 When I began my freshman year at Hamilton, I had no intentions of studying abroad. I was on a pre-med track and although it is not considered a major a Hamilton, there are a ton of course requirements to fulfill and prerequisites which made studying abroad seem virtually impossible. However, my sophomore year I dropped pre-med and began taking Chinese courses after a long deliberation with my roommate on whether or not to take up the language. The East Asian Studies department requires all students (majors/minors) to spend at least one semester abroad in their ACC program which is why I ended up making plans to study abroad in the first place. My only regret is not taking advantage of all the programs available, I would've definitely spent my entire junior year abroad like some of my friends. We have a prestigious program so most students receive Fulbright awards. Our financial aid office is very generous with study abroad scholarships, aid and grants.

If you're considering studying abroad start researching programs, scholarships and filling out applications as early as possible. If you haven't considered, I strongly suggest you do. Studying abroad is great for meeting new people, learning new cultures and languages, and new experiences that'll make cool stories and instagram pictures. It'll definitely make you the well rounded person that employers are looking for especially if you pick up a second language. Trust me-knowing how to read, write and speak Chinese on top of studying abroad helped me get my foot in the door as employers were impressed and wanted to hear about my experiences and how/why I got started.

It's best to get all your paper work done early to avoid stress. This includes visas, passports renewals, and vaccines. Make sure you select a country that is not prohibitively expensive but not so remote that you can't country hop during breaks (yes, you do get breaks abroad, well at least the people I know did). Embrace culture shocks, they're inevitable and will be your best and worst moments. Your worst moments will feel like a bad experience at the time but believe me they'll become your funniest stories. I have too many to share but if you're dying to know, feel free to ask.

-Kimberly Rowley (Fulbright Scholar)

This past summer I taught English through arts and sports in Istanbul, Turkey, at the Robert College Summer Program. It was definitely one of my most rewarding experiences. It helped prepare me for my future field, in both art and education. I was granted this opportunity through my school.  And did I mention it was completely FREE! 60 people interviewed for four spots, and I was blessed to get one of them; and I was the only woman of color. Istanbul was a beautiful city with amazing scenery. I was recently granted the opportunity to go to South Africa, where I would learn more about Nelson Mandela and apartheid. I will be going there over winter break. I strongly encourage other students to go abroad. It will tremendously enhance your educational experience; introducing you to new cultures and environments. And please do not let money discourage you. There is plenty of free money out there for low income students of color. When you do it, it gets done!

-Nataja Flood

My first visit to Beijing, China in 2011 taught me many significant things. It taught me how to be lost, found, dependent and independent. It also taught me the immense joy of exploring a culture vastly different from my own. I left China knowing that I had to return to deepen my understanding of this fascinating culture and myself..

I remember riding the bus past the Beijing Zoo. I had been in China for a solid month, and had been through a good deal of experiences. But this particular bus ride remains a monument in my memory. I am not sure what exactly crystallized this memory; it could have been the bus operator yelling out the next stop in Mandarin, or the crowdedness of the bus, but in that single moment the world felt so beautiful, and different from everything I had known. Standing in the bus and staring out the laminated glass window, tears of joy welled up in my eyes. I had realized that this moment was the epitome of a goal I had forgotten: to fight against the odds and make it out of the Bronx.

-Esmeralda Herrera (Gilman Scholar)

It felt like I had never left the U.S. I didn’t even fully realize I had left until people started speaking in French. It was the 4th of July and no one was celebrating. Paris was just like New York- tourists, natives, Vespas, the subway which they called Le Metro. But Paris had something that New York didn’t- time.

I fell in love with time and it revealed itself in everything from the flowing river in the heart of the city to the 6pm sky. Timeless and beautiful, and all I can do now is wish that I was there. Sometimes I wish that I was better prepared and had a plan back then, but I wouldn’t have been able to appreciate my first time abroad. Now with that insight, I plan to study abroad again and have go with a purpose while still remembering to notice the small details.

* Sasha Smith

I studied abroad in Copenhagen, Denmark. I first learned about Denmark on the news. Before I applied to study abroad, Denmark was rated as one of the happiest countries in the world. I really wanted to know why Danish people. Most importantly, as a Sociology major in college, I wanted to know what social policies were in place that facilitated this so-called happiness. I was really nervous about going to Denmark, however. You see, Denmark has very little diversity so very few people of color lived in Denmark. Also, I decided to live with a host family. Prior to making my housing decisions, I knew that I needed some form of support in order to help me navigate life in a new country for four months. When I first met my family in the Copenhagen airport, I was really nervous. I wondered what they thought about me and if they would like me, especially considering that I will be in living in their house for four months! My host family was really helpful from the beginning. I had a host mother, and a host dad, and two host siblings; a very nuclear family. My host sister was fifteen years old at the time, and my host brother was eight years old. I had a small bedroom in their house, and my large window overlooked their beautiful garden. My host mother was always concerned about me, and she always wanted to see my study abroad materials in order to clarify different things to me.

My study abroad program, Danish Institute for Study Abroad, was really organized and comprehensive, from pre-Departure to post-departure. This is one of the things that I wanted out of a study abroad program: a sense of organization and a bunch of planned activities. My study abroad program provided me with that. During my orientation, I visited many museums, and I went sight-seeing with other people in the study abroad program. I found other people to nervous as I was well, and other people to just seem to feel so comfortable since they have been to Europe before. Thankfully, I befriended a girl who lived in the Bronx as I did, and this particularly girl lived close to my host family’s neighborhood. We would often arrange to take the train together in the beginning of the program, and talk about all the things we would like to do in Denmark. Overall, I think its important to have support or make support for yourself wherever you are going. I didn’t travel to Denmark with anyone friends, or anyone I knew for that matter. I was by myself, but open to new possibilities and experiences. I think it is important to have that approach and to embrace this feeling of have a blank slate, of meeting people for the very first time who are from a completely different culture from you.

-Martha Lino