

## Sample Mitchell Scholarship Personal Statement—Student #1

Feet like lightning. Arms pressed to the sides. Instruments sounding like nothing I had previously heard. The airing of Riverdance on PBS was my first introduction to anything that could be considered “traditional Irish.” At that time, I had been dancing since I was five years old, so this newfound form of dance was naturally intriguing. My interest in dance and the arts continued to grow and at the age of nine, I began to play the flute. Almost immediately, music was my passion, and I knew someday I wanted to perform. For years, I focused solely on concert flute repertoire, assuming I would become a concert performer. During high school, though, I had the opportunity to collaborate with a hammered dulcimer player who gave me notated Irish music to read, and my interest skyrocketed. I began to listen to traditional Irish groups such as the Chieftains and “Celtic rock” groups such as Seven Nations. During my sophomore year as a flute performance major at Mythic University, I realized study in Ireland was the only way for me to properly learn traditional Irish music and culture.

Fall 20xx was my semester in the Junior Year Abroad (JYA) program at University College Dublin (UCD). Because the JYA program required two areas of emphasis, I chose Music and Celtic Civilization. Before arriving in Ireland, I knew the music department at UCD did not offer lessons with private instructors, so I contacted Mr. Bill Dowdall, professor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music and principal flautist of the National Concert Orchestra. Mr. Dowdall was willing to give me “classical flute” lessons, but he did not play traditional Irish music (often called “trad”). As my main reason for going to Ireland was to learn trad music, I had to find a teacher. With the help of Mr. Adrian Scahill, my “Irish Traditional Music” lecturer at UCD, and Mr. Dowdall, I found an Irish flute teacher, Mr. Seán Ò Broin.

At least once every week during my time in Ireland, I went to McNeill’s Traditional Music Shop on Capel Street in Dublin to take a trad lesson with Mr. Ò Broin. Irish music is an aural tradition—meaning that in order to perform it authentically, one must learn tunes by ear. Being trained classically, I was used to reading notes on a page, but one cannot analyze Irish music from a classical viewpoint. Trad is a separate and unique art form with its own set of special rules. I learned that lesson firsthand and through an ethnomusicology course at UCD.

Since returning to the United States, I have observed that most people who play Irish music read from “fake books,” which tend to approximate and simplify the complicated, time-honored tradition. Irish music must be learned aurally and personalized by each player with her own ornamentation, nuances, and interpretation of her teacher’s style. I realize that when it comes to seriously studying traditional Irish music, I have only scratched the surface with one semester of lessons. I must return to Ireland if I am to continue the pursuit of knowledge that was begun.

During my graduate study in Ireland, I plan to attend the Irish World Music Centre (IWMC) at the University of Limerick to attain the MA in Irish Traditional Music Performance. The Centre is the only one of its kind in the world, and the degree is unique to this university. Although University College Cork offers a one-year MA in Music, and NUI Maynooth offers a one-year MA in Music (Performance and Musicology), the IWMC is the only school to offer Irish Traditional Music Performance. At my target University of Limerick program, advanced instrumental tuition is provided by world-renowned traditional performers and tutors, and the examinations of repertoire sources and styles of performance are supplemented by important modern non-performance skills such as music business and music technology. The IWMC offers other specialized courses besides my proposed MA, and elective modules in the program will allow me to pursue some of my other interests.

I believe other interests are an integral part of my education and plan to continue gaining more knowledge in each area while studying abroad again. Classes offered through the Irish Traditional Dance and Contemporary Dance Performance programs at the IWMC will allow me to further my dance knowledge outside my world of ballet. Mr. Niall Keegan, Course Director of my prospective MA program, tells me there will be opportunities to continue my concert studies in ensembles. Not only do I plan to continue with concert flute studies, I also intend to teach private classical lessons. My first ethnomusicology experience at UCD whetted my appetite for exposure to diverse musical cultures and inspired me to apply for the newly approved International Arts Minor at Mythic University. Classes through the Ethnomusicology program at the IWMC will teach me more about other cultures and their special musical traditions. Irish language studies will broaden my understanding of Irish music traditions, and I look forward to beginning these classes while in the country.

Eventually, my goal is to perform in ensembles that incorporate varying musical styles, especially Irish traditional music. Since returning from Dublin, I have led workshops, given recitals, performed a jury for the Mythic University woodwind faculty, and spoken with many people about my Irish learning experiences. My joy comes from educating people about trad music through performance and conversation. I am determined to follow my ambition to share this passion. When my JYA semester ended with my first experience studying in Ireland, I realized how much more I needed to learn about traditional Irish music and culture. I do not merely want to study in Ireland; I must study in Ireland if I plan to pursue my passion. Now, with the Mitchell Scholarship and its many benefits, mastery of Ireland's distinct musical art form and immersion in its culture are within my grasp. It is an honor to be considered for this perfect opportunity.

**Sample Mitchell Scholarship Personal Statement—Student #2**

I have always found comfort in my mother's words: to find out where you're going, you need to know where home is.

Home was never an easy concept to me—a girl born of Peruvian parents and raised in Japan. A family heritage and birthplace are common differentiators, a way to identify oneself in acceptable categories to the world. Instead, I was often treated like a wandering foreigner, without clear and defined categories. I have no simple answer when asked about my identity: I was born in Japan and lived there for seven years as a Peruvian. Now I am an American with ties all over the world. Even though I cannot embrace just one location, I established a home for myself in a metaphysical and emotional space: the space where my family, passions, and goals all intersect.

My perspective as an ethnic minority deeply influenced the way I engage my life. Just as with my own family, struggling upon entering Customs in the United States, I see the pattern of struggle among Latino families due to a disconnect between Latinos and the larger society. Latinos are not major players in the discourse on vital issues facing the United States. With an increasing curiosity on the conditions facing other minority groups, I continue to pursue my motivating drives: to stand up for minority groups and dedicate myself to service.

As part of my fight against barriers for equal access to the political system, my ongoing campaign for civic participation has called upon all students at Mythic University to raise their voices and demand accountability of politicians. As the President of the Student Political Science Association, I led efforts in “Get Out the Vote” campaigns and coordinated major speaking events to inform students of the pertinent political issues. Also dedicated to children's rights, I have collaborated with students to improve the conditions of street children in the Dominican Republic through fundraising and the construction of shelters in Santo Domingo. The group Rescue Childhood continually increases its educational efforts by informing the campus and community about children's rights issues. Last year, I was instrumental in gaining the support of Mythic University in hosting a children's rights activist, a survivor of Pol Pot's killing fields.

As part of my commitment to understanding challenges facing minorities, I participated in the service learning initiative in the summer of 20xx. As a volunteer for Habitat for Humanity and NET, a juvenile detention center, I began to internalize the space of poverty in my month-long stay in Mythic City: the run-down homes, drug dealings, and shootings at night. Through the classroom, I investigated the history of the city and learned of the negative economic and social trends facing many other urban areas, mostly populated by minority groups. I was appalled by the lack of opportunities for African-American and Latino residents. Inspired by the goals and the convictions of the community leaders, I worked to improve the conditions of my community.

My interest in marginalized and ethnic minority groups has evolved into an honors thesis: an analysis of the successes of Latino interest groups on influencing policymaking in Washington DC. I am undertaking a project tracking the successes of Latino groups in specific policies over time. The results will show what factors play a significant role in increasing policymaking successes. My ultimate research goal is to investigate the ways in which Latinos can take part in the discussion of policies that will affect their daily lives. As the Latino minority grows larger, I fear rising tensions over immigration, education, and jobs will begin to polarize sectors of the population. These discussions must take place peacefully on the floor of Congress and not on the torn streets of places like Mythic City.

The Mitchell Scholarship is an incredible opportunity to study minority groups in a non-American institution. The focused, taught courses in Irish institutions offer the chance to develop a great expertise in an area. The Queen's University in Belfast offers an M.A. in Identity, Theory and Culture and Comparative Ethnic Conflict. A taught course in the concepts of identity, nature of ethnicity, and the politics of culture will provide me with the academic background needed to pursue my career of service to the Latino community. Most of all I believe my life in Belfast will force me to internalize the history and conflict that once consumed Belfast and Northern Ireland. I would find the experience extraordinarily rewarding.

I am also interested in the National University of Ireland in Galway for an L.L.M. in Human Rights. With future aspirations as an advocate for minority rights, I believe the L.L.M will set a firm foundation in the pursuit of my goals. The Equality Studies Program in the University College Dublin also offers a unique opportunity to explore my interests in minority groups. These programs are specific to my interests and will propel me into the field of public policy and advocacy for Latino issues.

More personally, I have never explored Western Europe and I am eager to take a step beyond my travel to Latin America and Asia. I am thirsty to branch out to another culture. The opportunities in Ireland will provide me with a broad understanding of ethnic minority struggles around the world and contribute to my personal growth as a world student and future political activist.

The spirit of the Mitchell Scholarship is fitting to my experience as an advocate for marginalized voices. Through my commitment to minority group's equal representation and protection of rights in political systems, my goal is to help ease future tensions within and beyond American society. Following the efforts of Senator George J. Mitchell, I hope to further Latino issues in the greater American society and support policies to improve the conditions of Latinos as a way to prevent rising tensions among citizens of the United States.