



Boren Scholarships Webinar - Crafting Competitive Essays

December 14, 2010

Notes from this online presentation by Boren staff

Statement of Purpose Part I

6000 characters (not including spaces, about 2 pages, single spaced)

Prompt: *Explain the significance of your proposed study abroad experience (including the region you selected, its culture, and the language you will study) to [U.S. national security](#), broadly defined. Describe how the country, language, and study abroad program you selected will help you achieve your academic and career goals, including your plans to fulfill the [service requirement](#).*

Tips for this essay:

- Describe the big picture –
 - What are your academic and career goals?
 - How is your study abroad program helping you to reach those goals?
 - How are your goals related to national security?
- Research national security issues related to the country, language, your major/academic interests.
- Avoid vague career goals. Do some research if necessary.
- You must directly and explicitly connect the country, language goals, and career goals to national security, broadly defined. Discuss how it connects to your field of interest. Explicitly articulate your definition of national security. Your perspective is what they are looking for here.
 - For examples and ideas, see the October Boren newsletter article [“What we mean by national security.”](#) See current Boren [Scholars](#) and [Fellows](#) lists, projects, and [service examples](#).
- Goals should include academic and career goals.
- Career goals should include how you plan to fulfill the service requirement.
 - It is o.k. if you are unsure, but you should do research to get ideas and avoid vagueness.
 - What agencies deal with the issues you want to work with?
 - Where are people doing the kind of work you want to do?
 - It is fine if you will need to get further education to be qualified for the job you want. You can and should talk about the path you’ll take to get there.
 - Be realistic about goals and steps to reach them and how the Boren experience fits into that path.
 - Many applicants say they want to be Foreign Service Officers (FSO). Sometimes it is very clear that this is chosen out of uncertainty. If being a FSO is what you want to do, great, but back it up by demonstrating your knowledge about what that job entails and what you would do as a FSO.

- Researching the service requirement: use the Boren website, webinar on Jan. 7, usajobs.gov (advanced search for your areas of interest), ask faculty/advisers, Career Center.

Statement of Purpose Part II

6000 characters (not including spaces, about 2 pages, single spaced)

Prompt: *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.*

Tips for this essay:

- Describe both the preferred and alternate programs, but don't just copy or repeat from the program brochure/website.
 - This should be a discussion of why you personally have selected these programs.
 - How they will improve your language skills and provide an immersive experience.
 - What the programs provide that will help you achieve your goals.
 - Thoroughly discuss the language courses in the programs and how they suit you, your learning style, and your learning goals.
 - Discuss other courses, internships, research, volunteering opportunities that fit your needs and be very specific about what you'll be doing and how it will benefit you.
- Demonstrate commitment to the language (before, during and after your program).
 - Discuss past experiences studying the language, or any way you've familiarized yourself with the language, country, and culture. Or having studied other languages and how that will benefit you learning this new language.
 - What your focus for your language studies is (ex. if you have strong speaking skills and want to work more on your reading ability, etc).
 - You need to have and describe concrete plans to continue using or studying the language after you return (enrolling in specific classes, independent study, conversation partner on campus or online, community groups, refugee center volunteering, etc). Be creative about how you will maintain the connection.
- Give concrete examples – in and out of class activities.
 - These could be organized activities through the program, or things you will do on your own. Hobbies that you do that will help you meet people, get involved, and give you ways to learn and use the language outside of class. Activities that will keep you from just hanging out with American people all the time. Things that will help you hit the ground running right when you get there and maximize your time and experience.
- Avoid weak reasons for choosing the program (ex. "My school offers it").
- Avoid copying the program description.
- Answer all the aspects of the question for alternate program as well, but more briefly. Alternate program should be in same country and for same language. You can do more than one program

(i.e. one program in the fall through CIEE, and another immediately following that in the spring through SIT) as long as they are in the same country and same language.

- *African Language Initiative* – If you are applying specifically for this program, you will need to complete essay 2, but hold on as more details will become available shortly about programs. In the meantime, you can be working on other parts of this essay as details about program are worked out.

10 Tips for a Competitive Application

- 1. Spell check is not your friend. Get feedback from people.**
- 2. Double check your facts (about the country, national security, language, etc).**
- 3. Boren does not ask for a “personal statement.”**
 - Put your personal stamp on the statements of purpose, talk about goals and interests, why you chose these programs, etc. But don’t start essays with “My name is...” (they know that), “I am applying for a Boren Scholarship...” (they know that), “When I first saw the sun rise over the Serengeti...” (be careful about overly poetic/romantic language and long stories that aren’t relevant).
 - Don’t waste time/space rambling generally about the importance of learning languages and other cultures. Be specific about your interests.
- 4. Answer the Boren questions. Make sure you’ve addressed each component of the questions.**
 - Demonstrate how you are interested in Boren’s goals and purposes specifically.
 - Draft, reread, revise, get feedback.
 - If you’re not meeting any of the Boren preferences, address that. Why are you not going for a full year, for example?
- 5. Must address national security, broadly defined.**
 - Not everything is related to terrorism. National security should relate to your own perspective, your academic background, the language and country being studied, your career goals.
- 6. Boren does not ask for a research paper.**
 - You don’t need footnotes (unless citing facts, but should be minimal); don’t quote famous scholars or politicians.
 - They want to know what you think, so just listing facts or quotes is not helpful.
- 7. Not all analogies are good analogies.**
- 8. Use the space provided but be concise.**
 - Don’t write just one paragraph. Don’t go off on tangents just to fill the space.
- 9. Work with campus representative and references.**
 - Help references write good letters. Provide them with drafts, resume, and information about the Boren program.
 - Get feedback on your essays.
 - 2 letters of recommendation should be from faculty who have taught you (better from professors than from TAs). 3rd letter can be from a boss, or other relevant person.
- 10. Preview your application before submitting.**
 - Write essays in a word processing program outside of application, then paste and preview.
 - Special formatting won’t carry over (bold, italics, special characters, quotes).
 - Make sure the end doesn’t get cut off if you’ve exceeded the character limit.