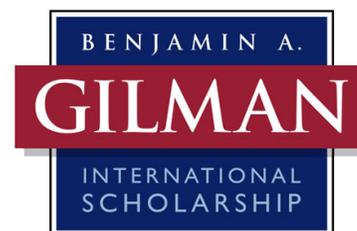


## SILVINA DI PIETRO, PERU, 2011

Florida International University  
Florida



**T**raditional study abroad programs involve immersion in language or art studies, but Florida International University's Honors Amazon Program was an exception. I chose this alternative study abroad program because it emphasized two components: service and research (also known as research service learning, RSL). As a future scientist, this program encouraged me to develop my own research project in a unique environment: the largest tropical rainforest in the world!

During my studies abroad, I spent four weeks in the city of Iquitos, Peru working with the Madre Selva biological station on the Orosa

River. This station is located in the heart of the Amazon, the homeland of the Yagua tribe and several mestizo communities. This was definitely not your typical classroom setting, and that is exactly why this study abroad program was so exclusive. I was able to experience the incredible biodiversity first-hand. My project involved examining the quality of water available to residents of these communities while working side by side with members of the tribe. Specifically, conducting interviews with tribe members regarding how they treat their water supply. These interactions proved to be invaluable as I gained knowledge I would not have been able to gather otherwise.

Although my focus was more scientific-research based, visiting and interacting with the different indigenous communities was another way my program was very unique. Such communities are not found in the U.S., which made me appreciate their culture even more through observing how they lived. Despite the scarcity of material

things, they were content, their big hearts and genuine smiles humbled me and made me grateful for the work I was doing.

*"I would not have been able to participate in this unique opportunity without the Gilman program. My experience abroad confirmed my path as a scientist while broadening my horizons."*

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### FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

As a member of my university's Honors College, I wanted to work closely with my fellow classmates. Since Florida International University's Honors College encourages its students to attend *Honors Hours*, informative 75-minute talks, I decided to give a

presentation promoting study abroad amongst students similar academic interests. With photos, a PowerPoint presentation, and my rainforest rain boots on my feet, I talked about my experience. I also encouraged students to study abroad and ended my presentation

with a Q&A session. I wanted my audience to realize that even under financial constraints it is possible to enhance a higher education degree through studying abroad and to seek out such opportunities as the Gilman Scholarship.