

1. Give a brief intellectual autobiography describing your research interests and professional goals, including why you would like to be an NSF-REU fellow at USC's Security and Political Economy Lab.

I am currently a third-year at the University of Central Florida majoring in International and Global Studies and minoring Sociology and Computer Science. While pursuing my undergraduate education, I have come to realize that the field of social sciences is a lot quantitatively-focused than I had originally thought. The consequences of late 20th researchers shifting fields of study such as economics, political science, and international relations towards increasingly quantitative methods of their hard science counterparts runs rampant to this day. These approaches also impact my own research interests and potential goals for the future. I have a deep interest and passion for computational social science, geopolitical conflicts, and studying the ruminations of imperialism and greed-driven decision-making fueled by capitalism. I hope to take an interdisciplinary approach when analyzing these issues, finding the balance between qualitative and quantitative means of analysis. This translates into my future goals after obtaining my bachelor's degree, as I want to attend graduate school to study interdepartmental fields ranging from public policy, data science, and political economy. I want to take my knowledge of programming, politics, and global affairs to a research lab or think tank, ultimately ending with me teaching at a university domestically or abroad. With all that said, the SPEC Lab allows me to take a step in the right direction, furthering my goals of adding to the academic conversation of interdisciplinary IR research. While the NSF funds a multitude of programs with various areas of study, it is rare to find one dedicated to the same mission as the SPEC Lab, making it even more important that I apply. I want to be in an environment that not only benefits my already present skills, but expands my knowledge to areas I didn't even know I possessed — and USC achieves this wholeheartedly.

2. After looking at the SPEC Lab website (uscspec.org), which research project is most interesting to you and why? What are other projects you'd be interested in?

Reading the works of Muradova, Davis, and Mohn opened my eyes to the world of military interventionism, Western imperialism, and the widespread use of military coercion to achieve large amounts of wealth. In contemporary mainstream politics, the impacts of America's emphasis on hard power rather than diplomacy are understated, and it is only through academic research that these decisions are scrutinized. Thus, aiding in the Gunboat Capitalism project by developing theories and collecting empirical evidence to further the notion that military conquest is used to realize economic gains is a task I am ready to undertake. Not only does this project fit within my research interests, but taking part in revealing the intricacies of how more developed countries can exploit their neighbors in the Global South is providing subsequent research with a perspective that is not common in the current academic space of IR. Although this is quantitatively focused, I will apply my knowledge of the ones that came before me, adopting their way of thinking in order to make our means of analyzing data more holistic. While we must celebrate the victories of nations all around the globe, the wrongdoings, especially from OECD countries, should be as well — no matter how heinous. In addition to that, the Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation project relates to what I mentioned, as both seek to address state motivations and the consequences of their actions, which peaks my interest. Overall, taking part in this almost sociological approach towards IR research will strengthen my already present qualitative skills in the field, but, just like the previous project, provide me with a new outlook on the countries I will be studying in the future.

3. What skills or experiences do you have that would make you a valuable part of the undergraduate research program (e.g., writing/editing, teamwork, statistics, programming, video production, graphic design, foreign languages, subject-area knowledge, grit)?

Fact-checking, writing, and editing are attributes I consider myself being highly skilled at, not only because I have a great passion for using these abilities in my academic career, but I have applied my knowledge on these subjects in the real-world. This can be most notably found in my internship with the Council on Foreign Relations, where I worked on the Editorial team, reviewing articles being published on the website, conducting research for pieces that need to be updated, and compiling information for data visualizations that are brought to life by JavaScript's D3 library and Datawrapper, which I hope I can bring to USC, communicating our findings through a new medium. Additionally, I have taught myself programming over the course of a year, focusing on languages that are object-oriented and most utilized for data analysis, such as Python and R. The personal projects I have taken on apply these skills directly, as simply knowing coding from a purely conceptual level will be doing myself a disservice to deepen my level of understanding. Moreover, taking on roles in data collection and annotation at a socio-technical research lab on campus furthered my want to learn and apply my skills of programming to international relations academia, making this program fit right into my niche. Finally, Latin American politics along with theories of immigration are areas of knowledge that I came to fully understanding through researching with my university's department of international affairs. The impact of applying these topics of the social sciences is unparalleled, as it allows the research team I am a part of to further their conjectures and hypotheses by broadening their scope to certain areas of the world rarely discussed in certain projects with a clear quantitative lens of analysis.