

Application to study at Al-Akhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco

*Note:* While the prompts have been updated, the essays should still help you develop ideas for how you want to approach your plan.

### **Connection to Studies**

How will the study abroad you propose build on your education to date as well as connect to your education when you return to campus and your post-Beloit endeavors?

I believe that studying both textiles and International Relations (IR) during my year abroad very much embodies the concept of liberal arts in practice. The portion of my education that will be spent abroad is a continuation of the work and studies I have done here at Beloit College. There are multiple ways in which my studies both domestically and abroad, will build off each other. I am currently enrolled in level one Arabic. I work very hard learning and developing the basic skills of a critical language that is also the primary language of the Middle East. Through learning Arabic, I have discovered that I must be exceedingly disciplined with studying this language if I want to succeed and not fall behind. In order to fulfill the foreign language requirement for my IR major, I must take Arabic while studying in Morocco. I plan on enrolling in Intermediate Arabic I, as well as Arabic for Communication, which will focus more on conversational speaking. When I return to Beloit, I will have to option to continue studying Arabic independently, as there will not be formal classes.

I have taken numerous political science courses during the past three semesters. Two of those, U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East, and Israeli/Palestinian Conflict, focused on the Middle East. While in Morocco, I can continue learning about the politics and culture of the region. The perspective in which these courses will be taught is invaluable because I can only gain true Middle East insight on IR while actually in an Arab country. I feel I need to experience both perspectives in order to have a solid understanding of IR regarding the Middle East. In turn, when I come back to Beloit, I can share these insights and perspectives in class discussions. In my Foreign Policy class, we have studied policy decision making and subsequent actions and outcomes at great length. Learning more about issues such as counter-terrorism policy and military action in the Middle East is really important because it will help me understand why people I meet abroad think what they think about the United States and its policies. Learning about Arab and Moroccan culture is something I feel adds depth to my Arabic and IR studies.

This semester I am taking Fundamentals of Acting, which connects to study abroad in a unique way. Through participating in this class, I am learning how to be a more open, sincere, and effective communicator. These skills will be vital to creating and maintaining a comfortable and healthy relationship with my Moroccan roommate. We will already face language and cultural barriers, so I am trying to do everything possible to make our time together the best and easiest it can be.

Senior year, I intend on taking courses that will further enhance my experiences and knowledge from abroad. For example, I will take more IR courses such as International Political Economy, and Politics of Development, and in class offer what I

have learned in Morocco and Sweden. I will also take a cultural anthropology course to better understand the role of culture in society, as well as develop skills to compare and contrast societies. I can apply my experiences from abroad to class work and discussions.

Studying textiles and IR in Morocco will truly enhance my education because it is not something that I can do while here on campus. Learning about and experiencing textiles is a direct link to studying principles of art and design, which I plan to do next semester. By blending my interests in IR and textiles, I create a superb liberal arts experience. I feel confident in my ability to combine these studies and bring my findings back to campus. I can foresee myself presenting what I have learned about textiles and globalization in Morocco and Sweden in an International Symposium program. I think it is really important to share my knowledge with Beloit students, faculty, and staff because everyone can benefit from and be enriched by the experiences and learning of others. In addition, I hope to share my experiences with prospective study abroad students when I am back on campus senior year.

### **Program and Goals**

A. State three to five things you hope to learn abroad. B. How will your choice of university/program and location help you achieve your goals? C. How might differences in educational philosophy and/or delivery affect your ability to achieve your goals?

I have numerous goals I will work to accomplish during and after my study in Morocco. I also plan on studying in Sweden in the spring of 2015. A few of the goals for my Morocco study involve Sweden because they are of compare and contrast nature, and therefore cannot be totally fulfilled by the time I leave Morocco. These two distinct locations are related through their strong and rich textile industries and histories, which are topics I am interested in studying in depth.

My first goal while in Morocco is to improve my Arabic skills in the capacities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, to a mid to intermediate level competency. My measurable standard would be the ability to engage in and understand a meaningful 5-10 minute conversation with a native speaker and write about it afterward. My second goal is to study elements of Moroccan textile design and how globalization impacts the textile industry. Later in the year, I will compare and contrast Moroccan and Swedish designs. Following my studies, I should be able to explain my research findings in a paper and presentation, as well as create some of my own designs reflecting Moroccan styles. I shall explain my outline of design study in a bit. Thirdly, I plan to generally compare and contrast two non-American cultures (Moroccan and Swedish), specifically how American students are perceived in both places, and the mobility and opportunities that are available to me as an American woman. Again, this is measurable through written and oral presentations. My final goal, which is an objective for my whole year abroad, is to gain a higher level of self-reliance and independence. Honestly, this is a much more personal goal, and I have no real way of measuring it.

I would like to briefly outline my questions of study in regard to elements of design for both Moroccan and Swedish textiles. Who produces and designs the fabrics? Are the designs contemporary, or traditional (in Morocco, Berber, French, Arab, or mixed)? What is the relationship between form and function, and how are the textiles used? For example, do they insulate the floors and walls of a Moroccan home, or are they mere

pillows on a Swedish sofa? How are the textiles produced? And finally, What impact does globalization have on the Moroccan and Swedish textile industries?

Al Akhawayn University appeals to me for a variety of reasons. It is located in the small, mountainous town of Ifrane, which is known for its blend of Berber, French and Moroccan culture as well as for four beautiful seasons. I feel I will be physically comfortable at al Akhawayn because of the climate and its setting in a town rather than a city. Furthermore, my body will not be stressed from prolonged heat, and air pollution will not aggravate my asthma, issues that would be problematic if I studied in Jordan, for example. I also chose this school because I am able to continue my Arabic studies. Taking Arabic in Morocco, as well as in the United States during the summer, is necessary to meet my major requirements. Beloit's direct partnership with al Akhawayn makes it possible for me to be part of another program for spring semester. Additionally, Ifrane is close to the historic cities of Fes and Meknes, both of which boast a rich history of art and textiles.

Although al Akhawayn is an American-style liberal arts institution with courses taught in English, it will offer me a variety of opportunities that Beloit will not. For example, I will be able to take courses on International Relations (IR) and Political Science from an Arab perspective. This will be beneficial to me because I am an IR major focusing on the Middle East. As mentioned, I will also be able to explore and learn about textiles, another thing Beloit does not offer. Furthermore, I can continue my studies in Arabic language which is vital to meeting a major requirement, and there will be no more Arabic at Beloit while I am here. There will also be differences in living spaces. While I will still be in a dorm with a meal plan, rooms are cleaned by maids, and residence halls are single gender with the opposite gender not allowed in. I will most likely have a Moroccan roommate which is something I look forward to because she will be one of my primary teachers of Moroccan culture, as well as someone I can practice Arabic with.

I am ready to take part in the fantastic learning experience of studying abroad. I know that learning and living at a foreign university and working to achieve my learning goals will not always be easy. I will encounter language and cultural obstacles and be challenged by settling into a completely new environment, alterations in diet, lifestyle, and whatever else comes along. I am alright with this. I am asking for these challenges so I can learn and grow as a person, a student, and a Beloit.

### **Preparation for Learning Abroad**

Study abroad requires background knowledge about a country. Students also need to be able to structure their time outside the classroom in productive ways. Please discuss your knowledge of the country (and what else you will do to gain more knowledge) and your plans for out-of-classroom activities while you are abroad.

There have been a variety of experiences in my life, both in and out of the classroom, that are outstanding building blocks for my study abroad preparation. My senior year of high school, my family and I hosted an exchange student from Brazil. The first few weeks were pretty challenging for me because I had to explain to her aspects of American culture such as really sexual dancing at clubs, and the general sexist attitude of the football and boy's hockey teams at our school. My exchange sister is a

totally gorgeous (think stunning model) and amazing person. She got loads of attention from guys who had absolutely nothing in common with me (think sexist, cocky, conservative athletes). I had to explain their intentions in a way that was comfortable for her. I also had a really difficult time coming to terms with her privileged background, materialism, comfort with status, and lack of knowledge of human rights issues across the globe. From these experiences, as well as other interactions with international students, I have gained a greater awareness of other cultures and stereotypes, as well as the ability to be open and receptive to cultural differences and similarities. I will definitely have to draw upon these experiences during my time abroad because I will be the international student. If I am not willing to be open to new experiences, people, and culture, there is no way I can have an even remotely successful study.

This familiarity of living with someone from another country segues into my next experience that prepares me for studying abroad. I will be living with a roommate in Morocco. Everything I have learned about living with someone I have gained through sharing a room with my younger sister, as well as living with my wonderful roommate here at Beloit. Sharing such a small space with someone who has other likes and dislikes is not for every person. There are issues to be compromised upon, each roommate must value and engage in effective communication, and some sacrifices must be made in order to live successfully with one another. Because of these experiences, I am comfortable being a roommate, and I know how to act in this situation. In addition, living semi-independently in a dorm away from my family is a great transition into living at a university overseas.

In the classroom, my Arabic and political science classes prepare me for studying in Morocco. Obviously, the Arabic is essential because it is one of the main languages used in Morocco, and I have no background in French, the other main language. Through my political science courses, I have learned more about U.S. involvement in the Middle East and how those actions and policies impact what other countries think of the U.S, and perceptions people may have about me. In my International Politics class, we discussed globalization at great length. I feel comfortable and able to use this knowledge to investigate the relationship between globalization and the Moroccan textile industry.

There are a number of steps I must take to advance my study abroad preparation. In terms of academics, I will continue to study Arabic, both next semester and in the summer. This spring I also plan on taking an intro art and design class to develop a formal knowledge of the fundamentals of design. It would also be wise to enroll in a comparative politics course so I can develop a comparative framework in which to analyze Swedish and Moroccan culture. Furthermore, I hope to be part of a class that combines the performing arts and democratic movements; this class will spend three weeks studying in Hungary and Serbia. Through working with artists in these countries, I will learn how to effectively collaborate across cultural and language barriers. I anticipate becoming more flexible and open to whatever happens, a life lesson that will be useful when studying abroad.

As far as preparation outside of the classroom is concerned, I have a list of actions I must take. I will research living and transportation costs in Morocco so I can prepare a realistic budget. I will also research textile museums, markets, and companies and create a more detailed plan of study. This summer, I hope to take courses and volunteer at the Minnesota Textile Center to gain general background knowledge on textiles before I begin a more independent study. Finally, to better prepare myself for living in Morocco, I will read various forms of media such as books and magazines, as well as watch documentaries, that detail Moroccan culture, customs,

and history. I have also begun to speak with Professor Majeed about Morocco and North Africa, because right now I do not have much knowledge in this area. Conversations with my advisor and students who have studied in Morocco are also resources I feel I can greatly benefit from.

By building upon these outlined experiences and working through my list of actions, I feel I will be thoroughly prepared to engage in a successful and enriching semester abroad.

### **Social Identities**

Social identities both shape how we see and interact with the world and how others see and interact with us. Consider how social identities, yours and others', might impact your study abroad experiences.

While studying abroad, I anticipate that people will assume things about me and generally place me in stereotypical categories. I understand people will think certain things about me because I am an American woman, and frankly, I am alright with that because they probably do not have first-hand knowledge of American culture and they do not know me. Moroccans may think that because I am an American, I have money to just throw around willy nilly. In fact, I identify with a hard working middle class, and I am careful about how I spend my money and what I purchase. Because I come from the United States, it may be assumed that I eat fast food every day. This is absolutely not true. Fast food makes me feel sick; I basically live in health food stores, co-ops, and markets. In some countries, people presume that Americans are ignorant of other cultures and beliefs. I think that is true to an extent, but I do not fit into that model. I love learning about other ways of life, and I immensely respect them.

I am a liberal American woman who greatly enjoys and respects her freedoms. I do however, often take my rights for granted. This is perhaps the biggest identity challenge I will face. In Morocco, there will be places I cannot go, and things I cannot do just because I am a woman. I am a feminist and I will have a really difficult time reconciling with an Arab culture that does not fully share my values. At Beloit, all of my friends share my values. I am nearly certain this will not be the case at al Akhawayn. Perhaps because I am a woman who takes certain freedoms and rights for granted, Moroccan men might not take my opinions, voice, and personality seriously. Because of our different backgrounds, they may just dismiss me as a crazy American woman who does not know her place. If indeed this does happen, I think it will have a profound impact on me. It will be an experience that will allow me to be personally aware of the inequalities and injustices women face in Arab countries. Right now, I have a general understanding of this, but it is not personal, just theoretical. During and after my time in Morocco, I feel that I will have a better understanding of perceptions and attitudes towards women in Arab countries. I do not think I will take my freedoms for granted as much as I do now. I really hope that my experiences will further inspire me to work on the behalf of and with Arab women. Sometime in the future, I would love to work with fair trade companies and women who create textiles.

While abroad, I know I will have a lot of explaining to do about myself and how I do and do not fit into stereotypical American models. Bridging these gaps between cultures is a part of the study abroad experience, both for myself and those I meet

abroad. To learn more about identity and how Moroccans generally interpret American students, I will read through reports in the OIE, as well as speak with students and professors who have spent time in Morocco. This learning will help me prepare for a successful study abroad.