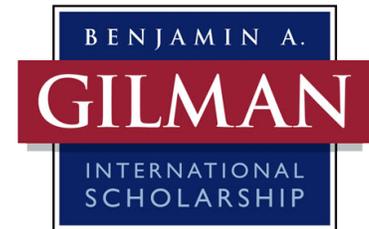


CHLOE FLEMING, ECUADOR, 2012

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My study abroad experience in the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador, South America, helped to shape me as an individual both intellectually and personally. Studying abroad was not a vacation, as many people tend to think, it challenged me each day, whether physically, academically, or emotionally.

Studying abroad is a taxing but rewarding experience. Although I was excited for my journey, moving to a new country, new family, new culture and new language was overwhelming especially with the addition of a new academic setting. After arriving in the Galapagos and getting settled into my new environment I realized the fruitlessness of my worries prior to departure.

Academically, studying abroad was a healthy way to challenge myself. The course material was new to me, and

the way in which I was taught differed from traditional U.S. methods. In the Galapagos, classes were two weeks long creating a compact and intense learning environment. There were days when we learned new course material in the morning, studied it in the field that afternoon, and were tested on it that evening. This was different from any other learning experience I had previously encountered and it required adjustment. I have grown as an academic and also as a person, as these new skills will surely carry over into other spheres of my life.

"I was lucky to have the opportunity to hold an internship with Galapagos National Park in wetlands restoration, and this invaluable experience only enhanced my career related experience."

With a large quantity of endemic species and a high degree of species richness, my time in the Galapagos included free diving with manta rays, sea lions, sea turtles, penguins, sting rays, and many tropical and South American fish. I lived with a host

family on an isolated island in a village of three thousand people. It was challenging at times because my family only spoke Spanish but my language skills grew better each week and by the end of my three months abroad I could speak almost fluently with my family.

By studying abroad in the Galapagos Islands my commitment to my career goals increased. For the past five years I have not been interested in conducting research and this lack of desire in research is part of why I decided to major in Marine Affairs, with an interest in marine management, policy, and law, instead of Marine Biology. Being exposed to field research in the Galapagos helped to solidify and justify my decision to gravitate away from research and towards the field of marine management and policy.

I was lucky to have the opportunity to hold an internship with Galapagos National Park in wetlands restoration, and this invaluable experience only enhanced my career related experience. This strengthened my career goals and encouraged me to continue my plan to obtain my Master of Professional Science in Coastal Zone Management upon my graduation.

FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT

For my Follow-on Service Project I applied to be a Global Ambassador on my campus. Global Ambassadors not only aid all students considering going abroad, but also work directly with the Study Abroad Office in organizing events and activities.

I have worked one study abroad fair, one open house for transfer students and incoming freshmen, and many tabling events that inform students of the possibilities of studying abroad.

Through the study abroad office and the Marine Science Peer Mentor

Program, I have worked with the university's science departments to inform freshmen sciences students about the importance of planning for study abroad early in one's college career. I have been pleased to see an increased number of study abroad applications from science students.