

A record 10 ASU students awarded US Department of State's Critical Language Scholarship

Program offers fully funded opportunity to study one of 13 languages important to national, economic security

By Lisa Robbins, ASU News
April 17, 2025

Ten Arizona State University students have been selected for the highly competitive [Critical Language Scholarship, or CLS, program](#) — an initiative of the U.S. Department of State that aims to expand the number of Americans studying and mastering critical foreign languages.

In addition, four ASU students have been named alternates for the 2025 CLS cohort.

The CLS program offers fully funded intensive overseas and virtual summer language institutes in 13 languages that are critical to national security and economic prosperity. Students from colleges and universities across the United States compete annually for the opportunity to deepen their linguistic and cultural fluency.

The 10 students are:

James Africano (Korean), undergraduate in political science.

Catherine Buckley (Japanese), undergraduate in Japanese.

Madelyn Forquer (Mandarin Chinese), undergraduate in sociology.

Ronald Lofano (Portuguese), international affairs and leadership graduate student.

Ame Min-Venditti (Korean), sustainability graduate student.

Aran O'Day (Mandarin Chinese), undergraduate in Chinese.

Mia Osmonbekov (Chinese), undergraduate in journalism and mass communication.

Evan Richardson (Russian), undergraduate in French and political science.

Lauryn Silas (Mandarin Chinese), undergraduate in medical studies and health solutions.

Griselda Solis (Arabic), public administration and social work graduate student.

At ASU, faculty and advisors have worked to expand access to this opportunity across disciplines.

“CLS provides students the extraordinary opportunity to engage in immersive study of critical languages within the communities that speak them — one of the most effective ways to improve language skills,” said Laurie Stoff, faculty mentor in the [The Lorraine W. Frank Office of National Scholarships Advisement](#) and primary advisor for CLS. “We’re thrilled for these students, who worked incredibly hard on their applications and continue to show that ASU students can compete with peers from the nation’s most selective universities.”

Over the course of eight to 10 weeks this summer, CLS participants will engage in intensive language instruction and cultural immersion, either abroad or online. In addition to formal classroom learning, students will take part in cultural activities, excursions, and language partner programs designed to accelerate their proficiency and foster meaningful connections with host communities.

For many participants, the program is a chance to explore a new country and culture for the first time.

“As someone who has never been to Taiwan, I am looking forward to experiencing the wonders of night markets and going sightseeing,” said Madelyn Forquer, a sociology major with minors in Chinese and justice studies who aspires to a career in public policy. “Likewise, I am super excited to meet and learn from the locals and program staff.”

The CLS program is one of the most competitive study abroad opportunities in the country, with an average selection rate of less than 10% most years. In contrast, ASU’s selection rate for 2025 was almost 17%, reflecting the university’s continued success in preparing students to excel in nationally competitive programs.

“Language is a fundamental tool for advancing effective diplomacy and fostering mutual understanding among people from different cultures and nations,” said Nancy Gonzales, ASU executive vice president and university provost. “I’m incredibly proud of our 10 students who, through their dedication to foreign language study, are helping build connections, encourage collaboration, and promote cross-cultural learning.”

For Russian language finalist Richardson, the program supports both academic and professional ambitions.

“The CLS is significant to me academically because it provides the opportunity to develop my Russian language skills to a more advanced level — a requirement for the master’s programs in professional translation and international relations I intend to pursue,” said Richardson, who will travel to Kyrgyzstan to study Russian.

The selection of 10 ASU students exceeds the previous record of six, which occurred in both the 2023 and 2024 cycles.

The next application cycle will open in mid-September, with a late November deadline. Students interested in applying for CLS or other national scholarships can contact ASU’s [Office of National Scholarships Advisement](#) for guidance and advising.

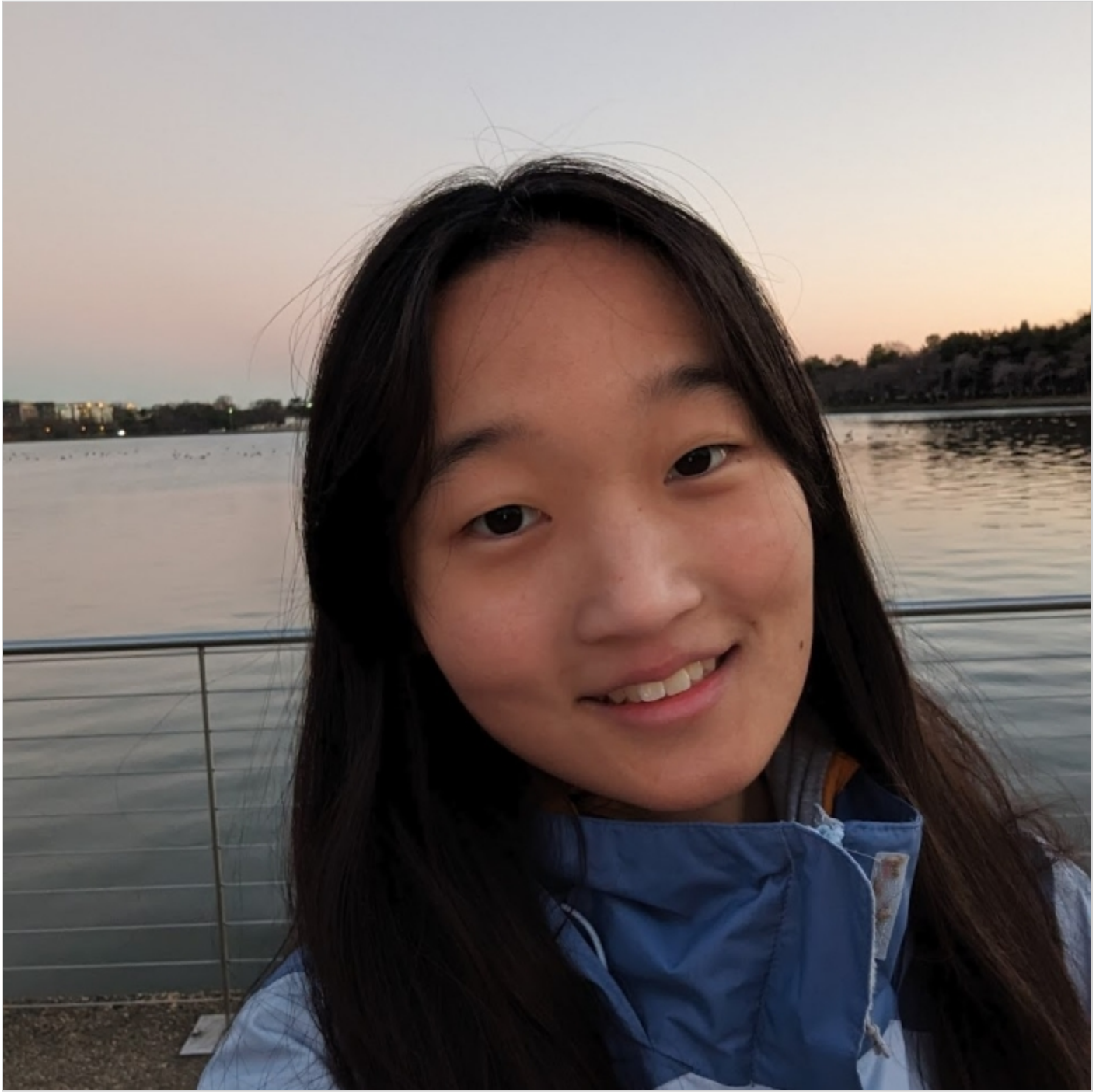
This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



The Critical Language Scholarship program is an initiative of the U.S. Department of State that aims to expand the number of Americans studying and mastering critical foreign languages. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU

Text image(s)



Madelyn Forquer will be studying Chinese in Tawain.



Evan Richardson will be studying Russian in Kyrgyzstan.