In one paragraph, describe how the language and area training you receive during the period of your FLAS fellowship will help prepare you to achieve your academic and career goals.*

When I choose the University of Wisconsin Madison for my PhD work in Japanese history, it was because of the institution’s commitment to interdisciplinary and transnational training. Since coming here, as my MA/PhD topic takes shape, I have realized the need to develop my competency in Southeast Asian languages and studies. I am interested in studying the relationship between economic and environmental policy in both East and Southeast Asia. Japan has long been one of the largest purchasers of exports (comprised predominately of natural resources) from Indonesia. There exists a strong tradition of historical work examining environmental activism in Japan and environmental degradation in Indonesia has also garnered attention, but little work on environmentalism in either country in an international context. I am interested in studying the economies and environments of both countries together in order to understand how they have developed in different, yet connected, ways in the postwar period. While I have found welcoming communities within the fields of Environmental Studies and the History of Science Medicine and Technology, I am only beginning my work in the field of Southeast Asian Studies. Pursuing a comparative study of environmental issues in Japan and Indonesia requires the support of grants like FLAS that allow scholars to dedicate time not only to area studies courses but also to language training. Despite being housed in the same department and their geographic proximity, scholars of East Asia and Southeast Asia exist within relative isolation to each other. The FLAS award would be instrumental in allowing me to cross geographic and field boundaries in my studies. In addition to allowing me the time and financial ability to embark upon academic work in a new field, it is my hope that the work I do during the fellowship period will allow me foster ties with my peers in Southeast Asian fields and to learn from their insights. Ultimately, I believe both these ties and my research will aid me in future career by allowing me convey the connections between seemingly unrelated phenomenon, such as international trade and environmental degradation, to future students. Alternatively, I am also interested in work for state or policy-making organizations like the State Department’s Economics Office in which I would be able to research or work on issues with global implications, such as trade, environmental conservation, or resource usage. For me, the FLAS fellowship represents the first step towards a comparative history project that is not only interdisciplinary but also inter-regional. It is my hope that such studies one day provide us the basis to navigate twentieth-century life in ways that allow us to learn from the past and act responsibly in the future.

Describe your training to date, your primary research interests, and the themes in your coursework and/or thesis
or dissertation projects. [500-1200 words] The evaluation committee understands that beginning or early graduate students may have rudimentary thesis or dissertation plans, while more advanced students will be able to lay out plans for major research projects in some detail. Likewise, the committee understands that essays from applicants in professional schools or other non-thesis degree programs will be quite different from essays written by students planning theses or dissertations. So, view this essay as a chance to inform the committee of your current thoughts on how you hope to advance knowledge in your field or use your training to prepare for valuable work in a profession.*

The Cold War represented a time of unprecedented division as the United States and the USSR fought for influence over what they considered to be developing nations. The economic hierarchy privileging developed nations over the developing forged during this period remains very much a part of our world today. Japan, by virtue of its early twentieth century imperial projects and postwar relationship with countries like the United States, has long enjoyed the designation of Asia's premier developed nation. However, Japan both gained and maintained its economic success at the expense of its neighbors. Indonesia, which was incorporated into the Japanese empire from 1942-1945 served as a key site for resource extraction. The end of World War II brought about the end of Japan's formal colonization of Indonesia, but not the end of Indonesia as an exporter of raw materials to the Japanese market. In the decades following the collapse of the Japanese empire Japan has continued to rely on Indonesia as a source of resources including forest products and oil. Today Japan remains Indonesia's largest export market, absorbing fifteen percent of total exports annually. Japan also remains engaged in a form of soft imperialism with Indonesia that is predicated on Japan's ability to purchase resources whose production degrades Indonesia's natural environment and spares Japan's own.

I am interested in examining the ways in which Japan's environmental imperialism of Indonesia has affected economic growth and understanding of the environment in both countries. Japan was the site of vigorous grassroots environmental movements during the 1960s and 1970s. These movements resulted in anti-pollution legislations, safeguards for Japan's labor forces, and in environmental preservation. However, Japan's environmental footprint stretches much farther than its national boundaries. While industries with large environmental impacts like forestry have declined in the twentieth century within Japan, imports of natural resources from nations like Indonesia have risen. Japan has been able to preserve its natural environment, but it has done so at the expense of other countries.
I want to investigate the ways in which Japan and Indonesia’s economic relationship has affected both the physical environments and understandings of the environment in both countries. An investigation into Japan’s dependency on Indonesia’s natural resources and Indonesia’s need for Japanese capital uncovers many questions. For example, how does postwar trade between Japan and Indonesia compare to Japan’s neo-imperialist period during which it formally occupied Indonesia? To what degree has Japan’s postwar form of soft-colonialism based on resource extraction allowed the Japanese economy to industrialize at the expense of other nations? From these economic questions come others that address the effect of economic activity on environments. I will examine if Japan’s robust grassroots environmental movements were able to develop in part because Japan’s environmental footprint was transferred to countries like Indonesia. Conversely, did Indonesia’s export-based economy foster or hinder the development concepts of environmentalism amongst Indonesian citizens? Finally, while these questions address social attitudes towards the environment, both countries’ political stances towards the environment are important as well. Despite the presence of several high-profile cases involving industrial pollution, the Japanese government has garnered a reputation for enforcing stringent anti-pollution laws. In contrast, environmentally-minded organizations like the World Wildlife Fund have pointed out that Indonesia faces severe environmental problems including deforestation, pollution, and over-fishing. Neither Japan’s success nor Indonesia’s environmental woes exist within a vacuum. By studying the historical relationship between Japan and Indonesia, which began in the 1940s and continues to this day, it is possible to uncover the complex ways in which globalization connects us to each other.

Throughout my graduate career I have been deeply invested in examining the connection between humanity and the environment, both within my home field of Modern Japanese History and in a wider context. While environmental health is an important contemporary issue, the issues humanity faces today are the results of our past actions. At the University of Illinois, where I completed an M.A. in East Asian Studies, I examined how the Japanese government promoted nuclear power as solution to Japan’s foreign energy dependence crisis in the 1950s, despite the atomic bombings the occurred only a decade before. I also produced an M.A. thesis on the efforts of the Allied Occupation and Japanese sanitation works to control the tuberculosis epidemic, which was enabled in part by the destruction of Japan’s urban environments following the end of World War II. Currently, as a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin in the joint History-History of Science program pursuing a minor in Environmental History, I study the ways in which humanity both affects and is affected by the environment. It is my hope that the FLAS fellowship will allow me to gain the skills necessary to expand my research outside of Japan. While I still lack the language skills and area training necessary to complete this project, I am strongly committed to the production of trans-national and interdisciplinary research that makes visible the ways in which peoples, places, and
events have been connected throughout history, and provide insight into the ways those connections shape our world today.