Since the moment I started lining up all my dolls and stuffed animals into a makeshift classroom in my living room and holding imaginary parent-teacher conferences, there was one of either two possible observations one could make about me: I showed signs of control issues from a young age, or I have always had the makings of a teaching somehow inherently built into who I am. This is why I am writing this proposal to you now: There’s nothing more I would like to pursue after graduation than the opportunity to return to Spain and serve as a teacher’s assistant representing both Fulbright and the US.

I am twenty-one years old with three years of an undergraduate career under my belt, a handful of internships and publications to my credit and five incredible months of study abroad in Spain. When I reflect on all my accomplishments and experiences that prepare for this ETA, however, the most unequivocal of them all was a humble volunteer opportunity I embarked on a year ago with Project Shine, and coincidently, the first time I stepped foot into the classroom in a teaching role. A non-profit organization that provides immigrants with the tools they need to acclimate to American culture and achieve citizenship, Project Shine engages college students as ESL tutors in various community centers, schools and churches in the Philadelphia area. As a Political Science and Spanish double major, I was enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn more about the legal nuances of the immigration process in this country while simultaneously utilizing my Spanish in a practical, hands-on environment. This initial enthusiasm was somewhat grounded, though, when I ran up against the many challenges of the volunteer-based ESL classroom: inconsistent student attendance, a stratified multi-level learner population and a two and a half hour time block to fill with an extraordinarily flexible lesson accommodating all of these conditions. It also became immediately apparent that in order to engage the students at a truly participatory level, I would have to integrate a proactive teaching style with activities and themes that genuinely stimulated their interest. Whether enacting dialogues, debating foreign policy, or dissecting popular euphemisms in the English language, I continually attempted to communicate my teaching through an innovative, interactive and meaningful approach and the results of observing my students’ progress was more than rewarding.

After Project Shine, I was newly invigorated about the prospect of building upon my Spanish language skills and incorporating bilingualism into a future career. In Fall 2007, I was awarded a global scholarship by Temple International Programs to study with an independent study abroad program in Seville, Spain. Through, I was dually enrolled in courses with the program and in the University of Seville where I studied side-by-side with Spaniards. With the exception of Project Shine, my five months of cultural immersion in Spain was the single most influential and inspiring experience of my life in terms of realigning my future goals and preparing me for an opportunity like the Fulbright ETA. Although I ran up against initial feelings of isolation, apprehension and frustration, little by little I began to integrate myself and seek networks within the community that facilitated the transition and offered me a true support system. The most successful attempt to maximize my cultural exchange and linguistic proficiency, however, resulted from my involvement with a Spanish magazine --what I like to call a real life training experience. It is because of the time I spent interviewing and writing in Spanish, at a professional and collaborative level, that I acquired the skills I needed to succeed in my Spanish university classes and bridge the gap between the two languages.

Both of these formative experiences, tutoring to Spanish immigrants and studying five months in Spain, have made me confident in my ability to speak Spanish, acclimate to Spanish culture, and above all, work in an educational environment where I’m bringing my knowledge of both Spanish and English to the table. I have a genuine passion for bringing language to other people through as many mediums as possible, and this is evident throughout my educational career. Whether mounting and producing an original play, political campaigning, interviewing public figures in Philadelphia for a newspaper, singing in a musical--all of these valuable experiences of developing and improving my ability to communicate to a designated audience has carried over into a passion for Spanish and wanting to serve the Hispanic community in a truly impactful way.
If I were to have the privilege of this teaching assistantship, I would leverage the new skills I acquired to pursue a masters in Journalism/International Relations in Spain. Upon completion of my masters, I plan to work in Public Affairs for a government agency dealing with immigration or as an organizational liaison for a US/Mexico border relations group. As a significant and disproportionately represented minority in this country, there is an undeniable need for civil servants who serve as conduits to the political process for the Hispanic community. Long term goals include pursuing my doctorate in Spanish and teaching at the university level, in addition collaborating with ESL programs that extend collegiate participation. For me, regardless of the definitive career path I choose, I feel a personal vocation to bring education and civic service together in a way that promotes cultural understanding, maximizes minority representation and citizenship and creates a seamless integration of immigrants into society.

To work with my interest in immigration and build upon my prior experience in Spain, I would ideally like to invest my time outside the classroom to pursue independent research further developing my current senior thesis with the Honors Scholars Program: "France vs. Spain: A Comparative Analysis of Immigration History and Policy and the Implications for a Harmonized EU Policy." While I attended the University of Seville last spring, I cultivated sustainable relationships with my professors with the idea in mind that I could call upon them for future research counsel, and I look forward to a deeper investigation into this theme. In addition to research, I’m interested in shadowing a Spanish newspaper or other publication to enhance my knowledge of the Spanish political process and journalistic reporting methodology.

For all the reasons I have already mentioned, my love of the Spanish culture, enthusiasm for teaching and language, and professional interest in continuing to live and work in Spain, I feel that the Fulbright ETA would be the most ideal opportunity to both make an impact on the educational experience of others and develop myself personally in order to better serve the Hispanic community in the future. My five months in Spain were the best in my life, on a number of planes, and I would be nothing short of thrilled to have such a grace come my way again. I am happiest when I am interacting and contributing to others while ceaselessly learning at the same time.