Poet and environmental activist Wendell Berry has this to say about the value of studying abroad: “Nobody can discover the world for somebody else. Only when we discover it for ourselves does it become common ground and a common bond and we cease to be alone.” English Matters agrees wholeheartedly! Particularly for curious college students, experience of the world outside one's home country creates possibilities for common ground and common bonds. And not just between people of different nations, but between peers who might not otherwise encounter each other from their embedded positions; this is a fancy way of saying that studying abroad allows students to push past their comfort zones, and that it brings people together. In doing so, the college experience itself expands beyond borders.

As such, the UW English Department encourages our students to study abroad, and, with the generous support of alumni like June and Robert Barnes, strives to support these endeavors financially. There are many options for where students can choose to study out of country, sponsored by a variety of faculty and programs both inside and outside of the English Department. But, along with Creative Writing's Rome program, our Study Abroad in London programs reflect our long-standing commitment to overseas education. The Barnes family established by way of endowment the June Yeakel and Robert Hardy Barnes Wings to London Scholarship, which has most recently provided support to twelve English majors studying in London in Spring 2018.

“Our father set up an endowment at the University of Washington in our mother's name after her death in 2005, specifically in the Department of English,” says Julie Morrison, eldest daughter of June and Robert.
“After Dad died in 2011, our family was gratified to be able to add his name to the endowment as well.” In an open letter to scholarship recipients, Julie relates what travel meant to her mother and father, what it did for them and what they did for others:

“It was through his medical community that our parents learned of the dire need for doctors in Algeria when the French left the country. The year was 1963. They and their team didn’t hesitate to pack their bags and medical supplies for a war-torn country. Mom learned to speak French and was the interpreter as they travelled from village to village treating people who had often walked for miles for medical treatment. This trip was the beginning of a lifelong passion for travel. Their lives were enriched by the people they met and the cultures they experienced. Acquaintances became friends and a part of our extended family . . . . They encouraged each of us to explore the world. It was one of their greatest gifts to us.”

Students who receive the Wings to London scholarship seem to echo the Barnes’ enthusiasm for travel, learning, and generosity of spirit. *English Matters* reached out to some current Wings recipients, who were glad to share some of their London experiences and reflections. First we have Megan Oakes (’18):

“I recall that in my application for Spring in London I discussed the city as a complex intersection of past and present, and how ‘art history’ could come alive in its streets. Little did I suspect how accurate this assessment would turn out to be .... Not only did I engage in the art and architecture of [London] in a traditional, academic sense, but discovered the versatility of street art, complicating everything I thought I knew about artistic spaces and how this living medium cohabitates with art and structures that have stood for hundreds or thousands of years.... London is a cacophonous mess of pasts and presents, of preservations and destructions, and struggling with these contradictions not only engaged in a multidimensional understanding of an international city, but helped me, personally, develop a nuanced relationship to a place that I once dreamt of and idealized.

“The Wings to London Scholarship was invaluable to my experience abroad. For an English nerd like me, someone who had dreamed of visiting the city of London for at least a decade, and of this specific program for at least three years, to receive this scholarship felt like an affirmation of my passions. It afforded me the opportunity to travel more extensively as well as a more comprehensive engagement with the artistic and cultural fabric of an intricately layered city. English as a discipline is frequently interrogated and called upon to justify itself and its merits, and therefore financial aid for studies in English, and the humanities in general, is relatively limited. Wings to London is a rare testament to the belief that there is inherent value in English studies, giving me and students like me the confidence to pursue our studies.”

Currently aloft in London, Aaron Castleton (’19) is also studying with help from the Wings award. He’s not just attending classes but taking full advantage of the city and country’s cultural opportunities:

“I have been abroad just over a month now, and I have yet to have an uneventful day. The London program is far from over and it has already been a tremendous opportunity. This program has been my first real cultural experience outside of the U.S. and it has opened my eyes to so many new perspectives and values. For instance, theater is an integral part of London, and it has been one of my favorite parts of being here. I've been fortunate to have the chance to watch a play per week, and so far each has been exceptional.

“I can't help being overwhelmingly grateful for this opportunity. I know that without the Wings to London Scholarship I would have significantly more financial restrictions. Throughout all of college and the majority of high school, I have actively been employed. However, during this spring quarter, I haven't had that option because I am abroad. This scholarship has given me fiscal breathing room that has allowed me to travel and explore the UK. For that, I am incredibly appreciative of June and Robert Barnes’ generosity. They are undeniably kind hearted.”

*English Matters* is proud to feature the widening perspectives of our undergraduates who are fortunate enough to be studying overseas with - as four Englishmen once put it - a little help from some friends. If you can provide similar support for deserving students in the English Department, we’d be delighted for you to visit our support page.