

## M.ED STUDENT, TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP, RUSSIA

The choice was relatively simple when it came to the type of grant I wanted to pursue for the Fulbright program. Over the past few years, I have become enamored with the process of learning language, and that love has become a career that I adamantly want to pursue.

Being that I am currently in my last year as a graduate student working on my M.Ed in Foreign language education, the chance to go to Russia and greatly increase my experience is a wonderful prospect. The experience that I would gather from such an opportunity could help me with my academic, as well as my personal goals. My academic goal is to complete a PhD in Applied Linguistics, specifically focusing on foreign language acquisition. This opportunity is second to none; the chance to live in the country, speak the language, and provide assistance in an English language classroom is essentially a dream come true. I know that the experience would benefit me greatly as an academic, teacher and a person, because it would allow me to connect with another culture during this potentially critical political climate.

When it came to selecting the country I wanted to work in, Russia immediately struck me as the top choice. After having been exposed to the wonder of Eastern European literature a few years ago through a very cherished university professor, I found myself wanting more. Through my own research and questioning, I found a number of Russian authors whose prose captured me. One of my small personal goals is to be able to read Russian literature in the original, because there is nothing like prose in its original form. One of the main reasons for living and studying in any country is to absorb the native culture, and to learn how to identify with and become a part of it. Personal experiences like these lead to better overall cultural understanding, which can promote better international relations in the future.

Finally, the need for genuine diplomacy is needed between my home country and Russia, and I know that I would be an excellent representative of the United States, and that I would be able to successfully represent how Americans truly are, regardless of what most people read or hear on the news. One of the most important aspects regarding international relations often overlooked is that in the end, we are all people sharing this planet, and we all want the same things.

I have spent much of my time this year preparing myself academically and practically for this opportunity. I began my Russian language studies this January, enrolling in an intensive 10 credit hour Russian course that encompassed the entire curriculum of one year of college level study. Afterwards, I spent my summer enrolled in an eight-week intensive Russian program at Beloit College in Wisconsin, where I spent eight to twelve hours a day conversing in Russian or doing homework. This program was also equivalent to a year's worth of college study. This fall, I am continuing my Russian language studies as a third year student because of my progress since January.

Practically, I see myself as well suited for the job. I have been teaching English as a Second Language at a private English school since January of this year, where I have had to teach students from a variety of countries such as Brazil, China, Colombia, Mexico, and Russia, all without use of the native language. This job has allowed me to learn how to explain things simply and precisely, as well as develop strategies to help explain words without knowing the learners' first language.

My other teaching job also provides a solid background for me, but from a different perspective. Since the beginning of this school year, I work for a German Language school on Saturday mornings, where I teach a three-hour class completely in German to students aged twelve to fifteen. This job has helped me to learn how to teach to a different age group, as well as be comfortable speaking a foreign language in front of a group of people with relative ease. It has also assisted me greatly in curriculum building and lesson planning.

I also have significant experience living abroad. I spent my junior year of high school attending Schubart Gymnasium in Aalen, Germany as an academic exchange student on scholarship, as well as a semester in college at Eberhard-Karls Universität in Tübingen, Germany. Both of these experiences proved my ability to survive in a

foreign culture and language and provided me with the opportunity to see how other people live and feel, and to connect with them on a personal level. I also had the unique opportunity to assist the English language teacher in Aalen with the class my peers attended. My experience living abroad will lessen my culture shock and chances for success, because I know the only way to achieve anything while abroad is to not be afraid to try.

Through this assignment I expect to fulfill many goals. I feel this grant will help improve my chances of attending the doctoral program I wish because of the increased amount of teaching experience I will have had. It will also provide me with the language skills necessary to complete a certification in the language so that I may teach Russian at the secondary level. I also feel this opportunity will provide me with the ability to conduct some personal research on second language acquisition. The research potential from a classroom of English language learners is enormous, and would provide me with the material necessary to complete a study or even fuel my eventual dissertation. Additionally, the experience will make me a better teacher, and better prepare me for my career choice. Personally, I hope to grow to understand the culture in order to promote understanding on both ends, as well as be able to fluently communicate in the native language.

In order to make the most out of this experience, I also need to engage myself outside of the classroom. As I stated above, I see this grant as an opportunity to begin my second language acquisition research, to study how the students learn the language, and how they do it best in order to help me decide on a topic for my dissertation. Therefore, I hope to be able to conduct one on one research with my students including tutoring, accent training, and conversational practice. Furthermore, I hope to enrich my diverse musical background by studying the balalaika and Russian folk music for my own pleasure and cultural understanding.

I know that this opportunity is something I want to pursue, because the benefits it would provide me with are exactly the ones I am looking for. Through immersing myself in the culture, and developing smart and modern curricula for the school I would be teaching in. I could gain the knowledge I want and pursue the life goals I wish to achieve.