

Statement of Grant Purpose
India, International Relations

As a student, volunteer, and future US Foreign Service Officer, the opportunity to undertake a Fulbright ETA in India is the ideal next step as I aim to better understand the close and complex relationship between the US and India. If awarded the Fulbright grant, I would utilize the experience for two primary purposes. The first is to apply my passion for public service by helping Indian students learn English and gain an understanding of life in the US. The second is to pursue my educational interest in South Asia by continuing my Urdu studies and developing a research project to examine how cultural differences inform Indian views of US-India cooperation.

Working as an ETA in India, I would apply the skills I have learned from previous experiences teaching English as a second language. As a college sophomore, I volunteered with English learners in the Dominican Republic. Through talking with university students about US-Dominican relations, faith, and their goals for the future, I successfully challenged them to learn more advanced English vocabulary in line with their interests. As an English Assistant for a Gesamtschule in Berlin, Germany, I worked with seventh through thirteenth year students. This vast range challenged me to tailor my speaking rate and vocabulary to the skill level of each class to ensure everyone could understand and participate. Helping teach English in Los Angeles, I served as a reading mentor to first graders. In addition to maintaining a high energy level to get students energized about the curriculum, I also recognized the necessity to ask questions while students read to prevent them from simply memorizing text with an associated picture.

In India, I hope to engage students in topics of particular interest to them. Through my experiences learning German and Urdu, I have gained an appreciation for conversation-led language acquisition. I hope to use books, movies, interactive activities, and music to excite students about the English language. The best teachers are those who inspire, and the best diplomats are those who care about the people with whom they are working—I hope to achieve both.

Outside of the classroom, I would be very active in my community. I hope to assist with or start up an afterschool activity—perhaps a sport or a club to discuss contemporary issues. I would strengthen my Urdu language skills by engaging in discussions with community leaders, attending a local church, and visiting local historical and religious sites. These experiences would allow me to gain insight into contemporary Indian life, understand cultural differences, and promote mutual understanding.

While the benefits of the Fulbright ETA grant are many, I am especially excited by the prospect of carrying out a small research project to examine how school instruction informs Indian views of US-India relations. I am interested to understand how Indian students are taught English, what they learn about the US, and how their studies and community impact their understanding of the US, American people, and the US-India relationship. This project would greatly benefit my professional growth, as I would like to work on US-India relations as a Foreign Service Officer.

Ultimately, the Fulbright ETA program in India would be a perfect opportunity to blend personal growth and service by allowing me to continue my study of South Asia through firsthand, practical experience in working and building relationships within the Indian school system.

Growing up in a small town in Wisconsin, I was surrounded by people who thought and looked just like I did. Wanting to explore other worldviews and cultures, I decided to enroll at the University of Southern California as an International Relations major. From the moment I arrived on campus, I was eager to become active in the Los Angeles community and began to volunteer in local elementary and middle school classrooms. Calling upon my previous experiences as an afterschool tutor and camp counselor, I taught local students English, US history, and conflict management skills. Working with these students, I gained insight into the history and culture of Los Angeles, and I discovered ways to strengthen the partnership between my university and the local community. This past year I created a volunteer program to teach international relations courses in Los Angeles schools with a focus on how Los Angeles is a global city. Volunteering in classrooms has allowed me to become an active participant in my community and to understand Los Angeles through the eyes of an Angeleno.

Simultaneously, on campus, I have explored the role of culture and diplomacy in my coursework. Attending seminars on US and South Asian relations and the relationship between Islam and Hinduism, I became fascinated with the dynamic cultural heritage of South Asia. I applied for and was awarded a Critical Language Scholarship to study Urdu in Lucknow, India in summer 2011. Although I had no previous Urdu instruction, I was excited for the opportunity to learn more about India and South Asia through studying Urdu. At first, being placed in a completely foreign environment seemed overwhelming with people, rickshaws, and animals everywhere. However, I was determined to learn from and engage with the local community. I actively sought out ways to use my developing Urdu skills through traveling, playing cricket with the local school children, and shopping in the local markets. By the end of my time in India, I had conversed—in Urdu—with the local grilled-corn salesman about growing up in America, traveled on a third-class, non-AC train to the mountains of Kashmir, and meditated with Sikhs as the sun rose over the Golden Temple. The challenges of facing something foreign—living situations, people, and culture—are an essential part of fully understanding a different worldview.

In pursuing a Fulbright ETA in India, I hope to continue learning about South Asian culture through a service-learning environment. Just as I learned about the diverse community of Los Angeles through working with local schools, I would like to work with Indian students to further mutual understanding of the US and India relations. The opportunity to work with and learn from English learners in India would allow me to invest in the next generation of Indian leaders and to serve as an ambassador, sharing my experiences growing up in the Midwest and going to school on the West Coast.

Ultimately, I aspire to be a United States Foreign Service Officer and to work on US-South Asian relations. I am a firm believer that diplomacy must be rooted in the sincere desire to learn about others. Thus, in applying for the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship to India, I hope to initiate a conversation that will last throughout my entire career. Applying my service and educational experiences today will provide me with a strong foundation to be a driven, informed, and passionate proponent of US-India relations tomorrow.