Applying for the Critical Language Scholarship

Tips & Considerations

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

**Deadline:** Late November

**Application opens:** Mid September

*Application, FAQ, and tips can also be found on the CLS website: [https://clscholarship.org](https://clscholarship.org)* *Please review the video tutorials on the CLS website before applying.*

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.

**Who can apply:** Open to undergraduates, graduate students, Ph.D. students enrolled in a program during the application cycle. *Financial aid/Financial need is NOT a requirement

**Program Benefits:**

- **Domestic travel** to/from Washington D.C. for the required pre-departure orientation
- **International travel** to/from host country
- Application Visa fees
- **Housing & Meals**
- **Cultural activities** and group trips in host country
- **U.S. academic credit** through Bryn Mawr College
- **Certified ACTFL OPI score** to demonstrate language proficiency
- **Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE)** for U.S. government positions (civil service)

**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.

- Open to students at all language levels, including beginners: [Azerbaijani], [Bangla], [Hindi], [Indonesian], [Persian], [Punjabi], [Swahili], [Turkish], and [Urdu]:
- One Year prior study required: [Arabic], [Korean], [Portuguese] and [Russian]: Advanced beginning, intermediate and advanced levels;
- Two Years prior study required: [Chinese] and [Japanese]: Intermediate and advanced levels.
Student Experience:

- No Free Time for travel, etc. It is a busy program
- Excursions are imbedded into the program
- Will study in cohorts with other recipients. No more than 30 students in one location.
- Class size is capped at 7 students
- Cohort size is in relation to location and distribution of languages. For example, they may have 12 students in India, 28 in Indonesia, and 27 in China. They try to have all languages represented.

General application notes & observations:

- Students can be awarded the CLS up to 2 times (in addition to Gilman 1 time)
- 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.
- Students are encouraged to apply for CLS multiple times, just because they are not selected or make it to the final round does not mean they did not put a strong application together.

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.

  - Have you had experiences of intensive learning or immersion experiences in the past that required adaptability? Explain beyond the experience and highlight HOW you adapted. What strategies did you employ, how did they work for you. It is more about identifying your process and strategies.

- **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.