

Introduction

Welcome to the Gilman International Scholarship Program's Composing Competitive Essays video. One of the most important components to your Gilman International Scholarship application is completing your essays: the Statement of Purpose essay and the Follow-on Service Project Proposal. These essays are closely reviewed during the selection process. This video will go in-depth with understanding how to compose competitive essays for your Gilman Scholarship application and the specific guidelines for each required essay.

Getting Prepared

Did you know that the prompt questions for the essays never change? Whether you are currently applying for the Gilman Scholarship or will be applying in the future, you can begin your essays at any time. The prompt questions can be found in the online application or on the Gilman website. It is in your best interest to start your essays as early as possible. Starting your essays in advance allows time for preparation. Let's take a look at what goes into preparation for composing competitive essays.

Word Processing Program

Within the Gilman online application you will be provided with text boxes for each required essay. You may type directly into the text box to compose your essay; however, we encourage you to compose your essay first in a word processing program, such as Microsoft Word. Then copy and paste your essay into the text box provided in the online application. This will allow you to save your essays and ensure that your information is not lost due to a session timeout in the online application system. Also, you can have a digital copy of your essay to send for proofreading or utilize as a basis for other applications.

There is a 7,000 character limit per essay, which includes spaces. This limit is approximately 1.5 pages, single-spaced in a word processing program. When you are ready to transfer your essays to your application make sure to double check your essays for the possibility of being cut off due to exceeding character limit. Additionally, do not format your essays in the word processing program (i.e. bold, underline, italics) because your formatting will not be retained upon transferring. We have provided limited formatting tools in the text boxes should you decide to utilize them.

Work with your Advisors

It is important to talk with your study abroad advisor prior to completing your essays. Your study abroad advisor can provide you with ideas for subjects to cover in your Statement of Purpose Essay. They can also help you develop a creative Follow-on Service Project. Remember your advisors may have participated in selection panels for scholarship programs and can give you some great insight into what makes an interesting and competitive essay. If your study abroad advisor is not available, you may also want to consider working with an academic advisor and/or your institution's writing center. If you have saved the digital file of your essay, they can review it and provide you valuable feedback.

Statement of Purpose Essay

The Statement of Purpose Essay is your chance to personalize your application. You will not be interviewed by the selection committee, so their only chance to get to know you is through your essay. When composing the Statement of

Purpose Essay it is important to address the impact that your study abroad program will have on your academic, professional, and personal goals. You should also address the impact that receiving the Gilman Scholarship would have on your achievement of these goals. Be mindful of the prompt questions that are provided to help guide the fluidity of your essay. Consider these key points when composing your essay:

- Coursework towards your major or minor;
- Reasons you chose the particular country and program;
- Your country knowledge and language acquisition;
- Your career goals and professional development;
- Your inspiration for study abroad;
- Your personal growth;
- Challenges you may face to study abroad.

What makes you unique? All students are unique in one way or another, but it is up to you to point out why you are different. You can reference the selection criteria for applications on the Gilman website. We encourage you to highlight how you meet any of the criteria by disclosing this information in your Statement of Purpose Essay. If you are not comfortable disclosing certain information, you are not obligated to do so.

Follow-on Service Project Proposal

Should you be selected to receive a Gilman Scholarship, you will be required to carry out a Follow-on Service Project upon your return to the U.S., which promotes the Gilman Scholarship Program and international education on your home campus and/or in your community. All applicants will be required to write a proposal explaining how they will give back by inspiring others to pursue their own experiences abroad. Projects should maximize the impact of your experience abroad by extending the benefits you received to your campus and community. Projects should be clear, able to be completed within six months of your return to the U.S. from your study abroad program, and have obtainable goals. Be mindful of the prompt questions that are provided to help guide the fluidity of your proposal. Consider these key points when composing your proposal:

- Your target audience;
- The impact your project will have on your audience;
- Methods of publicity;
- Collaboration with organizations, student groups, etc.;
- Any preliminary arrangements and contacts;
- Timeline to complete your project;
- Tools you may need.

Gilman Scholars have proposed and carried out a wide range of Follow-on Service Projects. There is no right or wrong proposal. We encourage all applicants to propose a unique Follow-on Service Project that highlights their individual background, experiences abroad, talents and skills. Let's look at some examples of projects that Gilman Scholars have carried out.

- Organizing a pen-pal program between a local classroom and a classroom in the student's host country.

- Development of a brochure or information flyer specific to that field of study that is then posted in the study abroad office.
- Serving as an office representative at campus fairs and events by sharing information on study abroad and the Gilman Scholarship Program.
- Volunteering or working in the study abroad office as a Peer Mentor/Advisor to potential study abroad students.
- Submitting a weekly or monthly article on their experiences overseas to their campus or hometown newspaper while the students are abroad, thereby sharing information with a wide range of readers.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and we look forward to continue to receive unique, individual proposals from all applicants. You can find more examples on the Gilman website as well as watch videos of Gilman alumni who have successfully carried out their project that can serve as inspiration for your proposed project.

Polishing your Essays

Proofread

One of the most important things to remember for any essay is to have it read by an advisor or professor. Spell check and grammar check are fine, but a good proofreader will find things that your word processing software will not. For example, study abroad is often spelled incorrectly in essays as study aboard. Both are spelled correctly according to spell check, but the latter is incorrect in context. In addition, a proofreader can often make suggestions on how to clarify a point that may not make sense to someone else.

Writing Center

Take the first draft of your essay to your campus writing center or to a composition professor. These individuals have invaluable expertise in writing essays and can be a great resource on your campus anytime you need to prepare an essay.

Spelling and Grammar Check

Before submitting your application be sure to double check your essay. Did you spell the names of cities correctly? Spell check will not always correct these mistakes. Be sure you have proper punctuation and do not type your essay in all lower case or all upper case letters. Most importantly, check for correct grammar. Grammar check will not always correct your sentence properly so it is important to have someone else look at your essay thoroughly.

Organize your Essays

Your essays should be in paragraph format and include transitions. The organization of your essays is vital to the success of any essay. Hold the organization of your essays to high importance. Think of bricks building a house without mortar. Lack of mortar would cause the house to fall apart without it. You need paragraph formatting, transitions and key phrases to build thoughts together in a coherent manner.

Conclusion

The information and advice provided to you on composing competitive essays is designed to help you succeed as a Gilman Scholarship applicant. We understand that in addition to your current coursework, extracurricular activities,

work and/or family obligations that you may feel too busy to prepare your essays; however, we encourage you to put in as much time and effort as you can. Think of the essays you must submit for your courses and instead of an A+ your goal is to receive several thousand dollars to help you study abroad. In addition to this video, we have provided many resources on the Gilman website for you to explore and utilize at your convenience. If you have any questions or need further information, please visit the Contact Us page to contact the appropriate Gilman staff by phone or email.