

**Boren Application Tips:** About one in six Boren applicants receives a scholarship. Although these are difficult odds, there is no reason why you cannot receive one. You have a university that is very committed to helping students obtain prestigious scholarships. If you work closely with the scholarship adviser and your professors, there is no reason that you cannot submit a competitive application. Toward that end, I am offering some tips about how to enhance your application. These tips assume you're already familiar with the Boren program and go beyond the obvious suggestions such as making sure you provide all application materials in the exact form Boren requires, eliminating all typos and grammatical errors from your essays, etc. They are more aimed at the serious student looking for a competitive advantage.

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**1. Revise, revise, revise.** As scholarship adviser I read lots of early drafts from extremely smart students with high GPAs who are usually very good writers. My initial reaction to a student's essay is almost always the same: this has little chance of getting funded. There are many reasons for this, but the point is that if you want to be competitive then your final submission must be the product of multiple drafts. Toward this end, you should:

- work with the Boren campus representative, professors, study abroad office, Writing Center, and anyone else whose judgment you trust. Have as many people as possible read your essays and offer feedback. Getting a prestigious scholarship is a **community effort**.
- start your essays **MONTHs in advance**. Your first draft should demonstrate that you've familiarized yourself with Boren and done necessary research, but it does not need to be flawless. Don't let too much time slip away trying to perfect it before you send it out to the campus representative for review.
- eliminate fluff! **Everything in your essays must prove a point or be specific.** See the sentence below for an example of potential fluff.
  1. "I seek to study abroad because I have a passion for learning foreign languages and gaining firsthand knowledge of people in another culture"

If that sentence is not followed up by a list of extra-curricular activities or discussion of specific activities that concretely demonstrate your academic and professional commitment to gaining knowledge about foreign cultures, it should be dropped.

**2. Read the essay prompts carefully and make sure your essay addresses each of them directly and completely. Make sure your application, and especially your essays, reflect the mission of the program.** For a Boren Scholarship, that means you need to:

- Make clear how your **program of study is related to national security**. Typically, you have to be interested in more than just a particular language or country. Successful applications usually present a specific **research topic or field of study** as well. In

other words, you cannot simply state that you are interested in China and then make a case that China is important to US national security. To strengthen your application and set yourself apart from the crowd, you should have a particular topic in which you are interested (e.g. public health, weapons proliferation, climate change). It is also important that you demonstrate that you are knowledgeable about your field of study and can provide details about what you will research and what resources you can already identify to help you with your research. You may even want to contact professors or other individuals abroad with whom you plan to work and mention these individuals in your essay.

- Make sure your **career goals** emphasize **government service**. You may not plan on spending your entire career in government service, but if you are applying for the Boren you should at least plan to start your career in the government and stay for several years. You will be competing with students who do plan to spend their entire career in the government, and Boren is a government-funded scholarship. If you neglect or under-emphasize this aspect, your application will not be competitive.
- Indicate that you are interested in **language immersion and in learning as much as possible about your particular field of study**. Toward this end, it helps to include ways you intend to go beyond the program's requirements. For example, you might propose an independent study or joining student groups or service projects. You might propose an unpaid internship (for Boren it must be unpaid and cannot be with a government agency). As always, provide details about the organization, opportunities, and whether you have already contacted relevant people in the host country.

**PLEASE NOTE:** All of the above usually requires you to **conduct research** about your destination and or your particular topic of interest. I also strongly urge students to **take advantage of resources available on the Boren program's website**, especially the webinars. This will help you develop a deeper understanding of the Boren program's mission and to tailor your essays accordingly.

3. **Be concrete.** One of the biggest problems one sees in initial drafts of student essays is the absence of concrete, specific details. In other words, there is too much fluff. Adding specifics accomplishes two goals. First, it helps the selection committee more clearly envision your plans. Two, it presents you as a more knowledgeable and serious candidate. Here are some examples,
  - If you are talking about **career goals**, don't say, "I want to work in a career that is related to international affairs". Mention **specific agencies and positions**. Boren expects you to demonstrate that you have an understanding of the actual selection process and the skills that are required for the government position. If you don't know any specific jobs, visit Career Services office or search online resources such as [USAJOBS](#) and the [Partnership for Public Service](#). Talk to professors or academic advisers.

- If you are discussing **your field of study and plans for research**, talk about professors or other **individuals and organizations abroad** with whom you plan to work. Mention that you have reached out to them.
- If you are talking about the relationship between your field of study and **national security**, offer illustrative examples, statistics, etc. For instance, assume that you are interested in China's climate change policies and you want to go to Beijing to study Mandarin. Which of the two statements below do you think does a better job of making a specific case that there is a link between climate change in China and US national security?
  1. Climate change is the ultimate global challenge and is a threat to both the United States and China. Climate change may contribute to rising sea levels and more extreme weather events such as droughts and hurricanes. Climate change threatens economic growth and political stability not only in China but many other countries that are important to the United States. If Americans do not learn more about how China is struggling to combat this huge problem, we cannot help them develop new technologies and develop sound policies to mitigate the challenge.

### VERSUS

2. China feeds 20 percent of the world's population on seven percent of the world's arable land. Scientists estimate that climate change will lower China's crop productivity by 5-10 percent by 2030 and by up to 35 percent for some crops (e.g. wheat) by 2050. As China seeks to enhance its food security by relying more on imports, it could contribute to global scarcity and higher food prices, further destabilizing countries vital to US national security interests. In 2008, when food prices spiked, there were riots in almost two dozen across the global, including countries vital to US national security interests, such as Pakistan, Indonesia, and India. For this reason, it is important for Americans to gain a better grasp of China's national climate change policies.

Hopefully you chose statement #2. It offers numerical data and specific examples, which makes it more concrete and gives the impression that the applicant is well informed.

4. **Find the right people to write you a letter of recommendation.** A letter of recommendation is external validation of your qualifications and abilities. The wrong letter can sink your application. You need a letter writer who can do two things. First, she must be able to comment on your academic and professional qualifications **in detail**. She will hurt your

application if she simply provides an annotated transcript (e.g. "Student X took my class Y in the Fall, 2013 quarter and received an A. The following quarter she took class Z and received another A). This means you must select someone who knows you well. Second, the letter writer should comment on your particular program of study and the reasons you are qualified to execute it. A letter that praises your academic skills and makes no mention of the Boren Scholarship will hurt your chances. This means you should give your letter writer a draft of your essays.

5. **Make sure there is a clear narrative from past experiences to your scholarship year to your future career and academic goals and that your goals for your Boren year are feasible.** The selection committee wants to see how your past experiences inform your Boren Scholarship plans. They also want to have a clear vision of how receiving a Boren will help you take the next step toward your professional and academic goals. Think of dominos. Past experiences are the dominos that have fallen leading you to the Boren domino, which is the link to the future dominos. Make sure you explain how the dominos are connected and where they are going. At the same time, recognize that the Boren Scholarship is only one domino and do not propose too much. **Undergraduates tend weaken their applications by proposing programs of study that are infeasible.** If you have an introductory-level of Chinese, don't indicate that you will master Mandarin while also conducting research and writing a thesis on China's climate change policies. That is not realistic, it's too many dominos at once. Rather, you should indicate that the Boren year will help you advance your Mandarin skills, build up knowledge and establish a network of contacts in the climate change arena. This will provide you the intellectual capital and skills necessary to succeed in your career as a X.