

SE02EP06

Victoria BienAmie

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I'm Hannah

Z: And I'm Zoe! And we're your hosts. On this podcast we'll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We'll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

H: Today we talk with Victoria BienAime about her experience studying abroad in Tianjin, China. Victoria was awarded a Benjamin A. Gilman scholarship and has some great advice on taking advantage of all the resources available to students at Florida State!

H: Good morning! How are you doing?

Victoria (V): I am doing really well, how are you?

H: I'm doing well. To start us off this morning could you go ahead and introduce yourself let us know what your name is, what you studied, what you were involved in while you're FSU, and then where and when you studied abroad?

V: Of course, I am Victoria BienAime. I'm currently an MBA student at Florida State University. In 2019 I went to Tianjin, China and I studied Chinese over there and I loved it.

Z: So what made you decide to study abroad in Tianjin, China?

V: So I've been speaking Chinese for three years and I had been planning this moment at least two years. I wanted to get over there to China because there is this one advisor I wanted to meet 'cause I was really interested in going to graduate school over there. I wanted to improve my proficiency and get an in depth understanding of the culture because I want to do international business and in order to succeed in that, I feel like I should understand Chinese culture if I speak the language. So I really wanted to get over there, to meet people, to connect, and to see what doors open just by traveling and introducing myself to different people.

H: Amazing and I think you certainly took advantage of the opportunity. So, many things have questions and concerns about funding their study abroad opportunities, can you talk a little bit about what that experience was like for you?

V: Right ,absolutely. So at Florida State I've been a part of the CARE program which is you know the Center of Academic Retention and [Engagement] Learning. And being part of the care program there was this one assembly that advisor, that I later on became close to, was speaking about Gilman, the Gilman scholarship and the opportunities that Gilman provides to students that are not able to fund study abroad experience. I was like this is perfect 'cause I want to go to China, I want to go to grad school over there there's so many things I want to do but I was always worried about my finances. So when I found out about Gilman, I was like perfect. I need to go talk to Jesse because he helped my friend you know my friend ended up getting Gilman like I think this is a great opportunity for me. So after a couple meetings and like figuring out like the layout of scholarship, what I had to do, how many essays I

had to write and things of that sort I was thinking like you know I can really do this. I can really do this. So for Gilman there are two rounds, there two rounds, there's one round in the fall and one round in the very beginning of spring. I missed the fall round because I was too nervous to apply but you know I was like you know I have nothing to lose, I need all the help I can get when it comes to finances is I'm paying for this by myself. So after I finished my Gilman application, that took months to do. A lot of writing, I really had to dig deep and find something to write about that was going to move me and also move the people that are reading the essay. Because it's one thing to sit in front of someone to tell them about your life and explain to them what's going on, it's another thing to put it on paper. When you put something on paper there needs to be feeling into it. You can't just write something bland and I really had to dig deep and those little uncomfortable for me, but I really think I accomplished what I needed to do in order to succeed. So the week before my study abroad I had \$5 in my bank account and I'm thinking how am I going to go to China with \$5 in my bank account? And my family members are like Victoria like you go to China next week you have \$5 in your bank account, their like I don't think you're going to be able to go, you only have \$5. And I just kept saying to myself, I'm like I worked so hard for this, I'm going to go I'm going to do whatever it takes to go. I'm going to go, I'm going to go. And my mom was like you know someone's going to have to fork this bill like this is a couple grand this study abroad trip, like you only have \$5. And something that I guess, when you're really hopeful about situations, you just always think the best. Like you know even if you only have \$5 and you're flying across the country in a couple of days you're like oh I can do it like this crazy absurd you know but luckily I did end up getting the scholarship which is like a huge relief because I really can't do much with \$5. I know that now, but I ended up getting the scholarship and I think my hard work paid off. And I think one thing that allowed me to even be position like that was just to speak and to be open. Being reserved you don't know what opportunities you are withholding from yourself, being reserved and not being open, not letting people, not telling people what's going on. By telling people like my situation, what was going on, like a bunch of doors and a bunch of opportunities were opened to me. And there were other scholarships as well, like my advisor for the college, Chinese my advisor for Chinese, Dr. Lan, told me about the study abroad program and the experience and how I could benefit myself for the future. And so I was like oh like I love that, I can definitely do that ,even though I knew I didn't have the funds for it I knew something I wanted to do and sometimes you can't just let fear define your future. 'Cause if you're always afraid you're never going to take chances, sometimes you just need to step out just step out and do it. And that's what I did.

H: That's an amazing story. And as a quick follow up for students who are listening and they're hearing Gilman, and they're interested in what that is, can you just give a quick overview of how students can find out more about Gilman? Where to go, where to get help with the application process?

V: So Gilman is a scholarship for students who I think receive the Pell Grant and thousands of kids, thousands of students, apply for it each year. And at Florida State we have the office of it's like, the honors office, the Office of National Fellowships, ONF. I'm pretty sure it's what it is, they would kill me for saying that. Anyway yeah, I'm pretty sure that's what it is and they have I think like four or five advisors and some graduate students there that are more than willing to help you and find a bunch of programs to fund your study abroad. Like they're there and they're dedicated to help you. And I think a lot of students don't realize how many resources we have at Florida State. Like not only do we have advisors, we have professors, we have like faculty, there are so many people you can ask and so many opportunities that you can have you just have to ask, you know? And I understand some people are

afraid but sometimes you just need to just step out, you know? Just step out and just believe in yourself 'cause that's what's going to carry you. Like I was so lucky to get Jesse as my advisor, he was great. He helped me the whole process, answered all my questions. He has helped many students with the Gilman process so it's not new to him and there are other processes as well that other students could go through for different scholarships and different funding. And I just think that everyone should utilize this tool because I mean we go to school there it's free for us. You might as well use all your resources, to be the best and to be the most successful you can be.

Z: That's great advice for students. We're also wondering what about your study abroad program had the biggest impact on you?

V: I definitely think something that had the biggest impact on me was the culture, you know? Because you know living in the United States you know, we get really wrapped up within ourselves. You're like hh my image, my social media, this, that, this, that. Being across the country, no sorry, being literally in a different country, being across the world, you realize wow all those things I was paying attention to don't really matter, you know? Like yeah they're entertaining, but it doesn't really matter. And there's so many things to learn, to experience, and to just be a part of and you just you're just open to a different world and to a different environment and you learn so much just by leaving your little comfort zone. So I definitely encourage other people to just go out and explore because you don't know what's out there for you. Like when I was over there I met with an advisor over there at the school where I did the study abroad program and I got a full ride to graduate school. Just from going out, stepping, you know stepping forward, saying this is what I want to do. Like, no I don't have the funds to move to China but I got a full ride, you know? You really never know what's out there for you if you don't say anything.

Z: Amazing and can you talk a little bit about how your experience sort of has informed your future career goals? I know you talked a little bit about grad school but just your bigger career goals also.

V: Well my biggest career goal is to open a manufacturing company in Tianjin, China. Being over there I learned that it's one of the four, the five port cities, good for trading in industrial stuff. And I learned that, you know, China is the number one exporter in the world so that's one reason why I was learning Chinese. And learning Chinese and being over there and being exposed to the culture and the environment, I think has opened a lot of doors for me. Because now when I go to job interviews and now in graduate school, people know me as the girl that speaks Chinese 'cause not many people can do that, you know? So it opens a lot of doors for you and I think being cultured and being well versed in a different language, and I know several languages, just knowing several languages and understanding different cultures is a huge part of international business 'cause I can't go to a business meeting expecting all the people there to understand what I'm talking about if we come from different backgrounds. In order to be successful you need to look at different viewpoints and understand the way people think because not everyone thinks the same way as you. So it's good to be open minded and it's good to learn from every situation, in every place that you go, because you never know what you can take away from an experience.

Z: Yeah that's such a lesson to talk about, you know, and just understand cross cultural communication to know that you have to really dive into where people are coming from.

H: To wrap us up today we have one final question for you. What piece of advice would you give students who are interested in studying abroad?

V: I definitely would tell students that are studying abroad that there are funding opportunities out there. I know like people can get overwhelmed with the price, when you see the price you're like oh no like how am I going to afford it? I only have \$5, I've been there. I literally have been there, you know. And sometimes you just gotta do it 'cause you can't put a price, I cannot put a price on what I learned in my experience in China. I feel like it's worth is immeasurable because not only did it help me grow as a person, I also developed different characteristics that I didn't have before, my proficiency increased, my cross-cultural communication increased, like so many benefits from it. So you can't just always look at the price because what you're getting from it is worth a lot more than just that monetary value you see on the bill. Another thing I would tell them is to speak to their professors and speak to advisors and to tell people what it is you want to do. Like we go to an amazing institution, we have so many resources, like even now in graduate school I'm still provided with amazing professors and amazing resources. Like there's no reason to just not reach out. Like what is the worst that they're going to tell you, you know? They're here to help us, you might as well take advantage of it. You know these are building years it's good to grow, and develop and meet the people that you need to meet, and speak to who you need to speak to in order to build those foundational steps for your future. That's why you're here, you're here to have a great future, you might as well start now.

H: Amazing. That is wonderful advice. Thank you so much Victoria for speaking with us today and for sharing your story and your experience. And I'm sure so many students will relate to your story and will really appreciate the advice you have, especially when it comes to finding the funding to make their study abroad dreams come true. So thank you so much!

V: Of course, it's not a problem. Thank you!

H: Before we disembark, let's talk about a few ways to fund your study abroad experience!

There are lots of ways to find funding for your study abroad experience at FSU. Victoria mentioned the Office of National Fellowships, this office and their advisors assist students in finding and applying for fellowships and awards. One of these is the Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship but there are many others! Check them out at onf.fsu.edu.

International Programs typically offers over \$200,000 in scholarships each year. We offer scholarships based on need, identity, merit, and more! You can check these out at fsu.academicworks.com, where you complete one application for all the scholarships available at FSU.

Z: You can also meet with the International Programs Financial Aid Advisor by scheduling a meeting on Campus Connect or by emailing IP-FinancialAid@fsu.edu. We also host info sessions throughout the year that you can attend to learn more about how loans, grants, and scholarships can apply towards your study abroad program fee. You can find this information by navigating to the "Money Matters" tab on the "Students" page of our website at international.fsu.edu. You can check out all these resources in the show notes for this episode.

H: Our 2020 brochure is here! Visit the show notes or our blog to see it! The brochure features information on financial aid, the types of programs we offer, and more!

Thanks to all of you for listening! And thanks to Victoria for talking with us!

Z: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey. Sound engineering is done by Chris Bret-Harte. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Zoë Crook and Hannah Meister.