

## Essay Sample 3: Study and Research

### STATEMENT OF PROPOSED STUDY OR RESEARCH

Poland—Language and Literature  
Literature and Politics in 1950s Poland

The institution of a communist government in Poland after World War II presented Polish national identity with a dilemma. How could one remain Polish under communism? How should one resist communism? To what extent could it be accepted? If selected to receive a Fulbright grant, I propose to research how Polish literature of the 1950s attempted to answer these questions and how it reflected the above conflict. Specifically, I will study the confrontation between Polish Social Realist literature and its literary critique in the form of satirical and grotesque literature. I will examine works by such authors as Leszek Kolakowski and Slawomir Mrozek, whose use of the modern fairy tale as a means of literary satire interests me. I plan to prepare for this project by reading traditional Polish fairy tales to understand what this ancient literary genre could offer Kolakowski and Mrozek as modern writers.

I intend to affiliate with the Department of International Polish Studies (IPS) at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Professor Michal Pawel Markowski, the department chair, has graciously agreed to supervise my work. IPS will be launching a research project on national identity which will be in progress during my time as a Fulbright Scholar. This project will involve renowned scholars in the field of nationalism and national identity. It would be exciting to participate in an event where Poland is the locus of such cultural research of international significance, and my understanding of Polish cultural identity would be enhanced by the intellectual activity around me. Through IPS, I would have full privileges at its institute library and at that of the Jagiellonian University Institute of Polish Philology, both of which contain many volumes relevant to my project. I would also have access to the extensive collection of Jagiellonian's main library which, as a deposit library, archives all publications in the Polish language printed both in Poland and abroad. I would thus have access to the newest scholarship.

As a complement to my research, I plan to attend courses at IPS and at the Institute of Polish Philology. I would begin my Fulbright grant at the start of IPS' academic year in September 2008. In the fall, IPS typically offers two unique courses which would provide me with a valuable theoretical framework: "Modernity's Dark Currents" and "Art and Politics." I will also attend one literature class at the Institute of Polish Philology and an advanced Polish language class. The fall will be a period of exploration during which I will immerse myself in Polish society and culture. With this background, I will be ready for more intensive archival work in the spring. During the second semester, I plan to take a course on Polish religion at IPS and at least one course at the Institute of Polish Philology. During the spring, I will devote more time to research, which I will complete by the end of the academic year in June 2009. While my research would ideally culminate in a paper, I would still benefit from this project if it did not. Interaction with Polish intellectuals and students would enrich my understanding of national and cultural identity, and would allow me to perfect my Polish language skills.

Jagiellonian University is an ideal place to continue studying the Polish language. It is a leading research center for the teaching of Polish as a foreign language and has hosted several conferences on that topic. I was impressed by its Summer School of Polish Language and Culture, which I have participated in twice. I applied techniques I observed there while teaching in Cologne. After completing my grant, I will bring back what I learn about language education.

I firmly believe that my project would be most successful if based at the Jagiellonian at University in Kraków. It would be an incredible experience to be able to study national identity at this great center of Polish literary and cultural studies. At Jagiellonian, I would also have the invaluable support and resources of IPS, including the supervision of Professor Markowski, which would greatly increase the feasibility of my project. Finally, Kraków was one of the centers of resistance under the communist regime, and as a result, the city is today home to rich historical archives of underground publications that would be invaluable primary sources.

My undergraduate education has prepared me well for this project. I have completed coursework in Polish language, literature, history, and politics which provide me with a solid foundation. I will prepare for my Fulbright project during the current academic year by taking an advanced Polish language independent study and a course on European history after 1945. Though I am not a heritage speaker, I have acquired a good knowledge of the Polish language which will allow me to interact on a social level while in Poland. My fluency in French and German, gained through my double majors, will give me access to scholarly publications in those languages, as well as English and Polish sources. Most importantly, my major subjects have thoroughly trained me in the art and science of analyzing and interpreting literature. Study abroad has readied me for the challenges of cultural immersion and has helped me to develop social skills that will allow me to integrate myself into my Polish host community.

I have investigated possibilities for involvement in that community. While I studied in Cologne, I taught an English grammar and conversation course. Dr. Radoslaw Rybkowski, a lecturer in the Department of American Studies at Jagiellonian, approved of my teaching a similar course at Jagiellonian. This course would allow me to interact with Polish students and help them better understand my culture while encouraging them to consider studying in the U.S.

Additionally, I will participate in the Tandem program at Jagiellonian University. Tandem would partner me with a Polish student who wishes to improve his or her English and who would help me improve my Polish through weekly meetings where we would alternate between Polish and English. I also plan to join the Student Association of American Studies.

This project would benefit me academically and professionally. My future plans involve pursuit of graduate work in cultural studies with an emphasis on national and cultural identity in Polish literature and eventually a career in academia. I wish to study Polish national identity in particular because of its remarkable survival story. Even when Poland did not exist as a political entity on the map of Europe in the nineteenth century, Polish immigrants arriving in the United States continued to identify themselves as Polish...and their descendants still do.

Though it has prepared me well for my Fulbright project, the Polish Studies program at the University of Rochester emphasizes political science, and did not offer me the same literary focus that my official majors did. Living and studying in Poland would enable me to finally explore the literary aspect of my interest in Polish culture. I would develop valuable research skills and would have the opportunity to collaborate with international scholars and students.

The topic I have chosen has been little studied. Thus, my project would contribute to literary scholarship. With Poland's entry into the European Union, what it means to be Polish has become a question of vital importance. Finally, the rich Polish literary tradition is relatively unknown in the United States, especially among those who have no Polish heritage. Literature has played a key role in Polish culture. Understanding how Polish literature has expressed and helped to create Polish national identity is crucial to comprehending today's Poland. Upon my return from Poland, I will encourage the study of Polish language and literature in the U.S.

## **FULBRIGHT CURRICULUM VITAE**

### **Poland—Language and Literature**

My two defining passions are my loves of music and foreign languages. I began playing flute at age nine. I was fortunate to be talented enough to make it into several youth ensembles including the prestigious Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra. Music has taught me dedication and perseverance. It has brought me together with people from all walks of life and helped me to develop an international perspective on life. I love music because it allows me to create a bit of beauty in the world. Wherever in the world I have been, my flute has come along, and it will accompany me to Poland if I receive a Fulbright grant.

I have always been interested in learning about the world beyond my own backyard. As a child, I used to trace maps for fun, and I would constantly ask my dad, who had taken German in high school, to teach me new words. In high school I was able to channel this enthusiasm in an academic direction and took as many foreign language classes as I could (including three years of German), engaging in independent study to fit in the equivalent of five years of French in three years. As a senior, I put my knack for languages to practical use by helping Elvizada, who had just moved to my town from the Congo, adjust to life in the United States.

During high school, the seeds for my future fascination with Poland were also sown when I took Pre-Calculus with Mrs. Koch, a Polish immigrant and one of the most dedicated teachers I have ever had. She taught me my first Polish words and sparked my interest in her homeland. However, I was not able to start learning Polish formally until college. As a freshman, I received a scholarship to study at the Jagiellonian University Summer School. I spent July 2005 in Kraków learning Polish and attending lectures on Polish history. My first visit to Poland was a cultural keelhauling. I knew exactly seven words, and the language barrier was overwhelming at first. I was afraid to explore the city alone for the simple reason that I could not pronounce the name of my tram stop (Akademia Pedagogiczna). However, four weeks and many flashcards later, I could pronounce Akademia Pedagogiczna and had come to love Poland. Since then, I have continued to learn Polish in Rochester, Kraków, and Cologne.

I have also been able to study abroad in Germany and France as an undergraduate, and I consider these experiences one of the most valuable components of my education. Apart from improving my language skills, study abroad has provided me with vital exposure to different cultures. I grew up in a small New England town with little cultural diversity. Living

abroad has broadened my horizons and challenged concepts that I had previously held to be immutable. This is particularly true with respect to national and cultural identity. I have long been interested in identity issues since I am a Hispanic who does not speak Spanish. Yet, until I studied abroad, I felt relatively secure in my position on the issue. When I met my friend Angelina in Cologne, who is ethnically German but grew up in Kazakhstan and speaks Russian as her native language, the issue of cultural identity was suddenly less clear to me. I began to ask myself what exactly does determine cultural and national identity.

Unlike many students of Polish studies, I cannot lay claim to any Polish ancestry. It is unfortunate that Poland and Polish culture, which have played such a dynamic role in European and world history, are so little understood in the United States among those who have no ethnic connection to Poland. And though Germany and Poland share a common border, one meets very few students of German who also choose to learn Polish. This is one of the reasons why I plan to pursue graduate work in cultural studies with an emphasis on Polish literature, a goal which would be greatly furthered by receiving a Fulbright grant to Poland.