Applying for the Critical Language Scholarship

Tips & Considerations

**Terms:** Summer (8-10 week intensive language study in country)

**Deadline:** Late November

Application, FAQ, and tips can also be found on the CLS website: [https://clscholarship.org](https://clscholarship.org)

The Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program is an almost FULLY FUNDED intensive overseas language and cultural immersion program for American students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities. Students spend eight to ten weeks abroad studying one of 15 critical languages. The program includes intensive language instruction and structured cultural enrichment experiences designed to promote rapid language gains.

**Languages Offered**

The CLS Program is part of a U.S. government effort to expand dramatically the number of Americans studying and mastering critical foreign languages. Students of diverse disciplines and majors are encouraged to apply. **Participants are expected to continue their language study beyond the scholarship period, and later apply their critical language skills in their future professional careers.** Please visit the CLS Institutes page for more information.

- **Azerbaijani, Bangla, Hindi, Indonesian, Korean, Punjabi, Swahili, Turkish,** and **Urdu:** Beginning, advanced beginning, intermediate and advanced levels;
- **Arabic, Persian** and **Portuguese:** Advanced beginning, intermediate and advanced levels;
- **Chinese, Japanese,** and **Russian:** Intermediate and advanced levels.

**General notes & observations:**

- Only 20% of applications move on to the final round for consideration.
- Roughly 1/5 applications are awarded the CLS.
  - For example, they may get 5100 applications, and move 1000 to the final round, and may award 900-1000 recipients depending on language choice and availability.
- In many ways applying for a language that you do not have a background in can be more challenging than applying for the CLS with a documented history, because many universities and programs do not offer these languages in a traditional classroom setting so making the connection between the language and your long term goals can take some planning.
- Non – traditional fields of study are encouraged to apply.
- All other factors being equal, the CLS program gives preference to veterans of the US armed forces.
- Preference may be given to candidates with limited or no previous study abroad experience.
Tips for the application: How are applicants selected:

- **Academic record and potential to succeed in a rigorous academic setting;**
  - Applications tended to score higher if they had a strong and developed academic history, activities, and experiences to connect and relate to within their application. They also had stronger letters of recommendation compared to applicants just starting their academic career.
  - For letters of recommendation: it is best to have two complete recommendations: it is also ideal to ask language professors to be recommenders, since they can speak to your advancements in language learning the best. Try to get recommendations from recent professors, rather than professors of the past.
  - If you are in a multidisciplinary field or major, this can be a challenge for the CLS, since they are reviewing academic history and academic trends to determine students that have a clear commitment to their goals and studies. If students move all over the place or have a hard time connecting various interests under one umbrella, this can be harder when showing and proving a commitment to one particular language or field of study.
  - It is good to utilize your resources and have many people review your essay drafts. That being said it should be clear that you wrote your essays. If it looks too altered or edited, the reviewers may question the authenticity of your application. Make sure your words are your own.

- **Commitment to language learning;**
  - Remember you are applying for a language, not a region; Focus on how the language skills will impact you rather than why studying in a particular region will assist you.
  - If you have a heritage component with the language this can be helpful. However, reviewers may wonder why your skillset is not more advanced and question your commitment to the language if you have already had several trips and opportunities for independent language learning that you didn’t take full advantage of. They may ask “why now?”
  - If you are studying or have studied other languages, the evaluators will want to know why you are not applying for your historically studied language, or why this new language is an asset in addition to your other skillsets. Same for other travel or study abroad experiences, if you have multiple unrelated experiences they will question how this relates to your long term goals.

- **Connection between the target language and career/academic goals**
  - Make sure to read and answer the prompts with intention.
  - The most successful applicants had very refined long term and short-term goals and their academic history and resume of activities aligned with these goals.
Flow of logic is important, academic history, commitment to language study and initiative in language immersion all must support your goals and connect with the language. It must be very clear why you have chosen to study the language, be clear how this is imperative to your future professional or personal goals, and must have a clear plan of how you intend to continue with language learning upon your return from the program.

Go beyond “additional language skills and cultural experiences are valuable” – they want to know how any study abroad experience vs. intensive language study of this particular language is a need for you, vs. a want

Spend time researching your language of choice, region(s) where it is utilized both internationally and domestically, and how learning the language can impact your career and future goals. Research and statistics can add to your essays and statement of purpose. Especially when asking how the language is imperative to your goals. This connection must be clear and strong.

- **Ability to adapt to an intensive program and a challenging environment;**
  - Maturity and resilience are also important on such a short and intensive/immersive experience. It is ideal to have documented examples that show you have readiness for this experience and have good self-reflection, and the ability to adapt in challenging situations.

- **Contributions to the CLS Program and program goals.**
  - Highlight what makes you diverse and unique. What can you learn from the program, and how can others learn from you. This is about knowledge share and having an open mind. What perspective and experiences can you bring to the cohort and what experiences in your past provide a foundation for your readiness for such an experience.

  - Why should the program invest in you? How will your improved language skills transition to further learning in the future, and how does this relate to your goals.