

Advanced Asian Language Students Score Prestigious Scholarships

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Two University of New Hampshire students have been awarded critical language scholarships through the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Cory McKenzie, of Hampstead, received his to study Japanese and Brittany Marien, of Lincoln, will study Chinese.

The scholarships offer full funding for participants to attend intensive overseas language study in 13 languages deemed critical to U.S. national security.



CORY MCKENZIE

McKenzie is a senior honors student and Hamel Scholar who is triple majoring in history, philosophy and classics, a rigorous academic curriculum that, he argued in his application, has prepared him for the challenges of an intensive summer language program. He began studying Japanese under a private instructor in high school. With Pam Ikegami, Japanese lecturer in the Department of Languages, Literature and Culture, he took Advanced Japanese and then an independent study.

Ikegami describes Cory as “a dedicated and talented scholar and really deserving of this award,” adding, “I am so happy that this will allow him to be able to continue to pursue his language study this summer in Japan.”

McKenzie also received one of the university’s competitive International Research Opportunities Program (IROP) grants to conduct research in Kobe, Japan, last summer. He spent two months researching Yuriwaka Daijin, a Japanese legend that closely resembles Homer’s *Odyssey*. McKenzie was intrigued by the fact that most Japanese sources flatly dismiss its Homeric origins without discussion.

Through his research, he concluded that this hasty dismissal is evidence that Japanese scholars have an ethnocentric perspective, likely rooted in Japan’s isolationist culture, of their own folklore and are unenthusiastic about suggestions of foreign influence. McKenzie’s senior honors thesis will examine this debate in depth.

McKenzie will return to the Kansai region for the eight-week CLS program in the castle town of Himeji. Part of the application for this scholarship requires potential participants to detail how they will continue their study of the target language after the program's conclusion. McKenzie will spend the 2014-2015 academic year in Saitama, north of Tokyo, at Saitama University before applying for a Fulbright grant and graduate programs in history and East Asian languages.



BRITTANY MARIEN

Marien is a sophomore honors student who is pursuing a dual major in political science and international affairs, with minors in Asian studies and justice studies.

She first started studying Chinese her freshman year of high school “simply because it was vastly different from the commonly taught languages of French and Spanish. I never realized the decision I made on a whim was something that would captivate me and influence my career path in life.”

In her application, she argued the necessity of studying intensively in China by noting, “Upon entering the University of New Hampshire, I was placed into the 600-level, advanced Chinese course. At the end of my freshman year, I had already completed the Chinese track and exhausted the opportunities available at UNH to further my language studies.”

Marien's language proficiency and interest in China immediately attracted the attention of political science professor and China expert Lawrence Reardon.

"I knew the first time that I answered a question from Brittany in a very large lecture class that she was somebody special," Reardon said. "I was thrilled when I discovered her interest in China."

To become fluent in Mandarin Chinese, Reardon states, "you need to devote time to memorize the tens of thousands of written characters, to train your ear to listen to a tonal language, to mimic those tones accurately while speaking, and learn to appreciate and work in a totally different culture."

Student participants need to be prepared for the challenges of living and working as a close group during the CLS program. Marien highlighted her extracurricular involvement as evidence that she has a lot to contribute to a group dynamic. Aside from participating in the University Honors Program, she serves as vice president for Alpha Xi Delta, vice president and a team member on the UNH Women's Club Ice Hockey team, and this year, she helped found the Chinese Language Club for non-native speakers on campus. She is planning to apply for junior year internships at the Washington Center and the Department of Homeland Security.

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 2014 competition; McKenzie and Marien are among the approximately 600 successful applicants. "The fact that these two UNH honors students have done so well confirms our contention that UNH honors students can compete with students from any university in the country," said Sean Moore, director of the UNH Honors Program. "Graduates of state university honors programs like the one at UNH stand on equal footing with graduates of other research universities when it comes to admissions to graduate school and winning prestigious fellowships."

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 office are available to undergraduates, graduate students, and alumni. Contact Jeanne Sokolowski at 603-862-0733 or Jeanne.Sokolowski@unh.edu

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