Statement of Grant Purpose

My experiences, academic background and upbringing have all contributed to my aspiration to teach English in Thailand. Even though my father grew up in Thailand, I have spent no more than a month in his home country, and have been longing to return since. Seeking some sort of connection to my Asian heritage, I declared a double minor in Asian studies and Japanese to supplement my majors in Environmental Studies and Geography/Urban Studies. Through this combination of coursework, I have been able to learn about the massive urbanization of Southeast Asia, and environmental obstacles in Thailand such as air pollution, rising sea levels and waste management. However, my focus in language study and culture has been in Japan. I studied the language for two years in the classroom before I went abroad. During my semester in Tokyo, I had a job in the Tutoring and Learning Center at the University where I worked with Japanese students writing essays in English, many for the first time. I pondered over how to teach a grammar pattern that, to me, simply just does not sound right. While I was learning to speak Japanese and simultaneously teaching Japanese students to write in English, I quickly learned that pronunciations and nuances of any new language are nearly impossible to learn without total immersion with native speakers. Learning foreign languages in a classroom is great for grammar and written components of the language, but when it comes to engaging in conversation, classroom learning often seems almost trivial. My father has told me endless stories about his first weeks in America, asking for garbage instead of cabbage at the grocery store. I can now relate to my father’s struggles through similar experiences in Japan. Having this understanding, I became better at explaining some of the English grammar patterns, thinking of how my host father explained things to me in Japanese. As the semester continued, I began to acquire regular students that appreciated my patience and encouragement.

Over the past two years in Philadelphia, I have embarked on a new journey teaching environmental lessons to youth in the city. As director of Philly Eco Kids, a Temple University-based environmental education student group, I teach local environmental issues to elementary, middle and high school students at some of the underprivileged public schools that surround our campus. I taught my students in Philadelphia that even a fourth grader can make a difference through the smallest acts: picking up litter, turning off the lights, and maybe participating in the community garden that used to be a vacant lot across the street. I used interactive styles of teaching, prompting my students to think beyond global climate change, and ask what daily activities they engage in that cause pollution, and how to mitigate them.

While teaching English in Thailand, I hope to influence my students in learning more about the environment they are living in, and how each individual can make a difference in their own community. Through the pedagogy I created with Philly Eco Kids, I want to create similar opportunities for my students in Thailand. I hope to create an after school program with my own students, teaching them about some of the environmental problems Bangkok faces, and in turn learning more about their lives and their perceptions on their city and environments. This pursuit in Thailand will enhance my knowledge of city planning and sustainable development, and how youth perceive and respond to these issues. As I pursue graduate programs in environmental city planning, my experiences in the Bangkok region will add a new dynamic to comprehension of Asian development. In Tokyo, I had the opportunity to explore the way an Asian city interacts with its environment, and I seek to gain the same understanding of Bangkok. This experience will widen my applied knowledge of Asia and contribute to my ability to plan for a sustainable city, with the hopes of one day contributing to environmental planning in Thailand.