



Gilman Alumni Interview Transcript – Jovonte Santos

Hi, how are you doing, my name is Jovonte Santos, I am originally from Mississippi. I went to my undergraduate studies at Alcorn State University, and I was blessed with the opportunity to study abroad in Oman, in the Middle East. The reason why I wanted to study abroad was definitely to get out outside of my context. Again, I am originally from Mississippi, and it can at times be closed, it can at times lack diversity, and what way ca I learn more not just about myself, but about the global world that is around me.

Now, I started my days going to school. My mother, I called her mama Fazouzi, she would make breakfast for me. Something that was different for her, that I am not used to, is that I am used to cereal and milk being cold, and so she would warm the milk so I actually had hot milk in my cereal. Then, I would board the bus and go to class, and there I would study in Arabic. Also after that we would have lectures, and then we would get on the bus and go home, and during that time it was actually Ramadan, so I was actually fasting with my family. We fasted, and once the sun set we actually had a huge meal, and a plethora of things to eat.

Some highlight that I could pull from my experience was just the first interaction that I had with my home stay family. The simple fact that I think there was 10 of us in total, and they were looking for me, they called me their son at the time and they were surprised to see me. They were surprised to see in essence how I looked, I looked different from all the other applicants in my program, I was the only African-American male there. For them it set a connection, you know my family is from Zanzibar, and it is just amazing that as soon as I connected with them they said this is my son. I looked at my father and I said, well I am ready to go home. From there, that really just set up a lifelong connection that I still have today.

The follow on project is a series of activities and or any creative way that the student is supposed to once they study abroad, they need to come back and to expose their experience to the community. So for me, again it was amazing to go back from the Middle East, and to go back to Mississippi, and to let my university know, and my family know where in the world did I go. Everybody was like where did he go, what part of the Middle East, they did not exactly know. So how I was able to do that, I did projects on campus, I did a couple of presentations, actually part of my project was to go to my local church and they allowed me to do a presentation about Islam. That was, for me it was challenging, for them it was eye-opening, and exposing, and just to say that we may live in this small dot but there is such a larger

broader world outside of ourselves. I guess the issue more so is being familiar with what is around you. Currently, actually the Gilman was such a blessing that it really defined where I would go educationally. Right now I am studying conflict resolution and mediation. I had a huge conflict where I stay on my Christian values, and my Islamic family, they stood on their views, but yet we still had to learn how we could find a middle ground.

If I could give anyone advice the main thing would be is to apply, apply, apply. Sometimes, we at times, whether we are going for a job offer, or graduate school, whatever it could be in our lives, we find that we can be our worst enemy. I would want students, hopefully if they get encouragement from their family, their administrators, their professors, if not then continue on and apply. In my situation, at times as students we can procrastinate a lot, but really get through those essays, have peers read them, have family members read them, your university will support you. Just really continue on with the process because it is just amazing to see that you can turn in your application, you don't know if you are going to get it, and then you get accepted, and it literally can define your world and open that world up to you. So my biggest charge would be for students to continue with their application, definitely apply, and go abroad to expand who you are.