



# 2024 Alumni Handbook



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## Becoming CLS Alumni

Welcome to the CLS alumni community! You're joining over 8,500 other alumni of the CLS Program who work and study in a wide variety of fields and locations across the U.S. and around the world. In the following pages, you will find information to reflect on and thereby extend your CLS experience, make goals and plans for the future, use CLS in your career development, share your experience, and stay connected to the program.

## Strategies to Continue the Experience

### Reflect on Your Experience

Be purposeful about taking time to reflect on your experiences, what they mean to you, and how they will continue to influence you. However you choose to process your experience – in writing, in conversations, or just in thought – reflection is an important and necessary step. Taking the time to reflect will allow you to frame what you learned during your time on this intensive program and decide how to move forward in a more meaningful way.

*Possible strategies for reflection:*

- Write in a personal journal
- Start or continue a blog to articulate your experience and how you are moving forward
- Address your experience artistically through video, photos, music, writing, or other media
- Talk with other CLS or study abroad alumni about your experiences

*What challenges did you overcome? What was your proudest accomplishment?*

*What did you learn about yourself during the CLS Program?*

*What skills, other than language, did you gain from participation in this intensive language program?*

*Did you meet your goals? How has CLS influenced or changed your goals for the future?*

There is room in the workbook section at the end of this handbook to take notes on the following prompts for reflection. These can be used to develop longer journal entries or blog posts when you find yourself having more to say.

## Keep in Touch

The relationships you developed with your CLS cohort and members of your CLS host institute or CLS Program staff will likely continue to be meaningful to you in different ways. Being part of the CLS alumni community means being part of a relatively small group of Americans who prioritize critical languages in their careers and academic pursuits. You never know how you may end up crossing paths and supporting each other over the coming years.

*Possible strategies for keeping in touch:*

- Schedule Google Chat, Zoom, or Skype dates
- Join the [CLS Alumni Facebook group](#) and/or the [CLS Alumni LinkedIn group](#)
- Plan a virtual or local meeting or an event for any CLS alumni in your area
- Send a postcard or letter to your language partner, teacher, or another acquaintance from the program
- Attend in-person CLS alumni events, such as the annual CLSAS Conference each summer

## Get Involved

As a part of the CLS alumni community, you now have access to a variety of programs and resources created specifically to help you share your experiences with future participants and strengthen the impact of your CLS summer.

### Keep your Contact Info Updated

The CLS Program uses the contact information you supplied during your CLS application process to keep you up to date on all alumni happenings. We have a quarterly alumni newsletter with important alumni updates, alumni spotlights, and other alumni-specific announcements. If you have an impending expiring university email address or would like to switch your email address from the one you utilized during the CLS Program, please fill out this [form](#) so we can update our database.

### Join the CLS Alumni Society

The Critical Language Scholarship Alumni Society (CLSAS) is an independent, alumni-led organization by and for CLS alumni. The society serves as an advocate for the continued advancement of critical language studies and cultural exchange in the U.S. and abroad. CLSAS provides alumni with avenues for professional development, community engagement, and language retention. Visit their website, [www.clsas.org](http://www.clsas.org) if you are interested in becoming a member or learning more about their organization.

### Participate in Alumni Initiatives

Each year, the CLS Program offers unique opportunities for alumni to grow their professional development, language skills and networks such as **CLS Refresh, virtual webinars, and more.** **CLS Refresh** is a free individualized tutoring program for selected alumni to continue the study of their target languages. All program alumni will be invited to join these alumni initiatives and events.

### Apply to Become an Alumni Ambassador

The CLS Alumni Ambassadors are a select group of CLS alumni representing the diversity of the CLS Program who take active leadership roles as volunteers for a one-year period. As representatives of the CLS Program, Alumni Ambassadors are called on to mentor prospective CLS participants, provide feedback to CLS program staff, assist in coordinating and planning alumni initiatives and events, and represent the CLS Program in their communities and to the general public. The 2024 CLS Alumni Ambassador application will be available in early winter.

## Sign Up for the Alumni Support Network

As an alumnus or alumna, you can sign up to mentor next year's cohort of CLS participants. A survey will be distributed in the fall asking if you'd like to be listed in the **Alumni Resource Directory**. In addition to supporting new CLS participants by sharing your experience and advice, this directory will allow you to connect with fellow alumni who have similar interests and goals.

## Claim Your Alumni Credentials

All CLS alumni in good standing will soon be issued CLS digital credentials. The CLS Program partners with Accredible, a digital credential service, to bring alumni a powerful mechanism to display your CLS alumni status on professional networks and other social channels. Please be on the lookout for an email from CLS Alumni in the coming weeks to claim your free digital badge and certificate.

## Share Your Experiences in Your Community

- Post and/or publish your stories so that others can connect with them
- Participate in the annual CLS Alumni Photo Contest
- Participate in online forums to offer advice on different topics
  - Some great starting points include [International Exchange Alumni](#) platform, [CLS Alumni Facebook Group](#), and [Official CLS Alumni Group on LinkedIn](#)
- Find and contact a [CLS advisor on your campus](#) to find out how you can help recruit for study abroad
- Reach out to newspapers on campus to submit a written piece about your experience
- Host [an information session](#) about CLS on your campus or another campus in your community
- Get involved with the international student community on your campus

## Stay Internationally Engaged

The suggestions below are just a few of many ways you can continue learning beyond CLS and stay internationally engaged now that the program is over.

## Stay Connected with the Culture

- Visit museums, concerts, and art exhibits, including their virtual options and events
- Look for international restaurants and grocery stores in your community and the surrounding areas
- Volunteer with cultural organizations
- Join international clubs and attend events
- Keep in touch with your language partner and other contacts at your host institute

## Continue Language Study

- Join or start a language club on your campus or in your community
- Connect with international students on your campus or in your community to engage in language exchange
- Sign up for a class on campus, at a language school, or online
- Set up virtual meetings with a fellow CLS participant or your language partner
- Read books, newspapers, and online stories in your target language
- Watch movies and listen to music and news radio in your target language
- Practice journaling or blogging in your target language



## Internationalize Your Studies

- Take an elective course in area studies
- Connect with staff and/or faculty who may be able to relate to your experience and help you connect it with your studies
- Do independent research to find out what your field of study is like in other cultures
- Consider another study abroad program: <https://studyabroad.state.gov/>

## Connect with the Wider Department of State's International Exchange Alumni Community

The International Exchange Alumni (IEA) community is for those who have participated and completed a U.S. government sponsored exchange program. Launched in spring 2023, the Department of State has a new ExchangeAlumni website where you can form new connections, create and participate in events, join groups based on exchange programs and areas of interest, search for upcoming career opportunities, and more.

Through this community, you'll have the opportunity to network with fellow alumni, access grant and funding opportunities, utilize free access to thousands of periodicals and research journals, and stay updated on the latest alumni news and stories. You will be able to register to join the new IEA platform later this fall.

## Going Abroad (Again)

After the CLS Program you may be eager for another international experience. You can start by thinking about what you hope to gain from another experience abroad. We recommend doing online research, including reaching out to the CLS alumni community through [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) or via the Alumni Resource Directory distributed to you in May. Many of our alumni have diverse experiences working, studying, and living abroad after the CLS Program. You can also connect with alumni from other U.S. Department of State programs at [alumni.state.gov](https://alumni.state.gov).

## Graduate School

If you're considering the opportunity to continue your education, you may want to think internationally when researching programs. This can include looking at U.S. institutions with internationally focused programs or components, or looking at institutions abroad. Some resources to get your search started are included at the end of this handbook.

## Scholarships and Fellowships Opportunities

Alumni of the CLS Program are eligible to apply for special scholarships in the following programs:

- Middlebury Institute of International Studies  
<https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/admissions/scholarships/partners/critical-language>
- The Hopkins-Nanjing Center U.S.-China Exchange Scholar  
<https://sais.jhu.edu/admissions-aid/tuition-and-aid/financing-your-education/hopkins-nanjing-center-financial-aid>
- Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University  
<https://thunderbird.asu.edu/students/financial-assistance>

You can find more information about fellowship opportunities such as Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Fellowship and Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship at [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov)

## Volunteer, Work, or Research

As you're probably well aware, the professional world is becoming increasingly globalized. Employers are looking for interculturally competent employees and more international opportunities are available across multiple fields. If you're interested in volunteering or working abroad, we encourage you to think about your career goals and how they may fit into the options listed below. There are hundreds of international opportunities out there, and these resources are simply meant to serve as a starting point for your own personal research. Again, additional resources are articles are provided at the end of this handbook.

- Domestic employers with international positions
  - This may include private companies, NGOs, or higher education institutions.
- International employers
- Government positions
  - There are many government agencies, including the U.S. Department of State, that offer international careers. Start your search at [USAJOBS.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov) and [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov)
  - Explore diverse career paths at the U.S. Department of State:
    - [Consular Fellows Program](#)
    - [Foreign Service Specialists](#)
    - [Foreign Service Officers](#)
  - Reach out to the [Diplomat in Residence](#) in your region who can discuss other opportunities
  - [Sign up](#) to receive career-related information from the Department of State
- Volunteer opportunities
  - There are many ways to volunteer abroad. You may want to start with a centralized list and short guide such as those offered by [GoAbroad.com](https://goabroad.com) or [Go Overseas](#).
- Teaching opportunities
  - Teach Away offers [a guide](#) to teaching English around the world.

[My World Abroad](#) also provides a large list of resources depending on your goals for returning abroad.

## Language Study and Career Development

While some employers understand the value of your participation in an intensive language program and the transferrable skills you likely developed from the experience, you will need to be able to articulate what you gained to really differentiate yourself from other applicants. There are three main avenues where you should plan to identify and express the skills you gained and strengthened while abroad: on your resume, in cover letters, and in interviews.

For individualized assistance on how to integrate your language study experience into your resume and cover letter, we recommend you contact the career center on your campus. These centers often extend services to recent alumni if you have already graduated.

## Resume

While every resume should be tailored to a specific job posting or application, you can include the CLS Program in a section about education, awards and scholarships, or international experience. In addition to listing the name of the program, also consider including some basic information about the program model. If your academic and professional goals for participating in the CLS Program are related to the position to which you are

applying, be explicit in making this connection with specific examples of the skills you gained or the content you mastered.

Here are a few examples of how you may present the CLS Program on your resume:

## **INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, CRITICAL LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

Summer 2024

- Studied advanced Arabic in an 8-week intensive language program, including regular meetings with a language partner
- Completed a final presentation on public health in Arabic
- Post-program ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview score: Advanced-Low

## ***Awards and Honors***

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### **U.S. Department of State - Critical Language Scholarship (CLS)**

**June - August 2024**

Group-based intensive language instruction and structured cultural enrichment experience with the target language of Hindi.

## **EDUCATION**

### **U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship Program**

*June-August 2024*

- Completed an intensive 8-week Russian language program, including 15 hours per week of instruction
- Strengthened oral Russian communication skills through regular meetings with native-speaking language partner



You can also incorporate your language proficiency into your resume, whether it be under a specific section for languages or communication, or under a section for additional skills or qualifications.

Here are a few examples as to how you may write this on your resume:

#### LANGUAGES & SKILLS

Mandarin (Intermediate), Spanish (Beginning)  
 Proficient in Microsoft Office Suite  
 Limited Working Proficiency in Adobe Creative Suite

#### Language Skills

Spanish (Native)  
 Persian (ACTFL OPI Score: Intermediate-Mid)

## Non-Competitive Eligibility

Under [Executive Order 13750](#), alumni who successfully complete the CLS Program are eligible for 12 months of Non-Competitive Eligibility (NCE) hiring status within all agencies of the U.S. government to apply for Civil Service jobs, with the possibility of an extension up to three years if certain criteria are met. Alumni of the CLS Program will automatically be issued a letter confirming this status upon successful completion of their post-program requirements. For more information and a guide to using your NCE status to apply for federal positions, download the **Non-competitive Eligibility Guide for CLS Alumni**.

If you are interested in working with the U.S. government and want to take advantage of your NCE status, more information is available through the [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#).

## LinkedIn

Adding your CLS experience to your LinkedIn profile is similar to adding it to your resume. You may choose to add CLS to one of many sections on LinkedIn, including Education, Experience, and Awards & Honors. You can also add language proficiency to your LinkedIn profile.

We also encourage you to join the [CLS Program - Official Alumni Group](#). By joining, you can:

- Easily indicate your status as a CLS alumnus or alumna on your profile
- Search the group membership for networking opportunities and career advice
- Participate in group discussions and learn of opportunities posted by CLS staff and fellow alumni

## Cover Letter

Similar to a resume, your cover letter should be tailored to a specific job posting or application. Within each cover letter you write, it is important to use concrete examples of your experience to highlight relevant skills based on the job description. Your cover letter should not summarize your resume; it is your opportunity to explain why you are interested in a specific role with a specific organization and how your experience makes you the best candidate for the position.

Be sure to connect the skills you gained through intensive language study and/or study abroad with the relevant skills listed on a job posting as much as possible. Being able to articulate the value of your experience on the CLS Program and other study abroad programs in terms of a direct benefit to potential employers and their organizations will make both your resume and cover letter significantly stronger.

Often, students develop or hone a variety of skills while participating in an intensive academic experience like the CLS Program. While language proficiency is an obvious skill gained from the program, you may want to think about other ways that you were stretched to develop new or improved qualities based on your experience. Several examples are listed on the right side of this page; it can be useful to write your own list of skills and qualities that are authentic to your experience. You can then prepare to tell the story in a cover letter or interview of how you've developed or honed these skills by providing examples from the CLS Program or other life experiences.

Your career goals may also have shifted, expanded, or completely changed because of your program experience. If your participation in the program influenced your decision to pursue a certain career or field of work, you can also mention this in your cover letter.

## Skills and Qualities

Some of the skills that you may have developed or utilized on the CLS Program that could be used in a resume, cover letter, or interview may include:

- Foreign language proficiency
- Communication skills
- Intercultural competence; experience working across cultures
- Tolerance for ambiguity
- Flexibility and ability to adapt to rapidly changing situations
- Open-mindedness and ability to understand different points of view
- Ability to learn quickly and act independently
- Experience working with people of different backgrounds
- Perseverance
- Time management skills

## Interviews

In most interviews, you will be asked to describe situations or give examples of times when you demonstrated particular behaviors and skills. This is a great opportunity to use your experiences abroad to stand out to an employer. It is important to remember that for a job interview, it is not necessarily the most interesting stories that you should plan to share, but rather experiences that reflect a certain skill you gained or strengthened while on the program that relates to the question. It's a good idea to collect examples ahead of interviews so that you have a few answers ready to go. Hiring managers are looking for concise yet descriptive responses.



Indonesian 2018

Some common interview questions that could be answered with stories from study abroad include:

- Can you give an example of a time you overcame a challenge or unexpected obstacle?
- Tell me about a time you set a specific goal and about your success in reaching it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to think quickly to resolve a difficult situation.
- Give a specific example of a time you had to function in a new or unknown environment. How did you adapt?
- Give an example of a time when you had to handle a very stressful situation. How did you cope?
- Please describe an experience when you worked in a group or on a team. What were your strengths and weaknesses within the team?
- Describe a time when you had to resolve a conflict based on misunderstandings or cultural differences.

Keep in mind that you won't want ALL of your examples to be from one program; balance your CLS stories with other specific experiences and examples.

To better articulate your program experience in an interview, we recommend the Situation, Task, Actions, Result (STAR) approach, outlined in the workbook pages at the end of this handbook.

## Additional Resources

Want to learn more about going abroad for a variety of purposes? The following list is not exhaustive but will give you a starting point to learn more!

### International Education

- Funding opportunities for education and research abroad: <https://studyabroad.state.gov/us-government-resources/programs/programs-us-undergraduate-and-graduate-students>
- Diversity Abroad articles and guides for finding the right programs and opportunities for going abroad: <https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles>
- GoAbroad.com Masters Degrees Abroad: <http://www.goabroad.com/degree-abroad/search/masters/degree-abroad-1>
- Association of Professional Schools in International Affairs: <https://apsia.org/>

### Working Abroad

- Making Global Impact: Guide to International Jobs in Government: <https://successworks.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/39/2017/06/Making-Global-Impact.pdf>
- “Humanitarian Aid Worker: How to Craft a Career Assisting with Global Issues” <https://online.maryville.edu/blog/humanitarian-aid-worker-career-guide/>
- “Six Strategies for Moving into Academia,” by Robert DiGiacomo <https://www.higheredjobs.com/articles/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=515>
- Higher Education Recruitment Consortium job search board: <http://main.hercjobs.org/jobs>

### Volunteering Abroad

- “Complete Guide to Volunteering Your Real Skills Overseas” by MovingWorlds <https://movingworlds.org/complete-guide-volunteer-skills-overseas>
- “Your Guide to First Time Volunteering Abroad & Traveling Solo” by Rachel Kaminer <https://www.volunteerhq.org/blog/first-time-volunteering-abroad-guide/>

### Studying Abroad & Career Development

- “Ten Hypothetical Questions to Help Your Career,” by Justin Zackal <https://www.higheredjobs.com/Articles/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=2764&Title=Ten%20Hypothetical%20Questions%20to%20Help%20Your%20Career>
- “How Study Abroad Will Help Your Career,” by Melissa Sakamoto <https://www.goabroad.com/articles/study-abroad/how-study-abroad-will-help-your-career>
- “Effective Marketing of Your Study Abroad Experience to Employers,” by Martin Tillman <http://www.studyabroad.com/articles/effective-marketing-of-your-study-abroad-experience-to-employers.aspx>
- “How to Market your Study Abroad Experience to Employers” <https://www.diversityabroad.com/articles/how-market-your-study-abroad-experience-employers>

- “3 Steps to Adding Study Abroad to your Resume,” by Julia Dunn  
<http://www.goabroad.com/articles/study-abroad/3-steps-to-adding-study-abroad-to-your-resume>

## U.S. Government

- U.S. Department of State Careers: <https://careers.state.gov/>
- United States Government Jobs: <https://www.usajobs.gov/>
- Non-Competitive Eligibility FAQ: <https://alumni.state.gov/member-resources/job-center/non-competitive-federal-employment>
- Non-Competitive Eligibility Guide for CLS Alumni: <https://clscholarship.org/alumni/nce>
- Diplomats in Residence and information about Foreign and Civil Service careers, internships, and fellowships: <https://careers.state.gov/connect/dir/>

## Workbook Activities

The following pages contain activities designed to help you reflect on your experience and articulate its value for various audiences, including potential employers.

### Reflection Activity

1. What challenges did you overcome? What was your proudest accomplishment?

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2. What did you learn about yourself during the CLS Program?

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3. What skills, other than language, did you gain from participating in the CLS Program?

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4. Did you meet your goals? How has CLS influenced or changed your goals for the future?

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## Sharing Your Experience

We love it when CLS alumni finish the summer happy, healthy, and feeling excited about their language-learning experiences. We also love it when they want to help spread the word about the program!

There are still many qualified students at schools across the U.S. who have not heard of the CLS Program. We rely heavily on CLS information sessions to help get the word out to these students, as well as to the faculty and staff at their institutions who will help to promote the program to new students for years to come.

Alumni presentations help to give CLS a voice all across the country; plus, prospective applicants love to hear stories from and ask questions of program alumni! With recruitment taking place virtually since 2020, both program staff and alumni are more accessible to students and institutions without being limited by geographic locations. Hearing about your first-hand experience on the program can be far more impactful for a prospective applicant than reading about the program online or in a brochure, or even hearing about it from program staff. Your stories humanize the program and help students who might not otherwise see themselves as CLS Program scholars picture themselves as they relate to you.

CLS Program staff spend a great deal of time during the fall performing outreach and recruiting applicants for the program. Keep an eye on the CLS website for announcements of CLS information sessions that you can share with your networks in addition to the individual outreach you can do on your own in your communities.

We have put together this short guide to help you represent the CLS Program and are available to answer questions or provide further information about your outreach. Please email us at [clsalumni@americancouncils.org](mailto:clsalumni@americancouncils.org) if you would like to get in touch.

Thank you for your enthusiasm!

## Where to Start

Applicants for the CLS Program must be enrolled in a degree-granting program, so most of our outreach happens on college campuses, including community colleges, public and private universities, and minority serving institutions. In addition to spreading the word on your own campus, we recommend reaching out to other schools in your area, especially those that may not have a study abroad or scholarships office to share opportunities like CLS with students, and those that do not have many recent CLS alumni. (You can check the number of alumni by institution on our website by searching for the institution here: <https://clscholarship.org/universities>.)

There are probably several offices on any campus that would be interested in helping you share your experience on the CLS Program, and we recommend that you reach out to them to offer to conduct an information session or attend an upcoming study abroad or scholarships fair. It will make your planning much easier, and it will help



you reach a bigger audience. If there's someone who told you about the program or helped you with your application, that's also a great place to start. If not, try reaching out to some or all of these people:

- **CLS Advisor** (search by institution here: <https://clscholarship.org/universities>);
- Office of **Study Abroad, Education Abroad, or International Programs**;
- Office of **Scholarships, Fellowships, or Nationally Competitive Awards**;
- Undergraduate **Honors Program**;
- On-campus **Fulbright Program Advisor** (search [here](#) for yours);
- On-campus **Gilman Advisor** (search [here](#) for yours);
- **Language departments** – either by language (e.g. Arabic Department, Russian Department), world region (e.g. East Asian Studies Department, Islamic Studies Department), or under a catch-all term like Department of Modern Languages or Foreign Languages. It is especially helpful to check with these departments if any of the [CLS languages](#) are offered at your school, but you can check with them even if the language offerings do not include CLS languages;
- **Language Lab or Language Learning Center**;
- Office of **Multicultural Affairs**;
- Office of **Diversity and Inclusion**;
- **LGBTQ Resource Center**;
- Campus **Writing Center or Tutoring Center**; or
- Office of **Fraternity and Sorority Affairs**.

People in these offices can help you set a time and organize logistics for a virtual or in-person information session, spread the word, and serve as follow-up contacts for students who are interested in starting an application and want help with it. Don't be afraid to email professors and administrators you don't know personally, or to ask for help from people in departments and offices without a clear connection to CLS. University web sites usually have a faculty and staff directory where you can find contact information.

Remember that the CLS Program aims to attract diverse students from all areas of study, so feel free to email professors with whom you work in any department to ask for help setting up an information session or class visit and tell them about how CLS can benefit the students they work with. Fields like engineering, business, or fine arts may not be as obvious as foreign language classes, but CLS offers many languages at the beginning level and is interested in students from these fields, too!

These offices are doubly useful if you're planning an information session at a school other than your university, where it won't be as easy for you to set things up alone or advertise your session by word of mouth.

## When to Start

The CLS application is generally open from early October to mid-November (stay tuned to the CLS website and social media for the announcement of exact application dates). The majority of our outreach happens during this period so students have adequate time to work on their applications. However, CLS does outreach throughout the year to encourage students to plan to apply in the fall and to talk about the value of studying abroad through *any* program, not just CLS, so if you have opportunities to do outreach in the spring or another time of year, that can be impactful too.

## Getting the Word Out

In addition to collaborating with offices across a campus, there are several ways to let students know about your CLS information session. You can download CLS Program fliers from the [Alumni Outreach page on our website](#) and print them out or make your own flier announcing the date and time of the session. You can email professors to let them know, write information about the session on the board in language classrooms, or create a Facebook event. You can also [let us know](#) that you're planning a session, and we'll announce it on the CLS [Twitter feed](#).

## Structuring an Information Session

The easiest way to structure a CLS information session is to download the CLS [alumni PowerPoint](#) from our website. The PowerPoint file has notes attached to each slide to help guide what you say. It also focuses in large part on providing a frame for you to share your experience of the CLS Program.

If you're PowerPoint-averse, or if your event isn't PowerPoint-oriented, you might still want to look at the PowerPoint before you present, just to see what information it contains and how it's structured. All of the key points about CLS – how the program works, which languages and levels are offered, who's eligible for the program, and how to apply – are in the PowerPoint.

While attendees of an information session will be interested in all of the details about the program, all of that information is also available on our website and in our informational YouTube videos, so it's ok not to focus too heavily on things like eligibility and the details of each language program. What *you* bring to the presentation is your personal experiences from the program, and we encourage you to share those stories! Students should walk away from your information session or classroom presentation excited about the idea of studying a language abroad and the benefits that are offered through a funded program like CLS.

Overall, a good length for your session is 15 to 20 minutes of presentation from you, followed by about 15 minutes for questions.

If appropriate, you can collect names and email addresses at your information session. Check with the offices you worked with on campus to see if they would like this information to follow up with interested students; you may also send it to us at [clsalumni@americancouncils.org](mailto:clsalumni@americancouncils.org).

## Social Media

The CLS Program is active on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, and we value engaging with our alumni through those channels. We encourage you to post memories from your time participating in the CLS Program, reunions with people you met through the CLS Program, and stories of how you are continuing language learning. This content helps future CLS scholars to see where the program can take them, and to demonstrate the impact of programs like CLS to the people who fund them!



When you post content relevant to your CLS experience and language learning, consider tagging:

- CLS Program (of course!)
  - Instagram: @CLSscholarship, Twitter: @CLSscholarship, Facebook: /clscholarship
- U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
  - Instagram: @ExchangeOurWorld
  - Twitter: @ECAatState, @ECA\_AS, @exchangealumni
  - Facebook: /ExchangeProgramsAtState
- Your local elected representatives
- Your CLS host institution
- Your home university
- U.S. Embassy of your host institution location

If you're interested in photo frames to make your content pop, we recommend Canva, a free online design tool.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***Can I give an information session even if I'm planning to apply for the program again?***

Yes, of course! There is nothing bad about an information session presented by someone who liked the program enough to want to apply again.

### ***Can I give an information session if I participated in CLS a few years ago?***

Yes, alumni from all years of the CLS Program are welcome to give information sessions. We recommend that you spend some time on the [CLS website](#) to become familiar with what might have changed about the program since you participated, and of course, you can [email us](#) with questions.

### ***Should I tell you about my information session?***

Please do! [Email us](#) and let us know. Ideally, you'll tell us about it before it happens, so we can help you promote it. If that's not possible, please tell us afterward, so we know how to explain the sudden uptick in stellar applications from your college or university! Please also send us photos of you presenting if you are able to have any taken.

### ***Can I co-host my information session?***

Sure! You can check the [CLS alumni database](#) to see if there are other CLS alumni at your institution or at nearby schools. You can also co-host with a faculty or staff member from one of the departments or offices we mentioned above. Another option is to speak at a study abroad fair or an information session for other study abroad or fellowship opportunities. Check with your study abroad and fellowship/scholarship offices for schedules of these events.

### ***Can I give information sessions at other universities?***

Yes! The CLS Program is interested in attracting applicants from the full range of American colleges and universities, so we encourage alumni to present at large public institutions, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, institutions with a technical or engineering focus, and minority serving institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, tribal colleges, and other institutions with high minority enrollment. If you're interested in traveling to a nearby campus to present, please [send us an email](#). Depending on funding and on

approval for your trip, we may be able to reimburse you for expenses such as gas and mileage or public transportation fares.

***I don't have a printing budget for CLS fliers. Can you send me some?***

We have a limited budget for print materials, but please [contact us](#) to check whether we have some available to send you. You can always distribute materials to interested students electronically as well.

***What do I do if someone asks a question I don't know the answer to?***

Don't worry! It's totally normal to have this happen, because we don't expect you to become an expert on CLS before you give a presentation. If the question is something you have experience with, you're welcome to share your story. This may not help answer the question fully, but it does give your listeners a little bit of personal perspective. For example, in answering a question about how often alternates for the scholarship are promoted to finalist status, you might share that you were an alternate who was promoted in mid-April, while also emphasizing that you don't know that statistic offhand.

If you don't have experience to share, a simple, polite, "I'm not sure about that, and I don't want to give you incorrect information" is fine. The first line of defense against tough questions is to direct applicants to the [FAQ](#) on the CLS website. You should also have our general email address, [cls@americancouncils.org](mailto:cls@americancouncils.org), ready to provide to attendees.

***I have other outreach ideas. Want to hear them?***

Yes! Please [email us](#).



## Civic Engagement

### How to be a good advocate

- Inform decision makers about your issue and let them know directly what you need.
- Treat your meeting like a conversation where you use your personal experiences to humanize the issue at hand. Don't overwhelm or overload them with information. Include hard data in your conversation, but use it sparingly.
- These meetings are all about building relationships, which takes time. Talk about what you know. Be informative, concise, and clear. Know your key messages and what you want to get out of the meeting.
- Start off with a quick elevator pitch consisting of the most essential, need-to-know information about yourself.
- Tailor your message to whomever you're speaking with. Make sure to answer the question "why should I care?"
- Always say "thank you" and follow up after the meeting.
- Make yourself a useful resource.



### What to expect

- A Congressional Office operates similarly to a small business in that members of congress provide a service to their constituents (representing and advocating for the issues that are important to the constituents or, in this metaphor, stockholders).
- Congressional Staffers do a large portion of the groundwork. They are generally young, smart, and hard-working. You will come across a lot of different temperaments and backgrounds when dealing with staffers.

### Personal Impact

Consider:

- How did you come to participate on CLS?
- What did the program mean to you and how did it contribute to your education?
- Would you have been able to participate in a similar intensive language and/or study abroad program otherwise?

CLS can benefit participants:

- Financially
- Academically
- Professionally
- In terms of personal growth and experience

### National Impact

Broad talking points:



- Exchange programs support national security and foreign policy interests
- Exchange programs strengthen the economy
- Exchange programs increase mutual understanding

A few hard facts to strengthen your argument:

- More than 80% of employers agreed foreign language proficiency is an important factor to consider when recruiting young college graduates (Erasmus impact study, 2014)
- International students contributed nearly \$41 billion and more than 458,000 jobs to the U.S. economy in 2018-2019 (according to a [NAFSA study](#)). Find the economic impact of international students in your state and jurisdiction using this [NAFSA tool](#).
- Recent studies show that students who studied or interned abroad exhibited better problem-solving skills, increased creativity, and more complex thoughts than their peers who did not (Time Magazine, 2014)

### How to reach out to your representative

1. Find the representative for your voting district by entering your zip code here:  
<http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>
2. Click on their name to visit their web site and look for a “Contact” link. Some representatives may have an obvious link to “Request a Meeting” or something similar. Within such a page, there may be a form and/or an email address.
3. On this specific page, there is a form to fill out in addition to a direct scheduling email address. Either option is fine. If you can’t find a “Request a Meeting” page or something similar, just look for a general email address to get in contact.
4. Draft and send a letter based on the template below. Feel free to personalize it a bit but keep it direct.
5. Follow up with a polite phone call if you don’t hear back in 2 or 3 business days.
6. If you receive any response (affirmative or negative), please let the Alumni Engagement Officer know as soon as you can and request for CLS information specific to your representative.

### Sample email requesting a meeting

Dear Representative (OR Senator) [their last name],

My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am one of your constituents from [YOUR CITY/TOWN/COUNTY].

I am an [alumnus/alumna] of the U.S. Department of State's Critical Language Scholarship Program and I successfully completed the program in 2024.

I am writing to request a brief meeting with you on [DAY], [MONTH] [DATE] to discuss the value of studying a language and culture based on my experience studying [LANGUAGE] at [CLS PROGRAM SITE]. I understand that your schedule may already be busy on this date, and I thank you in advance for your consideration.

I can be reached by phone at [phone number] or email at [email address].

I look forward to sharing my story with you and hope that we can arrange a time to meet. Thank you again for considering this request.

Best,

[Your Name]

[Your Home Address]

### Resources for civic engagement

<https://us.fulbrightonline.org/congressional-state-one-pagers>

The Fulbright Program releases one-pagers that highlight the local impact of educational and cultural exchange programs funded by the U.S. Department of State each year. These will help you to highlight relevant local facts about exchange programs like the CLS Program and show how it is benefiting individual States and districts.

<https://www.majorityleader.gov/calendar>

[https://www.senate.gov/legislative/2024\\_schedule.htm](https://www.senate.gov/legislative/2024_schedule.htm) Calendars for the House and Senate are important to refer to when considering requesting a meeting. Usually, when Congress is out of session, congresspersons are available to meet in their home districts, which may be more convenient for you!

## Activity: Creating an Action Plan

Writing down goals and making lists can help inspire action. Use the following pages to create your own action plan.

### Stay Connected

*Relationships that I've developed that are important to me are...*

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### Important Contact Information

Name	Email	Phone Number	Address

*My plan for maintaining my relationships is...*

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## Get Involved

*I want to get involved by...*

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## Stay Internationally Engaged

*I plan to stay internationally engaged by...*

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*Contacts needed for me to follow my plan are...*

Name	Organization	Contact Info
Local Diplomat in Residence	U.S. Department of State	<a href="https://careers.state.gov/connect/dir/">https://careers.state.gov/connect/dir/</a>

## Going Abroad

*My goals for going abroad after CLS include...*

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*Programs I want to look into are...*

Name of Program	Website	Program Information
Fulbright	<a href="http://us.fulbrightonline.org/">http://us.fulbrightonline.org/</a>	<i>US exchange program; -international graduate study; - advanced research; teaching</i>
Peace Corps	<a href="http://www.peacecorps.gov/">http://www.peacecorps.gov/</a>	<i>volunteer projects in education, community development, health, business and information and communications technology, agriculture, and environment.</i>

## Career Development

### Action Steps

- ☐ Revise your resume and cover letter to include your experiences abroad
- ☐ Schedule an appointment with the Career Center at your university to get feedback on your resume and cover letter (they often welcome alumni, too, if you've already graduated!)
- ☐ Practice telling your story. Think about what stories you want to share in interviews and how they communicate skill and knowledge sets you developed.
- ☐ Schedule informational interviews with program alumni and with professionals in the fields that you're interested in pursuing (see the CLS Alumni Resource Directory for a list of alumni willing to chat with you, or reach out through the [CLS Program - Official Alumni Group](#) on LinkedIn, see the [Informational Interview Worksheet](#) in this Workbook).
- ☐ Attend panels, presentations, and networking events in the fields you're interested in
- ☐ Join professional organizations in the fields you're interested in



## Career Activity: S.T.A.R. Interview Responses

The following method can be used to organize your answers to questions in an interview, like those listed on [page 10](#) of the handbook. By incorporating each of the elements outlined below, you can use experiences (from abroad, from school, or from previous work) to showcase the skills and attributes employers are trying to assess during an interview.

**S** – Describe the specific **setting** or **situation** for which the experience took place.

**CLS example:** While studying on an intensive Hindi language program in Jaipur, I found that my coursework was extremely different from what I was accustomed to in the U.S. I was used to a slower paced learning environment and having assignments due throughout the semester. However, CLS courses consisted of 20 hours a week and the entire grade was based on the midterm and the final. We also had to abide by a language pledge for the majority of the program.

**T** – Describe the specific **task** or project related to the skill sought.

**CLS example:** During that summer, I had to learn to maintain diligence to achieve my language goals, especially with my language partner. I also had to learn to balance my time outside of the classroom in order to keep up with class assignments and assessments, since we participated in weekly cultural excursions and scheduled meetings with our language partners.

**A** – Describe the specific steps or **actions** you took to complete the task or project.

**CLS example:** In order to stay on top of my assignments and learn as much vocabulary as possible, I formed a small study group with a few of my fellow classmates. We'd meet once a week and practice important concepts, and then put them into practice with native speakers. I brought up these topics in conversations with my language partner so that I could practice in a conversational setting. I had to take initiative to not fall behind and to receive a successful grade in the course.

**R** – Describe the **results** or outcomes resulting from the actions taken.

**CLS example:** I developed strong multitasking and time management skills because of the rigorous academic setting under CLS. By taking initiative with the study group and putting our weekly lessons into practice, I was able to earn high marks in my language classes. Additionally, I clearly executed a 20 minute presentation in Hindi at the end of the course about public health issues in Jaipur.

This is a typical STAR answer. It could be the answer to, "Give me an example of an accomplishment you are proud of." If someone asked, "What's your greatest skill?" you might answer, "I believe I can set goals and meet them," and then give a story like the one above. Or, if the interviewer says, "Why should we hire you?" you can respond, "I am a good problem solver, for instance..." and give an example like the one above.

**S.T.A.R. Approach for Job Interviewing**

Competency/Skill	Story	S	T	A	R
Specific skill that you want to highlight	Descriptive story	Situation	Task/Goal	Action	Result

This activity is adapted from the American Institute for Foreign Study's "Marketing Your International Experience" workbook: <https://ccidcertificate.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/student-workbook-marketing-your-international-experience1.pdf>

## Informational Interview Worksheet

Name of Interviewee:

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Position/Job Function:

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Organization:

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Skills necessary to be successful in position:

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

Qualities possessed by successful person in this position:

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

Typical working day of person with this position:

*Activity*

*% of time*

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

Opportunities to use language and intercultural skills in position:

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Debrief: Am I interested in this field of work? Why or why not?

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