

Personal Statement

Dear USCIS Officer,

Throughout my time in the United States, I have participated in various activities, taken on challenges that caught my interest, and met with individuals to discover what could eventually help me pursue a meaningful life. As part of this journey I reunited with Thé Quân, who was once my secret crush and best friend during high school. Our reunion provided us an opportunity to catch up with each other about random things in life. This fostered our friendship into a romantic relationship and eventually, marriage. For reference, I have attached a timeline that outlines the stages and development of our romantic relationships.

As a couple, we hope to establish our life together and raise our next generation in the United States. As a military spouse, I look forward to becoming a source of emotional, financial, and spiritual support to my husband, an active-duty member of the U.S Army. Obtaining a Green Card, therefore, is a building block to achieve such goals.

Our current situation

Reasons for temporarily living apart

My husband and I are currently living in different cities. Before our marriage, we discussed this issue and agreed that moving in together is critical to our relationship and mental wellness. However, we understand that this plan cannot be implemented immediately for several reasons.

First, when we reunited our careers had already been established: my husband is an active-duty member of the U.S. Army in Texas (Fort Hood), whereas I am pursuing my doctoral study as a full-time graduate student at The University of Alabama. Second, we had several discussions on a relocation plan, which requires either one or both of us to find a new job and housing. Given the mobility nature of my husband's job, we find it difficult to settle down outside of the Fort Hood-Killeen area. Alternatively, I may leave my current program at UA and apply for the same program (i.e., Educational Psychology) in another graduate school that is closer to Fort Hood, Killeen. However, the decision to leave the present Doctoral program is challenging in that funding is not guaranteed; thus, it could impact my income and prevent me from contributing to our marriage. The decision also raises an ethical concern: I break my commitment of time, energy and financial resources that I had made upon my graduate admission. Finally, sudden relocation – be it to Texas or Alabama – can take a toll on our well-being.

Despite the current geographical distance, we understand that this aspect is temporary and have negotiated being together and being apart of our marriage in several ways as listed below.

Evidence of bona fide marriage in the context of a temporary long-distance marriage

1. *Frequent air travel*

In our current long-distance marriage, we committed to visiting each other at least once a month. These visits are flexible in terms of the person who initiates the visit and its duration. In the previous fall semester, I was mostly available from Friday to Wednesday. Hence, I tend to visit my husband in Texas during this timeframe and stay for 5 or 6 days. Alternatively, my husband also traveled to Tuscaloosa to visit me on his leave days.

In this Spring 2022 semester, I decided to enroll in one online class and two in-person classes at the University of Alabama's main campus. This offers a greater degree of flexibility in the way I work, attend school, and spend time with my husband. Since 07/2021, I have traveled to Texas to visit my husband on a weekly- or, when possible, bi-weekly basis.. (Exhibit 1)

2. Joint lives

2.1. Joint tenancy as a commuter couple

A shared space is of vital importance in nurturing romantic relationships. It is also becoming more common for couples in their long-distance relationship to live together in one "main" residence, but one spouse can stay temporarily in different houses that are closer to their place of work. As a commuter spouse, I often plan my attendance for on-campus classes and laboratory duties at UA ahead of time. While staying shortly in Tuscaloosa for in-person academic responsibilities, I rent a room close to UA campus. Other than scheduled activities and the final exam period, I usually live with my husband in Texas and consider his one-bedroom apartment our main residence.

Due to the limited housing opportunities and long housing waitlist, my husband lived temporarily in his friend's house from July to mid-November of 2021. When I visited Killeen during that period, I also stayed with my husband at his friend's house. While staying there, we actively searched for housing in a safe residential area to move into. For all landlords we had contacted, we always asked whether they allowed the tenant's spouses to stay overnight (Exhibit 7). This was important given my frequent travel to Killeen. As a result, my husband weighed the pros and cons of living alone versus with roommates. The latter choice was undoubtedly better. Nevertheless, he was aware of my discomfort with living in an all-men house (if he had roommates) and my need for setting up a professional workspace to study and attend Zoom meetings/classes (e.g., stable internet, silent environment).

My husband ended up renting a one-bedroom apartment and moved in on **11/20/2021** with my help. Although I frequently moved in and out from my apartment as a student, I have never moved into a new house with a romantic partner. Therefore, having the chance to assist my husband in moving into his new apartment was a rewarding experience to me. We took advantage of our spacious studio to create a cozy shared space that reflects the experience of traditional couples living together. For instance, I ordered kitchen appliances and comforters from Amazon to his apartment. We also bought furniture and household appliances together. For example, we bought a desk, a futon, a microwave, LED string light, and so on. This supports not only our sense of shared responsibility but also ownership of space and interdependence in our long-distance marriage. (Exhibit 3)

In early February of 2022, I was able to stay for an extended time with my husband given the flexibility of my class and work schedule. My husband suggested adding me as a co-tenant to his existing rental agreement because we did not want to violate the rules (i.e., the landlord's written permission must be obtained for guests who stay more than 7 days). On **02/25/2022**, my husband and I were named as tenants on the rental lease agreement (Exhibit 2). This means that we not only have "joint and several liability" but also shared responsibilities for maintaining our house. For instance, we go to the grocery and have lunch or dinner together. After that, he is responsible for dumping trash and sweeping the floor, while I focus on preparing our meals. On the weekend or special holidays, we prepare and

enjoy barbecue or hot-pot dinner together in our cozy little apartment. Overall, the apartment has allowed us to create a joint living space that is tailored to our needs and preferences (Exhibit 14).

2.2. *Finances and bills payment*

Building a family is not just living together but also taking each person's financial problems seriously. In the early stage of our marriage, we felt that keeping track of our combined finances can be difficult while living apart. Thus, we discussed and agreed to keep our finances separate. However, we would take turns to pay monthly household expenses. These included but were not limited to plane tickets, hotel/airbnbs, grocery, shopping, and even coffee. Those transactions were mainly made in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and/or Killeen, Texas; those were consistently reflected in both of our separate bank statements (Exhibit 6).

In mid January of 2022, we created a joint bank account given my recent extended stay in our apartment. We agreed to deposit a portion of our income to the joint checking account while still maintaining our individual account. The joint checking account allows us to pay for household and entertainment expenses as we spend more time living together in Texas. (Exhibit 5).

Additionally, we set up a family-line phone plan at AT&T. This is an appealing option for us given that it saves money each month on our phone bill. Our family-phone plan has three lines, including us and my younger brother. Currently, my husband is the primary account holder and responsible for paying the total phone bill (3 lines) (Exhibit 4).

2.3. *Social interactions*

We strongly believe that social network sites, such as Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Imessage and Instagrams are central to our long-distance relationship. Through these platforms, we were able to communicate and nurture our long-distance marital relationship through private and public interactions. Although we frequently call and text each other through private messages, our approach to displaying love is different. My husband is selective about the platform that he chooses to share information regarding our marriage. For instance, he occasionally posts pictures with both of us on Facebook, whereas he is more comfortable posting both of our pictures and my picture alone on Instagram. In contrast, I am interested in public interactions. I tend to share photographs of both of us on different platforms. (Exhibit 8).

As a military spouse, I take pride in my husband's career as an active-duty member of the U.S Army. I am proud of the selflessness, courage, and sacrifice that he has made to ensure the nation's safety and security. When having opportunities to have casual conversation with my colleagues and/or professors, I often introduce my husband to those individuals. For example, I sent an email to my program listserv to inform them about my marriage. Another example is that I presented my husband to Dr. Han and Dr. Walkers, my research supervisors during one of our Zoom meetings. As for my husband, in addition to his family, he also introduced me to his best friend. Although we are mindful of the context and people with which we share information, we believe that a good-faith marriage deserves recognition and congratulations from relatives and those closest to us. (Exhibit 9).

3. *Power of attorney, wills, emergency contact, and insurance*

Trust is the foundation of all activities and decisions that we have made in our marriage. Trust enables us to rely on the other in various circumstances. For example, we have listed each other as the first person to contact in case of an emergency. As an international student, I live far away from my parents; hence, my husband is the closest relative that I am willing to entrust my life to. In the same way, my husband signed a durable power of attorney to designate me as his representative in case of deployment. Additionally, he chose me as the primary beneficiary on his Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI). [\(Exhibit 13\)](#)

Future directions and our intent to live together

To date, my husband and I have made several steps towards our official moving-in together plan. First, as a couple we agreed that my husband would move to Tuscaloosa, Alabama after his military discharge. Second, he would attend the University of Alabama to pursue a college degree. On 02/02/2022, my husband contacted the Veteran and Military Affairs Office at The University of Alabama (UA) by email to inquire about the application process. The purpose of the email is to obtain important information about the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon Program (i.e, cover out-of-state tuition and fees that the Post-9/11 GI Bill doesn't cover) ahead of time. These early email exchanges would provide guidance for my husband as he started his transition from the army to civilian life [\(Exhibit 11\)](#).

Third, my husband has initiated and engaged in his SFL-TAP program. In his Individualized Initial Counseling, he shared with the counselor his interest in selecting Computer Science as a potential undergraduate major as well as his transition to Alabama. [\(Exhibit 12\)](#).

List of Exhibits

Exhibit 1: Timeline spent together (plane tickets) + airbnb booking

Exhibit 2: Joint lease, house overview, and daily activities

Exhibit 3: Bills

Exhibit 4: Phone bills

~~Exhibit 5: Joint checking account PNC bank statement~~

~~Exhibit 6: Bank statements~~

Exhibit 7: Efforts in searching for housing in Killeen

Exhibit 8: Social media interactions

Exhibit 9: Messages announcing marriage.

Exhibit 10: Relationship timeline

Exhibit 11: VMA E-mail

Exhibit 12: Individualized counseling email

Exhibit 13: POA, Wills, Emergency contact, and insurance (DEERS)

Exhibit 14: Residential routine and activities

Exhibit 15: Timeline of our relationship