

# Student Headed to Azerbaijan on Critical Language Scholarship

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Kevin McAleese received a prestigious Critical Language Scholarship to study the Azeri language in Azerbaijan

Kevin McAleese of Nashua is the recipient of a prestigious Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) which will fully finance his study of beginning Azeri language for eight weeks this summer in Baku, Azerbaijan, at the Azerbaijan University of Languages.

Launched in 2004, the Critical Language Scholarships, which are a program of the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, offer intensive overseas language study in 13 languages deemed critical to U.S. national security.

“I am very excited. I hope this will be a life-changing experience and I’m looking forward to immersion in a new culture,” said McAleese, a dual political science/international affairs major and member of the university’s Honors Program.

McAleese became interested in Azerbaijan after learning of the country’s influence within the Middle East and Eurasia and its close military ties to the United States. As he wrote in his scholarship application essay, he believes that “increasing military and political relations with Azerbaijan and developing a stronger cultural connection with its people could help solidify a strategic ally in the Caucasus.” He hopes to use his language skills and this in-country experience as the basis for achieving his future goals of joining the Peace Corps and eventually becoming a political officer in the Foreign Service.

Since there are no courses in Azerbaijani language (a member of the Turkic language family) at UNH, McAleese has only been able to do self study of the language to date. The CLS Summer Institute is an intensive program, covering approximately one academic year of university-level Azeri in two months. His prior experience with languages (he speaks proficient French) provides him with some sense of what to expect, but he acknowledges that “Azerbaijani is a truly foreign language. My background in French provides me with very little help in studying this language. However, studying Azeri can open doors to learning other Turkic languages, which might be important for me in the future.”

Student participants need to be prepared for the demands of this type of language study and the challenges of living and working as a close group. McAleese tailored his CLS application to address these aspects of the program, focusing on his significant leadership experience with several groups and organizations, including UNH Model United Nations and the Mock Trial team. Political science professor Alynna Lyon said “Kevin has a wonderful drive to learn about other peoples and places. His work with the Model United Nations organization revealed a deep dedication to promoting better international exchanges. Under his leadership, the team won two distinguished awards at the international conference that placed his group in the top 10 percent of more than 5,000 schools from both inside and outside the United States.”

Though the CLS Institutes are intense, it is not all work; in the past participants have spent their free time learning to play Azeri instruments like the balaban (which resembles a flute) and going on cultural excursions. McAleese said he is excited to “spend some time at local parks playing pick-up soccer.”

The Critical Language Scholarship Program is part of a wider U.S. government effort to expand significantly the number of Americans studying and mastering critical languages. Over 5,000 students applied for the 2013 competition; McAleese is one of approximately 600 successful applicants. But, as Lyon explained, “Together, Kevin’s interests and drive make him an ideal candidate for studying a critical language.”

Established in 2005, the UNH Office of National Fellowships provides information, counsel, and editorial support to high achieving students applying for national and international fellowships and scholarships like the Critical Language Scholarships. The services of the Fellowships Office are available to undergraduates, graduate students, and alumni. Contact Jeanne Sokolowski at (603) 862-0733 or [jeanne.sokolowski@unh.edu](mailto:jeanne.sokolowski@unh.edu).

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