

Taiwan for the Summer

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I am unspeakably grateful to participate in the U.S. Department of State's 2022 Critical Language Scholarship for Mandarin this summer. This program is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to intensively study Chinese through complete immersion while also forging cross-cultural friendships and serving as a citizen diplomat. For the duration of the eight-week program, I will be in Tainan, Taiwan studying with students and faculty at National Cheng Kung University. By providing students with the chance to build connections, language skills, and cultural understanding abroad, the Department of State hopes to overcome political and cultural obstacles and take steps towards a more open-minded, collaborative world.

I have looked forward to an opportunity like this for many years. After graduating high school, I had my first experience with cultural exchange as a participant in the National Security Language Initiative for Youth Program. Having no previous experience with Mandarin, I stayed with a host family in Chengdu, China, for nearly six months, attending a traditional Chinese high school and learning beginner Chinese. During this challenging yet exhilarating journey, my love for languages bloomed. Unfortunately, the 10-month program abruptly ended in January 2020, as the Wuhan breakout of Covid-19 sent the country into lockdown. Ever since my hasty return to the U.S., I have dreamed of returning abroad and continuing to pursue cultural fluency through the platform of language.

Travel to Asia was impossible last summer, but the U.S. Department of State was determined to continue its language programs, even if students could not go overseas. So, last year, I accepted a virtual CLS scholarship to study Mandarin from afar at the Dalian University of Technology. Despite the distance, I grew to feel amazingly close to my classmates, professors, and peer mentors. Now, I am incredibly excited to participate in the CLS Program again, this time without the hindrance of a computer screen. Thank you to everyone who made this opportunity possible, including Dr. Jennifer Beers and the Mandarin professors who have fostered my continued passion for language study.

Zoe is a second-year Newcomb Scholar pursuing a degree in Political Economy and Environmental Studies and minoring in Chinese. Outside of her studies, she is the Director of Undergraduate Student Government's Sustainability Committee, a Resident Advisor, and a Tulane tour guide. In addition, she enjoys exploring the outdoors, reading, and spending time with her family in Phoenix, Arizona.