

FREDERICO ARMANDO, CHINA, 2012

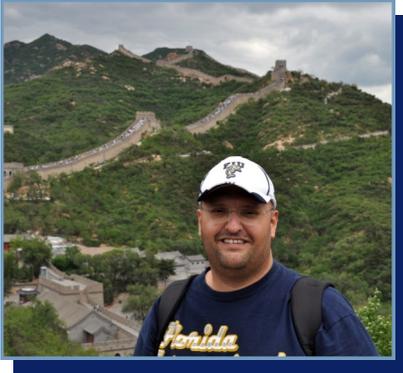
Florida International University

Florida

BENJAMIN A.

GILMAN

INTERNATIONAL
SCHOLARSHIP



I used my Gilman Scholarship award to go to China through the Florida International University's Study Abroad program. My goal was to improve my Mandarin Chinese in order to better my academic performance and increase my chances of being accepted into a good master's program. I was surprised with how much I learned during my study abroad experience.

Aside from the enhanced language skills I acquired, I returned home with an understanding of Chinese culture that I could have never obtained had I not spent this time in China. The experience of not just visiting such a different and ancient country, but actually studying there was life-changing.

Studying abroad in China gave me a better understanding of how the

Chinese citizens live their lives and how they see the west and especially the U.S. My time studying abroad in China made me realize how life in other countries can be more challenging than the comparatively comfortable life we have in the United States. It taught me things about the world and about myself that I had not expected to learn.

This was an amazing experience. It not only forced me to use the language skills I had learned in a real-world setting and adapt to culturally challenging situations, but also put me in a situation where I was a minority... the outsider. Prior to my experience in China, I have lived my whole life as part of an ethnic majority. Although I was raised to be tolerant and to be aware of and sensitive to the challenges faced by other people, I was never the minority. In China I was treated very well, but the fact that I was the outsider, different from those around me, was inescapable. This experience was both humbling and educating at the same time.

My study abroad experience has had a tremendous effect on me, both at an academic level as well as a personal level. The experience of studying Mandarin in China and

traveling to cities such as Shanghai and Beijing has made an indelible mark in my life. I have learned to be even more culturally adaptable, improved my language skills, learned about another culture by actually living it, and I have made great new friends on the other side of the world.

My study abroad experience has cemented my desire to work for the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer. Ever since I returned from China, I have pursued this goal even more relentlessly and am now applying for fellowships for master's programs in Asian Studies. Receiving the Gilman Scholarship has made all that possible, and helped me attain things that previously were only a dream.

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FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

My Follow-on Service Project was a blog that described my experience as an American student in China. My goal was to demystify the study abroad experience and encourage other students at Florida International University to take advantage of the study abroad

opportunities offered by our university. The blog included my experiences studying at Zhejiang University as well as my travels in China.

Additionally, I participated in my university's Study Abroad Fair

representing the China Language and Culture Program and was one of the panelists in a Study Abroad Alumni Panel. I also gave two presentations to the Florida International University Chinese Club about my study abroad experience to students of all levels.