There is little doubt that an international experience is one of the most life-changing events for a college student. That is what one hears from students when they return, particularly from those who have never even been abroad in their lives. Cost is usually mentioned as the major barrier for American students to study abroad.

Yet, there is a little known but very successful federal program for undergraduate education that is unique in the way it is designed to help bridge the gap between American and people from different countries and cultures when they return to the United States. While 72 percent of the survey respondents said that they had had concerns about living in a foreign country prior to participation in the program, only 24 percent continued to have similar concerns. As a result, the study found an active interest in the culture of the country where they spent their junior year and an eagerness to learn more about the language they had studied while they were abroad.

Almost three-quarters (75 percent) of survey respondents reported that the Gilman scholarship experience changed the way they prepared for their career options and locations where they were planning to work in the future. They benefited from the broadened cross-cultural experiences and skills gained through the unique combination of academic and leadership opportunities available through the Global U.S. study abroad program offerings and for contributing to their internationalization efforts. As more Americans gain access to study abroad, the Gilman scholarship had allowed them to expand their study abroad program offerings to other groups of students, including, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Several study abroad representatives, primarily at target campus offices, reported that the Gilman program has added several important programmatic components. As a model for improving their respective study abroad operations, they expressed interest in learning more about the studying abroad processes and the unique ways to attract, select and support American students for study abroad.

“An excellent example of your tax money put to good use,” Dr. Aldenamaro Romero Jr. is a writer and college professor with leadership experiences in higher education. He can be reached by his site at http://www.aromerojr.net.