

Fulbright Application Essay

On one hot late-summer day when I was in high school, my parents came back from a shopping trip with a surprise present for me: the legendary board game, Diplomacy. At first I scoffed at such an old-fashioned game. Who would want to waste glorious sunny days moving armies around a map of pre-World War I Europe, pretending to be Bismarck or Disraeli? But after playing the game once, I became absolutely riveted by the nuances of statecraft, and soon began losing sleep as I tried to craft clever diplomatic gambits, hatch devious schemes, and better understand the game's ever-changing dynamics. As my friends and I spent the second half of the summer absorbed by the game, my parents grinned knowingly. How could I resist being fascinated with Diplomacy, they asked me, when I incessantly read about international affairs, and liked nothing more than debating politics over dinner? How could I resist being fascinated, when I had spent most of my summers in Greece (and, much more briefly, France and England), witnessing first-hand the ways in which countries differ socially, culturally, and politically?

Though my passion for foreign policy and international affairs undoubtedly dates back to high school, I never had the chance to fully develop this interest before college. Once I arrived at Harvard, however, I discovered that I could learn about international relations through both my academics and my extracurricular activities. Academically, I decided to concentrate in Government, and, within Government, to take classes that elucidated the forces underlying the relations of states on the world stage. Some of the most memorable of these classes included Human Rights, in which we discussed what role humanitarian concerns ought to play in international relations; Politics of Western Europe, in which I learned about the social, economic, and political development of five major European countries; and Causes and Prevention of War, which focused on unearthing the

roots of conflict and finding out how bloodshed could have been avoided. Currently, for my senior thesis, I am investigating the strange pattern of American human rights-based intervention in the post-Cold War era, and trying to determine which explanatory variables are best able to account for it.

Interestingly, I think that I have learned at least as much about international relations through my extracurriculars in college as I have through my classes. For the past three years, for instance, I have helped run Harvard's three Model United Nations conferences. As a committee director at these conferences, I researched topics of global importance (e.g. the violent disintegration of states, weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East), wrote detailed study guides discussing these subjects, and then moderated hundreds of students as they debated the topics and strove to resolve them. Even more enriching for me than directing these committees was taking part in them myself. As a delegate at other schools' conferences, I would be assigned to represent a particular country on a particular UN committee (e.g. France on the Security Council). I would then need to research my country's position on the topics to be discussed, articulate my view in front of others in my committee, and convince my fellow delegates to support my position. Trying to peg down a country's elusive 'national interest,' clashing over thorny practical and philosophical issues, making and breaking alliances — - Model UN was basically a simulation of how diplomacy really works.

Thankfully, I have also found time over the past few years to cultivate interests and skills unrelated to Model UN and foreign policy. One of the most important of these has been community service. As a volunteer for Evening With Champions, an annual ice-skating exhibition held to raise money for children with cancer, and as a teacher of a

weekly high school class on current events and international affairs, I have, whenever possible, used my time and talents to benefit my community. Another more recent interest of mine is the fascinating realm of business. Two years ago, my father's Christmas present to me was a challenge rather than a gift: he gave me \$500, but told me that I could keep it only if I invested it in the stock market — - and earned a higher rate of return than he did with another \$500. Since then, I have avidly followed the stock market, and become very interested in how businesses interact and respond to strategic threats (perhaps because of the similarities between business competition and the equally cutthroat world of diplomatic realpolitik). A final passion of mine is writing. As the writer of a biweekly column in the Independent, one of Harvard's student newspapers, I find very little as satisfying as filling a blank page with words — creating from nothing an elegant opinion piece that illuminates some quirk of college life, or induces my readers to consider an issue or position that they had ignored until then.

Because of my wide range of interests, I have not yet decided what career path to follow into the future. In the short run, I hope to study abroad for a year, in the process immersing myself in another culture, and deepening my personal and academic understanding of international affairs. After studying abroad, my options would include working for a nonprofit organization, entering the corporate world, and attending law school. In the long run, I envision for myself a career straddling the highest levels of international relations, politics, and business. I could achieve this admittedly ambitious goal by advancing within a nonprofit group, think tank, or major international company. Perhaps most appealingly, I could also achieve this goal by entering public service and obtaining some degree of influence over actual foreign policy decisions — that is, becoming a player myself in the real-life game of Diplomacy.