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University of Notre Dame Student Selected for U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program

Sofia Piecuch, a graduate student from University of Notre Dame has been awarded a U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship to study Arabic during the summer of 2021.

The U.S. Department of State's [Critical Language Scholarship](#) (CLS) Program is part of a U.S. government effort to expand the number of Americans studying and mastering critical foreign languages. CLS scholars gain critical language and cultural skills that enable them to contribute to U.S. economic competitiveness and national security. Sofia is one of nearly 700 competitively selected American students at U.S. colleges and universities who received a CLS award in 2021.

The CLS Program provides opportunities to U.S. undergraduate and graduate students to spend eight to ten weeks studying one of 15 critical languages: Arabic, Azerbaijani, Bangla, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, or Urdu. The program includes intensive language instruction and structured cultural enrichment experiences designed to promote rapid language gains. The CLS Program is developed in partnership with local institutions in countries where these languages are commonly spoken. CLS scholars are expected to continue their language study beyond the scholarship and apply their critical language skills in their future careers.

The CLS Program plays an important role in preparing U.S. students for the 21st century's globalized workforce, increasing American competitiveness, and contributing to national security. CLS scholars also serve as citizen ambassadors, representing American values and the diversity of the United States. As Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, "People-to-people exchanges bring our world closer together and convey the best of America to the world, especially to its young people."

Due to the global pandemic, the majority of CLS institutes in 2021 will be offered as a virtual program. CLS Virtual Institutes in 2020 resulted in impressive language gains among participants with opportunities for virtual engagement with host communities abroad. As one 2020 CLS alumna noted, "The CLS Virtual Program was one of the most well-run educational programs that I have participated in. Virtual programs allow for flexibility, and in a time where travel is still uncertain, they connect us globally in ways we might not have ever thought possible."

CLS scholars represent a broad diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. The CLS Program actively recruits in states and regions of the United States that have been historically under-represented in international education. Recipients of the 2021 CLS awards include students from over 255 institutions of higher education across the United States, including public and private universities, liberal arts colleges, minority-serving institutions, military academies, and community colleges. They come from almost every U.S. state and territory, as well as the District of Columbia.

Since 2006, CLS has awarded scholarships to more than 8,000 American students to learn critical languages around the world. CLS scholars are among the more than 50,000 academic and professional exchange program participants supported annually by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. These exchange programs build respect and positive relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. The CLS Program is a program of the U.S. Department of State and is supported in its administration by American Councils for International Education.

For further information about the Critical Language Scholarship or other exchange programs offered by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, please contact ECA-Press@state.gov and visit our websites at <http://www.clscholarship.org/> and <https://studyabroad.state.gov/>