

## Personal Statement Example 1 (complete rough draft)

Who am I? Why grant me a Fulbright? What have I done or what do I know that makes me uniquely qualified? My story begins in Peace Corps. But here is the prelude. My parents were both Peace Corps volunteers in their twenties.... ah, too boring.

Ever since I can remember, I have been provided with the opportunity to experience other cultures. I lived for four years in Paris, France when I was in grade school. My parents were both Peace Corps volunteers who had travelled around the world and shared their experiences with me. In fact, they travelled so extensively that our house was always decorated like a museum of lost artifacts from Europe, Asia, and South America mixed together like a salad.

My interest in international development began when I joined the Peace Corps. Previously, all my experiences were in developed countries. Unlike many of my colleagues, I didn't join Peace Corps to save the world or make a difference; I joined because I could tell from my parents' stories that it would be a good way to take a break between College and Graduate School. I was going to become a chemist, a professor, and teach.

However, while in the Gambia with Peace Corps I was exposed to the standard of living enjoyed by over half of the Earth's people. My students were living on a dollar a day; other teachers with whom I worked were earning less than five dollars a day despite being considered professional educators. Considering I was assigned to teach science at the most prestigious high school in the whole country, this was a real shock.

Not even my parent's stories of working in the Philippines could prepare me for my personal experience. In Gambia people smuggle sugar, a basic nutrient, into Senegal because the Senegalese tax sugar as a *luxury!* Crossing a river is an ordeal. My urban students had never left the city. This is the world into which I was thrust by Peace Corps, and this is also the world I grew to call my home.

Despite the basic lifestyle, Gambia turned out to host a rich culture. People didn't eat a variety of food, but what they did eat was always tasty and probably better for me than the junk available in America. They didn't live in a world of entertainment, but they did laugh a lot. Despite the ups and downs of daily life, people were pretty content. I learned to speak wolof, a local language, and to cook local food. I dressed in local garb and found it to be more comfortable and sensible than western clothes. All said, I think I assimilated quite well.

At the same time, I was still perceived as a westerner and was thus a representative for Western culture and values. My virtues were held as western virtues – while my flaws were considered emblematic of the problems in the developed world. While under the microscope, I learned to conduct myself as the role model I wish more political figures strived to be here and abroad. And in the process, I learned how to be a leader, an independent worker, a project designer, and friend to people who speak a language I don't understand.

My original role in Gambia was that of high school science teacher. However, it wasn't long before I realized my capacity for change was greater if I took up the cause of promoting computer literacy in the schools. By my second year, I was coordinating

computer labs and training the new computer staffs at 4 schools in my area. In addition, I built a network of computer teachers across the whole country and organized an IT Consortium that met regularly, organized the first Gambian Computer Curriculum Development Workshop that brought together computer teachers nationwide, and wrote a book for Peace Corps on how to effectively design technology projects in West Africa such that they remain operational even after you are gone. But the project that had the most potential of all was a little month-long effort to create the first IT demographics in Gambia. In 2000, my team of volunteers surveyed every school and health center in the Gambia with a computer. We quantified hardware and personnel resources at these locations and determined what skills and computers were available in areas. This information was used at Peace Corps' IT Workshop for Africa in 2000, and broadly disseminated to agencies thereafter. However, I think the time is ripe to conduct an updated survey that will be far reaching and have a greater impact on the approaches the governments and organizations take to IT in the future.

Although I had intended to become a university professor, I now realize that I feel passionate about improving education in developing countries. Through my experience I realized that science education in West Africa isn't providing students with skills to get jobs locally. **However, it doesn't need to be this way. Knowledge of science is not an end but rather a means: In doing science, one develops the critical thinking, problem solving, and group planning skills that all students need to be leaders, regardless of the careers they choose.** With these goals in mind, I have set out to begin the process that will bring computers to schools and with it – better science education.

Computers are quickly spreading all over Africa. By now, my previous snapshot (from 2000 in Gambia) may not represent the current state of computers. A current survey could be compared to this previous one to determine how IT is changing in West Africa. Several years ago, the World Bank (World Links for Development) spend a great deal of money to promote computer literacy in developing countries, thus preparing them to compete in the future economy. However, measurements of this program (and the growth of computer literacy in rural areas in general) have been lacking. Somebody needs to find out what African teens have been using computers and the Internet to do. Have they discovered new ways to make a living? Is there a better kind of computer education? In short, what has the impact of computers and the Internet been in rural schools across West Africa?

From <http://chewychunks.wordpress.com/2011/10/14/sample-personal-statement/>

## Personal Statement Example 2

At the age of twelve, I visited my parents' home country of Lebanon. Confined to my grandfather's apartment due to a heavy Syrian military presence outside (and the drivers are particularly wild), I decided to use the elevator and get a view of the world outside. As the slow Otis elevator ground to a halt, the elevator door opened to reveal an entire story that was no longer in existence. Rubble was everywhere, and my mind, already processing the bullet holes that marked almost every building that did not get the fashionable facelift of downtown, was reeling as I stared from the edge of the 9th floor to the ground below. The devastation and destruction wrought by years of ethnic and religious conflict had a deep impression on my psyche. I could not imagine how such appalling acts could occur or how people could live in such an atmosphere of apprehension. Returning to her old mountain home overlooking Beirut a few days later, my mother could only cry as she saw old rusted bullets in her bedroom, and she could only scream at us in Arabic to stay away from the rockets in the bathroom. To help ease my apparent distress, my father gave me a hug, telling me, "You are safe in America. It is our new home. Just remember this: Anger does not solve anything, an eye for an eye and the world goes blind."

As I grew older in America I recognized that the lines of communication and understanding in Lebanon had been undermined and replaced by bigotry, religious intolerance, and hatred. During my high-school years, I was a bilingual speaker of English and Arabic, with a cadre of friends who spoke French, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, Hindi and Swahili. My world broadened with the many heated talks on international politics, and growing up near Washington, DC, I was drawn to the history and politics of the region, visiting the various museums and the Kennedy Center, and keeping abreast of political news. In my spare time (summer break), I spent my money on books and travel, visiting Japan, Spain, Australia, England, and New Zealand. I readily admit my life is sheltered, yet I have encountered many obstacles in my young life.

My multicultural experiences as a child and teen gave me inner strength to overcome the hurdles. From blatant racism in high school from teachers and students because of my name, to people discounting my ability to speak English, I have learned that respect is earned and patience and understanding are a necessity. Before visiting my parents' home country, I was an angry child. Students who would make fun of my name or call me 'camel-rider' were often hit. My anger led to numerous black eyes. Until I visited real suffering, I could not imagine a worse existence. Yet my world was radically altered when I could no longer look at myself in the mirror and see someone to pity. That day anger was replaced with a promise to do better for myself and others.

For these reasons, upon arriving at the University of Rochester, I was naturally drawn to History, Neuroscience and Political Science. My majors are a reflection of the self I have become and the future-self I still strive for. I want to be able to understand both theoretically and scientifically what drives world society towards horrific acts. I want to understand why anger can lead to violence. Most importantly, I want to gain the skills that will help implement solutions towards fixing such problems. Agonizing over

game theory, learning about centers of the brain, and understanding the historical roots of regional conflict all help further my aim of applying my education in real-world situations.

Living in Jordan as a Fulbright Scholar will give me the opportunity to interact with a new generation of young adults, providing me with the opportunity to learn and impart knowledge by acting as a bridge between cultures. As part of my community outreach, I will establish a rapport with local schools around my university, in order to engage in community service activities with secondary students. I will also volunteer in the community at hospitals, schools and shelters (in conjunction with the Public Services Club of JUST), much as I did in high school at Suburban Hospital or Bannockburn Elementary, both located in Bethesda, Maryland. By directly establishing a relationship with secondary students, I will learn how teenagers view democracy and what they see for the future politically. Understanding how younger generations of Jordan will adapt and implement democratic processes is essential in a region that is volatile, since the alternative is death, destruction, and needless suffering.

From <http://www.rochester.edu/college/studentfellowships/fulbright/essaysample2.html>