In the spring of 2013 I had the pleasure of studying abroad in Nagoya, Japan at Nanzan University. After I turned in all the required paperwork, there was one thing still nagging at me—how on earth was I going to afford living in Japan?

The answer arrived in my student email inbox from one of the study abroad counselors. It announced that applications for the Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship were currently open. This scholarship could help me with the expenses of studying in Japan. However, in addition to applying, I had to promise to do a follow-on project regarding my trip abroad. The project portion discouraged me a little bit since I was just a no-name animation student in Orange County. My major had nothing to do with anything like international politics and peace studies. What could they possibly expect me to do for a project?

But the answer couldn’t be more obvious. Since I’m an animation student, why not make a movie?

Making the film after I returned was certainly easier said than done. And it wasn’t because after returning to my home university I was juggling a job, an internship, and classes while trying to physically draw and paint everything before the project deadline. In order to make my personal experience relevant to people who knew nothing about me, I had to depersonalize a lot of the precious memories I made abroad. It meant that the touristy trek I made to Osaka would take precedence over the birthday party my international and Japanese friends threw for me. It also meant that I couldn’t fit all of the people I met into my film, so I had to invent characters to avoid the appearance of preference. In other words, I wasn’t only being challenged as an artist, but also tested as a commercial storyteller.

It’s amazing how a trip abroad ended up polishing not only the Japanese I learned previously, but also the skills I needed for my major. No matter what you’re studying in college, take the opportunity to immerse yourself in a different world. It’ll force you to think in ways you never knew you could, and therefore improve creativity. Creativity and innovation always benefit everyone, whether you are studying international politics, chemistry, graphic design, or like me, animation. It all comes back to seeking positive cross-cultural interaction, which is sure to inspire both sides and create a better world for everyone.