

GILMAN Scholarship Application

“Statement of Purpose” Essay Tips

Fall 2020

Keys to a strong application essay:

- Answer all questions. The readers will rate you on your answers to each question. If you don't answer a question you can't get any points for it.
- Be sure to mention **all** the ways in which you meet the broad Gilman definition of diversity at some point in this essay.
- Find a way to connect all the required answers into a cohesive essay rather than just listing the answers to the questions – find a common thread or theme.
- Be sure you specify the country and program to which you plan to go in your introductory paragraph. Reviewers should have this information by the time they finish the first paragraph of your essay.
- Compose coherent paragraphs, each with a clear topic sentence followed by evidence supporting that topic. Rather than mentioning the same point in multiple places throughout the essay, focus on the point once in the essay, say everything you need to say about it, and then move on to the next point.
- Your essay should be close to (and not over) the 7,000 character limit, including spaces.

Application Checklist:

Use the checklist below to make sure you have answered each required question. Provide a brief summary of your answer in the space given.

1) Study abroad motivation

- a. Why do you wish to study or intern abroad and what factors led you to this decision?

- b. What do you hope to gain from and what do you anticipate will be the impact of your experience abroad?

2) Specific Study Abroad program information

- a. Describe your study and/or intern abroad program.

- b. What factors led you to select this program and length of study?

NOTE: If your study abroad plans include studying the host country's language, or building on your already existing skills in the host country's language, be sure the essay includes this information. The Gilman is very supportive of language learning.

3) Distinctive program features

- a. Are there any distinctive components to this program, beyond coursework, that will impact your overall learning experience abroad? (i.e. signature seminars, home-stays, internships, field research, volunteer activities, extra-curricular activities, language learning, etc.)

4) Country choice

- a. Why have you chosen your country of study?

- b. What factors led you to select this country?

NOTE: It may be tempting to answer these questions by explaining why you DIDN'T choose to go to other countries ("I considered a study abroad program in Beijing but ultimately selected Tokyo because ...") but don't use your essay space this way. Instead, make a positive case for why the host country is of interest to you and how an immersive experience there will help you meet your academic and professional goals.

5) Connection to Future Goals

- a. How will this study and/or intern abroad program and the coursework you take abroad impact your future academic goals?

- b. How will this study and/or intern abroad program and the coursework you take abroad impact your future professional goals?

6) Academic preparation for study abroad

- a. What coursework have you taken to prepare you to excel at the abroad program you're applying to?

- b. Have you faced any significant academic difficulties? If so, how are you overcoming them?


- c. What strategies for academic success will you draw on to ensure you get the most of your study abroad experience?

Address Diversity:


Unless addressed in the community impact essays, be sure to mention in essay 1 each of the following ways you represent diversity in the US if they pertain to you.

- Financial means (Pell Grant) – this one is optional because already implied by eligibility
- Ethnicity/Race
- Students in underrepresented fields such as the sciences and engineering
- First generation college students
- First generation Americans
- Geographical (rural or inner city background)
- Disabilities (learning or physical)
- Veteran status
- LGBTQ
- Study abroad outside of Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand


Now look at your 11 answers and decide what order makes the most sense. How can you arrange these points into a coherent narrative that will be logical to someone who doesn't know you?

Topic: _____ 


Bridge: _____

Topic: _____ 


Bridge: _____

Topic: _____ 


Bridge: _____

Topic: _____ 


Bridge: _____

Topic: _____ 


Bridge: _____

Topic: _____ 

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Topic: _____ 

Bridge: _____

Topic: _____ 

Bridge: _____

What common thread(s) can help connect all your answers above? A common thread can serve as the theme of the essay that ties it all together. Examples of themes could be a particular interest, a career aspiration, a personal experience from the past, a personal trait, a lesson taught to you by your family, etc.

GILMAN Scholarship Application

“Community Impact” Essays Tips

Fall 2020

Keys to strong application essay 1 (Build Mutual Understanding):

- Answer all questions. The readers will rate you on your answers to each question. If you don't answer a question you can't get any points for it.
- Offer specific ways you plan to engage with your host community and facilitate cultural exchange while abroad. Draw on specific aspects of your abroad program that will help you do this – home stays, classes taken with members of the host community, opportunities to volunteer, etc. Are there any special interests, hobbies, or skills that you have that you would like to share with your host community? If so, how might you do this?
- Your essay should be close to, but not over, the 3,000 character limit (counting spaces).

Keys to strong application essay 2 (Follow-on Service Project):

- Propose a well-developed follow-on service project. Strong proposals often involve working or connecting with a campus or community organization with which you're already involved, usually through multiple methods of connection (for example, if you are a member of a campus club, you might share your study abroad experience and promote Gilman by posting to the club's listserv, giving a talk or presentation at a club meeting, and working with the club to sponsor a speaker from your host country). Strong proposals consider multiple ways to connect with your target population.
- Consider creative ways to engage with the population you intend to reach in lieu of or in addition to a more traditional PowerPoint presentation or talk. Proposals to do something creative—podcast, video, photo series, art exhibit, dance workshop, cooking workshop, etc.—can really stand out.
- Propose a feasible service project. Gilman does not expect you to speak to 15 different campus groups, or reach every high school student in your city—and would be suspicious of a project that seemed too big or too scattered for you to actually accomplish.
- Be clear that you will promote not just the study abroad experience, but the Gilman Scholarship specifically. Gilman wants its recipients to spread the word about the scholarship and to increase their numbers of applicants.
- Your essay should be close to, but not over, the 3,000 character limit (counting spaces).

Application Checklist:

Use the checklist below to make sure you have answered each required question for each essay. Provide a brief summary of your answer in the space given.

Essay 1:

- 1) What does it mean to be an American *to you*? This is a great place to include details about your background, especially if there are aspects of your identity that bring diversity to study abroad that relate to what you think it means to be an American.

- 2) When you are abroad, how will you represent and share your culture, interests, and background with your host community?

- 3) How will you seek opportunities to become culturally engaged and have meaningful interactions with people and cultures different from your own during your abroad program?

Essay 2:

- 1) What are the specific goals of your follow-on service project?

- 2) Who is your target population/audience and why did you select them?


- 3) How will you integrate the impact of your experience abroad into your project?

- 4) What, if any, campus departments, student organizations, or community organizations will you collaborate with in bringing awareness to study abroad and the Gilman Scholarship?

NOTE: Make sure your essay outlines a *feasible* project in scope, as well as in timeline (you are required to complete it within six months of returning to the US), and that you are discussing *in detail* its essential components and how you will complete them.

Now look at your answers and decide what order makes the most sense for each of the essays.

For essay 1: How can you arrange these points in a coherent narrative that makes clear how you will serve as a citizen diplomat abroad?

Topic: _____ 

Bridge: _____

Topic: _____ 

Bridge: _____

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Topic: _____ 

Bridge: _____


Essay 2: How can you arrange these points into a coherent narrative that makes clear how your follow-on-service project will impact your community?

Topic: _____ 

Bridge: _____

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For more information about follow-on service projects, refer to the “Community Impact Essay” section of this page on the Gilman website: <https://www.gilmanscholarship.org/applicants/essays/>

Common Problems in Gilman Essays and Exercises to Address Them

Problem:

Not all essay prompt questions are answered or thoroughly covered

- Look over your essay and make sure it addresses all 10 of the major questions in the Gilman prompts. Reviewers will assign scores for how you answer each of these questions. Remember, though, that the questions need not (and almost certainly should not) be addressed in order, like a list, but rather must be integrated into a cohesive essay.
- Consider assigning a different color to each of the 10 major questions and then highlighting the section of the essay where you answered that question. Assess the highlighted sections to make sure you've answered each question thoroughly. You can do this exercise electronically or with pens on paper.

Problem:

While the essays answer the general questions asked, the answers are vague and lack details, anecdotes, or specifics that bring the essay alive

- Reread your essay and look for specific details you provide to illustrate your answers to each of the prompt questions. Assess whether your answers are specific and detailed enough to give the readers a clear sense of your background, goals, and commitment to studying abroad in your particular country on your specific program.
- Brainstorm other relevant details you might include that could interest your reader, and make sure these details help set you apart from other applicants.
- Be sure you clearly describe your long-term academic and career goals, and articulate how and why your proposed study abroad experience is relevant to achieving those goals

Problem:

The essays rely on clichés and unspecific claims that could apply to any applicant, or do not indicate a serious interest in study

- Edit out vague and unspecific claims that could apply to any applicant, such as a desire to “get out of your comfort zone,” your “wanderlust,” or a “passion for [specific country]” that isn't backed up by specific reasons for that passion or an account of how you developed it.
- Remove references to plans that might sound as though you are anticipating a vacation or are focused on tourism. Don't use the terms “trip” or “vacation” in reference to your study abroad plans. Rather than describing your interest in visiting the Eiffel Tower in Paris or eating gelato in Italy, mention plans to investigate sites or pursue experiences related to your area of study.

Problem:

In essay 1 (the statement of purpose), all the questions are answered, but the essay reads more like a list of answers rather than an essay. The essay lacks flow and/or a cohesive theme

- Reread your essay and make sure you've made natural connections between topics. Consider moving the sections around to see if there is a better order that makes the topics flow more logically. Reorganization will likely require writing new transition sentences.
- Be sure your essay consists of coherent paragraphs, each with a clear topic sentence. Each section of your essay should introduce a topic, say everything you need to say about that topic, then transition to the next section. Your reader will likely be confused if, for example, you address your reasons for selecting your study abroad country in six different places in your essay. You want to make that point once, then move onto your next point.

Problem:

The introduction to essay 1 does not “hook” the reader, or does not provide important information reviewers need to know in order to evaluate your application

- The opening of the essay should provide a “hook”—an interesting anecdote or fact—that engages your readers and helps them understand your interest in your host country. This hook needs to be brief, no longer than two sentences.
- Do not open the essay with a statement of your name or major. The opening “My name is Jane Smith and I’m an economics major at Syracuse University” will likely bore your readers, and wastes space restating basic information contained elsewhere in the application.
- By the end of the opening paragraph, readers should know where you plan to go and what you plan to study. Essays that take two or three paragraphs to relate this key information will likely lose readers.

Problem:

In the first Community Impact essay (Building Mutual Understanding) students make sweeping generalizations or rely on clichés about what it means to be an American

- Make sure to include answers to the following questions in this essay:
 - Focus on your specific experience of being an American, especially if your background or culture brings diversity to the Gilman cohort.
 - Be clear about what aspects of your study abroad program will help you connect to the host community, such as home-stays or language study.
 - Look beyond your program components and consider ways to engage with your community. Discuss how you will draw on hobbies and skills to connect with the host community. Consider volunteer opportunities in the community in which you might like to participate.

Problem:

In the second Community Impact essay (Follow-on Service Project), the proposal sounds sparse and/or it lacks the detail necessary to indicate that the idea is feasible

- Assess your follow-on service project essay by answering the following:
 - Have you specified your intended audience(s)? Have you included statistics or details about who the audience is?
 - Have you named specific organizations, institutions, schools, and contact people? Have you indicated that you have communicated with a specific person?
 - Have you proposed multiple forms of presentation/communication/outreach to your target audience(s)?

Problem:

Information on all forms of diversity that are true for you haven't been included

- Financial means (Pell Grant) – this one is optional because it's already implied by eligibility
- Ethnicity/Race
- Students in underrepresented fields such as the sciences and engineering
- First generation college students
- First generation Americans
- Geographical (rural or inner-city background)
- Disabilities (learning or physical)
- Veteran status
- LGBTQ+
- Study abroad outside of Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand

NOTE: If your study abroad plans include learning the host country's language and/or a homestay, be sure you mention these plans in essay 1 since they align closely with Gilman's mission.