In the summer of 2016, I hope to participate in the Northwestern Spanish Language and Culture Program in Barcelona to build language proficiency and confidence in Spanish. Following the program, I plan to stay in Barcelona for a month to apply my language skills to research and study Barcelona’s history and politics. For my undergraduate career, I am working toward a degree in Political Science and International Studies with a European concentration at Northwestern. In my studies, I plan to focus specifically on issues of federalism, asymmetric federalism, and the relation between cultural-linguistic identity and autonomy as expressed in the situation of Barcelona within Spain, and more broadly through Spain’s role within the European Union.

In the fall of 2016, I intend to continue my studies at the University of Seville through the Sweet Briar Junior Year in Spain Program. As I plan to continue my Spanish studies in the fall with the help of Northwestern Financial Aid, participating in the summer program will help me build skills and confidence in Spanish so that I will be able to make the most of my fall experience, enrolling in regular courses in my major fields. In Seville, I plan to take courses in Political Science that will qualify me for the Certificate of Achievement in a Foreign Language. Also, through studying in both Seville and Barcelona, I will have the opportunity to compare differences political, linguistic, and cultural dynamics of two different regions within the Spanish system.

I am especially interested in studying the concept of federalism and cultural-linguistic identity within Spain and focusing on Spain in its role as part of the European Union. That knowledge of the region of Barcelona, and subsequently Seville, and the Spanish skills I will gain will provide the foundation of my honors thesis in Political Science. Federalism and regional autonomy are extremely important concepts in addressing the challenges of peaceful national and international cooperation among different peoples, as well as true democratic representation of diverse populations. I hope to learn from Barcelona and Spain as a study of these challenges. Spain is both a diverse democratic nation with a unique history and an extremely important part of the EU. As such, it has been at the center of internal and international questions of sovereignty, self-determination, and identity. As many minority identities—such as that of the Catalan or Basque people—were repressed under Franco, Spain has continued to deal with the relationship of different regional, linguistic, and cultural identities throughout the Transition and into the new democracy. The current system of varying levels of regional autonomy recognizing separatist sentiments, sometimes termed asymmetric federalism, is particularly interesting in considering solutions to diverse populations in a unified political structure. I would especially like to compare systems of sovereignty and culture within Spain and within the EU as a whole.

Following my honors thesis, I hope to apply this knowledge to working in national and international politics. I plan to go on to intern in the European Parliament and experience the structure and functioning of the EU, with a focus on Spanish issues. There Spanish—specifically that spoken in Spain—is an essential diplomatic language. I then hope to go on to work to find solutions to international and national issues, continuing to focus on democratic representation and international cooperation. It is a big challenge facing governments around the world today: how best to face questions of the intersection of cultural diversity and autonomy with the issues of political structure and sovereignty. I also hope my experience will help me be a better representative of the American people. The United States has an increasing Spanish-speaking
population whose voices need to be heard in our representative democracy. Further, as the United States continues to play a decisive role in global politics, it is imperative that we as a nation understand international issues and peoples. Many of these are Spanish-speaking, and many—including many of our greatest allies—live within the European Union.

At Northwestern, I have already reached a high level of Spanish proficiency and plan to minor in Spanish. I took Spanish classes throughout high school, reaching the AP level in both Spanish Language and Spanish Literature. At Northwestern, I have continued my progression in Spanish, enrolling in Spanish in every quarter. I am taking Introduction to Literary Analysis in this winter quarter of 2016. My focus throughout my Spanish career has largely been on literature, and as such my Spanish writing proficiency is currently ahead of my speaking proficiency. For example, I can currently read many of the Spanish documents produced by the EU, but I will need better oral skills for my career plans to work in the European Parliament and international politics more generally. Participating in the Spanish Language and Culture Program in the summer will help me improve and build confidence my language skills, especially in conversational Spanish. Traveling to a Spanish speaking country is the next necessary step to propel me towards the personal and professional level proficiency in Spanish I need moving forward. This would be my first opportunity to leave the United States and to be immersed in another culture and language. Conversation courses and daily interactions with native speakers will greatly improve my language ability much more rapidly than I could possibly improve otherwise. This improvement will give me confidence as I move forward with research following the program, and then as I enroll in regular university classes at the University of Seville and work toward a career in international politics.

Being Northwestern specific, the program fits perfectly into the Northwestern quarter system and academic accreditation. The program offers Spanish language, conversation, and culture courses in Barcelona. The focus on conversation and culture courses will especially help me improve my two weaker points in the Spanish language, lack of confidence and experience speaking and lack of cultural immersion and exposure. Academically, the program will simultaneously help me progress rapidly in my language skills and complete my Spanish minor at Northwestern. It will also allow me to have an intensive focus on Spanish in a way that I would not be able to during the school year, with my course-load, work hours, and extra-curricular activities. I hope to be able to fund this through my savings from my work-study and summer jobs as well as through applying for scholarships so that I will be able to advance my education without drawing on financial aid or over-loading myself during the school year.

Further, it is imperative for my plans to work within the European Parliament and more broadly European politics that I learn the Spanish spoken in Spain rather than elsewhere. Although Catalan is also a widely spoken official language in Barcelona, the Spanish skills I gain through the program and speaking to locals in Spanish will provide the foundation for my continuing studies in Spain and also give me insight into the link between cultural-linguistic identity and the desire for political autonomy within the diversity of Spain. Moreover, the classes focus on the regional history and culture of Barcelona and the Catalan people, which will give me insight into the issue of the intersection of sovereignty and ethnic and regional identities in Spain and elsewhere, while I practice my language skills. Following the program, I will have a month in which to apply this foundational knowledge and to practice the language skills I gain in a focused research project that uses Barcelona as a case study.