

Project Proposal: American Popular Music as an Informal Cultural Diplomat  
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As an Arts Administration and Music double major with a particular interest in the intersection of arts and politics, I intend to spend the summer abroad in Aix-en-Provence, France to research the phenomenon of informal cultural diplomacy through the lens of American popular music as it functions in French society.

The continuous development of technology and information has caused seismic shifts in traditional power structures and “soft power,” or a nation’s ability to persuade through the sharing of ideas rather than coerce through military might, is on the rise. Cultural diplomacy is an integral part of soft power, and it is increasingly imperative that nations evaluate their cultural identity if they hope to remain relevant on the international stage. While some forms of cultural diplomacy are official, others can now circulate freely thanks to the enhanced global connectivity of the digital age. American popular music is a prime example, as the internet allows for the rapid and wide-spread sharing of musical content. Its messages reach millions of listeners, and because the music is identified with the United States, those messages must surely effect perceptions of America in some way.

When I first traveled to Aix-en-Provence, France several years ago, I asked French students what music they chose to listen to, and was surprised when they responded that “their” music was mostly just “our” music. Given that France is a nation that invests deeply in the preservation and cultivation of its own cultural identity, and has leveraged that unique character to maintain social relevance internationally, I was fascinated by the apparent infiltration of American popular music into French society. I now desire to return to the country that first introduced me to this phenomenon so that I might better understand it. The goal of my research will be to explore the effects—however subtle—of American popular music on French cultural life. Does the French citizen’s sense of her own national identity shift when her soundscape is peppered with American songs? Does her perception of the United States itself change based on the values portrayed in American pop? I will attempt to answer these questions through two months of ethnographic research. Techniques used in this research method include immersion into the phenomenon itself through daily observation and participation, forging personal connections with observed parties, and eventually conducting conversational interviews once a certain depth of relationship has been achieved. I am most interested in how American pop music functions in the public sphere of French cultural life, and will observe its effects everywhere from supermarkets to public buses to popular nightclubs. I have both theoretical and practical experience with this research method through upper-level courses in musical ethnography and a smaller ethnographic project conducted this past fall. (You will find the final outcome of that project attached to this application as evidence of previous work). Through such experiences, I have grown accustomed to the challenges of ethnographic research, which will certainly be compounded by the language and cultural barriers of living in a foreign country. However, with Prof. Dave, an experienced ethnomusicologist, as my advisor and mentor and with my advanced French language skills and previous experience living in France, I am confident that I will be able to navigate these challenges.

Soft power and cultural diplomacy are topics of much conversation within the realm of Arts Administration, and the concept of purposefully exporting culture rather than passively allowing certain assets to disseminate is a central concern. Thus, the findings of this research

project could provide valuable information on the effects of informal cultural diplomacy, and would be of interest to the Arts Administration program. This project might also interest the Music department, both as a student project in musical ethnography and as an investigation of the broader significance of the popular music genre. At the conclusion of this project, I would be interested in presenting my findings within the Arts Administration and Music departments, in addition to the Annual Awards Outcome event next in April of 2016. However, I hope to see the results of my research catalyze a broader dialogue on American cultural identity. I would be eager to facilitate conversations between students and faculty of any discipline to continue discussion on various aspects of that topic. I hope this research project will be considered for a Miller Arts Scholar Arts Award both as a scholarly endeavor with significance reaching across several disciplines, and as a first step in what could be a highly collaborative and wide-reaching venture.

### **Project Timeline:**

Late April-May of 2015: Complete Student Projects Abroad application, preliminary research on additional ethnographic research techniques, prepare for departure

May 30: Arrive in Aix-en-Provence, France

June 1-July 25: Conduct independent ethnographic research in conjunction with internship position held with the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence

July 26: Travel by train from Aix-en-Provence to Paris

July 31: Continue research for several days in Paris, France

August 1: Return home from Paris, France

August-October: Compile research data, draw major conclusions, and prepare presentations for Arts Administration and Music Departments

November (or possibly January '16): Present research to Arts Administration and Music Departments, gather feedback

January-March '16: edit presentation as needed

April '16: Present research at Annual Awards Outcome event

**Budget:**

	<b>Line Item</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>Transportation</b>	Air/Train Fare	The University Singers Tour will cover the first transatlantic flight. The flight from Vienna, Austria (where the tour concludes) to Marseille, France will run between \$250-\$500, and the transatlantic flight home will be \$700-\$1000. A train from Aix-en-Provence to Paris will be priced at about \$100	Up to \$1600
	Public Transport	Regularly taking public transportation will require a monthly bus card purchase of ~\$30	~\$60
<b>Meals &amp; Lodging</b>	Meals	Having done considerable research, I will easily be able to eat for about \$12 each day as a generous estimate.	~\$720
	Lodging	I plan to rent a single room for the two-month stay. Having done considerable research, I can achieve this at \$1000 to \$1200 per month	Up to \$2400
<b>Health</b>	n/a	Health insurance provider covers travel abroad	
<b>Supplies</b>	n/a	No additional supplies needed	
<b>Other</b>	Music Venue Admission Fees	Actively engaging with music venues is an integral part of this research project. Most venues charge \$5-\$10, and some are free of charge. I plan to visit and observe 2-3 venues each week.	~\$150
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$4,930</b>

**Additional Sources of Funding:**

Recipient, Summer Ethics Internship Award, \$2000: Independent research will be conducted in conjunction with internship work in Aix-en-Provence, thus this award will partially cover certain Transportation, Meals, and Lodging.

Applicant, Raven Fellowship Research Grant: If awarded, this grant will supply additional funding of up to \$2,500.

**If your proposal budget exceeds the award amount, how will you handle the difference? Is the award amount sufficient to accomplish your proposal?**

Given that I have already secured \$2,000 of additional funding, \$3,000 will be enough to accomplish this project. This research is of utmost importance to me, and should I fail to receive full funding of \$3,000, or should there be additional expenditures, I would be willing to utilize some personal savings if necessary in order to accomplish my goals.