

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

### Argentina, English Teaching Assistantship

On the first day back at school from summer vacation, my friends would always bring me trinkets from their holiday travels abroad: carved boxes from India and knit scarves from Peru. Although I wanted to return the favor, my family only traveled once a year to my grandparents' house, and I doubted a gift from Cleveland would elicit the same reaction. For me, travel was a luxury of great novelty and mystery, and I longed to visit other countries as so many of my childhood friends had done. Unable to physically interact with the world at large, I strove to connect to it in the only way I could: studying language. Encouraged by my natural affinity for Spanish, I completed all of the Spanish courses offered by my high school ahead of schedule and seized a scholarship opportunity to study in Costa Rica the summer of my junior year.

It was in Costa Rica that I had my first taste of Argentine culture. By chance, I befriended the only non-Costa Ricans in the *pueblo* of Guaitil and spent hours at their house listening to everything from Mercedes Sosa to Bersuit Vergarabat. Back in California, the songs I had come to know by heart became my motivation to learn more about the country. Curious about the context and impact of the music I by then knew well, I joined an Argentina-based "task force" in a college history course, conducting a research project on the *nueva canción* ("New Song") movement. I spent hours reading Argentine newspapers, watching Argentine films, and even viewing Argentine commercials on YouTube. When it came time to choose the location of my semester study abroad, I had only one destination in mind: Buenos Aires.

My short time in Argentina quickly showed me that my knowledge of Argentine history and culture was limited at best, and that all of the classes I had taken and books I had read had only given me a superficial glimpse into life there. In a country where my friends expected me to dance *tango*, drink *mate*, and speak Spanish, I danced *chamamé*, drank *tereré*, and heard Spanish peppered with indigenous Guaraní. Rather than coming away with a full awareness of either my own culture or that of my host country, I realized how naive it had been to expect a complete understanding of any society. My own feeble attempts to understand other cultures strengthened my interest in translation, which I saw as a way to make these cultures accessible to more people.

I returned from my time abroad with a different philosophy of travel. I was never going to be able to see the whole world as I had imagined in high school because I no longer wanted to simply visit new places, but rather live in and interact fully with them. Going back to Argentina as a Fulbright grantee would not just be returning to a place I love; it would be my opportunity to finally participate in a society that I have only really observed. Being familiar with its culture and language would help me to integrate more quickly into the community and give me more time to contribute. With this goal in mind, I would volunteer with an organization like *Un techo para mi país*, which provides housing for impoverished families. On a cultural level, I would get involved by joining a dance company in my community. As a member of a semi-professional salsa team in the U.S., I have found dance to be a powerful means of self-expression and communication. Dancing in Argentina would connect me to people through a medium independent of language.

These diverse interests, my desire to teach, and my love of Argentine culture would finally be united by my work as a Fulbright ETA in Argentina, where I would take advantage of the lessons I've learned both at home and abroad. Just as I learned that the Porteño lifestyle does not encapsulate Argentine society as a whole, I want to share an understanding of American culture beyond the superficial. A Fulbright experience would prepare me for a lifetime of work devoted to improving communication between countries as a language instructor and a translator.

## STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

### , Argentina, English Teaching Assistantship

I was raised in a family of teachers: my mother, father, sister, and grandparents all chose careers in education, and many assumed that I would follow in the family tradition. Wanting to choose my own path, I rejected the idea but eventually gave in when a friend convinced me to tutor her brother in Spanish. When our hour-long session unintentionally stretched into two and a half hours of us laughing and talking in Spanish, I had to admit that I might actually like to teach.

Although I enjoyed the experience of tutoring high-school students, it did little to prepare me for the stakes I would face when I joined an English as a Second Language (ESL) program in my sophomore year of college. Its adult learners were not just worried about midterms like my privileged tutees; they needed the language to find jobs, get access to healthcare, and help their children with homework. Many spoke very limited English, and some had never fully learned to write. I was interviewed for the program and put in front of a classroom that same week. With no training and twenty pairs of eyes on me, I nervously raced through my first lesson and ended too early. Such immersion forced me to improve quickly, however, and soon I was relying less on meticulously crafted lesson plans and more on the natural relationships I made with my students:

Two years later, I have matured from a hesitant teacher to the elected coordinator of my ESL program and a confident facilitator in the classroom. As coordinator, I lead training workshops and have established a content-sharing website so that new teachers do not feel as overwhelmed as I did when I began the program. Most importantly, my students and I continue to learn from each other. My class constantly tests my knowledge of my native tongue, requiring me to learn rules I always took for granted and allowing me to appreciate the intricacies of language that drew me to studying Spanish. It has also taught me flexibility, as experience has shown me that the best lessons are often the ones that do not follow a carefully outlined plan. For my part, I try to incorporate whatever most interests my students—music, films, and practical materials—to encourage participation and make my lessons relevant. Even slight improvements in their English have positive effects on my learners' daily lives. One semester, a student asked if we could learn the names of different cooking ingredients, as his inability to distinguish between words like "lettuce" and "onion" had prevented him from working in the kitchen at his job. After a few months' careful study of the vocabulary, he announced in class that he had been promoted.

I see working as an ETA as the logical next step in my development as a teacher and a chance to apply the skills I have learned in a different environment. I would like to see how English learning plays out in a classroom in which the students have a less immediate need for the language and more years of formal education. My experience preparing new teachers would be particularly useful at an Argentine Teacher Training College, where I would understand the challenges facing prospective English teachers. Furthermore, working with students from a range of backgrounds has given me the flexibility to succeed in a program that demands adaptability.

To complement my teaching in Argentina, I would explore another method of overcoming language barriers: translation. As an aspiring translator, I need to have not only a strong command of a language, but also a complete understanding of the cultural and regional elements of a text. Living in Argentina would help me to convey these aspects faithfully and acquaint me with lesser-known authors in the region. I would therefore want to take advantage of my non-assigned teaching time to develop relationships with young writers in the community, undertaking a translation project in direct collaboration with the authors. In this way, I hope to foster a greater understanding between the two countries, not only by teaching about my culture, but also by making Argentine voices more accessible to those in the United States.

## Personal Statement

Joshua, South Africa, English Teaching Assistantship

Josh's face was as blank as the large gap where his front baby teeth used to be. The eleven year-old boy tried to look to his classmates for some inconspicuous hints, but it was clear that he neither understood my question ("Whose pen is that?") nor had any idea what response I was looking for ("This is my pen."). We'd been practicing possessives and classroom objects all week, but Josh and a cohort of younger children in my 35-student class still struggled with the alphabet while the older students were conjugating complex irregular verbs. My class was one of four in an English language summer program for students in Shanghu and other nearby villages in China's southeastern Anhui province. Since I had offered to teach the oldest students, my class spanned from illiterate middle schoolers to highly proficient sixteen year-olds. I surveyed my dilapidated classroom packed with Chinese teenagers, and asked myself an ever-important question. WWAD: What would an actor do?

At my progressive high school, I participated in an interdisciplinary theatre and English program. Because my school valued self-motivated, exploratory learning and considered writing skills and the ability to conduct comparative analysis foundational to any type of learning, we studied a Shakespeare play all year, wrote creatively and analytically about our characters, and at the end of the year performed the show. My director's theory of acting pedagogy relied on three basic skills: commit vocally and physically, respond to your partner, and always be willing to change tactics. Acting is a fluid, goal-directed, collaborative art, and in each scene, you can only engage an audience if you live in the moment and allow yourself to respond to the stimuli around you.

These tactics have proven helpful to me not only in my acting and directing work, but also in my teaching and personal life. Just as in acting, I put 100% of my body and voice into everything I do. My parents joke that, growing up, I would vault out of bed singing each morning, ready to take on the day. As for the responsiveness that my director encouraged, in my tutoring and mentorship work at Brown, I try to listen to the specific problems my students present, rather than applying a one-shot panacea. Finally, my philosophy that the process of learning is as important as the product allows me to continually reflect on my choices and remain willing to change course.

In the sweltering classroom in Shanghu village, I applied my director's wisdom to the pedagogic challenge in front of me. I decided to discard my old lesson plan, and create a new one everyone could appreciate and learn from. Starting the next morning, the younger students would come to class from 8am to 10am, and the older, more proficient students would come later for a more advanced lesson. When Josh finally responded to my question, he replaced the "th" in "this" with a z-sound, as even his older classmates were prone to do. There is no "th" sound in Mandarin, and it is a notoriously difficult pronunciation for ESL students. So, I pronounced "th- th- th-" in an exaggerated, theatrical way and asked Josh to repeat after me. He smirked, and did so. Then, I bounced to every student in the room, asking each of them to practice the "th" sound by repeating after their goofy teacher. If they mispronounced it, I repeated both sounds—"z-" and "th-"—in funny voices, so they heard the difference. The class was transformed. Once tense and afraid to make mistakes, they were now engaged and excited to experiment. Yet again, three lessons from Acting 101 helped solve an utterly unscripted challenge.

## **Statement of Grant Purpose**

, South Africa, English Teaching Assistantship

Sandi Holloway is a many-hyphenated woman. Although her business card likely identifies her as the "Artistic Director" of the youth theatre organization City at Peace, that is simply an expedient abbreviation of her more accurate title: "Teacher-Choreographer-Gay Rights Activist-Surrogate Mother-Psychologist-and (as rarely as possible) Parole Officer Liaison." City at Peace is a non-profit that teaches conflict resolution and cross-cultural awareness through the performing arts, and Sandi is the determined, inexhaustible beating heart that keeps it alive. Last summer, I taught acting classes at this organization and assisted the three-person staff with our seventy urban teens. In its first-ever summer program, City at Peace partnered with a local sexual health organization to produce an original musical about our students' experiences with teen pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Sandi used language and education as a tool for catharsis, and built a culture of openness, tolerance, and whole-hearted learning that extended beyond City at Peace to the audiences at our shows and all of the lives that our students touch.

As a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in South Africa, I want to employ my wealth of teaching experience and fill my educator's toolbox with the characteristics that make teachers like Sandi masters of their trade. I have led reading groups for rambunctious six-year olds, taught writing skills to high schoolers and university students, spent two summers teaching English in China, and led the advising program at Brown. I am eager to apply all of this experience to my own cohort of students and direct their learning throughout an entire school year. By observing teachers and testing out pedagogic strategies, I will continue to develop my already burgeoning educational identity. I will also reflect on and attempt to embody the attributes that made my own most effective teachers (whether they identified as coaches, directors, mentors, or actual academic instructors) as life-changing as they were. While I may become a principal, school founder, or policy advisor later on, I'm committed to a career in education. Like Sandi, I believe that education is the most effective conduit for social change. Developing the skills of a master teacher is invaluable in truly understanding what students need.

My work at City at Peace also interested me in South Africa. The persistent challenges that plague Washington DC-poverty, disease, and racial inequality-prove that America is still a long way from genuine equality. In addition, my honors thesis dealt with post-colonial linguistic tensions in Africa. So, I am eager to help students learn English: a global, non-stigmatized post-colonial language. As a teaching assistant in South Africa, I will closely observe an educational and linguistic system which is just emerging from legal discrimination, make connections between the problems facing South Africa and America's persistent stratification, and cultivate ideas for equalizing an unequal society in the classroom, in public policy, and in extracurricular activities.

I will also use the Fulbright Grant to engage the powerful connections between language skills and social change that I observed at City at Peace. I will pursue a side project in a secondary school that uses theatre games and writing to develop personal confidence and respect for difference. This type of program is particularly necessary in South Africa where post-colonial political and social inequality is entrenched in ideologies of language. I want my students to find empowerment and identity in their English skills, not fear or distance. Giving students a way to express themselves will strengthen their English skills and promote much needed social cohesion.