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**GILMAN Scholarship Application**

**Application Essays Worksheet**

**FALL 2025**

**NOTE: Generative AI and the Gilman Scholarship application:**

Recently, we have noted an increase in students submitting AI-generated Gilman Scholarship essays. While we suspect this has led to increased application rates, we have not seen an increase in rates of award recipients. Why?

AI tools like Chat GPT cannot answer the essay prompts ***specifically***or ***accurately*** without a lot of additional work from you. The Gilman Scholarship’s reviewers (typically university faculty and staff from across the country) assess applications based on a rubric that prioritizes students’ inclusion of specific details about their lives, their study abroad program, their academic plans, and their future goals. AI-generated essays do not include the level of specificity needed to make them competitive, and they tend to sound very similar to all the other AI-generated essays students around the country are submitting to Gilman. AI might also include [inaccurate or misleading facts](https://lib.guides.umd.edu/c.php?g=1340355&p=9880574) about your host country or study abroad program. If you aim to submit a competitive Gilman application, follow the guidance below to craft compelling, personal essays that will persuasively make the case for why *you* should receive this scholarship.

**How to use this worksheet?**

Each essay is looking for specific information from you, the applicant, to help determine if you meet the selection criteria. This worksheet includes prompts to help you brainstorm the information you need to include in the four main Gilman short essays. So, either before you begin or as you are writing, answer all of the prompts below. If there are some you cannot answer, meet with either a CFSA advisor, study abroad advisor, professor, or mentor (depending on the nature of the question) to help you arrive at a response.

Then, once you have responses for all prompts, follow the essay organization guidance provided for each essay.

\*\*If you plan to write either the critical need language award essay or one for the STEM supplemental award, discuss this with an advisor.\*\*

**ESSAY 1: MOTIVATIONS FOR STUDYING OR INTERNING ABROAD**

**Prompts:**

* **Make the case for why a global academic or professional experience would contribute to your future academic and/or career goals.**
* **Why did you select your specific program or internship and host country?**

1. What is your major/minors?
2. What career do you want to have in the next 5-10 years? In other words, what kind of job, specifically, is your degree preparing you for? (NOTE: you may still be unsure about this. However, for the sake of the application, the reader wants to know why to invest in you. So imagine a feasible future goal that seems likely for you).
3. What city and country are your proposed study abroad program in?
4. What are your professional and/or academic reasons for choosing this host country?

**NOTE:** It may be tempting to answer this question by explaining why you DIDN’T choose to go to other country (“I considered a study abroad program in Madrid but ultimately selected Chile 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.

1. What classes do you plan to take during your study abroad? It might be that you cannot yet see what classes will be offered the semester you’re going, but look and see what classes are typically offered, and consider what classes of those you’d like to take.
2. What relevance do those classes have to preparing you for your future goals?
3. Are there any distinctive components to this program, beyond coursework, that motivated your desire to apply for this particular program? (i.e. signature seminars, home-stays, internships, field research, volunteer activities, extra-curricular activities, language learning, etc.)
4. Why specifically would someone in your future career need experience living and working in your host country? (language skills, industry connections, etc)

**ESSAY GUIDANCE:** Within the first paragraph, the reader should know your major, future goals, and where you plan to study abroad. The body of the essay should clearly describe your study abroad plans for your reader (which program, how long, what semester) as well as some of the key aspects of the program that make it the ideal place for you study abroad *to help you achieve your academic or professional goals.*

**ESSAY 2: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH STUDYING AND INTERNING ABROAD**

**Prompts:**

**Please describe specific examples in which your knowledge, skills, and/or experiences (academic, professional, extracurricular and/or volunteer activities, etc.) have equipped you to effectively adapt to and succeed in your host country.**

**What specific knowledge and skills do you hope to develop through your experience abroad?**

* 1. What key courses have you taken that have helped prepare you for your study abroad? This could be prerequisites, previous language classes, etc.
  2. What are some of the things you might find difficult about studying and living abroad? (foreign language, heavy course load, homesickness, etc?)
  3. What experiences have you had that will help you adapt to living abroad in a new place? (Former roommate experiences, study abroad experiences, growing up in a multicultural community, etc?)
  4. What strategies for academic success will you draw on to ensure you get the most of your study abroad experience? Be specific about how you developed them and plan to use them.
  5. Have you faced any significant academic difficulties? If so, how are you overcoming them? ? (Gilman has no GPA requirement but they do request your transcripts and want to know you are academically prepared for your program).

**ESSAY GUIDANCE:** This essay should be organized by first stating your goals for study abroad – new skills, languages, etc. Then, the body of the essay will be organized around your evidence for how you are prepared to achieve those goals. You may want to start by describing your academic preparation, but then include any other forms of preparation, from cultural experiences to academic strategies (as well as specific information about how you developed these strategies).

**ESSAY 3: GILMAN SCHOLARS AS CITIZEN DIPLOMATS**

**Prompt:**

**Describe your plans and strategies for engaging your host community and showcasing what it means to be an American. Articulate any specific plans that involve showcasing America’s 250th anniversary while in your host community.**

NOTE: The Gilman Scholarship is part of the larger, U.S. government goal of promoting positive relationships between U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries. This is called **citizen diplomacy.** The National Museum of American Diplomacy helpfully describes citizen diplomacy thus:

*“While the visible forms of diplomacy are carried out by government professionals, in reality, every American can practice diplomacy in everyday life. When businesspeople, teachers, students, scientists, athletes, artists and musicians share work, performances, ideas, and experiences during visits abroad, they represent their country and thus act as citizen diplomats. All of these encounters produce subtle moments of diplomacy—an exchange of impressions and information about people and culture through individual contacts” (*[*https://diplomacy.state.gov/who-else-can-be-a-diplomat-everyone/*](https://diplomacy.state.gov/who-else-can-be-a-diplomat-everyone/) *).*

The Gilman Scholarship wants to fund students who are prepared to serve as citizen diplomats in their host communities. And, to mark this year’s historic national anniversary, they especially want students who can integrate acknowledgement of [America’s 250th anniversary](https://www.state.gov/america-250) into their plans. This does not mean hosting your own 4th of July celebration, although that could be a feasible plan for you! Instead, it means finding ways to highlight important aspects of America’s history, ideals, and future prospects. You can learn more about how the U.S. is working to mark the 250th anniversary here: <https://www.state.gov/america-250>

Gilman reviewers do not expect you to do something grand, but something feasible. As the quote states above, citizen diplomacy is primarily carried out in smaller moments and interactions – the kinds that students studying abroad experiences.

Here are some prompts to help you brainstorm:

1. What are some of the positive attributes you think many Americans share? How have you witnessed these attributes or enacted them in your own life?
2. What opportunities does your study abroad provide for engaging with residents of the host country (homestay, internship, classes, etc?) If little opportunity is provided, how might *you find* opportunities?
3. What are your current hobbies that are or can be shared with other people?
4. What are some feasible ways of engaging in those hobbies in your host country? (Keep in mind your own level of proficiency in the host country’s language).
5. What ways might you be able to connect your hobbies to U.S. history or a shared history between the U.S. and your host country?
6. What ways has the U.S. been a leader in your academic or career field? Have there been any notable collaborations between U.S. professionals in your field and those of the host country? (do some research, especially through government sites like those for the Smithsonian museums or the Library of Congress.
7. Given your answers to the questions above, what specific ideas do you have for engaging with residents of your host country as a citizen diplomat?
8. How could you integrate recognition of the U.S.’s 250th anniversary into those plans?
9. Are there already organizations at your host placement or within your host country planning to celebrate the 250th anniversary? If you’re near a U.S. embassy or consulate, for instance, you should review their website and see if they already have plans: <https://www.usembassy.gov/>

**ESSAY GUIDANCE:** For this essay, you may want to begin by stating what you believe are some key positive qualities or attributes that Americans share, giving specific examples (if you can) of how you developed that belief. Then, you will describe your specific plans for interacting with members of the host country, and how those might provide opportunities to share those values. Specifically discuss how those interactions could include or lead to additional opportunities to explicitly acknowledge America’s 250th anniversary.

**ESSAY 4: CONTRIBUTIONS TO U.S. COMMUNITIES AND FOLLOW-ON SERVICE PROJECT PROPOSAL**

**Prompts:**

**How do you plan to leverage and share the knowledge and skills gained overseas on return to the United States?**

**How will you raise awareness of the value of study abroad and highlight support available through the Gilman Program?**

**Who is the primary audience for your follow-on service project and why have you selected them?**

The Gilman Scholarship wants recipients to help promote the program and the value of studying abroad to students like yourself. Therefore, they want students to propose follow-on service projects that highlight the benefits of studying abroad and ways to make it affordable. 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.

Here’s some prompts to help you brainstorm:

1. What are the specific goals of your follow-on service project? I.e, what message do you hope to share with others about study abroad and the Gilman Scholarship?
2. Who is your target population/audience and why did you select them?

1. What resources will you draw on to carry out your project? In other words, who and what will you use to carry out your plans?

**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.

**ESSAY GUIDANCE:** This essay should be written as a clear proposal for your follow-on service project. It should introduce the group you plan to reach out to, and why this group would benefit from learning about the Gilman Scholarship and the benefits of study abroad. Then, you need to include information about what the project is, where and when it will take place, and how you will ensure that individuals will engage. You should also describe how you will leverage existing resources and contacts to carry out this project. It is your job to help the reader clearly picture what it is you are planning and how you will carry it out.