



Detailed Instructions for the 2026 CLS Program Application

Contents

Section 0: Pre-Application Form	2
Section 1: Program Overview and Requirements	2
Section 2: Application Instructions	2
Section 3: Eligibility	2
Section 4: Applicant Information	4
Contact Information	4
Biographical Information.....	5
Congressional District	5
Passport Information	6
Section 5: Current Academic Information	6
Section 6: Language Choice and Past Experience.....	7
Language and Level	7
Target Language Travel.....	8
Other Language Experience	8
Section 7: Transcript and Grades	8
Section 8: Previous Academic Information	9
Section 9: Previous Programs, Activities, Honors, and Fellowships.....	10
CLS Program Awards	10
U.S. Government Awards	10
Activities, Honors, and Employment.....	10
Sections 10: Essays	10
Section 11: Statistical Information	11
Section 12: Review and Submit.....	11

Section 0: Pre-Application Form

The pre-application form consists of the American Councils for International Education's (American Councils) Privacy Notice and Consent Form and the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program's Campus Advisors' Acknowledgement and Consent Form. You must agree to these forms before beginning the full application.

Section 1: Program Overview and Requirements

The program overview describes the basic information about the CLS Program. Additional information is provided about participation requirements; passports, visas, and entry requirements; and the terms and conditions of the award. You should read through this section in its entirety.

Section 2: Application Instructions

The application instructions cover technical aspects of using the online application system.

Section 3: Eligibility

Please complete the questions regarding your eligibility for the 2026 CLS Program.

Please read the prompts carefully. An answer of "No" to questions asked on this page does not necessarily indicate that you are ineligible for the CLS Program.

Complete eligibility information is available

at <https://clscholarship.org/applicants/eligibility>. A list of frequently asked questions is provided on the CLS website at <https://clscholarship.org/applicants/frequently-asked-questions>.

1) Citizenship: Only U.S. citizens and nationals are eligible for the CLS Program. Naturalized citizens must have U.S. citizenship by the CLS application deadline. Permanent residents and green card holders are not eligible to apply.

2) Age: You must be 18 years of age by May 15, 2026 in order to be eligible for the 2026 CLS Program.

3-4) Enrollment: Please answer questions about your enrollment status. If you are unsure, please refer to your college or university's office of the registrar.

Please note that students on a leave of absence are not eligible to apply for the CLS Program, with limited exceptions made for students who have withdrawn from their academic program in order to pursue an organized semester- or year-long study abroad, a national fellowship or scholarship program, or substantive co-operative internship program, and who intend to re-enroll following its completion.

If you are not taking classes at or through your home institution in the fall term, you must submit a CLS Enrollment Confirmation form completed by your home registrar in the U.S. You must also submit a signed letter from the program provider explaining the opportunity and confirming your participation. American Councils will provide the CLS Enrollment Confirmation form and further instructions to you if you are selected as a semi-finalist. If selected as a finalist, American Councils may ask you to submit updated documentation from the program provider confirming their successful completion of the program.

5) Accreditation: Applicants must be students at Higher Education Institutions based in the United States that are accredited by a Department of Education-recognized accreditation agency. Students at institutions with suspended accreditation are not eligible to apply. If you are unsure, please refer to your college or university's office of the registrar.

6) Institution: Applicants in dual-degree programs involving coursework both at a U.S. institution and an international institution must be able to provide a transcript from the U.S. institution. Students earning degrees at foreign institutions that are not based in the U.S. or its territories are not eligible, even if those institutions are accredited by a recognized U.S. accrediting agency.

7) College-Level Study: Applicants at the undergraduate level must complete at least one full year of college-level study before participating in the CLS Program. You should indicate whether you will fulfill that requirement by the start of the program in June 2026. Note that part-time students still qualify.

8) Only One Application: Applicants may only submit one application for the CLS Program each year. If it is determined that an applicant has submitted multiple applications in the same application year, they will be determined to be ineligible to participate in the CLS Program. If you submitted an application in error and need help deleting it, please contact our staff at cls@americancouncils.org.

9) Veteran Status: All other factors being equal, the CLS Program gives preference to veterans of the U.S. armed forces. Note that active-duty members of the military do not qualify for a veteran's preference in this case. If you are a veteran, you must provide a copy of your DD214 or NGB-22 form to prove your status, or you may decline to receive this preference. You should redact your social security number on the form before submitting it.

Prior to completing the CLS application, all applicants with affiliation to the U.S. armed forces should carefully review the CLS Program's instructions on this topic at <https://clscholarship.org/applicants/frequently-asked-questions> and seek advice from the appropriate commanding officer.

10) Medical Review: Applicants selected for the CLS Program award will be required to submit a medical information form and a physician's statement. Results of the medical review will determine if an applicant meets the requirements necessary for program placement and participation in the CLS Program. For information about participation requirements, please visit the CLS website (<https://clscholarship.org/applicants/participation-requirements>).

11) Visa: Applicants selected for the CLS Program will need to obtain a visa that is appropriate and valid for their CLS Program. For information about participation requirements, please visit the CLS website (<https://clscholarship.org/applicants/participation-requirements>).

12) Verification of Eligibility and Program Requirements: Applicants are required to certify that they have reviewed the eligibility and program requirements.

Section 4: Applicant Information

Contact Information

1-5) Current Contact Information: You must provide the primary email address and telephone number at which you can be reached through October 2026. If you are providing an overseas, non-U.S. number, please indicate the country code, preceded by a 'plus' sign ('+').

We also encourage you to provide an alternate email address and telephone number. The CLS Program will use this information to reach you only in cases where we cannot reach you using your primary email address or phone number

and there is time-sensitive information that we need to communicate, such as a program deadline. Consider entering the contact information for a close friend or family member.

Biographical Information

6-8) Name: Enter your name as it appears on your government-issued ID documents, such as your passport or driver's license. If there is a discrepancy in the personal information listed on your various government ID documents, please use the information as listed on the passport that you anticipate using for CLS Program travel, regardless of whether you have this passport already or will be applying for it later.

Your name as entered will be used on all official CLS Program communications, so please use appropriate capitalization.

9) Sex: Although applicants are not required to disclose their sex on the application, responses to this question are used when reporting on the demographic composition of the CLS Program's recruitment and selection process. If selected, applicants will be required to disclose their legal sex as indicated on their government-issued ID, which is required in order to ticket passengers for flights.

10-11) Date and Place of Birth: Enter your date of birth and the country, city, and state/province/region.

Congressional District

12) Congressional Voting District: The CLS Program reports to members of Congress when constituents from their states or districts receive a CLS award. Enter the state code and district number of your congressional voting district. This should be the district where you are registered to vote or plan to vote in the next election. This information can be found on your voter registration card or by searching for your address at <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.

Select "At-Large" for states with only one Congressional representative. Those states are: Alaska, Delaware, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming. Enter At Large also for the District of Columbia and U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands).

Passport Information

13-14) Passport Information: If you hold dual citizenship with another country, mark Yes and indicate which country in question 13a. If you hold citizenship in more than two countries, please select only one to indicate here.

Prior to completing the CLS application, all applicants holding dual citizenship should carefully [review the CLS Program's instructions on this topic](#).

If you currently have a valid U.S. passport, please provide passport information exactly as it appears on the photo page of your passport. If you do not currently have a passport or access to your passport, you may select No. A valid U.S. passport is not required in order to apply for the CLS Program, however all finalists are required to have a valid passport by March 2026 in order to participate in the program. If you do not take measures to secure a passport by March 2026, you will be responsible for any fees associated with expediting your passport application.

Visit the U.S. Department of State website at <https://travel.state.gov/> for more information on how to obtain a U.S. passport.

Section 5: Current Academic Information

1-4) Current College or University: Choose the name of your current college or university and provide information on your current enrollment, including your start date, expected graduation date, and the type of degree you are pursuing.

Please note that the data in the CLS application reflects information derived from the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is updated on an annual basis. If your college or university is an accredited U.S.-based institution but not listed as an option, please contact us at cls@americancouncils.org and we will happily add it as an option.

You may optionally indicate the specific campus or division of your school that you attend. Note that this field should not be used in the place of your college or university name, which is required to submit your application.

If you are attending two institutions of higher education concurrently, or you are enrolled in a dual-degree program with two institutions, then please choose one to indicate here, which we will identify you as a student of during and after the

program and indicate the other as a previous institution in the Previous Academic Information section. If one institution is not an eligible institution (for instance, if it is based outside the United States), then indicate the eligible institution in this section and the second institution in the Previous Academic Information section.

5-6) Current or Anticipated Academic Major(s) and Minor(s): Select your major(s)/minor(s)/field(s) of study from the provided list. You may not be able to find the exact name of your major or minor in the drop-down menu on the application. Please select one or more options that are as close to your degree as possible. The field of study list is derived from the [Classification of Instruction Programs](#), developed and maintained by the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

7-9) Spring 2026 Enrollment: Please answer the questions about your enrollment status in Spring 2025 (Spring semester or Spring quarter).

10) Fall 2026 Enrollment: If you're planning on being enrolled in the Fall 2025 term, please indicate 'Yes' here, along with the approximate start date for the term.

Section 6: Language Choice and Past Experience

Language and Level

1) CLS Target Language: Select the language you are applying to study and the level at which you plan to study. Please review which [levels are offered for the CLS language you want to study](#).

The language that you select may be referred to as the target language throughout the online application.

Choose your level based on how many years of target language study you will have completed **by June 2026**:

- No target language study, or less than one academic year of study: Beginning
- At least one academic year of target language study: Advanced Beginning
- At least two academic years of target language study: Intermediate
- At least three academic years of target language study: Advanced

For example, if you are currently in your first semester of Arabic study, and plan to continue next semester, you will have completed one year of target language study by June 2026, and should apply for the advanced beginning level.

Applicants must choose one language only. Multiple applications by one applicant will result in disqualification from the CLS selection process.

Post-Secondary Language Experience with your CLS Target Language

2) Post-Secondary Language Experience with your CLS Target

Language: Indicate if you have taken university or college classes in your CLS target language; studied or gained experience in your CLS target language, but not through formal classes; or have no prior experience with CLS target language.

Depending on your selection, you may be asked to provide information about your past, current, and planned language courses.

Other Language Experience with Your CLS Target Language

3) Other Language Experience with Your CLS Target Language: Indicate if you have any additional ways in which you have engaged with the target language.

Depending on your selection, you may be asked to provide supplemental details.

Target Language Travel

4) Target Language Travel: Indicate whether you have visited or lived in any countries where your target language is spoken, providing relevant details about your past, current, and planned travel where relevant.

Other Language Experience

5) Other Language Experience: Indicate whether you have studied or speak languages other than English and/or your target language, providing relevant details about the primary study method and number of years where relevant.

Section 7: Transcript and Grades

1) Semester Standing: Indicate whether you are currently in your first semester at your current college or university.

2 - 3) Courses and Grades: Upload a file or enter your classes and grades manually from your current college or university. Include past courses, as well as in-progress courses for fall 2025. Grades for the current semester are not required.

- **Option 1:** Scan and upload a copy of your transcript or grade list to the online application. First-year students without grades may upload proof of enrollment. The maximum allowable file size is 5MB. If your transcript file is larger than this, the file size must be reduced before uploading it. Do not upload a digitally signed or password protected e-transcript PDF. If your transcript has a digital signature or is password protected, print and scan it before uploading.

Note: Some transcripts include the Social Security Number students. Please redact this information if it appears on your transcript.

- **Option 2:** If you cannot upload a current transcript, enter your courses and grades manually by completing a form. Using your online grade report or transcript, please enter information on all courses you have taken. Please provide details on any courses listed on your transcript, including those you may have withdrawn from or for which you received an incomplete. This form should match your institution's record, exactly. If you have not received a grade yet, please enter N/A.

Note: All finalists must submit an official transcript to verify this information. Discrepancies between your CLS application and official transcript may result in award revocation unless verified by your institution.

Section 8: Previous Academic Information

1 - 3) Previous Academic Information: If you have completed college-level coursework in the past five years that is not reflected on your current institution's transcript, please provide previous academic information in your online application. You may add as many additional entries as needed. Upload a copy of your unofficial transcript for each institution attended.

Section 9: Previous Programs, Activities, Honors, and Fellowships

CLS Program Awards

1 – 2) Previous CLS Participation: If you have been offered or received a CLS award for overseas study or CLS Spark in the past, you will be asked to supply additional information about your goals for participating on the program a second time, or about why you were unable to complete the program previously.

U.S. Government Awards

3) U.S. Government Awards: Indicate other language programs funded by the U.S. Government in which you have previously participated.

Activities, Honors, and Employment

4) Activities, Honors, and Employment: Provide information on up to five jobs, internships, fellowships, or activities that are directly relevant to your language study, academic program, or your eventual professional career.

Sections 10: Essays

There are four essay questions on the application form. The essays are designed to allow the reviewer to connect with your story and understand your motivations for applying for this federally funded scholarship. Using AI to generate content for your essays may hinder this process and make it difficult for reviewers to assess your fit for the program. Please review resources on the CLS website before you start your essays.

Your response to each essay question should follow the guidelines for each question regarding the number of maximum words:

1. Commitment to Language Learning (300 words maximum)
2. Preparation for the CLS Program (300 words maximum)
3. Citizen Diplomacy and National Impact (300 words maximum)

4. Personal Statement (500 words maximum)

Essay responses may be written using a word processing program, then copied and pasted into the online application. Essays exceeding the word limit will not be considered for the scholarship. Please note that the word-count software used by the online application may differ from the software used by your word processing program. Be sure to leave yourself time to edit and reduce your word count, if necessary.

Before you begin your essays, it is strongly recommended that you read the information on the CLS website pertaining to your language. Applicants are encouraged to have an academic advisor, peer reviewer, or writing tutor review their essay responses before submitting an application to the CLS Program.

Similar to using AI to generate content for your essays, using materials from previous applications to CLS or other opportunities may be a helpful starting point in the writing process, but ultimately evaluators are looking to understand your goals and interests in the present moment.

Save your work frequently to avoid accidental data loss!

Section 11: Statistical Information

All questions in this section are optional. If you choose to complete the questions in this section, the information will **not** be shared with application reviewers or have an impact on the evaluation or selection process. This information will **not** affect your eligibility for the award.

Information in this section is used when reporting on the demographic composition of the CLS Program's recruitment and selection process and may be used in aggregate for the production of external reports or public presentations.

The CLS Program welcomes all eligible applications without discrimination.

Section 12: Review and Submit

If any mandatory fields are missing, you must complete them before the application can be submitted. Not all questions are required.

Before you submit your application, please be sure to review all sections. Make sure you have answered all the questions and required fields, uploaded all the required documents, and that you are satisfied with your responses.

Once you submit your application, you will no longer be able to make changes to any section of the application. You will be able, however, to continue to view your application online via this system with your existing login.

If you are not ready to submit your application, please press Save and log out of the system. You will be able to log-in at any time, thereafter, until the application deadline, and continue to complete or edit your application.

Before submitting your application, you will be asked to type your name as an electronic signature certifying that the material you entered into the online application is true and that you understand and agree to the terms of the application.

Please note: The CLS Program application is not complete until you press the Submit Your Application button and you receive an email confirmation. If you have not filled out necessary or required information in the application and attempt to submit your application, you will remain in the Review and Submit section and will be able to see which sections are incomplete in the section navigation box on the left-hand side of the application; incomplete sections requiring additional information will be noted, in red text, with an asterisk. You must return to these sections, fix any errors or omissions, and submit your application again before it may be considered complete. You will receive an automated email confirming the submission of your application.

For assistance with the online application, or questions about the CLS Program, please contact us at cls@americancouncils.org, or by phone at 1-877-257-9922.

Do not wait until the due date to submit your application. Submitting your application before the due date allows time to resolve any technical difficulties or last-minute questions.

The CLS Program strongly encourages you to submit your application well in advance of the application deadline. **The CLS Program and American Councils for International Education bear no responsibility for data transmission problems in submitting the application.**