

# A World Awaits You

A Journal on People with Disabilities  
Traveling with a Purpose

## Community Colleges:

International Exchange  
for Students with Disabilities





Your Official Source on U.S. Higher Education

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- Outline the visa application process
- Feel prepared for your interview

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- Ease into your new academic environment
- Adjust well to U.S. culture and your new community



EducationUSA is a network of hundreds of advising centers in more than 170 countries, supported by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. EducationUSA Advising Centers actively promote U.S. higher education around the world by offering accurate, comprehensive, and current information about accredited educational institutions in the United States. To find an advising center, visit [EducationUSA.state.gov](http://EducationUSA.state.gov).



Your Official Source on U.S.  
Higher Education



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Community Colleges:  
Where Inclusion and Innovation  
Make a Global Impact.....4

Finding Community at a Community  
College: Abdul Salam Mehsood.....6

The Road to Independence  
Runs Through a Community  
College: Anna Ringstrom .....8

Community College  
Opens Doors: Justin Chan.....10

Community Colleges:  
A Hidden Gem for International  
Students with Disabilities.....12

Building Confidence in Ireland:  
Chynna McNair.....14

Directing Access in the Czech  
Republic: Shea Megale.....16

Studying Abroad with your  
Community College .....19

Getting Creative with Fundraising  
for Global Opportunities:  
Katelyn Parker .....20





# COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

## WHERE INCLUSION AND INNOVATION MAKE A GLOBAL IMPACT!



Community colleges around the United States are increasingly demonstrating the impact of innovation and inclusion on both U.S. students and international students through international exchange. A historically under-valued resource, these agile higher education institutions offer a compelling proposition to both U.S. and non-U.S. students with disabilities to gain skills for a global workplace as well as a solid academic base and a smooth transfer process for students going on to a four-year college or university. They frequently offer the benefits of a small and supportive campus community, and cost-effective educational experience.

In this edition of *A World Awaits You (AWAY)*, we invite you to read about the impact and inclusive practices community colleges have offered U.S. and international students with disabilities, who choose to pursue their academic journey and global experiences at a U.S. community college.

Community colleges can offer programs that one might not find at a traditional university.

Shea Megale, a student at Northern Virginia Community College who uses a power wheelchair, had the chance to write and produce an original film script in a historical town in the Czech Republic. Anna Ringstrom, a Swedish student with Down syndrome, expanded her independence, improved her English skills, and built friendships that will last a lifetime on Montgomery College's Graduate Transition Program in Maryland.

Community colleges also build partnerships with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), and the beneficiaries are students like Abdul Salam Mehsood from Pakistan who participated in the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (Global UGRAD) at Snow College, and Katelyn Parker, a woman with cerebral palsy and learning disabilities who traveled from Kirkwood Community College in Iowa to Singapore to learn about the hospitality industry with the support of the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program.





Though institutional size and budgets vary, that does not stop community colleges from providing all the supports that one would expect. Chynna McNair, from Madison Area Technical Community College in Wisconsin, was accompanied by a team of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters during a two-week study abroad program around Ireland where she learned about ethical business practices from local organizations.

Not only do community colleges offer opportunities that students might not find elsewhere, they also make it possible to pursue career paths that might otherwise have seemed out of reach. When he took the entrance exam to get into the University of Hong Kong and was not able to pass, it seemed that Justin Chan was out of options in his native China. He wanted to pursue environmental science and math, but he just needed extra support. His chance came when he was accepted for admission at Madison Area Technical Community College.

Ready to start your international exchange at a U.S. Community College? Do you still have questions? The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE) has gathered practices and testimonials from both students with disabilities and professionals for an inclusive international exchange program and are eager to share what we have learned.

As president of Lane Community College, I believe that international exchange is an important component of higher education for all students, including students with disabilities. We are committed to developing a global culture of inclusivity and respect through dialogue, outreach education and equitable policies and practices."

—Margaret Hamilton  
President Lane Community College,  
Eugene, Oregon



We hope that this publication will provide insight into the hidden gem of U.S. community colleges for U.S. and international students on how to access academic opportunity and international exchange, at a community college. Our goal is to facilitate people with disabilities taking advantage of international exchange opportunities like everyone else, navigating any access barriers along the way. For more than two decades, the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange has provided free services and resources to help make this happen.

*The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange is a project of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, designed to increase the participation of people with disabilities in international exchange between the United States and other countries, and is supported in its implementation by Mobility International USA (MIUSA).*



# FINDING COMMUNITY AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

I wondered how people would react to me in the United States because I have a different culture and a different religion. I worried a little about that, but the people were awesome.

When Abdul Salam Mehsood, a software engineering student, was chosen by the United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan for the U.S. Department of State sponsored Global Undergraduate Exchange Program in Pakistan (Global UGRAD Pakistan) to spend a semester studying at a U.S. college, he did not know what to expect. He thought, the United States was not a Muslim country, and Americans would probably have a different way of viewing the world and him because of his religion. They also might have a different way of thinking about him because of his disability.

Abdul Salam lost his arms during a childhood accident and had to learn to complete daily tasks only using his feet. He became a social activist, motivational speaker and a trainer for daily living skills to people with disabilities, so they can enjoy living independently as he has.

He got his first taste of what Americans thought of his disability when he was at O'Hare Airport in Chicago waiting for his flight that would take him to Ephraim, a small mountain town in rural Utah, where he would spend the next six months studying at Snow College. He took out his laptop, placed it on the floor, and began typing with his feet like he normally did as a software engineering student. No one reacted. He did not get any of the stares or looks that he had been expecting.

The other pleasant surprise was the community around Snow College. Abdul Salam, like other international students, got a lot of support from the international student office. Alex Peterson, the Director of International Programs at





Snow College, invited him to spend his first week in Ephraim with his family.

He arrived a week early, and representatives from the international student office met him at the airport, and helped him get to the campus. They set up his classes based on his schedule, and worked with the campus Disability Services Office to ensure that there would be a place for him to sit in all the classrooms that had the appropriate workspace. This accommodation helped him to write with his feet as he was accustomed.

The international office and disability services offices worked together to hire a fellow international student as a personal assistant to support Abdul Salam with shopping, getting food from the cafeteria, and other items he might have needed. He preferred to have a male personal assistant, and the international student that they hired matched this preference. The personal assistant was also Muslim, and they were able to share more cultural customs such as going to the dorm to pray. The personal assistant was funded by the disability services office.

Yet for Abdul Salam, the most important thing was immersing himself in his new community. An experienced soccer player, he volunteered to coach the local team, and took a soccer elective at the college. He also jumped at every chance to share his culture with those that he met, and to learn about U.S. culture from them. That included giving a talk about Pakistan to a group of his peers. He found an opportunity to go hiking, and accompanied his roommate to church on Sundays. His roommate is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "It was good experience for me to learn about the Mormon culture and the Mormon religion."

As he finishes his software engineering degree, Abdul Salam is already thinking about how he can pay it forward. He is mentoring a fellow Pakistani with a disability who wants to apply to join the next Global UGRAD cohort, which is administered by IREX. He also hopes to return to the United States to earn his master's degree.



### Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (Global UGRAD)

The Global Undergraduate Exchange Program provides one semester or one full-academic year scholarships to outstanding undergraduate students from selected countries around the world for non-degree full-time study combined with community service, professional development, and cultural enrichment.

Visit the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Exchange Programs page to see if your country is listed and to review other scholarship opportunities!

[Exchanges.state.gov](http://Exchanges.state.gov)





# THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE RUNS THROUGH A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Going to college will help me achieve my dream.  
I'm learning to be independent, and speaking English  
24 hours a day. I've never done that before.

Community colleges can offer a path to independence for people with intellectual disabilities.

That's how it has been for Anna Ringstrom who is entering her second year at the Graduate Transition Program (GTP) at Montgomery College in Rockville Maryland.

For Anna, a woman with Down syndrome from Sweden, study abroad runs in the family. Her sister studied in Argentina, and her brother studied in the United States. It was only natural that she would also want to study abroad, and she strongly advocated with her family to support her in doing so.

"They support me very much. They are proud and happy for me. I call them every Saturday and sometimes on Sundays."

Anna and her family had many options to choose from but ultimately settled on Montgomery College. The family had made trips over the years from Sweden to the D.C., Maryland, Virginia-area to visit family including Anna's aunt in Silver Spring, Maryland. So it was not only a great place for their daughter to transition to independence, but also to do so while still counting on the support of relatives.

"I chose Montgomery College because it is my dream college. The Graduate Transition Program (GTP) has very good support, and the class sizes are the same as my classes in Sweden."

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE  
[ STUDY IN USA ]

ANNA RINGSTROM



SWEDEN ✈️ MARYLAND, USA  
[ DURATION: 2 YEARS ]

STUDIES:  
COMPREHENSIVE TRANSITION  
PROGRAM (CTP)



The Graduate Transition Program (GTP) is a post-secondary transition program for students with intellectual disabilities at Montgomery College. Students take a selection of classes in history, art, computers and the like. Each course is tailored for GTP participants, and there is extra support available in the form of tutoring and peer mentoring.

Anna also benefits from the support of a College Living Experience (CLE) center, part of a network of six centers around the United States which provide services for students with a variety of disabilities, including autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities in programs like the Graduate Transition Program (GTP). CLE supplements the academic services that the students receive from the college by delivering independent living supports in a community setting, such as housekeeping, shopping and money management.

According to Janet Price, a member of Anna's support team at College Living Experience, families from overseas appreciate that community colleges have added to the breadth of options available for students with intellectual disabilities to attend college in the United States. There are a number of programs like the Graduate Transition Program (GTP) around the country, and six CLE support branches strategically placed to provide wraparound services for students in those regions.

Ever since Anna started at Montgomery College she has been expanding the breadth of her academic learning skills. She takes classes in English, math, science, history, and computer science. A tutor helps her when she has trouble with her homework at College Living Experience's support center.

For Anna it has not just been about academics but also transitioning into adulthood and getting to a place where she would feel confident orienting herself in a new community.



Think College

Learn More About Transition Programs in the U.S.

ThinkCollege is a great resource to learn about Graduate Transition Program (GTP) and other Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP) programs in which students with intellectual disabilities build their confidence, independence, and career readiness by participating in college alongside their nondisabled peers.

ThinkCollege works to expand higher education options for students with intellectual disabilities by supporting research, guiding program development, recommending public policy, as well as engaging with students, professionals and families.

Learn more: [thinkcollege.net](http://thinkcollege.net)

# COMMUNITY COLLEGE OPENS DOORS

If I had stayed in Hong Kong, I would likely be working a basic 9-to-5 job in an office somewhere.

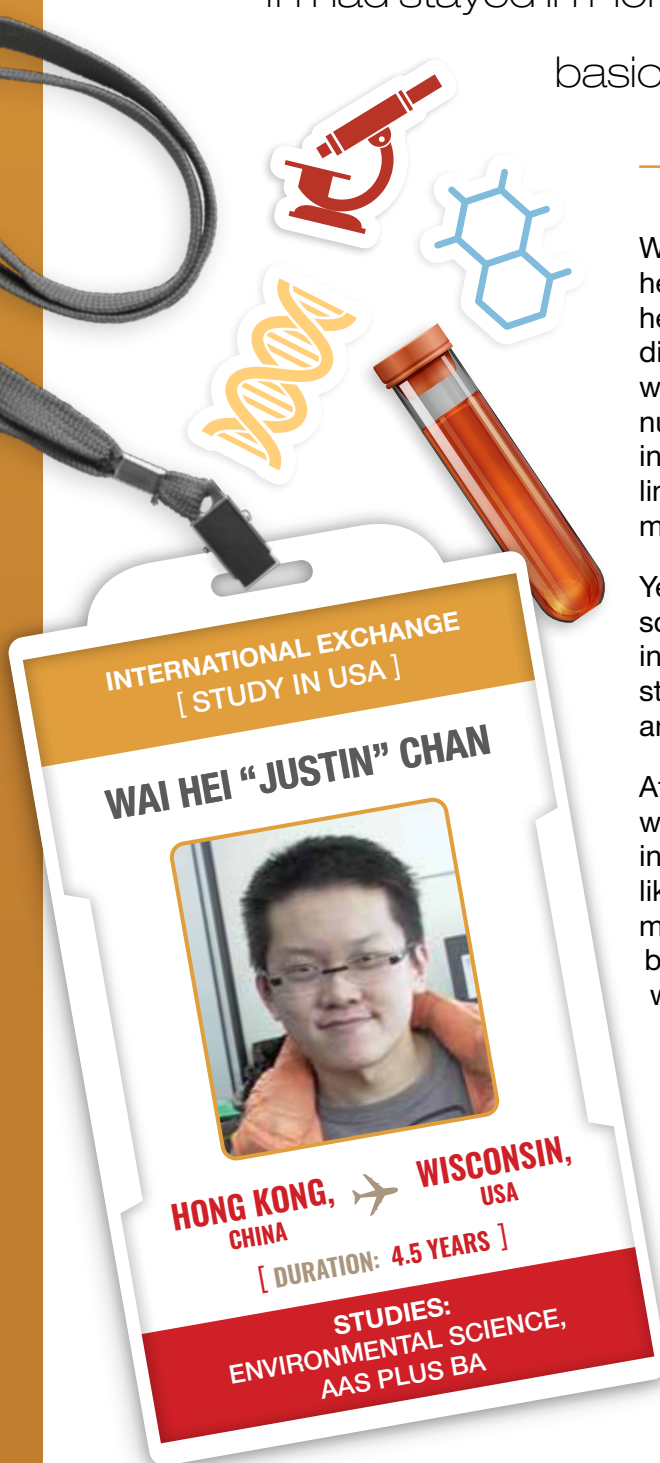
When other doors were locked, community college held the key for Justin Chan to pursue the career that he wanted. When Justin, a man with left hip dysplasia, did not make it into the University of Hong Kong, he was in good company. Since the government fixes the number of spots available for local students enrolling in the highly coveted public university system, space is limited. In a given year, only around 20% of applicants make it. That means 80% don't.

Yet Justin knew that he wanted to study environmental science, and he had arrived at an important crossroads in which he needed to make a decision. He decided to start looking for opportunities outside of Hong Kong, and even outside of China.

After he did a project in high school focused on global warming, he realized that he wanted to do something in the science field. Environmental science seemed like the best fit for Justin since he did not prefer the memorization involved in chemistry. It was also a better alternative to disciplines that were heavy in writing such as law.

While environmental science would allow him to focus on areas of strength such as math, there were some classes like botany where he did not feel as confident.

Justin found an open door after he began corresponding with an uncle who had lived in Madison, Wisconsin for the last 30 years as a professor teaching classes at The University of Wisconsin (UW), Madison campus. Justin began reading about courses at UW; however, when he realized that he did not have the test scores to come in as a freshman, he learned about







Madison Area Technical Community College (MATCC).

MATCC has been dedicated to reaching out to international students and internationalizing its campus for the last 10 years. It offers many benefits to international students including low fees, a clear transfer pathway to complete education at UW-Madison, and strong support from professors and tutors. This last part appealed to Justin, especially after he realized from the course catalog that he could take the subjects that he found more challenging with extra support at a small price.

He got in touch with Stephanie Belmas, Senior International Student Specialist, at the community college who in turn connected him to one of the college's Disability Access Advisors. Over the course of a few weeks, Justin would Skype with the Disability Access Advisor to learn all about the college and the community. They discussed topics such as classes, culture and transportation.

After he arrived, Justin encountered a community that was wildly different from the metropolitan center from which he had come. Madison, Wisconsin was a quiet small town, relatively speaking, with a slower pace of life, but that did not mean that Justin was resting.

In Madison, most of the time it was not as stressful as Hong Kong, so Justin had more

I feel like I can spend more time with students and get to know them better and develop my relationship building skills in the future for when I start teaching.

time to explore different ways of learning. While studying at MATCC, the Student Achievement Center helped him a lot with academics, getting through midterm and final exams. While he always struggled with botany, they helped him to understand it better. They showed him examples of different trees, and tricks for recognizing species based on the photo or name.

He transferred from MATCC to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ultimately graduating with his BA in Environmental Science. He is currently completing a Master's Degree in Education at Concordia University, in Mequon, Wisconsin and working part-time as a math tutor at a local high school.

He also enjoys the opportunity to spend time with his family including his uncle, and his sister who recently finished classes at MATCC and began studies at UW-Madison.



# COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A HIDDEN GEM FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

We have small class sizes and faculty spend a lot of time focused on teaching, Alex Peterson, Director of the Center for Global Engagement at Snow College in Ephraim, Utah.



Many community colleges are reaching out to international students including those with disabilities as they look for ways to create a more global experience for all on their campus. International students with disabilities are finding community colleges a great experience, whether pursuing a certificate or Associate's Degree in a technical field or in general education with a plan to work towards a four-year degree. Community colleges offer affordability, ease of adjustment to a new academic system, a new community, a new culture, and the option to receive support on a more personalized scale.

Often for international students with disabilities coming to the United States, it can be overwhelming to study at a large university, navigating a large campus, understanding the types of support services offered, and also arriving into a new disability culture. In addition to Alex noting that community college classrooms are smaller, community colleges are also intertwined with the local community. All students, including international students with disabilities have a plethora of opportunities to interact with a broad audience because of this campus – community relationship -- in the arts, politics and government, sports, business and commerce, and educational



opportunities. Students are able to develop relationships with people from all walks of life.

With regards to tuition costs, students can complete the first two years of their bachelor of arts/science degree at a community college at considerably less cost compared to a four-year institution. They can then transfer and complete that degree at a four-year college or university, such as Utah Valley University or the University of Wisconsin.

Many community colleges have partnerships with universities to enable students completing their Associates degree to transfer, thereby easing the process of gaining admission to a university. These partnerships, "guided pathway" or "direct-transfer" programs, are designed to create a clear pathway for students towards degree completion while helping them to work toward their education goals and desired careers.

After arriving to the United States and becoming a fully enrolled student, additional scholarship opportunities may open up as well as the chance to offset expenses through on-campus employment. Some community colleges like Snow College offer grants, or tuition waivers, either of which can result in awards in excess of \$5000 annually.

Even though these opportunities may be available, it is still recommended that international students arrive to the United States self-sufficient to cover all costs in order to prevent any financial hardships.

In the case of Snow College, international students apply for these opportunities as they apply for admission. A scholarship committee decides whether and how much to award based on considerations including grades and extracurricular activities.

When Abdul Rahman Ashamiri, a blind student traveled from Saudi Arabia to enroll at Snow College in Ephraim Utah, a partial tuition waiver enabled him to only have to pay in-state tuition. Additionally, a scholarship from a local businessman in his home country covered his tuition and living costs.

The tuition waivers are not only for students with disabilities, but if a student writes a strong essay about how their disability has helped them to become a better world citizen it could help them earn a waiver from the committee, Alex Peterson.

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Students planning to study at a community college should make sure to check before choosing a college about such waivers and scholarships for international students, as it is not something that every college in the United States offers. The Center for Global Engagement at Snow College worked with the Vice President of Finance in order to make these waivers available.

In recruiting international students with disabilities or otherwise, colleges like Snow College see the value in recruiting diverse students from different countries and world regions. This also enhances campus internationalization with interaction among American students and international students coming from many countries and cultural backgrounds arriving to Ephraim, Utah. Alex advises that this cannot be accomplished just by waiting for the phone to ring. It needs to come about through targeted incentives and intentional outreach such as partial tuition waivers to boost the college's international profile in places where they are less known.

Alex Peterson stresses that there are no free rides at Snow College, even for international students with disabilities. While community college can be a great way to save money, prospective students should be sure to secure funding and try to apply for fully funded scholarships, if available.

# BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN IRELAND

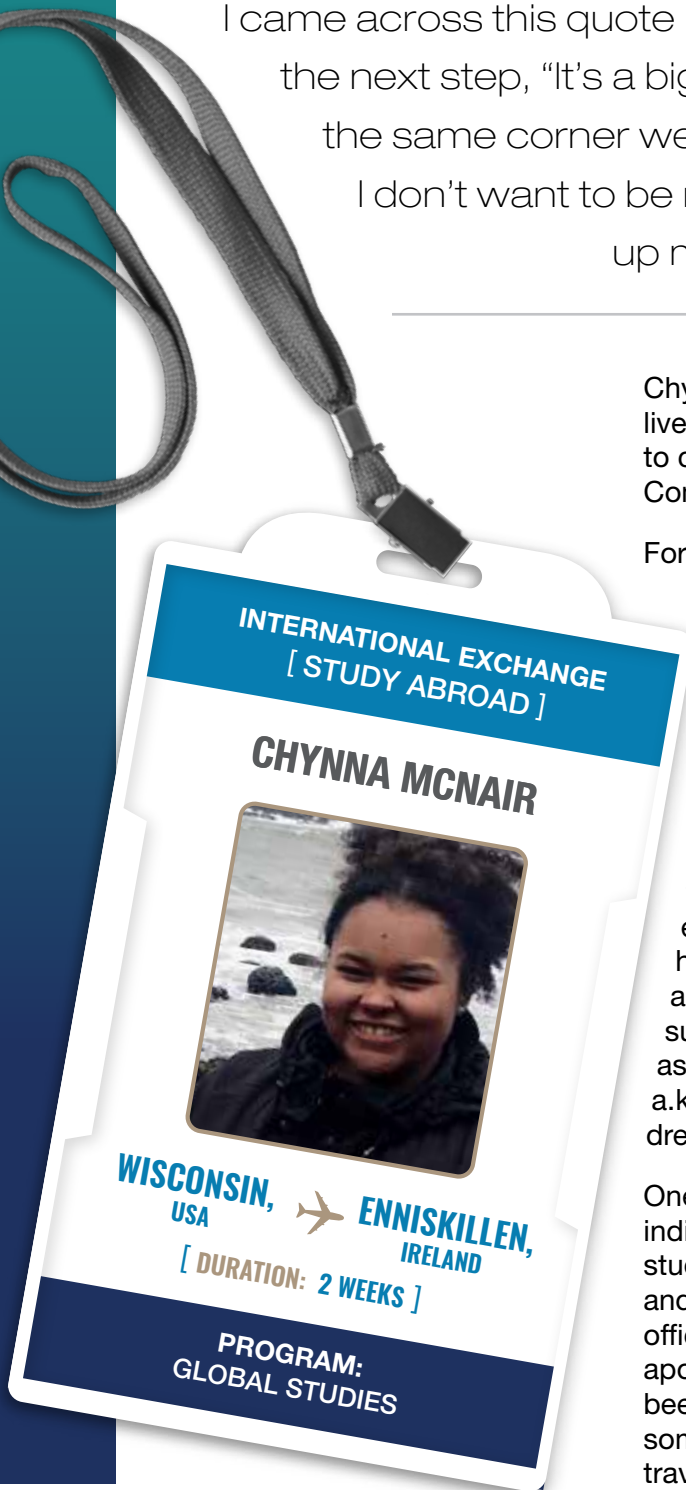
I came across this quote by Oberyin Martell that pushed me to take the next step, “It’s a big beautiful world. Most of us live and die in the same corner we were born and never get to see any of it. I don’t want to be most of us.” Next thing I know I am setting up meetings and signing up for study abroad!

Chynna McNair might have grown up thinking that she would live and die in Madison Wisconsin, but all that was destined to change after she enrolled at Madison Area Technical Community College (MATCC), her local community college.

For many years she had been curious about the world outside of the United States, but Chynna was also scared of what she might find. She had grown up thinking that the world is an unsafe place full of danger at every corner. She also had had her hands full in Madison sensing that as a deaf black woman with a cochlear implant she would have to work three times as hard to prove herself to others and to get ahead.

But she was ready for the next step. She had been fortunate to grow up with a supportive mother who encouraged her to work hard, and who advocated for her to be in mainstream classes where she would be adequately challenged. She also benefited greatly from the support of her special education teacher Jovita Gandolfo as well as her sign language interpreter Meinel Margaret, a.k.a. Peggy, all of whom encouraged her to strive for her dreams.

One day as she was checking her email she saw a message indicating that she could be eligible for a scholarship to study abroad. Chynna closed her laptop feeling surprised and unsure. A week later she was at the study abroad office looking at the list of program offerings. She smiled apologetically at the advisor explaining that she had never been abroad before. She began researching to try and calm some of her fears, looking up stories of people who had traveled and checking kidnapping rates abroad.





Motivated by the courageous Game of Thrones character's words, Chynna decided to join the 2019 global studies seminar, a two week exchange program organized by MATCC with partners in Ireland and Germany. In 2019, the destination was Ireland.

She had a million fears as she contemplated what those two weeks would involve. What if she lost her implant? What if she got lost? What if she couldn't communicate effectively with her classmates? Nevertheless, she knew that she didn't want to spend her life never knowing what was beyond Madison, and it was time to take a risk and venture out.

The students went to Enniskillen Ireland. They took a seminar on ethical business practices with students from MATCC's sister school in Ireland before dividing off into groups and visiting a business that was focused on these practices. Chynna's group visited a butcher shop which made sure to avoid using artificial dyes and chemicals in the meat and they maintained a free-range island where animals could roam freely.

The students also had time to learn more about Ireland. They visited the Titanic Museum, the Guinness Storehouse Tour and the Peace Wall between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. They saw the St. Patrick's Day parade, the set of Game of Thrones, along with Chynna's favorite, the Giant's Causeway.

It was the program's first time hosting a deaf student, and they did their best to provide reasonable accommodations that would enable Chynna to participate. They hired two sign language interpreters who accompanied her during the formal parts of the program. Since the program schedule was quite intensive, Chynna discovered that it was challenging to concentrate on the interpreters all day long. They let her know when it was appropriate to take a break.

While she was included in all formal activities of her program, Chynna had to keep up with the group during evening social gatherings where there were no interpreters. Her classmates were

not inviting her because they just didn't know that she could interact without an interpreter.

Growing up, Chynna became accustomed to letting other people speak for her. When ordering at a restaurant, she would have to explain that she couldn't hear, the waitress would give her a pitying look, before taking her order from her parents.

It was time to overcome her fears and invite herself to the social activities. She realized that just by explaining how she could read lips and how her peers could get her attention by tapping her on the shoulder, she could become part of the group.

Chynna has a lot to show from her time spent at her local community college. She has won academic honors, traveled internationally and grown into a more confident woman. She plans to transfer to the University of Wisconsin where she will major in business, and she hopes to one day own her own business, and to work to encourage others as herself to achieve more.



# DIRECTING ACCESS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Students from NOVA flew to Prague, then traveled south to the town of Pisek, where we were mentored by acclaimed Czech filmmakers at the Film Academy of Miroslav Ondricek and engaged with Czech students to produce short films.

Shea Megale spent four weeks over the summer of 2018 directing an original film that she had created with a group of Czech actors during an exchange with Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA)

In the summer of 2018, Shea Megale, a woman with spinal muscular atrophy type II who uses a power chair, participated in the first-ever Czech Republic filmmaking program organized by Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA).

Community college had represented an amazing opportunity for Shea to both grow as a person and to find a community of friends her age. She took two years of film classes, and collaborated on film projects with fellow students. All the while she was aware of a potential opportunity to participate in a filming exchange in the Czech Republic, as talk around the academic department of inaugurating such a program went back to her first semester at NOVA.

A panel of professors met to decide which of ten original film scripts from the NOVA students would be converted into movies during the student's time in the Czech Republic. Shea's script was one of those chosen, with Shea as the director.

The town of Pisek was the perfect place for a short film project, offering opportunities for a historical old world backdrop that would never be found in the United States. With its classic architecture and cobblestone streets, it was the perfect place for Shea's script which was based in 1908.

Directing her own film script, Shea practiced leadership and interpersonal skills as she worked





That feeling of belonging was sacred to me. So the idea of going to Europe to experience challenge, adventure, and discovery with people I loved was a life experience I lunged for.

with a diverse cast of American and Czech students and actors. Since they could not speak each other's language, she communicated with her movie cast partially with the help of interpreters. Her years of practicing different kinds of nonverbal communication also proved useful as she surmounted language barriers to achieve the perfect scenes, such as one in which a character is unexpectedly hit in the face by a flying fish.

"So for one take, I, without speaking through a translator, leapt in front of the actor and used two fingers to say, Keep your eyes right here on me, and smiled. He made eye contact with me as we rolled and the fish came and--perfect--he did not flinch. When we finally got the take, he smiled too. No words needed."

Shea was able to pay for the program and most of the cost of her personal attendant services using the money that she had earned as a teaching assistant for lower-level film classes taught by her favorite professor.

Shea also would require a personal attendant to help get in and out of bed. Shea and her parents did a lot of work to make sure to find the right person. Host staff in the Czech Republic helped find someone by publishing the request in local newspapers.

Shea and her parents ultimately settled on a personal attendant, who was a middle-aged woman that worked for a local eldercare home. Since the personal attendant already had a day job, she had experience, and more than that, she was genuinely interested in learning about Shea and supporting her with her needs.

The personal attendant supported Shea during the mornings and the evenings with her bedtime



and wake up routines. Since neither spoke the other's language, they communicated using a mix of Google translate and nonverbal gestures.

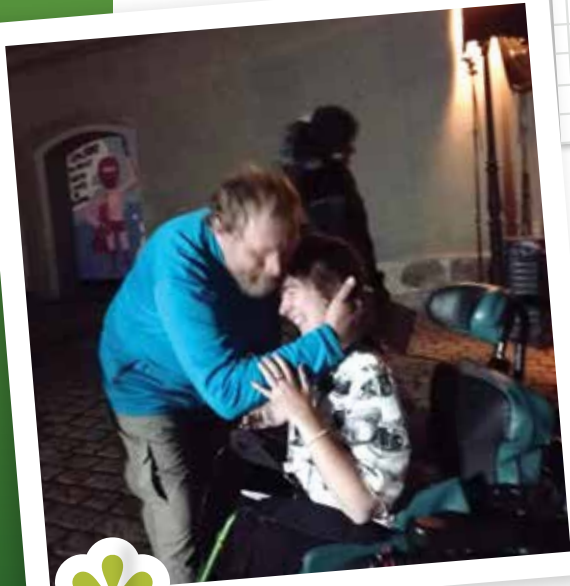
Nevertheless there were times when Shea's personal attendant was not available due to her other work obligations. For instance, Shea's personal attendant had to be off to work by six in the morning. At the same time, Shea would sometimes be up until four in the morning filming, and she would come back home more ready to go to bed than to wake up. Fortunately, all it took was a simple group text and she could reliably count on her classmates to assist. In one impactful instance, four male students responded to one of these group texts to transfer Shea from her bed to her chair.

Shea feels fortunate to have been able to access such a special opportunity. As a young, effervescent wheelchair-user passionate about the writing and filming worlds, she needed a college that was moving as fast as she was, and she found that in NOVA. Where else would she have been able to write and direct her own film, leading a cast of 20 Czech students, only in the nimble, supportive environment of the community college?

Shea plans to graduate with her BA in History with a minor in Astronomy from the University of Virginia. She has also published through St. Martin's Press her first Young Adult novel about a wheelchair-using film student who falls in love with her lead actor. The book is titled "This is Not a Love Scene."

# QUICK TIPS

for Personal Assistant Services Abroad



## □ GET FUNDING

There are a variety of methods to cover the costs of a personal assistant. Disabled travelers may save up money through work-study. A community fundraiser using an online tool like GoFundMe can also be a good way to find funding. Showing that the international exchange is part of an Individualized Employment Plan (IEP), an exchange participant might get funding from The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation for a personal assistant. For any sponsored programs or scholarships, check if funding for a personal assistant can be provided. Many colleges will likely not provide funding, but scholarship programs have supported cost for personal assistant services in the past, so it's worth checking on!

## □ BEGIN THE SEARCH

Enlist support from staff in the host country who can publish an ad in the local newspaper or ask around their networks for personal assistant services. Consider if a friend or classmate would be willing to come along as a personal assistant (PA).

Check disability services/organizations, independent living centers, for staff looking for chances to work and assist an enthusiastic student with a disability.

## □ FIGURE OUT COMMUNICATION

Learn a few key terms in the local language to provide guidance to locals on lifting, guiding, reaching or other support that the individual with a disability might need. Google translate can bridge the gap where language skills fall short.

## □ IDENTIFY BACKUPS

Sometimes the person with a disability and the personal assistant's schedules will not be the same, and at other times they may need a break from one another. Check to see if a local care home has other staff on hand that could serve as backups. Don't underestimate the ability of peers to step in if needed.





# STUDYING ABROAD WITH YOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**A selection of international exchange opportunities abound.  
Learn where to find them.**

More and more students find that community colleges are an affordable way to obtain a college degree. In states like Maryland, disabled students even have the option to seek a tuition waiver on some community college classes. Community colleges realize the value of serving a broad range of students and offering options including technical and general education: two-year and four-year degree programs.

Despite the growing opportunities, study abroad is not the first thing that comes to mind when discussing the benefits of community colleges; nevertheless, international programs are one of the growing opportunities. Try these tips and start your international experience now on your campus.

## START BEFORE YOU ENROLL

While more community colleges are seeking ways to internationalize their offerings, it is still important to make sure they have what you are looking for. Make the campus's commitment to internationalization and to creating a welcoming environment for students with disabilities one of the deciding factors before enrolling. Educate yourself about the specific program and services offered vis-à-vis your interest.

## MEET THE FACULTY

Many overseas programs at community colleges are faculty-led. Research your options.

## LEARN IF YOUR COLLEGE IS PART OF A CONSORTIUM

Many community colleges belong to consortia, or have agreements with other community colleges to pool resources in order to offer a wide selection of programs. Consortia typically tend to be among colleges within the same state, though some entities such as the Illinois Consortium for International Studies and Programs include members from contiguous states. Sometimes consortia offer their own exchange programs completely apart from any particular college.

Specifically, Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) is an international association of community, technical, and vocational institutions creating

globally engaged learning environments.

And the College Consortium for International Studies (CCIS) is a partnership of colleges and universities encompassing the broad spectrum of international higher education. CCIS builds collaborative arrangements, most notably study abroad programs, among institutions who share the commitment for developing international dimensions as an integral part of collegiate education.

## THIRD-PARTY PROVIDERS

Third-party organizations like the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) and the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) sometimes contract with community colleges to make their programs available to their students. These organizations establish partnerships with universities around the world to offer a rich selection of study and work opportunities for community college students and beyond.

## ASK ABOUT SCHOLARSHIPS

Some community colleges offer need-based aid to enable students to study abroad. Check the opportunities at your college, and don't forget to learn about the U.S Department of State sponsored Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program and the Fund for Education Abroad which give priority to community college students.

# GETTING CREATIVE

## WITH FUNDRAISING FOR GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES

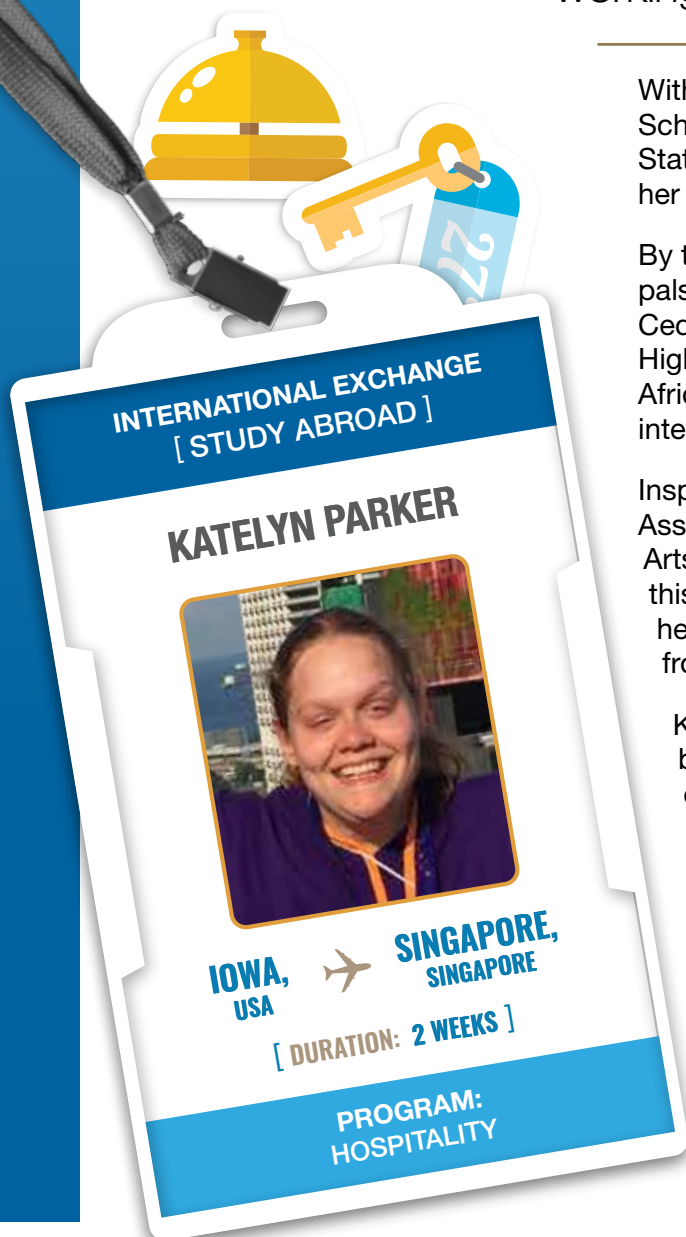
There are lots of careers where you go to college and you are mostly learning from a textbook and then you later step out into the real world after getting your degree, and you realize “oh this is what this is actually like,” but learning and receiving real practical experience as you earn your degree at The Hotel at Kirkwood Center enables students to learn what it’s going to be like working in the real world before you graduate.

With help from her college, community, and a Gilman Scholarship Award, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Katelyn Parker learned more about the world and her own vocational interests.

By the time Katelyn Parker, a student with cerebral palsy, enrolled at Kirkwood Community College (KCC) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, she had already traveled quite a bit. Highlights included mission trips to Zimbabwe and South Africa. These early experiences left her with a passion for international exchange.

Inspired by these early travels Katelyn chose to pursue her Associates of Applied Science Degree (AAS) in Hospitality Arts at Kirkwood Community College because she thought this would be an ideal path for a career that would take her all across the globe and enable her to meet people from many different cultures.

Kirkwood’s Hospitality Management program is unique because it offers the chance for students to take classes while practicing their skills on the job. The goal is to learn how to manage a hotel. This does not just include learning management techniques and food preparation, students build a grounding in technical subjects such as financial record keeping, food fundamentals, computers, food purchasing, sanitation, equipment, human relations, and the safety and legal aspects of the hospitality industry. Students get to help run The Hotel at Kirkwood Center. They also lend a hand at Kirkwood’s Class Act restaurant which serves up a variety of exquisite gastronomical options for the local community.





In addition to building skills on the job, another exciting element of the course was the chance to gain global experience. Katelyn jumped at the opportunity to study abroad with the Institute of Technical Education in Singapore (ITE), which was one of the Global Education Network (GEN) institutions offered through Kirkwood. She joined a group of students from Kirkwood's vocational programs to study the culture and hospitality of Singapore at the Kirkwood campus, before hopping on a plane to spend a few weeks in the country itself.

The GEN is used to facilitate student and faculty exchange of expertise and international outlooks between Kirkwood and three other partner schools in Australia, Canada, and Singapore. Singapore was a great place to visit for the hospitality students because of its thriving tourism industry, spanning small boutique hotels to some of the largest, luxury hotels around the world.

Among other activities, Katelyn enjoyed exploring Merlion Park, Little India, and Marina Bay Sands, the largest hotel in Singapore. Katelyn also relished meeting and getting to know people from all over the world.

Katelyn was impressed by both Singapore's safety and diversity. It's a regional nexus of cultures, with people from Chinese, Malay and Indian backgrounds intermingled. Though English is one of the spoken languages of Singapore, she often found herself navigating language barriers while trying to navigate the light rail system.

Though Katelyn enjoyed her program in Singapore, the funding necessary to join was not easy to obtain, especially considering the additional costs for accessibility needs, but Katelyn got creative!

She resorted to a few different funding sources both to pay for program tuition and travel costs as well as a scooter rental, which she identified as necessary because her cerebral palsy limits her stamina if she has to walk or stand for extended periods of time.

By far, the most significant support she received was the U.S. Department of State's- Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship. The Gilman



## KATELYN'S TIPS FOR FUNDRAISING

We are lucky to have Katelyn Parker's thoughts for fundraising as she has searched for coins under rugs three times over the last few years from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Singapore.

- ☐ **Identify specific things that you're raising money for** i.e. a scooter.
- ☐ **Apply for every scholarship you can find**—Ask your school's study abroad department if they know of any additional scholarships you may be eligible to apply for.
- ☐ **Set up a GoFundMe** or some other page where people can donate.
- ☐ **Get other media involve!** Katelyn contacted a local newspaper to share her story to help with her fundraising.
- ☐ **Put together a list of all of the people that you know** including friends, family and indirect acquaintances through all of your community networks including church, school and beyond. **Pro tip:** Indirect acquaintances can sometimes be the best.
- ☐ **Don't be afraid to ask multiple times.** If someone does not respond to the first outreach, try a couple more times before you give up. Sometimes people want to support your dream, but they just need to be reminded.
- ☐ **Finally, don't forget to thank them for their contribution,** and make sure to share by giving a presentation, writing a blog, putting together a photo album or sharing your story with the Clearinghouse!

Program enables students of limited financial means to study or intern abroad. Students who are awarded Gilman Scholarships must study or intern abroad for a minimum of two weeks, if they're at a community college, or a minimum of three weeks if they're at a four year institution. As an outstanding community college student with disabilities, receiving Federal Pell Grant funding, Katelyn was an ideal candidate for the program.

Additionally, Katelyn applied for and received a \$1,500 scholarship from Kirkwood and organized a GoFundMe campaign to raise money to rent her scooter. Katelyn also contacted her local newspaper to help promote her campaign. She was able to raise all the funds necessary. It can be a vulnerable experience to put yourself out there, but in the end Katelyn was able to access an opportunity that she will never forget and will continue to reap the benefits for years to come.

The faculty as well as the Singaporean students were always willing to lend a hand when it came to negotiating escalators or curbs with Katelyn's scooter rental. Though she was reluctant to request formal reasonable accommodations from study abroad staff due to fears that they would not let her go, Katelyn coordinated with Kirkwood and staff at the Institute of Technical Education to plan logistics for the scooter rental.

Katelyn still has that flair as someone who likes people and wants to share her passion for learning about different cultures with others around the world. After finishing her hospitality arts program, she plans to continue her search for a career that includes travel and meeting interesting people.

## APPLICATION TIPS FOR THE GILMAN SCHOLARSHIP

The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program is a program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs with funding provided by the U.S. Government and supported in its implementation by the Institute of International Education (IIE).

Students from underrepresented backgrounds including those with disabilities are encouraged to apply. Submit a successful application by following these key tips.

- ➔ You may have to begin your Gilman application before you apply to your program.
- ➔ Submit your transcript with time to spare. Expediting a transcript of the last minute could get expensive.
- ➔ Take time to write and revise your essay.
- ➔ Hook the reader from the beginning with something that makes you unique.
- ➔ Have a trusted person review your essay for grammar and style.
- ➔ Demonstrate that you have researched your program by explaining how it relates to future goals, career plans and major.
- ➔ One of Gilman's priorities is to enable more students from backgrounds that are underrepresented in study abroad to go overseas, so disclosing if you are at a community college, the first of your family to go to college, a person of color, a person with a disability, studying STEM, from a rural background etc. can make your application more competitive.



# Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship

The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program is reshaping study abroad to make it more accessible and inclusive for American students. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), U.S. Department of State, is committed to ensuring that our next generation of leaders — American students of all backgrounds — engage internationally to foster mutual understanding and develop critical skills in support of our national security and economic prosperity, as well as their own futures. The Gilman Program broadens the U.S. student population that studies and interns abroad by providing scholarships to outstanding undergraduates who, due to financial constraints, might not otherwise participate. Since the program's establishment in 2001, over 1,300 U.S. institutions have sent more than 28,000 Gilman Scholars to 150 countries around the globe. Recipients are awarded up to \$5,000 (or \$8,000 including the Critical Need Language Award) to be used toward the cost of study abroad or international internship programs.

## Eligibility Requirements

- U.S. Citizen
- Undergraduate student in good academic standing
- Federal Pell Grant recipient
- In the process of applying for, or accepted to, a credit-bearing study abroad or internship program in a country with an overall Travel Advisory of 1 or 2, according to the U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory System

## Application Deadlines:

### FIRST TUESDAY OF MARCH

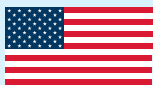
For summer, fall, and full academic year programs

### FIRST TUESDAY OF OCTOBER

For spring programs and summer (early decision) applications

**For additional information and application, please visit [gilmanscholarship.org](https://gilmanscholarship.org) and contact your study abroad office.**

Contact us at [Gilman@iie.org](mailto:Gilman@iie.org)



The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program is a program of the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and supported in its implementation by IIE.

- Complete the application at [GilmanScholarship.org](https://GilmanScholarship.org)
- Contact your campus study abroad advisor as early as possible to inform them you are applying for the scholarship. They are a great resource





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[www.miusa.org/NCDE](http://www.miusa.org/NCDE)



Information provided throughout the A World Awaits You (AWAY) publication has been compiled by the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange.

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange is a project of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, designed to increase the participation of people with disabilities in international exchange between the United States and other countries, and is supported in its implementation by Mobility International USA.

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community



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