



Loyola Marymount University

Office of National & International Fellowships (ONIF)

Example of a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to Malaysia application

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STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

[REDACTED], Malaysia, English Teaching Assistantship

My interest in Malaysia comes from learning about its success in unifying a diverse society and making multiculturalism a bedrock of its culture. As a college journalist, I strove to tell stories that highlighted harmonies among diverse groups at the University of Michigan. My most rewarding story was about Mohammed Tayssir Safi, the first Muslim chaplain at a public university. He spoke often to me of his travels in the Islamic world. He emphasized his time in Malaysia, noting the ways in which different ethnic groups—Malays, Indians, and Chinese—and religious groups—Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims—have learned to live together in unity since the days of the May 13, 1969 race riots. I learned about the philosophy of Rukunegara, which sought to foster unity and close the economic gap among Malaysia's various ethnic groups. That ideology lives on today in the form of One Malaysia, a program seeking to promote national unity and ethnic tolerance. I will use my experiences and understanding from my year as a Fulbright ETA to develop a more inclusive classroom with a similar emphasis on the diversity back home in the United States. I will use lessons I learn in Malaysia to more effectively teach the principles of tolerance and to promote ethnic unity in my American classroom.

During my first year as a teacher at an inner-city high school in Los Angeles, I found my students' understanding of Islam to be lacking. Often, my students associated Islam only with stereotypical portrayals they gleaned from the media. Shortly after the November 2015 Paris attacks, I noticed my students using anti-Islamic rhetoric they were seeing on social media posts. That evening, I put together a lesson on debunking misconceptions about Islam. The next day, I assigned readings about Muslim stereotypes and had students work in teams to choose a specific stereotype to disprove and then present to the class why that stereotype was false. Students shared how historically Islam has promoted women's rights and how it springs from the same traditions as Judaism and Christianity. It was a successful example of developing cross-cultural empathy in my classroom. Spending a year in Malaysia, a majority Muslim country, will better equip me to inform my American students about Islamic peoples and cultures the world over.

During my first year as a high school teacher in Los Angeles, I developed a literary magazine for my students to share stories about their backgrounds. Some wrote about immigrating to the U.S. and struggling to learn English. Others shared recipes from their home countries of Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. They developed original plays that highlighted the diversity of our classroom. After the performances, we discussed how our differences brought us together and made us stronger. These activities provided important ways for my students to practice language skills. Writing personal stories required them to edit one another's work for vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. Performing plays taught valuable speaking and listening skills. I will bring effective hands-on activities such as these to my Malaysian classroom to make learning the English language more enjoyable for my students.

To encourage cross-cultural engagement in my classroom, I will set up a pen-pal program between my Malaysian and American students who will be overseen by a fellow English teacher at my current school. Both groups of students will complete projects that develop vocabulary and writing skills by sharing information about the most important objects in their lives, their daily routines, and their friends and family members. My Malaysian students will write letters explaining the importance of Malaysian Independence Day, or Hari Merdeka. My American students will write letters explaining the importance of the Fourth of July. In online sessions, we will hold a discussion that compares these two holidays, looking at how they differ and how they are similar. Through this, both groups of students will develop their intercultural understanding. My skills as an educator and my desire to make cross-cultural learning the cornerstone of my pedagogy will make me an effective English Teaching Assistant in a Malaysian classroom.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

[REDACTED], Malaysia, English Teaching Assistantship

My desire to serve as an ETA in Malaysia has its roots in the unlikeliest of places: Morocco. Before leaving for my semester in Morocco, all I knew was that I wanted a story. I had signed up for a study-abroad program run by a media non-profit whose goal was to bring student journalists to Morocco to produce important journalism about the country in major media outlets. I was excited by the thought of an international byline before I had even graduated from college. Before I left, I found an article about the discrimination faced by African migrants in Morocco. I was struck by the parallels to how the news media often describes hurdles faced by immigrants in the United States. I decided this would be my story.

As soon as I dropped my bags in my host family's home in Rabat, Morocco's capital city, I took to the streets to begin interviewing migrants. Although I was taking classes in Arabic, Moroccan culture, and Moroccan history, I was much more focused on my work in the field. All I needed, I thought, was to be aggressively pursuing the story that would get me published in *The New York Times*. Fortunately, I was under the supervision of a professional journalist. She introduced me to Pierre, a migrant from Cameroon who had come to Morocco to raise awareness about migrant issues. When he first learned of my strategy, he laughed. He had met many young journalists who wanted to write about migration in Morocco yet failed to learn about the complexity of the problem. "Do you really want to write about migrants?" he finally asked me. I nodded. "Okay," he said, "Come with me."

We drove to Rabat, a neighborhood home to the majority of African migrants in the city. At a dinner with Pierre's friends, who were also from Cameroon, I learned that if I wanted to understand this migrant community, I had to take time to get to know them as human beings. After a few hours of developing trust with Pierre's friends, they taught me who they were on their own terms and helped me to understand the migrant narrative from their perspective, which was different from the filtered accounts I had encountered in newspapers. From that day forward, I strove to better understand the lives of sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco. I took my classes more seriously. If I wanted to understand the full complexity of the issue, I realized, I needed to learn the historical context. I needed to know about Morocco's politics and culture to understand how laws and customs were affecting Moroccans' treatment of outsiders. I emerged with a powerful story that contained depth and nuance about the issue of migration in Morocco.

My experience in Morocco has prepared me to engage with my host country community in Malaysia, both in and out of the classroom. Covering sensitive issues that spanned cultures taught me to pause, look around, and make sure I try to do a better job of engaging with people. These opportunities can take the form of large gestures such as writing articles; but they can also take the form of small gestures—attending community events, greeting people in the way they like to be greeted, and lending someone a helping hand when help is needed.

Like Malaysia, Morocco is a multiethnic society that is also predominantly Muslim. As I began to learn more about the developing world, I became intrigued by the ways in which Malaysia, even more than Morocco, promoted inter-cultural tolerance and social harmony among its varied ethnic and religious groups. Though I was initially focused while in college on using journalism to satisfy my curiosity about the world, I eventually came to see that teaching young people would give me greater meaning and satisfaction. While working as a reporter for the Christian Science Monitor after college, I applied to Teach For America and wound up teaching in an underserved inner-city high school in my home city of Los Angeles. I plan to continue teaching upon my return to the U.S. and believe that my experiences in Malaysia will prepare me to return to my American classroom with a stronger foundation with which to guide my students in better understanding the diverse world today and their positions in it.