

**Orla Lavery**

**Rutgers University, New Jersey**

I would like to start my final report by saying a very big thank you. Thank you to the alumni who helped fund my North America Scholarship, thank you to the Global Programmes team at York.

If I could give you just a snapshot of what the scholarship has allowed me to experience and achieve it might not exemplify just how formative this year has been for me. But, it will at least give a quantification of how valuable this funding can be to a student abroad.



Over two semesters at Rutgers I traveled to 9 different cities across the US on a pretty limited budget. I gained lifetime friends from Korea to Australia to France. I became a regular contributor to two student publications, achieved a first in my degree and gained a 6-month internship at the United Nations headquarters in New York. I also suffered from severe food poisoning on a flight...at the airport, in a taxi and to my new roommates delight, on arrival to my new room. I had my laptop stolen (and very fortunately returned). I wrote over 27,000 words in assessed essays and spent more time missing my family, friends and boyfriend than I would dare to admit to myself.

Of all the things I experienced abroad I am most grateful for my new found appreciation for my friends, family and University at home. My time abroad shed light upon just how fortunate I am to be surrounded by a network of people who really know me and really care. I learnt that building that network takes time, energy and is almost impossible to match in just a year. At times, this was quite a difficult realisation to come to terms with.

Despite making some wonderful friends during my year abroad the dynamic was something entirely new to me and that took some adjusting to. In accepting this, I found it became much easier to see my year abroad as time for personal development. This certainly allowed me to focus on my own ambitions and what better place to foster my own (albeit small) American Dream?

In facing both emotional and practical challenges, I found that often there is nothing that can't be made better by just reaching out to someone. I learnt that often a little perseverance will go a long way and in doing so achieved a first in my degree, balanced a long-distance relationship and got my 6-month internship with the UN.

My time abroad has changed my outlook in many ways, some of which I wouldn't have expected. My time with American students has given me a much more entrepreneurial approach towards my work which I think will prove invaluable when looking for future employment. It has enabled me to have experiences that very few 19-20years olds are afforded the luxury and opportunity to. It has made me realise just how important funding is to a student's wellbeing and education but above all, it has inspired me to ensure that more students to do the same.