Thanks to the generosity of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, I was able to travel to the island of Ikaria this summer and spend six weeks studying the Modern Greek language and learning about the culture of Greek islands. I attended three sessions of the language program offered through the???t???????????????????????? (Hellenic Cultural Center), located in the tiny mountain village of??????s a (Arethousa).

My experience in Ikaria by far exceeded my expectations. The language program at HCC was very well-run and the teachers were committed and dynamic. The classes, which ran Monday through Friday, were taught by two teachers: one from 10am until 12pm, and another from 12:15pm until 2:15pm. Daily homework assignments consisted of grammar and vocabulary exercises, written compositions, and preparation of dialogues to be presented in class. Class work focused on dialogues and the use of new vocabulary and grammar in oral expression. We would orally present the topic we had written on the previous night, without notes, and then the teacher would give us feedback on both the written and oral mistakes that we had made. Typically, I would spend 2-3 hours each night doing homework and memorizing vocabulary. As I progressed from Beginner 3 to Intermediate 2, the class size reduced dramatically (from 10 to 3) and the curricula increasingly emphasized vocabulary. The Intermediate 1 and 2 classes were arranged thematically, covering topics including weddings, ecology, art, business and the European Union.

In addition, the school organized a variety of evening activities to complement the classes, including dance lessons, singing lessons, guest lecturers and conversation classes, where we would debate topics ranging from education to sociology. I attended lectures by professors and experts on topics such as ethnography, Ikarian mythology, music, sustainable agriculture, and politics. They were all conducted in Greek and helped significantly with vocabulary and listening comprehension. The teachers at the school were extremely responsive to suggestions and comments. For instance, when another student and I mentioned that we found the conversation classes very rewarding, the schedule for the next two weeks was changed so that we could have conversation classes every evening. They consistently went above and beyond what was required of them. One teacher, on her own time, would teach me about ethnographic topics relating to dance—which was her specialty.

Since the cost of living in Ikaria was so low, I was able to afford private lessons for an hour before regular group class during my 4th week at the school. During this time, I worked on extra passages and vocabulary with my teacher and worked on grammatical mistakes that I had made in

my compositions. I also had extra homework from these classes, so for a week, I was attending 5 hours of class and working outside of class for about 4-5 hours.

The rural location of HCC was a major asset to the program because it facilitated interaction with local Greek speakers rather than English-speakers and tourists. My speaking skills improved significantly this summer, thanks to my making friends with Greeks on the island and spending the majority of my personal free time with them rather than the students that the school who were not comfortable expressing themselves in Greek in social situations.

The breadth of my learning experience in Ikaria went beyond language improvement because the island offered me copious outlets for academic and personal enrichment. My stay in Ikaria followed a class I had taken at New York University over the summer which thoroughly familiarized me with issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and migration studies and touched upon techniques for ethnographic research. Consequently, my trip to Ikaria offered me an opportunity to test the techniques for research in ethnography that I had studied in class. The time I spent away from my books was naturally channeled to my informal first attempt at field research.

On my third day in Ikaria, I made friends with—or rather, was "adopted" by—an older couple with whom I had coffee almost every morning for the remainder of my stay on the island. Not only did this offer me invaluable language practice, but it placed me in a advantaged position for ethnographic research because I was not referred to as a ???? (foreigner). Rather, I was included in the village in a way similar to the young adults that live in Athens or the States, but return for the summer. Having discovered my passion for ethnography, I hope to one day return to Ikaria to do formal research on topics such as the construction of Greek (and specifically island) sexuality and the summer as a place of convergence between diasporic identities and permanent Ikarians.

Sincerely, I cannot thank the Foundation enough its support of my studies this summer. By the end of the program, I had reached my goal of being able to speak and write on a wider array of topics, with significantly increased vocabulary and grammatical accuracy and, most importantly, without hesitation. Furthermore, my summer in Ikaria was a turning-point in my life because I realized that I would like to live and work in Europe when I graduate. The fellowship was pivotal to this end because I am confident that with my continued language work at Yale, I will be able to apply for internships and programs in Greece next summer. I wish to convey the deepest gratitude to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation for this invaluable opportunity.