

Alexandra Tatarian

Graduation Year: Junior

College: Science

Major(s): Science-Business, Pre-Med track

Minors(s): Science, Technology, and Values (STV)

Scholar Group Membership: N/A

Did you received other funding for this project?: Yes, Nanovic Institute

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance?

Project Title: Fili: More than a Poet

Project Location: Dublin, Ireland - Trinity College Dublin

ND Faculty Mentor: Christopher Stevens

Project Type: Creative Endeavor

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Prepare for national fellowships, Career discernment and/or preparation, Internationalize your Notre Dame experience

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Very Much

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Very Much

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Very Much

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

During my visit, I was able to experience the Science Gallery and Book of Kells at Trinity, National Library, National Gallery, National Museum, Howth cliffs, Merrion Square, St. Stephen's Green, O'Connell Street, Dublin Castle, and St. Patrick's Day Parade. It was quite busy! One of my favorite destinations was the Yeats Exhibit, because it elucidated for me how interwoven and influential poetry has been throughout Irish history. This proven power of poetry inspires me to continue pursuing my goal of improving doctor-patient relations through poetry and related means of effective, creative communication. My phone call with Jane Clarke provided me with great insight into the approach to poetry writing, especially by encouraging me to focus on emotional intensity as a motive and the long-term process. She gave me direction for the next steps of my project and described poetry as a "distillation" of a subject or idea to its essence. For me, this explanation that poetry can have multiple levels of meaning above a core message demonstrated its power as a means of communication. Then, my meeting with Dr. Iggy McGovern confirmed this role for poetry as he stated that poetry, kept simple, is meant for all. This is an important underlying concept for my project. It was also interesting to hear that his approaches to physics and poetry are independent, but relatively consistent processes. Dr.

McGovern was an impressive and sincere individual who I am so fortunate to have met. He also shared that sometimes science and poetry can be difficult to connect, but that this challenge can be addressed by using humor and emphasizing human nature. Later that day, Dr. McGovern invited me to a presentation by Irish poet Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin about discerning the audience of one's writing. This was particularly key for my work connecting doctors and patients—individuals usually with very different backgrounds and knowledge bases. She even shared that, even though politics are not as tightly tied to poetry as they were previously, there are still opportunities and moments when poems can be incredibly influential. Ultimately, all of these encounters during my time in Dublin were incredibly fruitful in terms of developing my project and gaining new insights into how poetry can shape society.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

My conversation with Dr. Iggy McGovern was fascinating. As the most renowned scientist-poet in Ireland, he was incredibly humble and candid. He admitted difficulties he sometimes encounters when relating the two subjects, especially when expectations of him are high. This transparency taught me so much about academia. He expressed how he enjoyed our conversation and truly took me under his wing while I was in Dublin. I believe that my genuine interest in the subject matter was uplifting for him, because he feels that there is a need for a younger demographic in the poetry community. Furthermore, he was curious about my own thoughts, since an American undergraduate premedical student likely has a very different perspective than an Irish physics professor and published poet. I look forward to continuing to develop a relationship with him, as his respect for and interest in my opinions helped me realize my potential in this field as a scholar. This experience has certainly motivated me to continue interacting with individuals who have expertise in this realm.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

Upon returning from Dublin, I have gained significant clarity in terms of my future plans. I first intend to read the plethora of poetry books and other resources acquired during my trip. Once I have done so, I will begin work on a submission for the Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine, taking into consideration what I have learned and the advice given to me by Iggy and Jane. Beyond that, my current goal is to write a proposal for both the Fulbright Scholarship and Mitchell Scholarships. I am currently looking into Dublin City University's Masters in Science and Health Communications. This program would be the perfect fit in terms of my goals. While in Dublin during this time, I would also intend to advance my relationship with Dr. Iggy McGovern as I continue to pursue this project outside of my master's course studies. After this gap year, I believe I will be ready to make a final decision to attend medical school. If all goes as intended, my project and master's degree will provide me with a unique perspective into clinical relationships as I begin my medical training. This would not only make me a better physician, but also an agent for improving doctor-patient relationships on a larger scale in the future. Following medical school, I hope to use my background in science, business, health

communications, and medicine by working with institutions such as MedScape and WebMD to enact greater changes in medical education across the United States.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

This project has taught me to take advantage of opportunities and pursue my passions. I would not have expected that my strong interests for science and poetry could relate so powerfully, and that Ireland with its rich, poetic history would be the perfect venue to study this intersection. Therefore, my advice would be to list your passions and then begin gathering as much information as possible. This is not only incredibly satisfying, but also can result in self discovery. Moreover, being naturally motivated to do “work” because you are so excited and intellectually captivated by it is a unique and incredible feeling. During this trip, I experienced strong emotions of determination, excitement to learn, clarity, and fulfillment unlike ever before. It almost felt as though I was meant to be in Ireland studying this subject matter, as information fell into place and connected in ways I could not have predicted. For instance, sitting at the Yeats Exhibit of the National Library, the video began discussing the Irish Fili just as explained my proposal.

One note I wrote in my journal during the trip says, “I may be the happiest I have ever been. I realize life is about seeing the world and pursuing your passions. For the first time, I am doing just that.” I will end with a quote from Anthony Moore which captures how I am feeling now, upon returning from Dublin and preparing to apply for the Fulbright and Mitchell Scholarships. “Most people will never experience the surge of excitement after beginning to truly believe enormous success is possible.” Overall, seeking to fulfill these statements is the best advice I could give to someone interested in pursuing one of these projects.

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.
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