

Connecting personal interests to a global mission

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College: Arts and Sciences

Program: French

Degree: Master's

Forward March

I was afraid of French because I was afraid of time. From an early age, much of my focus has been on how to get ahead by taking accelerated courses, overloading my credit schedule, and starting and finishing college early. All of this haste in pursuit of getting to an undefined future. One thing I couldn't speed up, however, was my second language acquisition. I saw French as both stimulus and deterrent as I pursued my goal to become a professor. I longed to reach the mountaintop where I would be fluent, comfortable, and successfully francophone.

Financial Insecurity

The years after graduating from university were spent working in customer service for a wine company in Seattle. I escaped the doldrums of a secure yet passionless job to teach English in France, following my elusive linguistic goals. Halfway through my year in Normandy, I found myself sitting down to rewrite my meager monthly budget: "What am I doing here," and, the panic kicking in, "what am I going to do next?" I remembered receiving an email from the [French Department](#) at Florida State University that I had originally ignored. "Florida? I'm from the Pacific Northwest—I don't belong among the palm trees and blue skies." And, more crucially, though graduate school was my dream, I couldn't even afford the coursebooks.

Finding FSU

Looking more closely at the email, I found out that the master's program in French literature is fully funded at FSU. My opinion of Florida quickly shifted more "pro" than "con," and my two-year plan settled into place. Now, to finally become a master of the French language and read some books along the way. I was in my element: reading, teaching, and speaking French in sunny Florida, but the same practical doubts returned as I neared the end of my first year of grad school: "Do I have what it takes to make teaching French a stable career?"

Fulbright Investment

Graduate school had taught me to take initiative and to ask for help when I needed it. Accustomed to being independent, I soon realized the process of applying for a fellowship grant like [Fulbright](#) would require a team effort. I had attended a few Fulbright information sessions as an undergrad back in Seattle but never felt the timing was right, and my small university didn't provide a lot of support. Looking for guidance with my application, I took the first step and emailed the [Office of Graduate Fellowships and Awards](#) (OGFA). According to their office, I had missed the campus deadline to submit my intent to participate in Fulbright, but there was still a way to apply if I worked fast enough. I didn't waste time second-guessing my qualifications as I had done in the past. I worked for a month over the summer to craft two single-page essays expressing my motivations to apply for an English Teaching Assistantship. The process was intensive: weekly meetings with advisors from both OGFA and the [Office of National Fellowships](#) (ONF) and dozens of emails sending revised drafts back and forth. There were also brainstorming sessions when I found out I wasn't eligible for the Fulbright in France, having previously lived there as an English teaching assistant. With the wrench firmly thrown into my plan, I had to change my course and be flexible—a quality that served me when I arrived in Luxembourg a year later as a Fulbright grantee.

French without France

Luxembourg is a tiny country wedged between France, Belgium, and Germany and has three official languages: Luxembourgish, German, and French. Half the population comes from outside Luxembourg, and daily life means interacting with people from, quite literally, all over the world. Teaching my own English class of high schoolers who spoke, on average, three-and-a-half languages was a lesson in listening. I listened to understand what it's like to live in a place most people don't realize exists, to learn what it's like to go to a school where classes are taught in German and suddenly switch to French in ninth grade, and to experience teenage fears about the future and the desire to speed up time. English class was about grammar, yes, but also about building the confidence to express yourself over the school year.

Prestige is one reason to pursue a fellowship grant like Fulbright, but it is the investment of working and living in an international community that will be a valuable return throughout my personal and professional life. Critically, the year in Luxembourg will influence my future students of French. Instead of turning to the French capital of Paris, we'll study French within the context of Luxembourg City. Being a fluent francophone is no longer the end goal. Instead, I seek to develop the interdisciplinary communication skills I gained and hope to equip my future students to do the same. Full circle. Even if I hadn't received the Fulbright grant, the process of applying for the Fulbright was an instrumental one. Working with a team of people to prepare my essays and do practice interviews meant revisiting and refining my short- and long-term goals. Being asked why I do what I do and what my individual skill set can offer others was a critical piece of my development. As I worked on my Fulbright essays, it became clear that this was, indeed, the path I wanted to pursue, and I made plans to move forward with a PhD in French.

After finishing my year as a Fulbright grantee in Luxembourg but before heading back to the West Coast where I'll begin my doctoral degree at Stanford this fall, I've come back to FSU. This summer, I'm working with the Office of Graduate Fellowships and Awards as a Fulbright Lead. My position allows me to advise students and alumni as they put together their applications to teach, research, and study in various countries around the world. Listening to their stories is a privilege, and I'm inspired by their dedication to taking the plunge into the Fulbright process. To anyone interested in cross-cultural exchange: investigate Fulbright and other opportunities with OGFA and ONF. Instead of worrying about probabilities and perfection, focus on the story you want to share and be prepared to adapt the ending.

