Boren Essays: Helpful Advice

As you develop your essays for the Boren Scholarship, keep in mind that selection committee readers will not have access to your resume, so be sure to build as much of the relevant information into your essays as possible.

Make sure your essays clearly and in some detail answer the entirety of the questions asked. This is a common failing that selection committees often observe and is a common cause for non-receipt of the Boren Scholarship.

**Essay 1** (not to exceed 800 words): Discuss the following points in one integrated essay, giving equal attention to each point.

- Explain the significance of your proposed country, region, and language to US national security. Although the Boren recognizes a broad definition of national security, you should make a specific, detailed and focused argument.
- Describe how the country, language, and overseas program you selected will help you achieve your career goals, including your plans to fulfill the Scholarship’s federal service requirement. If appropriate, you may also include relevant past academic, extracurricular, volunteer, internship, and professional experiences in support of your proposed plans. Be specific.

**Advice:**

- Address your academic/career goals. What do you plan to be doing 1, 2, 5, 10, … years down the road?
- With respect to fulfilling the “federal service requirement”, in what type of position or agency do you see yourself serving? How does federal service fit with your career aspirations? Remember, you don’t need to have a government career to be awarded a Boren, but you do need to fulfill the service requirement.
- Since the scholarship is not need based, don’t talk about how you can’t study abroad without the funding.
- Think broadly, deeply, meaningfully and creatively regarding how your study abroad program, your undergraduate (and graduate?) studies, and career aspirations are intended to address “national security interests”. The more thought you put into this aspect, the stronger your application. If you get stumped, talk it over with Dean Goldberg and others (faculty, mentors and advisors, including those from [Career Services](mailto:career-services@lafayette.edu)).
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- Do your homework! Think about the current situation in your study abroad program, relate the country to US interests/concerns, then link both together with your career aspirations. You want to show that you are truly interested in the country and how knowledge of the language and culture are important.
- Lay out a realistic yet somewhat innovative/interesting career vision. This will help you stand out from the pack. Most of the applications reviewed don’t do this. Instead, we often read that the applicant intends to become a Foreign Service Officer or CIA analyst without much thought about what that really entails or the role/position in which the applicant sees him/herself. Consider other options as well (Homeland Security, Dept of Defense, WHO, CDC, INS). And understand what these agencies do and how you can contribute to their mission.

Essay 2 (not to exceed 800 words): Study Abroad Program Description (both the preferred program, and alternate, if applicable).

- Describe the study abroad program’s course of study and related cultural activities, as well as the administrative and support services provided (i.e., facilities, housing, resident director, etc.).
- Describe the language component in as much detail as possible, including the number of classroom contact hours and informal language study opportunities outside of the classroom.
- Describe your past experience in studying or speaking the language (or another language, if relevant), as well as your plans for continuing to study and/or speak the language following your Boren Scholarship.

Advice:
- Don’t just repeat what you find on the study abroad program’s website.
- Relate the program to YOUR goals, interests, etc. Make the program stand out as the ideal program for your needs. Own the program; don’t just regurgitate the basics.
- Ensure that the program of study actually provides intensive language training, along with the other relevant-to-you courses and experiential activities. Does the program offer a homestay? An internship? Volunteer opportunities within the host community?
- Make a case for why the preferred program is so compelling for you. There are many programs out there that can accomplish much the same outcomes, so why this program? If it is simply the case that that’s what Lafayette promotes, don’t go state as such, instead make the case for the program itself as relevant to your goals as possible.
- Make sure to talk about how you are going to continue your study of the language AFTER the program—this can include coursework, graduate study, work, informal language learning strategies (e.g., internet, staying in touch with host nationals, planned future study/work abroad opportunities like those offered by Fulbright Student Grants or the Boren Fellowship or through a summer Critical Language Scholarship or other language intensive program). This is important, especially for those languages that are not commonly taught or if you will be returning with advanced level skills that exceed the course offerings provided here at Lafayette.