

# World-Changing

## UNH recognized for two decades of student achievement on Gilman Scholarship

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To an outsider, recent graduate Garrett Puchalski's path to studying abroad was anything but clear. Although his father was originally from Germany, Puchalski grew up in a small Connecticut hometown where he says there were few models of international education. At UNH, he was a civil engineering and sustainability double major managing demanding graduation requirements.

However, the question for Puchalski was never if, but when. “Even before I came to UNH, I knew that studying abroad was really important to me.” A prestigious U.S. State Department award called the Gilman Scholarship would help open that door.

The University of New Hampshire is one of the top producers of Gilman Scholars in the country. As the U.S. State Department celebrated the 20th anniversary of the program this fall, they recognized the universities with the greatest number of scholarship recipients over the past two decades. UNH made the top 20 list for medium-sized institutions alongside peers like Columbia University and Boston College. Puchalski is one of 91 UNH students to have earned the Gilman Scholarship since 2001.

The program’s mission is increasing access to international education, explains Jeanne Sokolowski, director of UNH’s [Office of National Fellowships](#). Students who are historically least likely to study abroad are precisely those it supports. First-generation students. Students from rural backgrounds. Students of color. STEM majors. It awards \$5,000 to Pell-Eligible students for studying abroad – and up to \$8,000 for students studying critical languages.

What makes UNH so successful with the Gilman Scholarship? Sokolowski says that strong partnerships across the university are essential to getting more students to the table. Leonie Meijer, interim director of UNH’s [education abroad](#) office, says her office assists in the “soul-searching process” of helping students identify the right international program; what’s important to them academically, personally, professionally and financially? When cost is a factor, Meijer discusses study abroad funding options with the students, and introduces them to Sokolowski and the national fellowships office.

A lot of the UNH magic happens, however, as students focus on the application’s three required essays. Since the program has neither GPA nor major requirements, the personal essays are a critical vehicle for storytelling. Students must be able to articulate why they want to study abroad in the country they’ve selected, how they’ll represent the U.S. overseas and what strategies they’ll use to raise awareness about the Gilman Scholarship once they return home.

Sokolowski encourages applicants to bring their work ethic, point-of-view and global ambitions to life in their essays. One of the benefits of this process, she says, is that it asks students to get really intentional about where they’re studying and why – and also what kind of person they want to be abroad.



BELTRÁN FRANCO *COURTESY PHOTO*

For Angélica Beltrán Franco '19 that meant sharing how her multicultural background growing up in an immigrant family positioned her to be an ambassador.

“I welcomed the culture shock,” the wildlife and conservation biology graduate says of her study abroad program in Tanzania. “I was excited to learn about the things I could only experience in Tanzania.”

That immersion in ecosystems so vitally different from the ones she knew in Colombia and New England would prepare her for what came next: studying environmental impacts on wildlife populations out west for the federal government. She also worked with the UNH fellowships office again to submit a Fulbright Scholarship application this October – an encouraged next step for Gilman alums – to earn her master’s in applied ecology in Norway.

As for Puchalski, he achieved his dream of studying sustainability and civil engineering in Sweden, followed by four weeks of French language immersion with the University of Grenoble. Today, he’s living in Germany, where he knew he always wanted to land, working as a consultant for a company focused on sustainable building.

“The experience of earning the Gilman made me realize this is definitely what I want for my life,” he says.

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## STUDENTS



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