

## Personal Statement

### Bulgaria, English Teaching Assistant Program

“Why can’t I speak Tagalog?” I asked, to which my mother responded with a vague, generic answer about how she never saw any reason for my siblings and I to learn the language. I never quite understood this answer despite knowing my parents never valued the importance of upholding and passing on their ancestral heritage. Though I have always interpreted their choice to ascribe only to American culture as their way of preventing my family from feeling like outsiders in American society, I had come to feel like a part of me was missing. In spite of always having identified as a Filipino/Mexican-American, I never felt I was a part of either the Filipino or Mexican culture because I lacked the language. This empty feeling has since led me on a lifelong journey to understand culture through the context of exploring different countries, languages and communities around the globe.

This quest to learn about the different peoples and their languages has inspired me to pursue any opportunity to experience a new country. After my sophomore year in college, as an eager pre-medical student, I found myself embarking on a medical mission trip to Lima, Peru where I volunteered in mobile medical clinics created to provide healthcare to the underserved communities. It was not until I spent that time in Peru that I realized what it means to actually understand and connect to a place and to a people. Experiencing the poverty and widespread needs, I was quickly transformed from wanting to just visit the country to wanting to embrace the country as my own and help the people as if they were my own family.

On my sixth day in Peru, while using what Spanish I knew to understand the conversations going on between the doctor, Dr. Jose Luis, and his patients I began to see that doctors are more than healers, they are teachers. As a part of his medical treatment plans, Dr. Jose Luis had to also educate his patients about good health practices and effective methods of preventing the contraction and spread of disease. Making this realization I soon became worried because, although I knew I possessed the potential to one day become a doctor, I knew I lacked the strong communication and teaching skills required of a competent physician.

After seeing how vital being an effective teacher and communicator is to healthcare delivery from Dr. Jose Luis, I began tutoring student-athletes at my university in their science and humanities courses to cultivate my communication and teaching skills. In working with these students, I have been able to develop my abilities to adapt my teaching methods to various needs and learning styles, while also building my confidence and effectiveness in communicating. At the same time, I was serving as the president for my university’s honor society dedicated to promoting international education and service, Scholars Without Borders. Through my service as president I was exposed to a variety of opportunities to strengthen both my public speaking skills and my ability to work with people from different cultural backgrounds.

My time spent abroad, tutoring, and serving as a part of Scholars Without Borders has ultimately given me confidence in my potential to serve as an effective ETA in Bulgaria. Though I have never visited Eastern Europe before, I am beginning to become familiar with the country, so I am eager to know more about the culture, language, and its longstanding history as a link between the East and the West. After completing the ETA program I plan to apply for admission to American medical school. In having the opportunity to serve as an ETA, I hope to utilize the skills and experiences I gain to be a more articulate and culturally competent physician working against global health issues.

A few weeks ago my family found an autobiography I wrote for a fourth grade project. In it I discussed that my goal in life was to travel to as many different environments as possible and to work with people from cultures different than my own. I had written that I had loved being in an academic setting, as my parents were both employees at the university. I described "my dad is my hero because he takes me to the San Diego State University Library to do research." It was clear even at a young age that I was destined to pursue working in a university environment.

Those things I had written about as a young elementary student still hold true to my current goals. Today I find myself eager to work at a university and pursue teaching as a career goal. I want to share my passion for education and learning with both my peers and my students. As part of my career goals, I also strive to incorporate international experiences into the lives of my students.

I attribute my earliest experiences at home to shaping my career aspirations. In my youth, home life included hosting a diverse group of university and secondary school, exchange students many of whom remain close family friends in adult life. Hosting 25 or more homestays over 20 years, my own perspectives reflect a unique exposure to diversity in the contemporary world. My global view incorporates academic pursuits liberally laced with practical exposure to different religions, customs, social strata and languages throughout my life. My fascination with these diverse worlds has ignited a passion to always broaden my horizons.

These exchange students inspired me to be a lifetime learner through work, study, and volunteer. It made me excited to learn about other countries when it comes to food, tradition, religion, transportation, social customs, etc.; In the work arena, I have been able to work with foreign scholars and students in my former position at the Office of International Programs. In regards to study, while pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Administration, I decided to also study Arabic as well. San Diego has a large Arab community, and I wanted to learn more about their community and be able to relate to them more, especially if I am going to be teaching them one day. I had no need to take Arabic for my degree but saw it as a way to learn more about the world and my local community. And lastly I have volunteered in many international sectors. I am proud to serve as a Career Development Intern at the International Rescue Committee. In this role I assist refugees in job searches and becoming familiar with the American job market. I also volunteer as a visitor at a Detention Center where I visit asylum seekers who have no family or friends.

All of my experiences have made me excited to pursue a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant grant in Morocco. As an avid reader and language learner I have studied Morocco on several projects in my Arabic classes. I am particularly attracted towards Morocco because of its unique location and rich history of colonization, which has resulted in a very diverse country. I would love the opportunity to share my unique experiences with both students and other citizens in Morocco in addition to learning from the Moroccan citizens about their culture and way of life. I am eager to participate in a cross-cultural exchange and utilize my experiences in future career endeavours.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

\_\_\_\_\_, India, Public Health

My dear friend and colleague died in 2013 after an eighteen-month battle with kidney cancer. He was only forty-three. This devastating event made me reevaluate my priorities both in my professional and personal life. It was clear early in my medical practice that most of the conditions that I treated were preventable and so I often dreamed of working in public health, especially in obesity prevention and treatment. I also knew that I could not make a committed effort in that area while simultaneously running a busy clinic and it seemed that public health would have to wait until the end of my career in medicine which was likely not for another twenty years. But when I came to the crossroads after my friend's death, I realized that it could wait no longer. After careful consideration I transferred my practice to another physician and returned to graduate school full time to pursue my long held interests in public health.

The transition over the last two years has been thrilling, fulfilling, and sometimes nerve-racking. Changing tracks in the prime of my medical career appeared foolhardy and even incomprehensible to many of my own family and friends. But I felt that the timing was perfect. I was old enough to have the education, skills, experience and confidence to embark on a new chapter in my life, and young enough to have the energy, motivation and mental fortitude to forge ahead with this new plan.

During the past year I have had the privilege of learning from a variety of people, all from different educational backgrounds, each bringing their own approaches to solving public health problems. I have been challenged to think like never before, to open my mind to innovative ways of tackling large scale health issues facing not only our communities, but others around the world. I finally understood the enormity of the task ahead and how much I needed to learn if I wished to make even a small dent in the obesity epidemic. So, I read voraciously, took advanced courses, wrote comprehensive literature reviews and designed research projects.

My four-week internship in India this summer was life changing. I interviewed about forty women in Tamilnadu, a southern state of India, about their eating behaviors and breastfeeding attitudes. The experience of being with these women, hearing their stories, speaking with them in a language that was foreign yet familiar, seeing their curiosity and willingness to share, and feeling the tremendous need for public health efforts in nutrition, was very compelling. Being of Indian heritage, I have visited extended family in India over the years, but this was the first time that I was there to do research, and I was hooked. The Fulbright would certainly be the best way for me to go back for more.

With my extensive and varied educational and personal background, I hope to bring a unique perspective to healthcare communities in clinical and public health, and facilitate obesity prevention and treatment for people in both India and the U.S. I believe that my dual cultural background, fluency in spoken Tamil, previous exposure to Tamil culture, passion for learning, and great pride in our exceptional country, would allow me to be an effective ambassador for the United States in India. I am truly grateful that I live in a country where I have the freedom and opportunity to follow my dreams at every stage of my life.

I am exhilarated at the prospect of collaborating with people across the world and am confident that I am fully prepared to complete my proposed research project in Coimbatore. The Fulbright program, with its prestige and impact in India, will open doors to key stakeholders and enable me to network with community leaders, educators, healthcare providers and the general public and will help me achieve my professional and personal goals.

## **PERSONAL STATEMENT**

### **Spain, English Teaching Assistant (ETA)**

As a first generation college student who maintains my Mexican-Polish cultural heritage, I have been privileged to experience life as the child of a refugee in the U.S., a country that has provided my family with the opportunity to prosper. Polish was my first language, followed by Spanish from my maternal side; I learned English when I began school. My own language learning experience has led me to value the importance of being able to communicate in different languages and helped ignite my fascination of international learning and collaboration. When I was in elementary school, my father, who worked abroad as a merchant mariner, told me stories of his global travels on research vessels, sparking a strong curiosity in me to better understand the world. Having traveled to 19 countries and lived abroad, I have grown to realize that I share more in common with people I have met during my travels, than differences, and I greatly appreciate global diversity. These experiences have inspired me to apply for an ETA position.

In 2013, I was selected as a Student Diplomat and, subsequently, awarded a Fellowship from the Hostler Institute on World Affairs to represent SDSU and the Olive Tree Initiative. Through this, I traveled to the United Nations (New York), spoke with policymakers at the U.S. Department of State, flew to Israel, Palestine, and Jordan to engage in dialogue with various groups, and conducted research to better understand the complex problem of violence in this region. Upon my return, I have continued community outreach with this program. During the summer of 2015 as a U.S. Student Ambassador with the Hansen Summer Institute, I lived and collaborated with 17 international students, focusing on conflict resolution, leadership, and social entrepreneurship. As an ETA, I would further learn from an invaluable international experience.

Moreover, an ETA position in Spain would allow me to help empower youth. I have worked on several social service projects, such as the empowerment of women and children, youth violence prevention, and global affairs education. I continue returning to a goal of working with youth toward social justice. My empathy and desire to work toward social justice stems from when I was a victim of a violent crime and I experienced the difficulty of pursuing justice through the legal system. I felt vulnerable. It was during my recovery that I realized there are people suffering in far more dire situations than me. This experience has driven me to serve the common good and "be a part of the solution." For instance, in the workplace, I took on additional duties to serve as a Border Patrol Union Representative and provide assistance to my peers. I was selected by my superiors and colleagues to be a Peer Support Member providing emotional support to grieving employees and their families, partners and children, in times of need. In addition, I have helped Border Patrol Agents translate legal documents and conduct full interviews in Spanish. Also, I have assisted with the coordination of rescuing human trafficking victims, helped with operations to combat human and drug smuggling, and assisted in the return of kidnapped children to their families. As I have committed myself to working toward social justice in all that I do, I have found that my passion lies with working to empower youth.

Valuing experiential knowledge and education, I have taken on various leadership roles and participated in many university activities, while working full-time and being a full-time student. I have prioritized my efforts to mentor and educate fellow university peers and local youth, while I finish my degree. Working with youth in Spain would not only allow me to follow my passion, but it would also inform my career goal of developing an international non-profit organization to empower youth. The youth are our future leaders. Following an ETA, if selected, I will pursue graduate studies to enhance my skills toward building an international nonprofit that empowers youth through educational resources, training, and transnational networking.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

### Honduras, Sociology

I have lived, worked and studied in several Latin American communities over the course of my life. My parents' commitment to community work with Latin Americans led us first to the inner-city of Los Angeles, California, where I was born, and then to a hillside slum in Caracas, Venezuela. Growing up in Caracas, a city with one of the highest murder rates exposed me to the harsh realities that young people experience in violent cities and taught how to handle potentially dangerous situations. Nevertheless, I felt protected due to my safe home life which, in turn, inspired me to extend this to others in turbulent places.

Through my parents' work in the community, I witnessed transformation among my friends and other youth through community sports events, peace murals, summer day camps, and the practice of processing grief and liberation through art. As a teenager, I participated in street murals where kids drew their dreams for peace in our warring neighborhood. Currently, I am living in Caracas, Venezuela, learning from my mother's work with a curriculum called "A Window Between Worlds" that uses art to help people heal from trauma.

I moved to San Diego in 2011 and graduated in 2015 from San Diego State University with a B.A. in International Security and Conflict Resolution. During this period, I worked and volunteered with migrants and refugees in various roles. From 2012 to 2015, I co-led a mentorship program at a local shelter for Central American UAC.<sup>1</sup> We used art, sports, and group building activities to help them process and share their stories in a safe environment. We also identified organizations in the cities where children were sent, and provided resumes and letters of recommendation. This taught me the importance of accompanying and supporting child migrants and provided me insight into why they migrate and what they endure to reach the US.

In San Diego, I also worked four years at a low-income high school as an academic advisor and tutor for immigrants and refugees from many nations. I developed relationships and learned about their dreams, many of which came true as they graduated and went on to college. In 2013, I interned in the West Bank with Palestinian youth living in a refugee camp. In 2014, during my semester abroad in Istanbul, Turkey, I volunteered with Iraqi and Syrian refugees, providing arts and crafts activities for the children.

I have travelled through Central America several times. On one trip, I visited a shelter along the tracks of "La Bestia" near Puebla, Mexico and a return center for child migrants in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. I also visited my internship coordinator, Elizabeth Kennedy, in El Salvador while she completed her Fulbright research with unaccompanied child migrants. I observed interviews and helped her collect data. My research in Honduras will give me the necessary experience to pursue further professional development in Migration Studies, an area that touches on many of the most pressing issues facing our world today, like international relations, human rights, and inequalities. I want to represent this vulnerable population that is often criminalized and marginalized and influence policy reform.

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<sup>1</sup> Unaccompanied Alien Children

## Personal Statement

Mexico, Social Work

### From the Eyes of a Woman: Women in Migration and the Realm of Sex Trafficking

Living in the border region of San Diego your surroundings are politicized. I grew up in inner city San Diego where the community is dynamic and diverse. Here I first witnessed the spirit of perseverance; through income inequality, challenges of starting over in a foreign country, and gentrification. These issues and all that came with it were the norm. Friends and family took part in high school dropout rates, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse. It was not until my family experienced gentrification that I realized my world was not the norm.

In 2007 we moved to El Cajon, a small city a few miles east of San Diego. The community encompasses a complicated web of Iraqi and Kurdish immigrants, conservative evangelicals, and racism. Moving into an unknown neighborhood with new demographics helped me understand a different world of language, culture and customs. It also helped me understand racism and the dangers of patriotism. This experience showed me how different issues expand across communities and culture.

Experiencing this and wanting to bring about change I enrolled at San Diego State University as a criminal justice major. During my first year I helped co-found the Olive Tree Initiative, a conflict resolution group focused on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. After joining the organization I traveled with them to Israel and Palestine. Crossing the border daily and meeting with political figures and community leaders on both sides I returned to San Diego impacted. I enrolled in Arabic courses and switched my major to political science.

My second and third year of university I joined a program working with unaccompanied child migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in county detention facilities around San Diego. We provided creative writing, English courses, math tutoring, professional development and college workshops. The youth I serviced left a life changing impression on me, so much so that I now work for a county detention center under the Office of Refugee Resettlement here in San Diego.

Torn now between two regions my senior year I decided to study in Istanbul, Turkey. Here I worked with United Christian International servicing Syrian refugees, teaching English. I studied international migration while in Turkey, at the time it was the only country admitting Syrians and Turkey itself has a huge flux of migration to Germany. Simultaneously I witnessed huge gender inequality. The AKP government at the time had been the most right wing conservative, fundamental government Turkey has had so far. Controversy over the head scarf and laws in favor of female purity were in the headlines and daily conversation. Contradictory to this the prostitution market flourished.

These experiences allowed me to see domestic issues not as isolated events. Rather an interconnected web affecting first the community, national, and finally international setting. I returned to San Diego more inspired and committed than ever. I began taking courses in Tijuana. They covered the complex dynamics of the city and focused on issues of migration. We studied the Red Light District of the city and the reality of sex workers. These investigations led to the study of trafficking, padrotes (pimps), and sex slavery. These life experiences have shaped me and motivated me to continue with these studies today.