKALA” WYATT, FRANCE, 2013

University of Houston
Texas

BENJAMIN A.

GILMAN

INTERNATIONAL
SCHOLARSHIP



Thanks to the Gilman International Scholarship Program, I was able to advance my French language skills while studying at the Université Catholique de l'Ouest in Angers, France. Angers was the most beautiful city that I had ever seen. When we arrived, I was taken aback by the antiquated architecture surrounded by verdant forests, lakes, and rivers. Roses and cherry trees lined the residential street leading up to my host family's home. This was a sharp contradiction to my home in Third Ward, Houston (a historically underprivileged area). I was relieved at how peaceful it all was and inspired as to how my future life could be. All of this before I even stepped foot inside of a classroom.

My biggest challenge in Angers was

that my host family did not speak English. Although my professor told us this beforehand, it did not sink in until I was there. To my surprise, I quickly adapted to my French speaking home with the help of a dictionary! Before arriving in Angers, I did not understand how to put the words I learned together into a conversation. I was accustomed to studying based on each upcoming test. Within my first week in Angers, I was asking for directions, discussing politics, and making local friends. We spent six to eight hours a day in class. Our professors required that we asked questions in French, which was challenging, but they made it fun by incorporating games, storytelling, and music videos.

As a component of our coursework, we also traveled on group excursions. We visited and learned about the history of Monastery St. Michel, the castles of the Loire Valley, the Troglodyte caves in Anjou, and the graves of U.S. soldiers who died at Normandy. I had only heard about the battle of Normandy, but here I saw thousands of white crosses, each cross representing a grave, stretched as far as my eyes could see. My heart was heavy for the young men who

died and I was inspired by their bravery. After five weeks of enriching cultural and academic experiences, I left Angers by bus for Paris to explore France some more before retuning home. In my short time abroad, I completed my foreign language requirement and was one giant step closer to graduation.

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Studying abroad was the most diverse and amazing period of my life and I am so thankful for the Gilman International Scholarship for empowering me to experience it. After I graduate, I will embark on a new adventure with my young son, whom I home school, to the Francophone country of Cameroon for a two year English teaching position at a boarding school.

FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project, I held a Study Abroad Fair at the SHAPE Community Center for high school and college students. It included the SHAPE Community Center, the University of Houston African American Studies Program, and the University of Houston Office of International Studies and Programs. Each organization helped me to promote the fair through flyers and

e-mails. Between 50 and 60 students attended the Study Abroad Fair. I presented by explaining my personal story and sharing my experiences abroad with the students. The short term goal of the fair was to inspire underrepresented students to apply to an international study program. Through questionnaires, students responded remarking that this presentation enabled them to be

more likely to study abroad, and they would share this information with other students. Since it has been demonstrated that students who study abroad are more likely to graduate, I feel confident that these students will matriculate to college, study abroad and continue to achieve.