

# Executive Summary



## Evaluation and Program Overview

Since 2001, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) has administered the Congressionally-mandated Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program (Gilman Scholarship, Scholarship) to offer grants for U.S. citizen, undergraduate students of limited financial means to participate in study and internship programs abroad.

Gilman Scholarships are intended to help prepare these students to assume significant roles in an increasingly global economy and interdependent world. In 2013, ECA commissioned an evaluation by Research Solutions International, LLC to investigate whether the program's goals were being met. The evaluation studied the medium- and longer-term outcomes for recipients of the Gilman Scholarship between the years 2003 and 2010, and also considered the impacts of the scholarship on U.S. higher education institutions, and on the family and communities of scholarship recipients. According to the data collected, representation of minorities among Gilman Scholarship recipients well exceeds that of the U.S. study abroad population as a whole. Participation in the Gilman Program from African-American, Latino and Asian communities is two to three times greater than their participation in U.S. study abroad overall. Just under half of Gilman Scholars (Scholars) in the cohort examined were part of the first generation in their families to enroll in higher education.

The Evaluation data shows that the Gilman Scholarship is diversifying the kinds of students who study and intern abroad and the countries and regions where they go by offering awards to U.S. undergraduates who might otherwise not participate due to financial constraints. From changed perspectives on the world and new interests in working on global issues to focusing academic pursuits on international topics and deepening foreign language skills, the Gilman Scholarship has enabled students of limited financial means to develop the knowledge and competencies required to compete in a global economy. The evaluation also uncovered many ways in which the Gilman Scholarship experience influences Scholars' professional paths.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **SHIFTS AND EXPANSION IN PERSPECTIVES**

- Two-thirds of Gilman Scholar survey respondents (66 percent) found opportunities to serve as a bridge between Americans and people from different countries and cultures when they returned to the United States.
- While more than half of the survey respondents (52 percent) said they had had concerns about living in a foreign culture prior to participation in the program, after the Gilman Scholarship, seventy-nine percent of survey respondents continued to follow media coverage on the country or geopolitical region where they studied and nearly three quarters (74 percent) kept up an active interest in the culture of the country where they studied.

### **SHIFTS AND EXPANSION IN ACADEMIC CHOICES**

- Of the 1,441 survey respondents who returned to undergraduate studies after their Gilman Scholarship, 87 percent (1,253) reported taking a greater interest in international or cross-cultural topics, and more than one-third indicated that they had chosen an academic major or minor field of concentration with an international or cross-cultural focus.
- Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents studied a foreign language while on their academic study program overseas. Among Scholars who had studied a language while abroad, more than three-fourths (82 percent) sought opportunities to speak the language they had studied when they returned home.
- Of the 819 survey respondents who were attending or already completed graduate or professional school at the time of the evaluation, almost half (48 percent) had chosen a concentration with an international or cross-cultural focus, and more than one-third (36 percent) had studied abroad again or pursued international field research.
- Eighty-three percent of survey respondents indicated that the Gilman Scholarship had enabled them to undertake academic activities overseas that they could not have taken at their home institutions.

### **SHIFTS AND EXPANSION IN PROFESSIONAL CHOICES**

- Eighty-three percent of survey respondents found jobs where they could interact with people from different backgrounds or nationalities, and more than half (54 percent) reported working in a field that includes an international or cross-cultural component.
- Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of survey respondents reported that the Gilman Scholarship experience caused them to broaden the geographic range of locations where they were willing to work in the future.

### **EFFECTS ON U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION**

- One-third of university representatives interviewed, across all types of institutions, credited the Gilman Scholarship directly for changes in their school's study abroad program offerings and for contributing to their internationalization efforts. Many stated

that the Gilman Scholarship had allowed them to expand their study abroad programs to more diverse, non-traditional locations, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

- Several study abroad representatives, primarily at minority-serving institutions, reported using the Gilman Scholarship parameters as a model for revising their study abroad programs. Other effects included adaptation of campus study abroad programs to meet Gilman Scholarship parameters, attracting new sources of funding for study abroad in general, expanding course offerings to help students prepare for a wider array of study abroad opportunities, and promoting professional development of study abroad professionals.

## **Gilman Scholars on the Program's Impact on their Academic and Career Goals**

### *Former Gilman Scholars:*

- *My current employer told me that my international experience and the internship I held while abroad was a deciding factor in my getting hired. —Scholar, 2010*
- *I am a Naval officer and always focus on problems with global implications. I was able to get a job in this field largely because of my study abroad. —Scholar, 2007*
- *For the first time in my higher education experience, it allowed me to focus completely on my academics and study abroad experience instead of worrying about [how] to pay for school. It provided me with a stress-free environment to fully embrace the study abroad experience. —Scholar, 2008*
- *[The Gilman Scholarship experience was] crucial and definitely a pivotal [point] for me... the first big step in figuring out how I wanted to contribute to the world. —Scholar, 2005*
- *I have committed my life to helping U.S. citizens gain greater self-reliance so that we can be positive contributors to globally shared resources.... —Scholar, 2008*
- *(Now) when there is a problem of international concern, I try to think about it from a comprehensive point of view knowing that the current state of a country, an event, or a conflict is probably the result of years and years of different decisions and events.... —Scholar, 2010*

### *University Administrators on the Gilman Scholarships:*

- *They've really had to fight hard to get where they are (just to pursue higher education). [The Gilman Scholarship] makes something that seemed like an out-of-reach dream become a reality for them.*
- *[The Gilman Scholarship] allows some of our highest need students to think about their [undergraduate] academic experience, their international experience in the same way as other students do.*

## EVALUATION DESIGN

In designing this evaluation, the research team focused their inquiry on whether the Gilman Scholarship addressed Department of State priorities, including increasing opportunities for students of limited financial means, improving Americans' understanding of other countries, increasing U.S. global economic competitiveness, and supporting the internationalization of U.S. institutions of higher education.

In order to assess medium and longer-term outcomes, the evaluation focused on collecting information from Gilman Scholars who had studied abroad from the 2002-03 to 2009-10 academic years.

This evaluation gathered data from former Gilman Scholars and representatives from colleges and universities. Data was also gathered from Scholars' family or friends. In all, the research team electronically surveyed 1,591 Scholars, conducted 17 focus groups with Scholars in six cities, conducted phone interviews with 25 Scholars individually, and interviewed representatives at 42 colleges. Thirty family or friends of Gilman Scholars were also interviewed.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### *Gilman Scholars: Under-represented in Study Abroad*

The Gilman Scholarship aims to support students who have been traditionally under-represented in academic study abroad programs. The results from this evaluation confirm that the Scholarship successfully targeted students in this population and provided additional insight into how the program assists them in overcoming challenges to pursuing international opportunities.

**Financial Obstacles:** More than three-fourths of survey respondents (79 percent) reported that financial considerations were a significant challenge in studying abroad. This included both the cost of travel and lost income from leaving a position of employment.

**Not the “Typical” Study Abroad Student:** In focus groups and interviews, Scholars spoke about seeing themselves differently from “typical” study abroad participants, primarily by virtue of their lower socioeconomic status (SES). Other self-identified characteristics distinguishing them from usual study abroad students included race/ethnicity, older age, having a physical disability, and being a parent. Forty-four percent of survey respondents indicated they were part of the first generation in their families to attend college.

**New Academic Opportunities Overseas:** In addition to giving recipients access to other countries and cultures, Gilman Scholarships also supported their enrollment in a variety of academic study abroad programs, providing experience with different academic structures, students, activities, academic topics and extracurricular experiences than their home institutions. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents indicated that the Gilman Scholarship had enabled them to undertake academic activities overseas that they could not have taken at their home institutions.

## *Shifts in Perspectives*

The evaluation results indicate that the Gilman Scholarship supported Scholars in expanding their knowledge of other peoples, cultures and perspectives.

**Shifts in Worldview and Perspective:** More than half of the survey respondents (52 percent) said they had concerns about living in a foreign culture prior to their study abroad experience. After coming home, the majority (74 percent) kept up an active interest in the culture of the country where they studied. Seventy-nine percent followed media coverage on the country or geopolitical region where they studied. In focus groups, Scholars said that the Gilman Scholarship provided an opportunity for them to develop an analytic framework through which to observe the world and scrutinize information about it.

**International Engagement:** After returning home from studying abroad, Scholars sustained their international engagement through a wide range of activities. Eighty-four percent reported maintaining relationships with people from the country where they studied. Seventy-four percent remained actively interested in the culture of the host country. Two-thirds of survey respondents found opportunities to serve as a bridge between Americans and people from different countries and cultures when they returned to the United States.

In addition to influencing their peers at school, some Gilman Scholars targeted their educational efforts on their communities back home, taking the time to share their experiences with people who have less access to international opportunities.

**Gaining a Greater Understanding of and Representing American Diversity:** In focus group discussions, several Scholars also described the study abroad experience as clarifying their own American identity, and discussed how this understanding influenced their role as American ambassadors. Scholars who were children of immigrants, raised in the United States but identified with their parents' cultural heritage, found themselves representing American diversity in other countries.

**Expanding Disciplines and Degrees of Study:** The Gilman Scholarship influenced Scholars' choices to pursue study of international topics that they might not have previously considered. In some cases, the Scholarship catalyzed a desire to pursue graduate studies or professional degrees.

**Enhancing Interest in International Study:** Of the 1,441 survey respondents who returned to undergraduate studies after their Gilman Scholarship, over 1,250 reported taking a greater interest in international or cross-cultural topics, and more than one-third indicated that they had chosen an academic major or minor field of concentration with an international or cross-cultural focus.

**A Decisive Factor in Graduate/Professional Study:** Scholars who went on to pursue graduate studies or professional degrees described the Gilman Scholarship experience as a decisive factor in their choice of what to study.

Of the 819 survey respondents who were attending or already completed graduate or professional school at the time of the evaluation, almost half (48 percent) had chosen a concentration with an international or cross-cultural focus, and more than one-third (36 percent) had studied abroad again or pursued international field research. Almost one-third (31 percent) had written or were writing a thesis/dissertation on an international or cross-cultural topic.

**Fellowships, Scholarships, and Certificates:** Thirty percent of all survey respondents reported having pursued educational activities inspired by their Gilman Scholarship experience. Of these, 34 percent received fellowships or scholarships—the largest portion of that group going abroad again as Fulbright Students (14 percent). Twenty-three percent reported having pursued professional certificates, including Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

**Enabling Graduate Study:** In addition to influencing their academic choices, some Scholars believed that the Gilman Scholarship was the reason they were accepted to graduate school. Whether through the coursework or the international experience—or both—the Gilman Scholarship provided them with the qualifications to make them competitive and better prepared graduate students.

### *Foreign Language Study*

Foreign language skills are critical to improving Americans' understanding of other countries and increasing U.S. global economic competitiveness. Language learning gives young Americans tools that will allow them to better engage with foreign counterparts in international settings. The Gilman Scholarship affords recipients the opportunity to pursue language study while abroad. However, in some cases where foreign language study was not the focus of the international experience, Scholars returned home and participated in language study that was inspired by their time in a foreign country.

**Foreign Language Learning Overseas:** Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents studied a foreign language while on their academic study program overseas. They studied a diverse group of languages, with forty-three percent studying romance languages and twenty-eight percent studying Asian languages.

**Foreign Language Study after Returning Home:** Scholars were asked if they had undertaken specific language-related activities during the period of time that they were undergraduates or graduate or professional school students. A majority of the undergraduates (64 percent) had either continued or started taking language courses. More than a quarter of graduate/professional students (29 percent) had taken more foreign language courses. Among Scholars who had studied a foreign language while abroad, more than three-fourths (82 percent) sought opportunities to speak the language they had studied when they returned home.

### *Expanded Professional Choices*

The Scholarship enabled U.S. undergraduates with limited financial resources to develop competencies required to compete in a global economy, helped focus their academic pursuits on



international topics, and encouraged recipients to deepen their foreign language skills. In this section we will see how the Gilman Scholarship experience influences Scholars' professional paths.

**Gilman Scholars' Professional Visions:** Scholars found that the experience of studying abroad gave them a new perspective on their career possibilities. For example, almost three-quarters (73 percent) of survey respondents reported that the international experience afforded by the Gilman Scholarship caused them to broaden the geographic range of locations where they might work in the future. Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents reported wanting to work in a cross-cultural or international field. In addition, more than half (59 percent) reported having applied for positions at companies that included an international or cross-cultural focus. For nearly half of the survey respondents (48 percent), the Gilman Scholarship experience clarified their professional direction. In some cases, Scholars were introduced to new academic fields, for example, various science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, which became their professional focus.

**Seeking Diversity in the Workplace:** As a result of their Gilman Scholarship experience, most survey respondents (83 percent) found jobs where they could interact with people from different backgrounds or nationalities, and more than half (54 percent) reported working in a field that includes an international or cross-cultural component. In addition, 47 percent of survey respondents said they had sought out a company or organization with a diverse workforce. In focus groups, some Scholars elaborated on this preference and its connection to their Gilman Scholarship experience. Further, nearly half (45 percent) reported working in an environment where they could use a foreign language. Many reported that the Gilman Scholarship had allowed them to acquire the language skills necessary for specific positions. Almost one-third of Gilman Scholars (30 percent) reported taking a position where they could travel internationally.

### *Effects on Scholars' Family and Friends*

Survey responses from Scholars revealed that they are sharing their international experience with family and friends. Interviews with family and friends provided evidence of how they are being changed by their Scholars' experiences.

**How Scholars Shared Their Experience:** The most frequently reported activity (over 80 percent) was offering a first-hand perspective on a country or an international issue; notable numbers of Scholars encouraged their family and friends to directly participate in cross-cultural activities.

**Changes in Family and Community Members:** Virtually all interviewed family and community members believed that Scholars' experiences had affected them in varying degrees. Some family members responded to their Scholar's desire to discuss international topics by developing more of an interest in foreign news. A few interviewees who had only traveled domestically in the United States reported a new eagerness to go to another country. Community members testified to the educational opportunities offered by Gilman Scholars.

A small number of family members reported hosting international students, either because they were interested in “giving back” the kind of experience that their Scholar had while abroad, or to support their family member’s new interest in hosting foreign exchange participants.

**Influencing Family and Friends to Study Abroad or Seek other International Experiences:**

Just over half of the survey respondents (53 percent) reported influencing someone else to study abroad or participate in an international exchange. Of those survey respondents, 40 percent said they influenced friends, 34 percent said they had influenced fellow students, and 27 percent had influenced either a sibling or other family member.

Other family members, especially siblings, observed the example set by Gilman Scholars and became motivated to undertake study abroad themselves or to pursue other international opportunities.

**Encouraging Family and Friends to Apply for Gilman Scholarships:** In focus groups and interviews, some Scholars—especially those who identified themselves as atypical study abroad students—recognized that study abroad is a less obvious option for their peers and felt a particular responsibility to encourage others similar to themselves.

*Effects on U.S. Higher Education*

The Department of State also seeks to support the internationalization of American colleges and universities through the Gilman Scholarship and other educational exchanges and related programs. This evaluation probed effects of the Gilman Scholarship on higher education by speaking with university representatives at 42 colleges and universities from a wide range of school types and student populations.

**Making Study Abroad Available to a Much Broader Range of Students:** University representatives who were interviewed regarding the impact of the Gilman Scholarship on their institutions said that it had contributed to changing perceptions about the kind of student who can study abroad.

**Support for Short Term Programs and Flexible Approaches to Study Abroad for Working Adults:** For students who must work during their studies or have familial obligations year-round—including many enrolled in community colleges, in particular—spending a semester or academic year in another country is difficult or impossible. To allow more students to participate, the Gilman Scholarship has instituted offerings for summer (and now also winter) that are a minimum of four weeks in length (now two weeks for current community college students.)

According to university representatives interviewed for this evaluation, STEM majors had difficulty fitting study abroad into their schedules during the regular academic year because of the high number of courses and labs that are required to complete their degree. For some STEM majors, a shorter summer session is the only opportunity to study abroad. According to interviews with university representatives, the Gilman Scholarship Summer Program awards



made it possible for low-income STEM majors to overcome both financial and curricular obstacles.

**Changes to Study Abroad Offerings:** About one-third of university representatives, from all types of institutions, credited the Gilman Scholarship directly for changes in their school's study abroad program offerings. Many stated that the Gilman Scholarship had allowed them to expand their study abroad programs to more diverse, non-traditional locations, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

**Reorganizing Study Abroad Programs:** Several study abroad representatives, primarily at minority-serving institutions, reported using the Gilman Scholarship parameters as a model for revising their study abroad programs.

Other effects on higher education included adapting study abroad programs to meet Gilman Scholarship parameters, attracting new sources of funding for study abroad in general, expanding course offerings to help students prepare for a wider array of study abroad opportunities, and promoting professional development of study abroad professionals.

University representatives also featured Gilman Scholars prominently in study abroad information sessions, particularly as a way to educate other "less traditional" potential study abroad students about the possibilities available to them.