



 Gilman Scholarship<sup>®</sup>

## Returning From Abroad: What Next?



## Returning From Abroad: What Next?

---

Welcome home, Gilman Scholar! On behalf of the U.S. Department of State, the Institute of International Education, and the Gilman International Scholarship Program, we hope your experience abroad was beneficial to your academic, professional, and personal goals. Please explore the following resources to aid in your return to the United States and stay engaged with Gilman.

For a comprehensive list of alumni benefits and resources, please visit the [alumni section](#) of the Gilman website. In addition, stay updated on exclusive opportunities for Gilman alumni in the [alumni newsletter](#).

Gilman alumni can contact [gilmanscholars@iie.org](mailto:gilmanscholars@iie.org) with any questions or updates. We encourage you to share new jobs, career wins, and awards with the Gilman team for a potential profile or shout-out on social media!



## Table of Contents

---

Gilman Alumni Requirements.....	4
What Is Re-Entry?.....	4
Re-Entry Challenges .....	4
Overcoming Reverse Culture Shock.....	5
Re-Entry Questions for Reflection .....	5
Reflection Activities: Life After Abroad .....	6
Maintaining Language Skills.....	7
Integrating Experience Abroad into Your Career Search .....	8
Assessing New Skills and Qualities.....	8
Cover Letters .....	9
Resumes .....	11
Interviews .....	13
Gilman Alumni Community .....	13
Get Further Engaged in International Education .....	15

## Gilman Alumni Requirements

---

- Review the [Gilman Scholar Checklist](#).
- Update your contact information in the [Gilman portal](#) within one month of your return home.
- Complete the re-entry survey in your Gilman portal within one month of your return home.
- Submit your Follow-On Service Project report in your Gilman portal within six months of your return home. For more information, visit [this page](#).

## What Is Re-Entry?

---

Re-entry is an emotional and psychological stage of readjustment. Most people expect some sort of culture shock at the beginning of their study abroad or internship program, but fewer anticipate the “reverse culture shock” that often happens after returning home. Preparing for reverse culture shock can help limit its effects.

Many factors may influence readjustment to your home culture, including the length of time you were away, any previous international experience, your level of contact with friends or family back at home, and whether you enjoyed your time abroad.

You have likely changed because of your study or intern abroad experience. Although you might not notice these changes in yourself right away, your friends and family might see an increase in qualities such as confidence, independence, and resourcefulness. In the weeks and months that follow your return to the United States, recognizing and processing these changes can help you maximize the impact that your experience will have on your future.

If you kept a journal while abroad, continue writing for a month or two after you return home. Doing so can help you reflect on the challenges of re-entry and the ways that your overseas experience has affected you.

## Re-Entry Challenges

---

*Source: LaBrack, B. (2003.) What's up with culture? School of International Studies, University of the Pacific. Retrieved from <https://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>.*

For many, re-adjusting to life in the United States is more challenging than adapting to your host culture abroad. Re-entry can be especially challenging because it is often not understood by those who have not spent time overseas. Dr. Bruce LaBrack has compiled the top 10 re-entry challenges, as rated by university students. Check out the full list of the most common challenges, as well as tips for dealing with those challenges, [here](#).

Some of the most common challenges include boredom, inability to explain your experience properly, and changing relationships:

- **Boredom:** While overseas, every aspect of your day was likely new and different from your norm. Living abroad presents constant challenges and opportunities. After you return home, settling back into your old routine, while comfortable, can also seem boring compared with your life abroad. These feelings are normal and can be countered by getting more involved in your local community and finding ways to stay engaged with the community you lived in abroad.
- **You Can't Explain:** It can be difficult to convey what you felt, learned, and experienced abroad, especially to an audience without much international

travel experience, and that's okay! Encourage your audience to study, intern, or travel abroad to have these experiences for themselves. If you are finding it difficult to convey what you gained from your experience, take time to write down your thoughts to process them better. Connect with others who have studied abroad recently; share your stories with them and listen actively when they are sharing with you!

- **Relationships Have Changed:** You might find that some relationships with friends and family have changed. While you were abroad, life continued as usual for your community back in the United States. Be flexible, open, and communicative, and realize that some rebuilding of these relationships may be necessary.

## Overcoming Reverse Culture Shock

---

Reverse culture shock refers to the discomfort associated with acclimating back to your home culture. After adjusting to life in your host country, you will view the United States through a different lens. Upon your return, you may notice things about Americans and American culture that you didn't notice before you left.

Alternatively, you may have viewed the United States through rose-colored glasses while abroad (American food is better, everything is clean at home, the American way of doing this makes more sense to me, etc.). When you return to the United States, it may be shocking to find that some things do not match the impression you had of them abroad.

If you are experiencing reverse culture shock, please review the following resources for strategies and skills to overcome it:

- [How to End Your Study Abroad Experience on the Right Foot](#)
- [How to Deal with Reverse Culture Shock After Studying Abroad](#)
- [Frequent Travelers Often Experience 'Reverse Culture Shock' – Here's What That Is and How to Deal with It](#)
- [How to Fight the Post-Abroad Blues](#)
- [10 Ways to Overcome Reverse Culture Shock](#)

## Re-Entry Questions for Reflection

---

Processing the ways you have grown from your time abroad is key to successful re-entry. We encourage you to consider these questions to help you reflect and readjust:

- How have you changed during your time abroad?
- How might your friends have changed while you were away?
- How has your view of the United States changed?
- What are some of the most significant experiences that you would like to share with your friends at home?
- What has been the most challenging part of returning home? What has been the best part?
- How will you keep in touch with friends, professors, members of the community, and others that you met while abroad?
- How has your experience inspired you personally, professionally, and academically?



## Reflection Activities: Life After Abroad

Source: Loyola Marymount University. *Life After Study Abroad Activity Packet*. Retrieved from <https://academics.lmu.edu/studyabroad/returnees/lifeafterstudyabroad/>.

### Overseas Roller Coaster

Look back at your time abroad and reflect on the opportunities and challenges you encountered. On the following grid, create an overseas roller coaster. Draw a graph of the highs and lows you experienced while abroad. The x-axis represents time and the y-axis represents the highs and lows.



Then answer the following prompts with your roller coaster in mind:

- I learned something new about myself when ...
- I made my biggest cultural faux pas when ...
- I had my greatest cultural success when ...
- I had my proudest moment when ...
- I had my weakest moment when ...
- I learned a new skill when ...
- I tried a new activity when ...
- I overcame a challenge when ...

### Things I'll Miss

One way to ensure you build on the experiences you had abroad is to find connections to your host culture back home. Integrating new favorites back into your life in the United States can be enriching and can help ensure the long-lasting impact of your abroad experience. Consider the day-to-day aspects of your life abroad, including things such as shopping, friends, hobbies, foods, classes, and activities that you do every day. What will you miss from your host culture and why will you miss it? How will you maintain your connection with these things after you return home?

Things I'll Miss	Why?	Ideas to Stay Connected

## Telling Your Story

For many, living abroad is a transformational experience, but one that is difficult to describe to an audience at home. For example, how would you respond to the question, “How was Spain?” You’ll likely be asked general questions like this, and it can be frustrating when the person you’re talking to doesn’t seem to care about the answer as much as you do.

It can be helpful to brainstorm a few key stories from your time abroad. When telling your story, remember these three steps to keep it concise and relevant:

1. Think of a memorable experience from your time abroad.
2. Identify what knowledge, skill, ability, or quality you gained from that experience:
  - a. Knowledge: Mastery of facts or information in a subject matter area; examples include awareness of your host country’s cultural norms, an understanding of your academic field through a unique lens, and how to write a successful essay for a nationally competitive award
  - b. Skill: Proficiency, expertise, or competence in a subject area; examples include foreign language proficiency, research, and functioning in a multilingual office environment
  - c. Ability: Demonstrated performance of using knowledge and skills when needed
3. Connect this skill with something you are doing now or in the future.

Additional resources on communicating and expanding the value of your Gilman experience can be found [here](#).

For a list of skills, abilities, and qualities commonly gained abroad, please review the later Assessing New Skills and Qualities section.



## Maintaining Language Skills

Immersion in a language allows you to learn at a much faster rate than learning in a classroom setting. If you were studying a language abroad, it can be very challenging to keep up with your language skills after you return home. Maintaining foreign language skills will require deliberate action and hard work.

Many universities offer a low-cost option for alumni to audit one class per semester on campus. Contact your institution’s alumni office to see if your institution offers this option. If so, continuing with classroom language study can help you maintain your language skills. In addition, watching television or movies in your target language, staying in contact with people you met overseas, and bringing reading material home with you from your host country are all easy ways to keep your language skills from getting rusty.

Often, language meetup groups are available in cities across the United States. Participating in a foreign language meetup can be a great way to meet new people while practicing your language skills over a meal or a drink. You can search online for group get-togethers in your region and in your target language; [meetup.com](#) is a great place to start!

At the end of your abroad experience or immediately after returning home, take a language test to gauge your proficiency. Doing so will allow you to accurately represent your foreign language abilities in resumes, cover letters, and interviews. If you were a recipient of a Critical Need Language Award, you have access to free language testing with [ACTFL](#) – contact your [Gilman regional advisor](#) for more information.

## Integrating Experience Abroad into Your Career Search

---

We recommend using your time abroad as a linchpin for future career and academic endeavors. Complete the self-assessment on the following page to consider the skills and competencies you gained while abroad. For example, did you gain time-management skills because of your large course load or internship? Did you develop critical thinking skills and strength in handling unpredictable and unfamiliar situations through your experience abroad? Articulating transferable professional and academic skills into your career search can be challenging. However, using the following tips can help you successfully integrate your experience into your cover letters, resumes, and interviews.

Keep an eye out for workshops and seminars offered exclusively to Gilman alumni. These events offer professional development, networking opportunities, and

*“Had I not studied abroad, I wouldn’t have had that level of connection with a recruiter who would then go on to recommend me for an internship. Studying abroad allowed me to be a lot more competitive in the job market. It’s a point of differentiation between myself and my colleagues.”*

—Manessa, France 2015

hands-on learning in a variety of professional disciplines and career fields. Travel stipends are typically available for accepted alumni to attend these events. Applications to attend alumni events are announced on the [Gilman Scholarship website](#), social media channels, and in the [alumni newsletter](#).

## Assessing New Skills and Qualities

---

Source: University of Minnesota. (2014.) *Maximizing study abroad: a student’s guide to strategies for language and culture learning and use.*

Identification and application of the professional skills that you developed while abroad is a key way to leverage your international experience into a job. Complete the following self-assessment to identify the many transferable skills you gained while abroad.

To take stock of what you learned abroad and prepare yourself for job applications and interviews, remember to complete the Re-Entry Survey in your [Gilman portal](#). In addition, take a moment to revisit the goals that you set for yourself in the Goals tab of your Gilman portal.

Many study/intern abroad returnees gain the following skills and qualities while overseas. Check off the skills and qualities that you possess:

### Skills and Attributes

- Adapt to new environments
- Appreciate varying perspectives
- Approach issues with tolerance, open-mindedness, and cultural sensitivity



- Be self-reliant and function independently
- Communicate despite language barriers
- Communicate effectively (oral and written)
- Conduct research
- Manage crisis
- Develop intercultural awareness
- Function outside comfort zone
- Function with a high level of ambiguity
- Gain foreign language skills/proficiency
- Handle difficult situations diplomatically
- Identify and solve problems with limited tools
- Identify career objectives
- Lead others in formal and/or informal groups
- Manage time and resources
- Take initiative
- Understand a different culture
- Understand non-verbal cues
- Work as part of a diverse team

*“I work at CERN [European Council for Nuclear Research]. Without study abroad, I never would have thought that I would want to work internationally like this. Now I am thinking about pursuing my Ph.D. somewhere in Germany.”*

—Nick, Germany 2015

*“Critical thinking and broadening my perspective are definitely skills that I will carry forward with me from my study abroad experience.”*

—Hanusia, Madagascar 2017

### Qualities

- Assertiveness
- Cultural sensitivity/awareness
- Empathy
- Flexibility
- Independence
- Inquisitiveness
- Open-mindedness
- Perseverance
- Self-awareness
- Self-confidence
- Self-reliance
- Tolerance

Review the skills and qualities that you checked off. Did you have these skills or possess these qualities before going abroad? How did you develop each skill or quality while abroad?

### Cover Letters

Students must also be prepared to describe how their transferable skills from abroad can be applied to a potential position or field. We recommend working with your study abroad advisor or career services department to write a cover letter that highlights your experience abroad. Please review the following sample cover letter.



January 1, 2020

Name of Individual  
Title  
Company  
Company Address

**Avoid using “To Whom It May Concern.” Research to find out the appropriate person to address.**

**Show interest in the position and succinctly articulate why you are the best fit for the company/ organization. Include details about why you chose this specific company/ organization.**

Dear Dr./Mr./Mrs./Ms./Mx.:

I am writing to apply for the International Trade Analyst position with the U.S. Department of Commerce. I am uniquely qualified to excel in this position with my background in international trade, research experience in global financial markets, and knowledge of Chinese business operations. I am excited about the opportunity to contribute to the high-performing team at the Bureau of International Trade Administration within the Department of Commerce. As an alumna of the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, I also hold Non-Competitive Eligibility hiring status for federal jobs.

**Describe qualifications and skills for the position that match the job description. Cite transferable skills from abroad and use examples.**

I will be graduating from University at Buffalo this May with a degree in international trade and a minor in Chinese language. I held an internship last summer with Wells Fargo Advisors, which fostered my analytical skills and gave me an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of multinational corporations. My experience studying abroad in China provided me with a cross-cultural perspective on business and trade. Learning firsthand about the expanding Chinese market awarded me invaluable expertise in this area, and I would like to use this knowledge in my work analyzing the United States’ trade interactions with Asia. As an International Trade Analyst, I would use my enthusiasm for international relations and trade to contribute to your team.

My subject knowledge as well as my ability to adapt to changing environments will make for a smooth transition from the classroom to a government setting in the United States and abroad. In addition to my education and work experience, I have many skills that will enable me to be an excellent addition to the team. I am self-reliant and efficient at problem solving and cross-cultural communication. My internship with Wells Fargo and my academic experience in China taught me how to multitask and work independently.

I would love the opportunity to learn more about this position and am available to interview at your convenience. I can be reached at (800) 8522141. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Margot A. Broad  
gilman scholars@iie.org

**Close the letter, noting confidence in their response. Show gratitude for the consideration.**

## Resumes

---

A resume should effectively communicate why an applicant is an ideal candidate for a specific position or field. We recommend you add your transferable skills and knowledge gained from studying or interning abroad to your resume to show why you would be a valuable employee.

If your program was primarily academic, list the program details under the education section of your resume. If your program included an experiential learning component, such as an internship, work experience, or volunteer opportunity, include it in the experience section. You can also list leadership achievements, honors, and skills developed abroad under the appropriate headings.

Add your foreign language acquisition and level, as well as other skills learned abroad, to a skills section of your

resume. You can also include a statement of purpose or goal at the top of your resume to briefly summarize and preface your experiences in an “elevator speech” format. Remember to include your status as a Gilman Scholar and your Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) status!

As you are working on your resume, list your skills and experiences in a way that demonstrates how you meet the qualifications for the position. Wherever possible, use the exact language from the position description in your resume rather than rephrasing in your own words. For many jobs, the first review of applicants is a digital resume scan, so if your resume doesn’t include certain keywords from the position description, your application won’t be reviewed.

*“Through being in the Dominican Republic, I found the place where I want to work and continue my academic trajectory into graduate school. I would not have been able to come to this area of study where I’ve really found a passion for working and for research if it hadn’t been for my field experience.”*

—Kilian, Dominican Republic 2018

*“These [study abroad] experiences really gave me a leg up in returning to complete my degree in the United States, and then afterwards, directly led to my getting the job that I did after graduation. I was immediately hired into a promotion position thanks to my Japanese experience.”*

—Vee, Japan 2013



## Sample Resume Sections

### OBJECTIVE

---

Motivated and ambitious college graduate with demonstrated ability to meet deadlines and work under pressure. Seeking to leverage internship experience and cross-cultural communication skills honed in Accra, Ghana, into a position as a Social Media Manager at Example Company. As an alumna of the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, I hold Non-Competitive Eligibility hiring status for federal jobs.

### EDUCATION

---

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Coursework: Business, Finance, Marketing May-August 2020

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

---

Example Company Accra, Ghana  
Marketing Intern September-December 2019

- Formalized standard operating procedures for the marketing department, contributing to a 24% increase in sales
- Supervised a multicultural team of six volunteers
- Organized three community engagement events, which involved a total of 200 participants

### PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

---

- Intermediate High proficiency in Spanish on the [ACTFL Proficiency Scale](#)
- Cross-cultural communication, allowing for contributions to a diverse, high-performing team

### HONORS/AWARDS

---

- Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, Winner 2019
- Per Executive Order 13750, holds Non-Competitive Eligibility hiring status for federal jobs

## Interviews

---

Once you have identified transferable skills you want to highlight, you can practice answering mock interview questions by using the Situation, Task, Actions, Results (STAR) approach. Doing so will help you develop specific examples to show how your skills and experiences will translate into the professional world.

- Situation:** Describe the backstory to a challenge you have overcome.
- Task:** What was your exact role or responsibility in this situation? What was your end goal?
- Actions:** Explain your sequence of actions and your thought process for dealing with this challenge. Why did you choose this method?
- Results:** Summarize the tangible results and impact of your work and decisions. How were things better off because of your input? Use a high level of detail and concrete evidence to show the full impact of your efforts.

The following few examples of interview prompts can guide you in preparation for interviews. Answers to many of these questions can include examples from your experience abroad!

- Tell me about a time you had to adapt to a difficult situation? How did you handle this challenge?
- How has your education prepared you for this job?
- What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction?
- What is the toughest challenge you have faced? How did you overcome this challenge?
- Can you work independently and take risks? Give an example.
- Tell me about a time when you were flexible and adaptable to a rapidly changing situation.
- Describe a situation where you had to work under pressure. Were you successful?
- What motivates you to put forth your best effort? Give an example.
- Why did you decide to study or intern abroad? What did you gain from the experience?
- Tell me about a time that you worked with someone you disliked and how you managed the situation.
- Describe a time when you had to juggle multiple projects and deadlines simultaneously. How did you manage these projects?
- Give an example of a time that you contributed to an ethnically diverse team.
- Tell me about a time that you worked with someone who did not share your communication style. How did you handle this situation?

## Gilman Alumni Community

---

After your Follow-On Service Project report has been submitted and approved, you are eligible for the benefits and resources available exclusively to Gilman alumni! Check out the [alumni section](#) of the Gilman website to stay updated on opportunities for alumni.

### *NCE for Federal Employment*

Gilman alumni are eligible for 12 months of NCE, which allows American federal government agencies to hire eligible exchange program alumni outside of the formal competitive job announcement process. You can download a certificate demonstrating your NCE status from your Gilman portal, and learn more about NCE [here](#).

## Networking Opportunities

### International Exchange Alumni

All Gilman alumni are encouraged to join the [International Exchange Alumni](#) online community. International Exchange Alumni is a secure, password-protected website that offers alumni of U.S. government exchange programs an exciting opportunity to continue the exchange experience after returning home! In this online community, alumni can network and take advantage of the many features the website has to offer, including grant opportunities, job postings, alumni resumes, discussion forums, an online academic research journal database, and Live Q&A with distinguished guests.

After your program, you will receive an invitation by email to register for an account with International Exchange Alumni. If you do not receive the invitation email, contact [exchangealumni@state.gov](mailto:exchangealumni@state.gov) with the following information: first and last name (the name you used while you were a Gilman Scholar), program name (from the list of eligible exchange programs), program dates, the country you are from, the country where your exchange took place, and your Gilman Certificate of Achievement.

### Gilman Scholars and Alumni Facebook Group

In [this group](#), Gilman alumni and current Scholars can share stories, discussions, and academic and professional development opportunities with each other.

### LinkedIn

Connect with other Gilman Scholars and alumni in the [closed LinkedIn group](#). Group members and the Gilman Program often post opportunities that may be of interest to alumni.

### Recent Webinar Recordings

The Gilman Scholarship regularly hosts webinars for alumni. Click on the following links to view recordings of recent webinars:

- [Extending Your Exchange Experience: Pursuing Advanced Degrees](#)
- [Extending Your Exchange Experience with the Peace Corps](#)
- [Extending Your Exchange Experience with the State Department](#)
- [Leveraging LinkedIn: Building Your Professional Brand](#)
- [Non-Competitive Eligibility: What Is It, How to Use It](#)
- [Opportunities to Go Abroad Again: Extending Your Exchange Experience](#)

### Alumni Ambassadors

Gilman Alumni Ambassadors serve as official representatives of the Department of State's Gilman International Scholarship Program. They provide testimonials about their Gilman Scholarship experiences at campus presentations and offer application tips via written articles, videos, webinars, and special events. The Alumni Ambassador application opens every spring, and selected ambassadors travel to Washington, D.C., for a three-day training in July. For more information, please visit our [website](#).

### Alumni Newsletter

Gilman Scholars are automatically subscribed to the Gilman alumni newsletter, which is published every other month. The newsletter is a great way to find out about opportunities for alumni, including the Alumni Ambassador Program, U.S. Future Leaders Seminars, job postings, and tips on using NCE. If your email address has changed since your Gilman program or if you haven't been receiving the newsletter, you can sign up [here](#).

### ***U.S. Future Leaders Seminars***

Each year the Gilman Program hosts two types of seminars in various locations across the United States focusing on career readiness and professional development for Gilman Alumni. The U.S. Future Leaders Career Readiness seminars are one-day events focused on specific career fields. The U.S. Future Leaders Topical Seminars are two-day events focused on specific industries. The Gilman Program typically provides travel support and lodging for accepted participants. Attendance at each seminar is capped at 50 attendees and alumni must apply to attend.

## **Get Further Engaged in International Education**

---

**Boren Scholarships and Fellowships** – Funding from the National Security Educational Program supports American undergraduate and graduate students for intensive study of language and culture overseas. Boren Awards applicants may either elect to propose their own programs for funding or participate in a Regional Flagship Language Initiative.

**Critical Language Scholarship** – The Critical Language Scholarship Program is a summer study abroad opportunity for American students to learn languages essential to America’s engagement with the world.

**U.S. Department of State** – Visit the U.S. Department of State’s website to learn more about various employment opportunities.

**The Forum on Education Abroad** – The Forum on Education Abroad is a membership association recognized as the standards organization for the field of

education abroad. The forum develops and disseminates comprehensive standards of good practice, resources, and training; advocates for education abroad and its value; and engages the field in critical dialogue to benefit students.

**Fulbright U.S. Student Program** – The Fulbright U.S. Student Program offers research, study, and teaching opportunities in more than 140 countries to recent college graduates and graduate students. Grants are provided for individually designed study/research projects or for English Teaching Assistant Programs.

**Institute of International Education** – IIE administers the Gilman Scholarship on behalf of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. IIE administers more than 200 programs for students, scholars, and professionals to participate in international exchange. IIE has offices throughout the United States and around the world.

**NAFSA: Association of International Educators** – NAFSA is the world’s largest nonprofit association dedicated to international education and exchange. As a professional association, NAFSA offers networking opportunities, career services, research, and conferences for its members.

**The Language Flagship** – The Language Flagship offers programs at 21 universities and colleges across the United States combined with overseas study opportunities at ten Flagship Overseas Centers. Flagship offers pathways for students of all academic majors and language levels to pursue advanced-level language study in one of seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, or Turkish.

