Studying Abroad with Saige Albert

Saige Albert was attending the University of Wyoming (UW) and receiving a UW Institutional GEAR UP scholarship when she decided she wanted to study abroad. For fall semester 2009, she attended the National University of Ireland in Maynooth. In her own words and photos, she shares her experiences.

A friend and I decided we wanted to study abroad, and we needed an English speaking country. We didn’t want to go to London, and we didn’t want to go to Australia. So, I said, “How about Ireland?”

The University of Wyoming didn’t have a student exchange program with Ireland, so I had to go through another university to set it up. It was really expensive, so I knew I’d have to take out a private loan.

Finally, I decided I’d ask GEAR UP Wyoming if they have funds for studying abroad. I emailed them and asked if there was a way I could get some extra scholarship money because my cost of attendance was going to be so high. They had never had a student study abroad before and had never done a study abroad scholarship. I sent in a budget, and they checked...
into it. They did everything for me and gave me a huge scholarship through the UW Institutional GEAR UP Scholarship fund.

Being able to spend 100 days in Ireland and knowing it’s not going to be as financially burdensome is really nice, because I was able to do a lot more things knowing I had a little bit more leeway, a little bit more play. And study abroad builds such a sense of independence that it’s one of those experiences that I think everybody should do, and everybody should have the opportunity to do. And by giving a scholarship, especially one as massive as this one, then it allows opportunities for more people to be able to participate.

I was really lucky to have found a university that had a good department in my major, Molecular Biology. At least two of the classes will count for my major. The others should count for University Studies programs.

I really enjoyed the school system in Ireland. If you’re there to learn, then that’s what you’ll do, and if not, you’re going to fail. You have to be self motivated. For the most part, I didn’t have any busy work. For me, it was much more motivating. It made me feel a lot more independent.

“If you’re there to learn, then that’s what you’ll do, and if not, you’re going to fail. You have to be self motivated.”

Class structures were quite a bit different in Ireland. It’s more of a lecture based class. Some of the professors are trying to change their style, so they love having American students, because in the U.S., we are already used to a discussion based class.

Also, they don’t have any homework over there. So it’s really great for study abroad students. If you’re going to school for all four years in Ireland, you have 12 weeks of classes and a two week break and then two weeks of exams, and those exams are your grade. For international students, they make it so you don’t have to come back for exams, so I wrote essays. I had nine essays all due within the last week of classes. In theory, you’re supposed to study and work on the essays all semester long. They give you your topics at the beginning, so you have all semester to work on it and really develop it into a good paper.
I found everybody to be so friendly and so willing to help. Students study together all the time. It’s a lot more of a social learning atmosphere outside of class which is really nice. I enjoyed that.

I know that I got so much out of studying abroad. There’s nothing like traveling around a different country all by yourself. It makes you realize that you can do this, and you can be out in the world on your own. I feel I have a better sense of myself and the world in general. I feel like a whole new person coming back to Wyoming.

It’s not about being able to go anywhere in the world as it is getting that different cultural experience. It’s about getting out of what you’re used to, being thrown in a totally different situation. I learned so much about myself and what I value. It’s really important to have that kind of experience where you really understand who you are.

It’s as much about learning about another culture as it is about redeveloping a love about your own life and the way you were raised and the person that you are. And at the same time, realizing things that could be better, things that could change that you like better from living in different places. It’s totally life changing. One thing I personally learned is that Wyoming is where I belong. This is where I need to be, because I love it and missed it so much.

GEAR UP Wyoming Scholarship Awards

There are three types of GEAR UP Wyoming scholarships which former GEAR UP students attending college are eligible to receive:

1. Wyoming Community College Institutional Scholarships
   Five of GEAR UP Wyoming’s community college partners have committed institutional funds to be awarded to former GEAR UP students who attend their institution. Students attending these five community colleges are eligible for institutional scholarships: Central Wyoming College, Laramie County Community College, Northern Wyoming Community College District, Northwest College, and Western Wyoming Community College.

2. University of Wyoming Institutional Scholarships
   The University of Wyoming (UW), the administrator of GEAR UP Wyoming, has committed institutional funds to be awarded to former GEAR UP students who attend UW.

3. GEAR UP Wyoming Federal Scholarships
   GEAR UP Wyoming has established a trust fund to provide scholarships to former GEAR UP students who attend any institution in Wyoming or who attend out-of-state programs not offered in Wyoming.

GEAR UP Wyoming is excited to report a record number of college scholarships for the 2009 fall semester!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Wyoming Community College Institutional</td>
<td>$49,326.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Wyoming Institutional</td>
<td>$67,118.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEAR UP Wyoming Federal</td>
<td>$150,641.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$267,085.00</strong></td>
</tr>
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There were a total of 161 former GEAR UP Wyoming students attending college during the fall 2009 semester at both the University of Wyoming and the state’s seven community colleges. In addition to providing the GEAR UP scholarship opportunities, the GEAR UP program assists students in finding and applying for other types of scholarships. Through these efforts, all of the unmet costs of attendance were covered for all former GEAR UP students enrolled in college the 2009 fall semester.
Community College Spotlight

This issue’s featured community college is Laramie County Community College (LCCC) which serves Laramie and Albany counties. The main campus is located in Cheyenne, and the Albany County branch is located in Laramie. In addition, LCCC maintains an Eastern Laramie County Outreach Center in Pine Bluffs.

The LCCC GEAR UP service area includes 6,959 square miles in school districts located in Laramie, Pine Bluffs, Burns, and Cheyenne. Currently, 350 students are served from Central, East, Laramie, Triumph, and Whiting High Schools; Carey, Laramie, Johnson, and McCormick Junior High Schools; Attention Homes, Burns, and Pine Bluffs Junior/Senior High Schools; and students who are home schooled.

GEAR UP at LCCC is part of the Center for Secondary Students in the Workforce and Development division and works closely with the college’s original college prep program, Pathways to Success, a program for low income and first generation college-bound high school students.

Some of the opportunities offered to students include monthly skill building lunch meetings and tutoring at each of the 12 schools served. Also offered are academically rigorous monthly academies on the LCCC campus, summer academies, college campus visits, and cultural events. Financial aid and parent workshops are offered as well.

Through these activities students become aware of post secondary degree opportunities, thereby raising their aspirations for a college education.

Students also participate in a variety of educational field trips during the summer. Past academic adventures have included a science day at the Denver Downtown Aquarium, a biology trip to the Denver Zoo, and a visit to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science where GEAR UP students viewed IMAX films such as “America’s Last Frontier: Alaska” and “Grand Canyon: River at Risk.”

Each summer students visit four-year college campuses such as Colorado State University, Black Hills State University, University of Utah, and the University of Wyoming. These visits also allow students to spend time at historical sites such as Devil’s Tower and Mount Rushmore or to participate in cultural events such as a chuck wagon dinner. Through these activities students become aware of postsecondary degree opportunities, thereby raising their aspirations for a college education.

Another way students experience college life is through spending four days on the Laramie County Community College campus. The GEAR UP students have this opportunity the first week of August at “Summer Opportunity Academy Rocks” (SOAR). SOAR provides high school students with firsthand experience of life on a college campus. They eat all their meals in the college cafeteria, attend selected classes each day, and explore the campus. In past years, some of the class choices have included Entrepreneurship, Computer...

Another unique academic opportunity for GEAR UP students is an online career planning program for the secondary school districts. Purchased with Perkins funds, this program allows all secondary students access to the Kuder Career Planning System (KCPS) through their school counselors and GEAR UP. This free program introduces students to lifelong electronic portfolio development and course planning. It helps students connect coursework with the world of work and explore career options they can discuss with their school counselor and parents. Per the KCPS website, “[Kuder] features interactive and reliable tools to make career planning fun, engaging, and relevant for today’s middle school and high school students.”

As part of the grant, LCCC GEAR UP wants to help students not only graduate from high school, but also to enroll and engage in postsecondary education. Learning about and developing an online portfolio helps build the 21st Century skills needed to meet the grant objectives.

LCCC GEAR UP January Academy

GEAR UP Wyoming
Student and Family Services
Laramie County Community College

Parents are a vital component for successful students and are invited to all Laramie County Community College (LCCC) campus academies. During the January Academy, high school seniors complete a FAFSA workshop with their parents. LCCC and GEAR UP staff help participants sign up for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, building parent involvement while assisting families to receive money towards education.

During the workshop, parents themselves were encouraged to return to college providing role models for their children as well as furthering their own aspirations.

Last spring parents were invited to a positive parenting workshop to discuss how to celebrate students’ achievement. Parents also shared ideas on how to engage their children in achieving family goals while discussing the benefits of college. During the workshop, parents themselves were encouraged to return to college thus providing role models for their children as well as furthering their own aspirations. One of the greatest outcomes of this workshop was an improved interpersonal connection between parents and staff. LCCC has also opened Facebook and MySpace web pages to keep students informed and in touch. For more information, visit the LCCC website at lccc.wy.edu under High School Programs/College Prep.
Scholarship Corner

GEAR UP Wyoming Matters interviewed Aaron Reynolds while he was attending Casper Community College. He participated in the GEAR UP program during high school and received a GEAR UP Federal Scholarship as well as several other scholarships.

GUWY: Where did you attend high school?
Aaron: I attended Star Lane Center and Kelly Walsh high school.

GUWY: How did you learn about the GEAR UP program?
Amy: I learned of it when Chelsea Depalo and Carrie Corrigan-Maki came to my school looking to recruit.

GUWY: What type of scholarships were you awarded?
Aaron: The Casper College Opportunity Award, Richardson Scholarship, and in my senior semester, I received the GEAR UP Federal Scholarship. I also received Pell Grant funds.

GUWY: Was it difficult to apply for the scholarships?
Aaron: Not with the GEAR UP staff’s support, but without them, I wouldn’t have known where to begin.

GUWY: Is the scholarship meeting your financial needs?
Aaron: It does if I live very conservatively.

GUWY: What type of support are you receiving and does it help?
Aaron: My education is currently possible with the sole support of the scholarships and helps immensely.

GUWY: How does having your financial needs met affect your social and academic life?
Aaron: It warrants both, my social life is tied to my academic life.

GUWY: What has having a scholarship opened up for you? Does it allow you to participate in extracurricular activities?
Aaron: It has opened the doors that poverty closes. Because of the scholarships, I was able to learn Arabic, Russian, German, and Japanese; the language skills that were provided to me will open doors abroad, and will enable me to experience firsthand the diverse cultures and societies. It would also allow me to do extracurricular activities, had not I taken two falls, which resulted in the development of Turret’s Syndrome and also caused permanent debilitating chronic pain.

GUWY: Is there anything else you’d like to discuss?
Aaron: Yes, GEAR UP pushed me through the door of college. I had grown up knowing that I would never have the funds or the encouragement to study in college. Anyone who thinks the same as I once thought, should seek out the help of the GEAR UP program.

GUWY: When do you graduate, and what are your plans?
Aaron: I recently graduated from Casper College with an associates degree in World/Foreign Languages. I will be transferring to the University of Wyoming this summer where I can begin my bachelor’s degree in Russian Language. Once I complete the bachelor’s degree, I will be eligible to be selected to participate in the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. If I am selected, I will be able to teach English in Japan, with every expense covered, courtesy of the Japanese government. My plans are to finish college to the best of my ability, then I plan to either teach foreign languages in America or to teach Russian, Arabic, or English in Japan. I hope to teach a language unfamiliar to foreign countries, in their high schools.

“Aaron Reynolds, a recent graduate of Casper College

“The scholarships have opened the doors that poverty closes. Because of the scholarships, I was able to learn Arabic, Russian, German, and Japanese.”
GEAR UPWyoming
Professional Development

Creating a College-Going Culture
in Middle and High Schools

This feature, aimed at middle and high school counselors, educators and administrators, appears in each GUWY newsletter. The objective of a college-going culture is preparing all students for a full range of post-secondary education options.

College-Going Culture Defined: College-going culture – where adults and peers see college-going as expected and attainable and where they see the effort and persistence that preparation for college requires as normal. (Increasing Access to College, 2002)

The College-Going Mindset: Should every student pursue higher education? Not necessarily. Should every student be prepared for and have the choice to attend college or pursue other types of post-high school education? ABSOLUTELY. (Rethinking High School, 2007)

Beyond College Eligible: There is a distinct difference in being college-eligible and college-ready. The goal of a college-going culture is for all students to be college-ready which is defined as being able to meet the expectations of entry-level college courses.

Upcoming Professional Development

June 14-18, Rock Springs
Quantum Learning for Teachers Levels 1-5

August 2-6, Cheyenne
Quantum Learning for Teachers Levels 1-5

Contact Lori Kimbrough at lorik@uwyo.edu for registration information for these public workshops.

ACT Corner

The ACT college entrance exam is offered in the Fall and Spring. Students and parents should contact their GEAR UP Coordinator for information on ACT preparation.

Sample ACT Prep Questions:

1. How many irrational numbers are there between 1 and 6?
   A. 1
   B. 2
   C. 4
   D. 10
   E. Infinitely many

2. What is the value of x when $2x + 3 = 3x - 4$?
   A. -7
   B. -1/5
   C. 1
   D. 1/5
   E. 7

3. A typical high school student consumes 67.5 pounds of sugar per year. As part of a new nutrition plan, each member of a track team plans to lower the sugar he or she consumes by at least 20% for the coming year. Assuming each track member had consumed sugar at the level of a typical high school student and will adhere to this plan for the coming year, what is the maximum number of pounds of sugar to be consumed by each track team member in the coming year?
   A. 14
   B. 44
   C. 48
   D. 54
   E. 66

Answers to ACT Prep Questions:

1. Correct Answer: E
   If you chose this answer, you know 1 and 6 are real numbers and that there are an infinite number of irrational numbers between any two real numbers.

2. Correct Answer: E
   You can solve this problem by first subtracting 2x from each side of the equation to get $3 = x - 4$. Then solve the equation to get $x = 7$.

3. Correct Answer: D
   For each member of the track team to consume 20% less sugar, the track member will consume 100% - 20% = 80% of the level of a typical high school student. 80% of 67.5 = 0.80(67.5) = 54 pounds of sugar per year.
GEAR UP Wyoming is funded 50% through a grant from the US Dept of Education totaling $3.5 million annually with an additional $3.5 million provided by in-kind and scholarship contributions from Wyoming’s community colleges, the University of Wyoming, and the Wyoming Department of Education.