Selections from ETA Statement of Grant Purpose Sample Essays
Middlebury College

Note: these are to be used solely for Middlebury applicants as a reference to better understand this genre of writing. These are not to be reproduced or shared. Even though there are specific points that need to be addressed, statements are unique and reflect the experiences and motivation each individual applicant brings to the application as well as the Fulbright specifications (which have shifted slightly over the past ten years) and the specifications for the specific country. Applicants give permission for the fellowships office to share essays or portions thereof when they apply. This is intended to help future applicants in their writing process.

As you review these excerpts, note the writers’ skillful integration of specific details with more general statements—they really do show rather than tell, so that the reader can clearly imagine what they might do in a classroom, how they will engage their communities, how they will represent the US and what draws them to a specific country. They have diverse backgrounds; some of that may be reflected here or not; sometimes that shows up more in the personal statement.

What remains essential is that you craft a statement that reflects your relevant experiences, qualifications, motivations, and plans for cross-cultural engagement in your own voice. You will write many drafts—as did these applicants before you. Keep writing and revising and your essays will reflect your talents and vision as an ETA!

1. Discussing your relevant experiences for the ETA and ideas for the classroom:

1.1 Working with multigenerational English language learners in Seattle and Vermont helped me learn effective approaches to language learning. During college, I volunteered through a program called Juntos that helps migrant farmworkers acquire English skills. My teaching partner and I prepared two-hour lesson plans each week before we met with a group of Mexican workers at a nearby farm. Based on what they wanted to learn, we incorporated the local newspaper, their smartphones and computers, and textbooks to help them learn English and navigate their local community. Currently, as a weekly study hall and job readiness tutor at FareStart, a non-profit teen and adult culinary job-training program for the homeless in Seattle, I use role-play to teach new concepts to English language learners who are native Spanish speakers. Students practice speaking out loud in English as they move step by step through their cooking process or mock job interviews.

In these teaching settings, relevant resources and role-play are powerful tools to develop cultural competency. Coupled with the skills I developed in Toastmasters, such as coaching and making oral presentations to diverse audiences, I will be prepared to work with Argentinian students from different backgrounds. I plan to use readily available resources, such as articles from the English newspaper, the Buenos Aires Herald, to explore different perspectives on world and Argentinian history. If technology is accessible, I want to use YouTube and English programming on RAE Argentina al Mundo to examine media and teach listening in my lessons.

Given Argentina’s history of immigration, I hope to incorporate cultural awareness with the intention that my students can develop a deeper appreciation for different ideas.

I also want to use my background in photography to connect with young people in impoverished communities. I envision collaborating with a non-profit or a school to teach photography classes as a means of self-expression.

1.2 I have the experience, enthusiasm, and values that would allow me to cultivate a
supportive and successful learning atmosphere as an ETA in [specific country]. I care deeply about the students I work with and am invested in their growth. I spent this summer teaching two English literature courses to 9th and 10th grade non-native English speakers and was able to track improvement in paragraph structure and grammar in my student’s writing. I also have provided one-on-one academic assistance as a peer-writing tutor and First Year Seminar mentor at my college. I pride myself on being a creative and diligent teacher, as I have demonstrated by generating curriculum from scratch for my courses this summer as well as planning and executing a free six-day-per-week camp for the large Nepali refugee youth community (10-18-year-old) as the Summer Activities Coordinator. These experiences indicate both my comfort leading students from a wide range of ages (from elementary through college levels) and success as a leader of cross-cultural settings. This is an area I will continue build upon this upcoming January in my role as a teaching assistant to a gender studies course.

I will bring these experiences, insights and approach to my work as an ETA teaching students from a different pedagogical tradition than my own. I’ve learned that the best teachers demonstrate both humility and adaptability; I intend to adjust my approach as needed to fit the school’s philosophy and head teacher’s pedagogy. However, I anticipate that I could successfully reconcile any perceived differences in pedagogy by incorporating students’ extra-curricular interests into the language learning experience. This is a pedagogical approach that requires flexibility, observation, and response that can be adjusted to fit a variety of ages groups or learning stages, all of which I would be excited to work with. I also plan to utilize the skills I acquired in my “Models of Inclusive Education” course to ensure that students with a range of learning styles and abilities are engaged in my classroom. The combination of staying attuned to students’ comfort zones and familiarities while also pushing boundaries would constitute my approach to reaching students from a different pedagogical tradition.

1.3 As an ETA, I will serve as a facilitator and resource for students who wonder about the U.S. political processes, the lyrics to the “Top 10” English songs, the mechanics of the subjunctive in English, or even how to study in the U.S. themselves. Through my roles as an English Tutor and Citizenship Exam teacher throughout college, I have developed strong language-teaching skills, curriculum development abilities, and cross-cultural techniques that would allow me to approach a classroom of language learners with confidence. Without a given curriculum or structure, awkward introductions and cultural misunderstandings characterized my first classes as an English and Citizenship teacher. However, I immersed myself in teaching guides and methodological strategies, and I soon became acutely attuned to the needs of students. Through tailored lessons and activities, the students and I fostered an environment of mutual learning and confronted the complexities of English and U.S. culture together.

In my role as an ambassador for the U.S. and the English language, I plan to blend linguistic immersion with cultural learning that feels relevant to the students with whom I am placed. Whether assisting students in preparation for the UN Global Classrooms project in Madrid or creating activities that revolve around xenophobia and race in an elementary school in La Rioja, I plan to stimulate both linguistic and intellectual curiosity, while acknowledging that activities and lessons will change according to the school’s needs and goals. By analyzing popular song lyrics, recreating literature through skits, or simulating political debates, students of any age will learn English through cultural markers that feel relevant to them.

2. Expressing motivation for serving as an ETA in this specific country
After a semester abroad in Madrid involved with socio-political issues and community initiatives, I am motivated and eager to engage Spanish secondary school students in Madrid in the politics, culture, and issues of the U.S. through linguistic exploration. As the only U.S. student that most of my Spanish classmates knew during my semester abroad, I served as the go to source for information on the contested presidential primaries, pop culture icons, and the traditions of the U.S. As I attempted to mask my American identity, my Spanish classmates sought to highlight it and probe my cultural knowledge.

I want to teach in Argentina because of its history of immigration and journey towards modernization. During my last two years of college, I learned about Argentinian society through the comic Mafalda and studying the Dirty War. I examined Argentina’s various waves of immigration, government and social policies, women leaders, journey to modernization, cultural acceptance of psychotherapy, and formation of a middle class. I have an affinity towards Argentina because of the importance of women, such as Eva Perón and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, in shaping Argentinian policies and life. Also, I am interested in exploring the positive role of psychotherapy in student and educational development. I believe that my interests in these topics through a global perspective will allow me to add value as a teacher.

3. Host Community Engagement
3.1 Outside of the classroom, I will involve myself in university life by participating in extracurricular offerings, be they film society, theater, or jazz band. Outside of the university, I will connect with the community on common ground: food. Not many people put stock in the contributions of street food vendors to a young traveler’s education, but during my time in Moscow, I found that my simple interactions with the corner piroshky lady was one of my sincerest connections to the community. Besides being an integral part of local culture, food can also reveal stories from all strata of society. Food vendors may blend into the background, but they live in the thick of day-to-day routine and interact with people from all walks of life.

3.2 [This country's] folk music is what first compelled me to learn more about the country, and if given the chance to live and teach there, sharing American or other international music is how I will engage with my host community further. Creating or assisting with a choir or a cappella group, in addition to offering guitar lessons, would be an opportunity to connect with the community on the level that is most meaningful to me. In following with what initially attracted me to Macedonia, I will seek out opportunities to participate in [this country’s] music and dance, and thus attempt to more deeply engage with [this country’s] people, culture, and language.

4. That difficult introductory paragraph
4.1 As a [New American and first-generation student], I was expected from a young age to make American culture and English accessible to my communities. Since this came naturally to me, I never considered myself an educator. I have continued to strengthen my skills as an educator and believe that as an ETA, I can connect my cross-cultural heritage and experiences to the vocation of teaching. I will encourage mutual learning across diverse groups, continue to explore graduate school studies in international education and cross-cultural psychology, and gain experiences that will inform my future career.

4.2 Success as a student of foreign language requires vulnerability, willingness to take risks, and determination not required to the same extent in other areas of study. Teachers able to
inspire these qualities in their students and support them in this kind of learning are therefore essential. As an ETA in Macedonia, my goal will be to create learning environments that nurture these qualities in my students by practicing engaging and inclusive language learning pedagogy and emphasizing the humanity and culture that enlivens language.

4.3 Умом Россию не понять. Tyutchev’s words ring true to this day; Russia cannot be understood with the mind, but perhaps with language, one can try. Wrestling convoluted cases and prefixes to the context of unstructured syntax, one gets a taste of Russia’s complex nature. Language is the cornerstone of culture. I have always loved learning languages—grappling with foreign ideas to discover new modes of communication. Luckily, cultural engagement is twofold; learning a language expands horizons, and teaching one multiplies them. As an English Teaching Assistant, I will engage my students with the English language and American culture, while also opening myself up to new understandings of their culture and my own. In a time when the US and Russia are at such odds, I want to take part in interactions that are essential to fighting ignorance and fostering positive relations among our cultures.