

Dear (Donor),

Thank you. Those two simple, unassuming words do little to communicate the depth of the gratitude that I feel for your gift. The word gift is truly appropriate: you didn't simply sign a check, magically reducing my tuition. You gave me the gift of experience, an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. An experience I wouldn't have had without your generosity.

Some students want to study abroad because it sounds fun, or cool. That's great, and there's nothing wrong with it, but to me, this opportunity to study abroad in Argentina has been a chance to open a window into the culture of a people that live half a world away. The classroom is no substitute for the kind of learning that your gift has made possible. In my application essay for this award, I quoted a Chinese proverb that says, "tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I'll understand." I want to repeat that here because this quote – this philosophy – resonates profoundly with me, and it is a powerful insight into the processes of learning. This trip to Argentina unquestionably falls into the third category: what better way is there to involve a student in his or her own learning than to put him in a situation where the lesson isn't some abstract idea, but his reality? The world becomes the classroom, everyday events become the blackboard, and memories become the notes.

As a politics student, this class wasn't directly related to my major. However, while I was in Argentina I was able to practice both my Spanish and investigate politics. What better place to learn about international politics than in a foreign country? I spoke extensively with Argentineans about their political system, prominent politicians, and their own political views. Many of my conversations turned to American politics, and I gained new insights about my own political system as well as how we are perceived by others. And I learned a lot of new vocabulary, too!

My time in Argentina was something that has influenced me powerfully. Obviously, my skill in Spanish improved dramatically, but I also learned a lot about the world and the people who live on it, including myself. One of the reasons that most compelled me to attend Cornell was the school's commitment to fostering academic independence in its students. "Academic independence" sounds important, but what does it mean? To me, it embodies the idea that students shouldn't be just along for the ride, but instead should control the course of their own education. It means that students are being prepared for the real world by genuinely meaningful experiences instead of being coddled in an academic netherworld. It means that teachers aren't chaperones or "the adults," but are guides along the long road of self-improvement. My experiences abroad have been fundamental to my development as an individual as well as a global citizen. It is imperative that students -- not only students, *everyone* -- be exposed to the uncensored world that waits beyond our national borders, beyond the tourist areas, beyond our comfort zone.

I am grateful that alumni such as you also hold these values dear, helping to make that necessity a reality for students at Cornell. I hope that reading this letter has helped you to understand what I mean when I say "thank you." As I said earlier, you didn't just give me money: you helped me to grow as an individual. You are one of the guides along *my* road to self-improvement.

Thank you.
C. Griffin Litwin

