Fulbright Bulgaria Turns 25

Museums as Social and Educational Spaces

“Empathy Is Something Every Child Should Learn”

Harmonica Diplomacy
The Fulbright Bulgaria Newsletter is a biannual magazine published by the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange (Fulbright) in print and electronically. Opinions expressed by the authors are their own and do not necessarily represent those of the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange. While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the material in this publication, the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange does not accept liability for any errors or omissions.

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Cover photo: Fulbrighters planting saplings at the Commission’s second annual Volunteer Day

Fulbright Bulgaria thanks its sponsors for their support:
Happy 25th Anniversary to Fulbright Bulgaria! It has been a long and exhilarating ride, which I am proud to have been part of since 1996, way back when I was a researcher at Sofia University studying Bulgarian language and folk music. Julia Stefanova and her handful of staff had just a few years earlier laid the foundations of a program that has now grown into a vibrant community of more than 1300 Bulgarian and American scholars, students, professionals, civil society representatives, lawyers, artists, business people, writers, judges, and educators. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Dr. Julia Stefanova for piloting Fulbright Bulgaria through the first 23 years of its existence!

What is in store for Fulbright Bulgaria in the future? Educational exchange is and will remain the core of the Fulbright program, since as Senator Fulbright himself put it: “Educational exchange can turn nations into people, contributing as no other form of communication can to the humanizing of international relations.” However, at Fulbright Bulgaria we have expanded our view of how and where educational and cultural exchange happens and will continue cultivating new programs and partnerships to reflect this. We recognize that we can be inclusive while still being committed to excellence, thus we are actively seeking geographic, socio-economic, ethnic and gender diversity in both the US and Bulgaria, to make sure we are tapping the true potential of both of these complex countries. We are also forging new institutional partnerships and expanding our media presence and outreach efforts, so as to encourage candidates who may never have imagined themselves as “Fulbrighters” to join our community.

To achieve these lofty ambitions, we need the support of all of our alumni and partners – I look forward to working with you all in the new quarter-century to come!

Best,

Angela

Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange

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If you Google “Turning 25,” you’ll find dozens of articles about this milestone birthday. Twenty-five, they say, is the time to take stock of youthful lessons learned and to set the course for the peak productive years ahead.

On April 13, 2018, the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission did just this at its 25th anniversary celebration, reflecting on the achievements of the past, while also proposing a vision for the future of Fulbright in Bulgaria.

The day began with an academic conference “The Shape of Thing to Come: the Post-Human World in the Post-Truth Era,” which focused on universal topics of humanity and truth in relation to future changes in the scientific, social, cultural and economic spheres. Uniting the knowledge and expertise of leading Bulgarian intellectuals, including both Fulbright program participants and partners, the event sought to create an interdisciplinary venue for reflection, discussion and discovery.

In the evening after the Conference, Bulgarian and American Fulbright alumni, representatives of partner organizations, official guests and friends were invited to an evening program and a cocktail reception hosted by Bulgarian Fulbright alumna, actress and TV producer Iskra Angelova. H.E. Eric Rubin, US Ambassador to Bulgaria, addressed the audience, followed by Dr. Ivan Dimov, Deputy Minister of Education, who congratulated the Commission on the occasion. In her welcoming speech, Commission ED Angela Rodel outlined the many achievements of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission over the past 25 years, and also focused on her vision for a future of further expansion of Commission programs, projects, partnerships and outreach. On behalf of the commission, Angela Rodel presented former ED Dr. Julia Stefanova with a statue in the shape of a bird, as a token of appreciation for two decades of work, which allowed Fulbright to “take flight” in Bulgaria.

The evening program continued with a video reel, musical performances and brief presentations by Fulbright alumni Eric Halsey, Agatha Manolova and Stoyan Kiryazov. Winners of the Fulbright Photo and Story Contests, which had taken place online, received their prizes. Guests were also treated by some original music by Fulbright student Kate Conklin, as well as vocal performances by Angela Rodel, Molly O’Keefe and Helena Tatgenhorst (Bulgarian folklore), and by Fulbright alumna Lilly Drumeva (bluegrass).
Fulbright Bulgaria would like to thank all of its alumni, partners and sponsors for their support over the past quarter-century. We look forward to working together in the decades to come!

Nearly 200 Fulbright grantees, alumni, partners, supporters and friends joined the celebration.

US Ambassador Eric Rubin, ED Angela Rodel and Deputy Minister of Education Ivan Dimov

Dr. Julia Stefanova with her statue

Fulbright alumna Lilly Drumeva singing American country music

Nearly 200 Fulbright grantees, alumni, partners, supporters and friends joined the celebration.
On December 15, 2017, the Fulbright Commission held its annual “One Hundred Days in Bulgaria” midterm conference for American Fulbright grantees. Participants were greeted by Commission’s Executive Director Angela Rodel; Natalia Miteva, Director, Programs for Education at the “America for Bulgaria” Foundation; and Scott Righetti, Academic Exchange Specialist, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

The conference began with short project presentations by the current Fulbright researchers, working in diverse fields such as archeology, creative writing, political science, history and international relations. The audience then enjoyed an hour of creative short video presentations by Fulbright English Teaching Assistants.

The conference continued with a short Q&A session led by Terry Cobble, Regional Security Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, who addressed the current political situation and issues of safety and security. After lunch, conference participants met with Katherine Scodova, Regional Educational Advising Coordinator (REAC) for Europe and Eurasia with EducationUSA, who also made a presentation and talked to grantees about different ways to get involved and promote American education abroad. After a feedback session with Fulbright staff, the participants split into two groups for the afternoon part of the meeting.
conference – the 33 English Teaching Assistants discussed issues of cultural adjustment and teen psychology with Dr. Ron Harvey, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Psychology at American University in Bulgaria and Anna Zhukivskaya, Psychologist and Family Psychotherapist; the Fulbright researchers met to discuss their projects and share best practices, contacts and ideas, after which they visited the Sofia History Museum.

The conference concluded with a Christmas cocktail party and a Fulbright Talent Show, which featured the newly-minted “Fulbright Choir,” made up of a dozen grantees and alumni who sang a number of classic Bulgarian folksongs under the direction of ED Angela Rodel. After the show, Fulbright grantees, alumni, staff and board members and guests sang, laughed and danced together to celebrate a successful first semester.

Volunteer Day

As part of the on-going festivities around Fulbright Bulgaria’s 25th anniversary, on April 14, 2018, a group of 25 Fulbright grantees, alumni, staff and friends gathered for the second annual Fulbright Volunteering Day. Last year’s inaugural event was spent helping excavate the 4th-century Bishop’s Basilica in Plovdiv, but this year we focused our efforts on a less urban setting. With the help of the Ekoobshtnost or Eco Community Foundation, the Fulbright volunteers travelled to the village of Hrabursko near Sofia and were taught how to properly plant delicate acacia tree saplings to restore a wooded area that had been decimated by disease. Over the course of a few hours, Fulbrighters planted more than 100 saplings – we hope that they will grow healthy and strong and remain as a living reminder of Fulbright’s 25th anniversary!
The program is supported by the “Plovdiv 2019” Municipal Foundation, in order to help the city prepare for its tenure as European Capital of Culture in 2019. The training includes eleven seminars and practical workshops for museum professionals, as will culminate in the publication of a handbook that summarizes the methodologies, the case studies from the museums in Plovdiv, as well as the results of the workshops.

The seminars familiarize the participants with the theory and methodology, but above all, they will offer practical training for small groups of up to 15 participants. The project represents a unique opportunity for museum specialists in Plovdiv to participate for extended period of time in training seminars, at which to re-think the social role of museums.

“The project represents a unique opportunity for museum specialists in Plovdiv to participate for extended period of time in training seminars, at which to re-think the social role of museums.”

Seminar leaders Maria Karadecheva, Dr. Todor Petev and Meglena Zapreva

Museums as Social and Educational Spaces
Fulbright Bulgaria Helps Plovdiv Prepare for European Capital of Culture in 2019

by Rada Kaneva

The Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange, in partnership with My Museum Foundation and the museums in Plovdiv, has developed and launched a ten-month training project “Museums as Social and Educational Spaces – Practical Training for Work with Various Audiences” aimed at the development of educational and social capacity of the museums in the city of Plovdiv and the region.

The Plovdiv museum education training project grew out of the work of the Bi-National Commission for the Preservation of Bulgaria’s Cultural Heritage, which was established under the auspices of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission after US Secretary of State John Kerry’s visit to Bulgaria in January of 2015. During this visit, Secretary Kerry announced that education and culture was one of a number of key areas in which the US and Bulgaria would engage in strategic dialogue. Over the past two years, the Bi-National Commission has organized a major conference on museum education as well as two smaller practical seminars, and is now actively engaged in developing guidelines for the digitalization of Bulgarian museum collections.
Waffles, chilly breezes and picturesque country views proved to be the perfect backdrop to a critical discussion about the role of NATO and the European Union during the 2018 Fulbright EU-NATO Conference held from February 20-24 in Brussels and Luxembourg. In some ways, the conference was an ideal meeting of east and west, European and American, taking place in cities with vivid historical ties to the end of World War II, the training ground and impetus for the very institutions that desperately sought to clear a better way toward sustainable peace and mutual understanding between nations, including the Fulbright Program itself. Fulbright Bulgaria’s generous nomination allowed me to participate in discussions with fellow Fulbrighters – researchers, activists, scientists, and lawyers – as well as many key actors in the European Union and NATO, which both reinforced my understanding of how these institutions function, as well as allowing me to reflect on the increasingly complicated role they will play in the Europe of today, in an EU that looks with uncertainty and resolve toward the future.

One of our first evenings at the conference took place at the small yet distinguished American Embassy in Luxembourg, where we received a rudimentary introduction to the complicated institutions of the European Union itself by Professor Jerome Sheridan. A reception that followed allowed us to mingle with former Fulbright grantees dating back to the program’s early inception, as well as to begin to discuss our projects with each other more in earnest.

Another highlight took place the next day at the European Court of Justice, where we were witnesses to a court proceeding taking place on the explosive topic of fireworks regulation in the Netherlands. With translation devices embedded in our ears, we looked on during the court’s discussion of the case and heard the burbling channels of translation available, from Dutch to French to English and back again, through all 24 languages of the EU. At the following lunch and reception, we were honored to sit at a table with some of the highest-ranking justices of the European Court, some of whom had studied in America as Fulbrighters, and were able to consider with new eyes the legal dilemmas shared by so many from both sides of the Atlantic.

A true high point for me as a researcher was the opportunity to speak with fellow grantees from across the European Union, and to reflect on their experiences in a changing Europe. It quickly became apparent that at least a third of the cohort of attendees for 2017-2018 is currently working on projects related to migration, political security or asylum, and we felt tangibly the urgency behind our work and the need to engage directly with institutions and stakeholders from the EU and NATO. An impromptu evening gathering of those of us studying refugee issues, in contexts as diverse as Greece, Germany, Sweden, and of course, Bulgaria, allowed us to share the particular struggles faced by the people we work with, as well as to gather valuable insights and create connections for future collaboration.

It was the tireless coordination, welcoming atmosphere and work of the Fulbright Brussels, as well as so many who support Fulbright and its mission throughout Europe, that allowed me to gain so much from this conference. I look forward with bated breath to my next Belgian waffle – and hope to pass on more waffles and insights to next year’s researchers in Bulgaria.
“Empathy Is Something Every Child Should Learn”

An Interview with ETA Emily Paxson

by Iliana Dimitrova

Emily Paxson is a Fulbright | America for Bulgaria Foundation English Teaching Assistants awarded the opportunity to teach in Bulgaria for a second year in 2017-2018. A native of Greenville, Pennsylvania, Emily has a B.A. in International Studies and German from the Miami University of Ohio, and is a keen basketball player, runner and mountaineer. She currently teaches at the “Ekzarh Yossif” Foreign Language High School in Lovech.

Emily, what made you apply for a Fulbright grant extension and stay a second year in Lovech as an English teaching assistant?

Midway through my first year I could sense the end of the year coming quickly. I was starting to feel really comfortable in Lovech. I thought to myself: “If I leave now, those relationships that I have invested time in building will just remain very superficial,” and for me coming to Bulgaria was all about meaningful connections. I really wanted to deepen those relationships — with the students, with my colleagues, and with the community at large. Last year I was just a foreigner walking the streets, no one really knew me, and this year I am considered a local at some of the restaurants, I visit the same wonderful woman from whom I buy orchids (since I cannot seem to keep them alive). I’ve worked hard to become involved in local groups to meet more people — I really feel like I am part of the community in Lovech. I am a small town girl, I grew up in a town of just under 6,000 people, and for me the “small town” experience has enabled me to cultivate relationships on an intimate level.

You are very athletic, I know that you play basketball, you love the mountains, you run — did you succeed in passing some of your passion for sports to your students?

Yes! Sports have always been a very important part of my life. I joke that my parents put me on skis before I could even walk! So when I came to Bulgaria I really wanted to use that passion for sports to connect with my students. I had the opportunity to start some groups at school, and spend a lot of my time outside of school participating in athletics with my students including yoga, basketball, running and attending dance classes.

In your Fulbright application you wrote that you wanted to be “a catalyst for change on how individuals with disabilities are viewed”. Do you feel that you have made an impact during your time in Bulgaria?

For me it’s really important that people are viewed equally, without letting any physical or mental differences build barriers. In my individual experiences, and at times during my travels abroad, I have found that the social view of
disabilities was very different than what was accustomed to on a personal level. This was part of why I wanted to come to Bulgaria – a country different from the United States, where I felt that I could make an impact by bringing my own personal experiences as a person considered disabled. I am missing a total of four of my fingers and am considered 49% disabled by medical standards in the United States. I think “being different” so to speak gave me a greater appreciation for the wide spectrum of human differences. I do believe that I have helped people be a bit more understanding and accepting, and I do think I raised awareness of disabilities, especially with my students. I have become very comfortable with people asking about my hands, in fact it is far more comfortable if they ask rather than just stare. I think the fact that I have been totally candid with my students about my hands has been a great learning experience for them. I have shared with them how I dreaded shaking hands at the end of basketball games with the other team. How the girls would pull away their hands as soon as they got to me so they did not have to shake my hand. I shared how that made me feel, which I think was most important. Empathy is something every child should learn. I developed a thick skin because of it, however that doesn’t mean I didn’t have my fair share of breakdowns because of how people treated me. My parents have never let me use this as an excuse. They instilled in me the mentality that if I wanted to do something, I can do it and nothing is going to come in the way. Ultimately I control the way the world responds to me based on how I respond to the world. I think that a lot of people view disabilities as a hindrance or limitation on achieving one’s dreams, and it shouldn’t be viewed that way. I think it’s very important to celebrate our uniqueness, our differences from each other—it’s what makes the world so interesting.

As we have discussed before the topic of personal disability is still somewhat taboo in Bulgaria, people feel awkward bringing it up, and our country often lacks the facilities to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Yes. I actually personally experienced that “taboo” mindset in my classroom one day. I was teaching and thought I should address the “elephant in the room” about my hands in hopes that the students would then have a comfort level about it. So I put my hand behind my back and called on a student and told him “pick a number between 1 and 10”. So he picks 7, I pull my hand out and say ‘Guys, it’s 1, 2 or 3, I only have three fingers!’ No one laughed, because I think they felt it was awkward. I wanted them to feel comfortable about it, ask questions and gain a personal perspective from someone with a disability. I think it broke the initial tension. I wanted them to know that I was very approachable, especially on this topic. I wanted them to understand that although I was physically different it didn’t change who I was as a person. I am hoping that my short time with these students helped them to develop a level of empathy when it comes to people with disabilities or those who may be different than them. The students in Lovech are absolutely amazing, they are so polite and mature—they are very special students, and I am beyond grateful to know each of them. I absolutely love them.

If everything goes according to plan, where do you see yourself in 10 years?

This is a question I’ve been asking myself a lot lately as I’ve been preparing for life after Bulgaria. I’ve done two internships with the State Department and between that and my time spent abroad I know that I want to work in diplomacy. So in ten years I’ll be, let’s see...34, and by then I hope to have acquired a Master’s degree in International Affairs, and if ALL goes according to plan, I will be living abroad as an American diplomat. I dream of getting into the Foreign Service but it is a very rigorous and difficult process. But that’s the hope!

Fingers crossed for you, Emily, and thank you for this interview! Good luck!
My Fulbright Experience: Seeing the New World in More Than One Sense

by Blagovest B. Blagoev

Only 10 months have passed since the moment I arrived here in August last year. One academic year. But looking back now, it seems like a lifetime. So much happened within these months. Exploring new places, meeting new people, facing a different reality and perspective on life. The two weeks standing between my arrival and the start of the academic year passed in the blink of an eye and here I was - living in a new place, a new environment, with new routines. The change was even bigger considering my switch of fields from Transportation/Mechanical Engineering to Urban Planning.

While still placing my personal emphasis on the field of Transportation, my program and my host school UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago) opened like a new world in front of me. The first semester started, bringing in the first classes - “Planning Skills,” “Geospatial Analysis,” “Urban Place, Space, and Institutions,” and “Economic Analysis.” While all of them interesting, if I am to emphasize one, it would be “Urban Place, Space, and Institutions” - I did not know what to expect from this class. To be honest I expected a very “dry” theoretical series of lectures. Nothing of the kind. The class posed questions I did
not expect, and even if I have asked myself some of them, I never really pursued their answers in depth. “What brought cities into existence?”, “How did the city structure evolve?”, “What makes one street actually a street?”, “What properties define a living unit as a home?”, “What makes a park appealing?” among many, many others. Going through this class, participating in the discussions, analyzing my designated neighborhoods and urban objects, I realized I will never be able to look at the cityscape with the same eyes again. I started (at least to some degree) seeing the thoughts at work behind the urban environment, engulfing us for the most of our lives. It felt like magic, it felt like I have been cured of blindness. Since finishing this class I was able to visit more than half a dozen US Cities, have a look, and get some sense of them. I am not sure I would be able to do the same without this class. I came to really, really wish I could revisit Philadelphia - the first US city of my stay – and get a different, and better look at it with the newly acquired knowledge, for now I feel my first, superficial glance failed to give it justice. I was looking, but not seeing. So different from now.

Going through the fundamentals, the first semester came and went. I almost did not realize when the sixteen weeks were gone. So many new things, combined with challenging intensity and academic loads made time fly fast. Finals came and went, and so did the winter break. The Christmas Concert of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, one calm week on the beaches around San Diego and meeting New Year’s Eve on San Francisco’s Embarcadero crowned the semester’s end, and soon it was again time for studying.

With my fundamentals in place, the second semester was devoted the real thing. “Plan Making,” “Introduction to Transportation Planning,” and my chosen second specialization of “Economic Development” was what it served me, and I was not disappointed. Perhaps there could not be a more inspiring start of a new semester than the introductory lecture in “Plan Making” - bringing us the basics of what it is to be a planner, or as Professor Emeritus Charles J. Hoch described it: “a Professional Dreamer: To live in the feature, but never getting there.” Again, new ideas, new points, new perspectives.

More and more from the sea of knowledge. Within these classes I was for the first time able to bring my own expertise to the table, and see and compare it to the American environment – a priceless experience that raised even more questions to look into. To some of them I found my answers, to others I have yet to search. The new things were so numerous and all of them important that I have difficulties knowing what to focus on. I still need time to put the new knowledge in proper order in my mind. Yet I am already looking forward to the new semester, with its new challenges and new knowledge.

I would like to close with a quote by Daniel Burnham, a quote that I came across many times during this academic year and which has pretty much grafted itself into my thoughts:

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work…”

And so be it! Let’s plan big!
Visiting Scholars

**Dr. Petya Dimitrova**

- **Field of specialization:** Immunology
- **Home Institution:** BAS, Institute of Microbiology
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN
- **Fall 2017**

**Dr. Tanya Dimova**

- **Field of specialization:** Immunobiology
- **Home Institution:** BAS, Institute of Biology
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** Yale University, New Haven, CT
- **Spring 2018**

**Dr. Ana Ganeva**

- **Field of specialization:** Music
- **Home Institution:** Veliko Turnovo University
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** University of Washington, Seattle WA
- **Spring 2018**

**Dr. Bozhil Hristov**

- **Field of specialization:** Linguistics
- **Home Institution:** Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** University of Texas-Austin, Austin TX
- **Spring 2018**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivo Topalilov**

- **Field of specialization:** Archaeology
- **Home Institution:** Shumen University “Konstantin Preslavski”
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, NC
- **Spring 2018**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Jivko Kissovski**

- **Field of specialization:** Physics
- **Home Institution:** Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA
- **Fall 2017**

**Prof. Dr. Kornelia Slavova**

- **Field of specialization:** Theatre/Drama
- **Home Institution:** Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** University of Washington, Seattle, WA
- **Fall 2017**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivo Topalilov**

- **Field of specialization:** Archaeology
- **Home Institution:** Shumen University “Konstantin Preslavski”
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, NC
- **Spring 2018**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivaylo Ivanov**

- **Field of specialization:** Medicine
- **Home Institution:** National Reference Laboratory of HIV
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
- **Spring 2018**

**Dr. Julia Stefanova**

- **Field of specialization:** Economics
- **Home Institution:** BAS, Economic Research Institute
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** American University, Washington DC
- **Spring 2018**

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivo Topalilov**

- **Field of specialization:** Archaeology
- **Home Institution:** Shumen University “Konstantin Preslavski”
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, NC
- **Spring 2018**

**Hubert Humphrey Fellowship**

**Dr. Svetla Borisova**

- **Field of specialization:** Substance Abuse Treatment
- **Home Institution:** “Sveta Marina” University Hospital, Varna
- **Host Institutions in the U.S.:** University of California-Davis, CA; Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- **Fall 2017**

**Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society**

**Svetla Baeva**

- **Field of specialization:** Public Relations
- **Home Institution:** Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** Change.org, New York, NY
- **Fall 2017**

**Graduate Students**

**Blagovest Blagoev**

- **Field of study:** Transport Engineering
- **Home institution:** "Todor Kableshkov” University of Transport, Sofia
- **Pursued degree:** MUPP in Urban Planning and Policy
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** The University of Illinois at Chicago, IL

**Deniza Georgieva**

- **Field of study:** Psychology
- **Home institution:** Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
- **Pursued degree:** Masters in General Psychology
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** City College of New York, The City University of New York, NY

**Evgeni Minchev**

- **Field of study:** Law
- **Home institution:** Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
- **Pursued degree:** LLM
- **Host Institution in the U.S.:** Georgetown University- Law Center, Washington DC
Margarita Pavlova

Field of study: Psychology
Home institution: New Bulgarian University, Sofia
Pursued degree: PhD in Psychology
Host Institution in the U.S.: The University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS

Hristiana Videnova

Field of study: Economics
Home institution: Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”
Pursued degree: MAPSS in Social Sciences
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Chicago - Division of Social Sciences, Chicago IL

Non-Degree Research Grants for Doctoral Students

Borislav Momchilov

Field of study: History
Home institution: Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution in the U.S.: Harvard University, American Studies Program, Cambridge, MA
Fall 2017

Evelina Prodanova

Field of study: Organizational Psychology
Home institution: Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Southern California-Marshall School of Business, Los Angeles, CA
Fall 2017

Nominations for Bulgarian Fulbright Grants 2018-19

Visiting Scholars:

Principals:
1. Todor Tanev – Public Policy
2. Georgie Bocheva – Pharmacology
3. Sylvia Nikolova – Public Health
4. Konstantin Balachev – Chemistry
5. Petko Nedyalkov – Astronomy
6. Maya Cholakova – Social Work
7. Alexander Feodorov – Philosophy
8. Georgi Marinov – Military Science
9. Svetla Danova – Microbiology

Civil Society Researchers:

Principals:
1. Oleg Gochev – Mural Art
2. Nikola Yoncheva – Social Work
3. Ivan Vassilev – Museum Studies

Visiting Researchers:

Principals:
1. Delyan Rusev – History
2. Iva Nedelcheva - Communications

Graduate Students:

Principals:
1. Peter Georgiev – Journalism
2. Konstantin Georgiev – Anthropology
3. Mira Stefanova – Business Administration
5. Stoyan Madin - Law

Alternate:
Peter Petrov – Law

Scholars

Brian Murphy

Field of Specialization: Law
Home Institution: Self-Employed Attorney at Law
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia

Jesse Scinto

Field of Specialization: Communications
Home Institution: Columbia University, New York, NY
Host Institution in Bulgaria: American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad

Brenda Tooley

Field of Specialization: Literature
Home Institution: Knox College, Monmouth, IL
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Cyril and St Methodius”, Veliko Tarnovo

Denis Vovchenko

Field of Specialization: History and Political Science
Home Institution: Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, OK
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia

Nancy Virginia Whitehouse

Field of Specialization: Journalism
Home Institution: Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia
## Graduate Students

**Benjamin Bush**  
**Field of Specialization:** Creative Writing  
**Project Title:** Novel on Migration and Cultural Influence in Bulgaria  
**Host Institution in Bulgaria:** Elizabeth Kostova Foundation, Sofia

**Matthew Schueller**  
**Field of Specialization:** Archaeology  
**Project Title:** Entertainment Venues as Network Actors in Roman Macedonia and Thrace  
**Host Institution in Bulgaria:** Balkan Heritage Foundation, Sofia

**Eliza Campbell**  
**Field of Specialization:** Political Science, Arabic  
**Project Title:** Refugee Resettlement and Education in Bulgaria: Mapping the Field  
**Host Institution in Bulgaria:** UNHCR and Caritas, Sofia

**Kristina Frye**  
**Field of Specialization:** Political Science  
**Project Title:** Brain Drain or Brain Gain? A Comparative Study of Bulgarian and Romanian Youth Migration  
**Host Institution in Bulgaria:** Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia

**Ashlee Hart**  
**Field of Specialization:** Archaeology  
**Project Title:** Convening Cultures in Iron Age Thrace: An examination of Indigenous Ceramics and Identity  
**Host Institution in Bulgaria:** National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, Sofia

**Daniel Keifer**  
**Field of Specialization:** History  
**Project Title:** Dissemination of Historical Experiences as an Influence on Bulgarian International Affairs  
**Host Institution in Bulgaria:** Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia

**Isabella Carey**  
**Field of Specialization:** Sociology, History  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Ruse, Bulgaria

## English Teaching Assistants

**Allison Bailey**  
**Field of Specialization:** Political Science, French, Theatre Arts  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Vidin, Bulgaria

**Erica Boden**  
**Field of Specialization:** Finance, Economics  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Silistra, Bulgaria

**Anna Brainerd**  
**Field of Specialization:** Integrative Studies  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Gabrovo, Bulgaria

**Faith Brown**  
**Field of Specialization:** Communications  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Haskovo, Bulgaria

**Emily Donlon**  
**Field of Specialization:** English  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Shumen, Bulgaria

**Emily Enquist**  
**Field of Specialization:** International Business, Anthropology  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Varna, Bulgaria

**Savannah Fortis**  
**Field of Specialization:** German Studies  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sofia, Bulgaria

**Joshua Goldstein**  
**Field of Specialization:** Mathematics, Chemistry  
**Project Title:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Varna, Bulgaria
Megan Lough

Field of Specialization: English
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Vratsa, Bulgaria

Chinmayi Manjunath

Field of Specialization: Mathematics, Philosophy
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Montana, Bulgaria

Maureen Marsh

Field of Specialization: Russian Studies, Educational Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Pravets, Bulgaria

Amanda Mayer

Field of Specialization: Political Science, Diplomacy, Spanish
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Vidin, Bulgaria

Marcus Michael

Field of Specialization: ESL, Linguistics
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Kyustendil, Bulgaria

Lindsay Mickles

Field of Specialization: Intercultural Communication, Visual Communication
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Tajia Moertle

Field of Specialization: English Literature
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

Emily Paxson

Field of Specialization: International Studies, German
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Lovech, Bulgaria

Thomas Petrino

Field of Specialization: Political Science, Creative Writing
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Dobrich, Bulgaria

Aaron Ross

Field of Specialization: Business Administration, Finance, Insurance
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Panagyurishte, Bulgaria

Claire Russel

Field of Specialization: International Relations, French
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Razgrad, Bulgaria

Keegan Scott

Field of Specialization: International Studies, Turkish
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Galabovo, Bulgaria

Brian Shouse

Field of Specialization: Political Science, History, Philosophy
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Pleven, Bulgaria

Helena Tatgenhorst

Field of Specialization: Geosciences, Biological Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Ruse, Bulgaria
Peering out the window of my bus to the city center, I thought about the seminar’s topic, “The Future of Work,” and wondered how I could contribute to a meaningful and productive discussion about a topic I thought I knew little about. As the seminar unfolded, I would learn that each of our personal and professional backgrounds enabled us to share unique perspectives and facilitate a truly stimulating discussion on this topic of great importance.

After I checked in, there were two hours before the opening dinner, and so I dropped my bag off in my room and immediately went to explore the heart of Brussels. As I strolled down the main pedestrian boulevard, I was met by all the sights I had been told to expect; waffle shops, french-fry stands, and chocolate stores were as numerous as pizzerias in Manhattan. Eventually I arrived at La Grand-Place, the city square, and was instantly struck by the stunning gothic architecture speckled with gold trim and glistening in the afternoon sun. After taking a mental snapshot of this breathtaking view, I made my way back to the hotel and got ready for dinner and introductions.

After meeting a handful of the other participants, we all sat down to enjoy dinner and listen to opening remarks by Erica Lutes, director of the Belgian Fulbright Commission, as well as Tim Rivera, a representative from the
Delegation of the European Union to the U.S., and then we each made our own introductions. I was impressed by the cohort of seminar participants and our various backgrounds. From journalism and animal science to economics and robotics, a broad array of skillsets had been brought together in order to exchange knowledge and discuss possible solutions for the future of work in an increasingly technology-dominated workplace. After dinner, Erica surprised us when she had a friend pull up to the hotel patio with a waffle truck and started dispensing these delightful treats faster than we could eat them! Fully satiated, I made my rounds and started to get to know as many people as I could. Over the course of a few hours, I met so many incredible people from various countries such as Lithuania, Malta, and Spain. By the end of the night I already felt like I had made some new friends, and I was excited to begin our work together the following day.

We kicked off the first full day of the seminar with some opening remarks from Walter Parrs (U.S. Mission to the European Union). This was followed by a plenary and subsequent panel discussion, with speakers such as Alison Crabb (European Commission), Andrea Glorioso (European Commission), and John Breidenstein (U.S. Mission to the European Union) framing the topic for our breakout sessions. After a short coffee break, we divided into three groups to discuss some prompts that were given to us. The question that my group seemed to focus on was the following: In an ever more quickly changing world, how can we know what the “skills of the future” will be and how can we make sure to be/remain prepared for the needs of the labor market? After much deliberation, a consensus began to take shape that seemed to point toward pre-tertiary education reform as a crucial component of preparation for a rapidly shifting job market. We identified a need to break down barriers between different school subjects and make the classroom a more multidisciplinary environment that allows students to incorporate principles from various fields. It is our belief that this will foster enhanced creativity and the ability to more readily adapt to rapidly shifting work environments and job markets.

Following another round of panel discussions and breakout sessions, we made our way to a reception at the U.S. Mission to the European Union. The evening began with a few remarks from Christina Tomlinson, Minister Counselor for Public Affairs. Afterwards I had the opportunity to make more acquaintances and speak with some participants I had not yet had the chance to engage with. It was a great opportunity to share experiences with other Fulbrighters, as well as many Europeans from around the continent. As a Fulbrighter, I am, of course, accustomed to meeting foreigners, but I have rarely been able to talk with people from Germany, France, Poland, and Spain all at the same time! It was fascinating to hear the multitude of different perspectives and experiences pour forth as we talked about topics ranging from sports to politics.

Once the reception was over, we formed small bands and embarked on a mission to experience the Brussels nightlife. It didn’t take long to convince me that Belgian beer has no equal, and that the frites (fries) are nothing to scoff at. More importantly, though, we were able to form stronger connections while sharing personal stories from our past along with our hopes and dreams for the future. I found myself inspired by the fact that, no matter what part of the world we came from, we all had a similar vision for the future we would like to help create as fledgling professionals.

The next day followed a similar routine. We concluded with each group presenting the results of their breakout sessions, along with some words from Richard Tibbles (European External Action Service) and Christina Tomlinson (U.S. Mission to the European Union). We spent the last night solidifying friendships and taking in as much of the city as we could with the time we had left. Of all the incredible adventures I had during my time in Brussels, nothing was more memorable than sitting in the middle of La Grand-Place, surrounded by new friends and marveling at the beauty of guild halls and gothic spires bathed in soft, glowing light. As I boarded the plane to Sofia, I thought of these friendships and felt confident in a bright future, knowing that all of these incredibly gifted people would continue working to achieve it.
In the American Movie Musical course, we examined the genre with regard to artistic significance, technological innovation, cultural expression, and identity. We studied and viewed ten movie musicals, ranging from Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*, a few of the Fred Astaire and Gingers Rogers classics, the French movie musical *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, as well as Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. During the course of the class, we all had independently viewed the 2016 film *La La Land*, and we could then easily identify how this modern-day movie musical was influenced by the films in our curriculum. It was always interesting to have the opportunity to steer the discussion to any parallels in Bulgarian film or culture, as well as the distinct cultural differences between the two. We talked at length of shared racial issues and how artistic expression can be usurped by a majority population with no regard or recognition to the original creators. We also discussed the unique place dance inhabits these film, particularly in the earlier movies of the 1930's and 1940's. It was a rewarding class full of thoughtful discussion and historical discoveries, not only for the students, but for myself as well.
The theater course Theater without Text met once a week for twelve weeks in a workshop setting, exploring monologue work through many different text sources. Our work primarily focused on Bulgarian folk songs as monologue texts, Shakespeare monologues in English, monologues of Socialist Realism, as well as contemporary monologues from the British and American dramatic canon. Working with the third-year theater students at NBU was a great joy! They were a wonderful group to work with: intelligent, hardworking, reflective, and respectful. We worked together to explore the assigned texts, and together, we uncovered how the evolving nature of the English language connects its users to the relationship between language and power. Through monologue work and discussions, students were actively engaged in the learning process to critically examine their own and each other’s pronunciation of English words, their inflection, and the meaning of the language.

The applied voice lessons that I taught focused mainly on American Musical Theater literature and were held weekly. The particular challenges in teaching these voice students was to encourage the use of their head and mixed voices in a way that matched in tone and volume with their chest voices. The material ranged in these individual sessions. Students performed standards of the American Songbook (George & Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter), iconic songs from the Golden Age American musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and more contemporary 21st century musical theater material. The students loved exploring this song literature. The ten voice and theater students shared a workshop performance at the NBU Art Gallery in late May 2017.

In addition to my academic responsibilities, I also led an ambitious and enthusiastic group of students in love with musical theater in a workshop at the American University in Blagoevgrad with the Broadway Performance Club. We had a lovely afternoon exploring song as monologue and musical theater voice techniques, and I had a wonderful time with them.

On a more personal note, family came and lived in Bulgaria for seven weeks during my Fulbright grant. They had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the Bulgarian culture and the summer atmosphere in Sofia—we had a wonderful time! During this stay, my wife and I performed a duo piano concert at the National Academy of Music in mid-May 2017. We had a lively appreciative audience comprised of students, friends, and colleagues. Additionally, I had visits from two of my American college students who visited Bulgaria on their spring break to explore Sofia with me, and we had the unique opportunity to attend an event dedicated to Holocaust Remembrance Day at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria.

In the midst of preparing to embark on my Fulbright journey, I had been informed that the musical I wrote in collaboration with my Sage colleague and friend Matt McElligott—Backbeard: The Musical—was selected for production at the New York Musical Festival (NYMF) following a rigorous application process. As a Grand Jury Selection, Backbeard received five performances in NYC in July and August 2017, just blocks from the heart of Manhattan. This incredible opportunity not only awarded Backbeard the opportunity to share its message with a new and much larger audience, but it also allowed dozens of college-aged theater artists the chance to work in New York theater for the first time. We could not have asked for a better teaching and showcase opportunity.

My Fulbright experience has played a transformative role in my life in innumerable ways, both professionally and personally. I enjoyed all of the tasks and activities I did at NBU and learned from each of them, despite the difficulty and intensity of the work. I deeply value the opportunities I had to observe music and theater rehearsals in Bulgaria, and to recognize the differences from the methods by which we carry out these processes in the United States. I value every chance I had to interact with Bulgarian academics, theater professionals, music teachers, and students. I have learned so much from each and every one of them. Nothing is more rewarding than observing the professional growth of young student musicians and actors—a journey from feeling unsure about the material I was assigning to them to ultimately becoming confident and competent in their performances. It is so true that “to teach is to touch a life forever.”

While my Fulbright experience has not been without its challenges—both academically and personally—I am grateful for the time spent and the perspectives gained in Bulgaria. I have made new friends and colleagues, found talented and curious students, travelled a beautiful, richly-cultured country, attended many music and theatrical performances, and discovered much about myself. It was a deeply rewarding experience. I can’t wait to go back!
Yane Sandanski Science and Mathematics High School, Gotse Delchev

by Yane Sandanski SMHS staff

This is the beginning of the school anthem of the Yane Sandanski Science and Mathematics High School, Gotse Delchev. The fates of thousands of students and many teachers are interwoven in these four verses—numerous students and teachers who have engraved their bright traces and glorious deeds on the prosperous existence of the school.

The Future is what belongs to us
”...Our dear school, you are a ford during turbulent Bulgarian times
you are our cherished memory,
our collective spirit and divine blessing.....”

Yane Sandanski Science and Mathematics High School in Gotse Delchev has a 97-year history. It was a successor of the prestigious pedagogical school in Serres, which played a significant role in the cultural and national rise of Bulgarians from Macedonia. On October 1, 1920, the lower secondary school became a high school, with its first principal Iliya Baltov, who obtained his higher education in Switzerland. Even at that time, the school had all the necessary equipment and amenities, along with innovative teachers with progressive perceptions. It turned into a school that continues to keep the balance between long-established traditions and indispensable modernity. In 2012, the building of the high school was renovated under the project “Renovation of the Educational Infrastructure in the Municipality of Gotse Delchev.” The school has a modern European vision with richly furnished classrooms, computer laboratories, a modern sports base, an assembly hall, and an impressive library.

Yane Sandanski High School has successfully worked on projects supported by America for Bulgaria Foundation. In the 2016/2017 school year it won an ABF School of the Future project and modernized the school environment by creating a Multifunctional Center for Natural Studies and Mathematics. Principal Elka Bozhikova joined the “School Leaders Academy” program to help directors implement tools for effective leadership, apply 21st century pedagogy, establish a professional school community at school, and obtain new approaches by introducing project-based learning. Ms. Gergana Sharlandzhieva and Ms. Ekaterina Todorova, both senior teachers at the school, participated in the Educational Leaders’ Training Program, a program for teachers where educators were taught new pedagogical approaches and were encouraged to promote collaborations between professional teachers.
During this school year, the school has a valuable asset: a Fulbright|ABF English Teaching Assistant from North Dakota, Nathan Jacobson. During English class, he helps our students develop their communicative skills, build confidence in using the English language, and improve their pronunciation. Meanwhile, Nathan also helps high students prepare for various competitions, as well as for various exam formats. Nathan has chosen to come to our country not only because of its natural beauty and temperate climate, and not merely because of our magnificent traditions and the magical power of Bulgarian folklore, but also because of his desire to dedicate himself to one of the most significant and satisfying professions, that of a teacher. We believe that Nathan, who will be staying for a second year in AY2018-19, will motivate our students even more and contribute to their future success.

In addition to what has been mentioned so far, Yane Sandanski SMHS is the most reputable school preferred by students from four municipalities. Currently, 750 students are trained in 30 classes with profiles including the natural sciences, humanities, technology, foreign languages, and social sciences. The school is the place where teachers, students and parents feel accepted, supported, and share common values. The highly qualified and motivated teachers and managers accept the challenges of the new era, implement ICT technologies in the educational process and are open to the positive and innovative changes in education. The educators at Yane Sandanski are determined to develop and improve their level of competence and professional expertise through qualification courses related to the new trends in education.

Furthermore, our students enjoy successes in various fields. Many have successfully competed in the regional Olympiads in Chemistry and Environmental Preservation, Biology and Health Education, Information Studies and Technologies, Mathematics, Bulgarian Language and Literature, History and Civilization, Physics, Philosophy, Astronomy, and English. The participation of Yane Sandanski SMHS students at the National Olympiad in Chemistry and Environmental Preservation once again confirmed the undeniable fact that we are a factor not only at the regional level but also at the national level. The excellent grade (6.00) in Chemistry received by Krastyo Draginov from the 12th grade gave him the undisputed right to participate in the Bulgarian team at the International Olympiad in Chemistry, where he was awarded a bronze medal for his excellent performance.

For the people involved in the educational process, school is a place where young people should be prepared for the real life. They should see the future as a time that is not too far away, but rather is coming very soon. Therefore, everything that happens in the classroom must be practical, interesting, and dynamic. It is understandable that young people have an urgent need to recognize reality with its true problems, shortcomings and opportunities. Yet, some of the traditional methods do not allow each young person to reveal their potential in a specific field of study and that is why, at our school, more teachers try to utilize role-playing games, dramatization, small group work, discussions, debates, and project work to allow students to learn and grow through a variety of educational methods.

As of this academic year, Yane Sandanski Science and Mathematics High School in Gotse Delchev is included in the list of innovative schools in Bulgaria after approval by the Council of Ministers, with two classes where innovative interdisciplinary lessons will be conducted in the Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Information Studies and Technologies, English Language, Bulgarian Language and Literature, History and Civilization.

Yane Sandanski Science and Mathematics High School, Gotse Delchev – a school with an indomitable spirit that manages to cope with all the challenges of its time!
Sarah Perrine, a Fulbright Fellow in Bulgaria in 2002-2003 and current member of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission Board, founded the Trust for Social Achievement, a Bulgarian NGO working with socially disadvantaged communities, in 2012. In October 2017, the Trust for received an “Outstanding Contribution” award from the United Nations for its project “Urban Planning – Everybody Wins.” The “Sustainable Cities And Human Settlements Awards” (SCAHSA) is an annual worldwide prize awarded by Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS) and supported by UNEP. It is focused on promoting the mission of GFHS and enhancing the implementation of post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals by recognizing Awardees and recommending their prominent progress and valuable experience over the course of a more sustainable goal. The Trust’s prize-winning project promotes access to land, basic services, infrastructure, and urban legislation in Kyustendil, Peshtera and Dupnitsa. Moreover, TSA’s work to zone and legalize Roma neighborhoods includes community-based action groups, introduction of green and public spaces into urban planning and access to basic services such as safe drinking water, sewage systems, and waste removal. These are important first steps toward the creation of socially inclusive, resilient, and economically prosperous towns and cities.

Judith Michelle Hill, Fulbright Scholar to the Bulgarian National Academy of Arts in 2007-2008, received a faculty grant for studying character animation using After Effects. She was also recently awarded professional membership to Women in Animation, and nominated to National Geographic’s Student screening board for digital storytelling.

Fulbright graduate student Teodor Stanilov graduated with honors from the MBA program at Emory University, Goizueta Business School, and was admitted to the “Beta Gamma Sigma” honor business society. He was also presented with the “Rigor” core value award, which is a peer award received for professional and personal commitment in the pursuit of excellence.

Dan Fellner (Fulbright Scholar to the American University in Blagoevgrad in 2014-2015) received a Fulbright Specialist grant to Indonesia during the spring 2017 semester and lectured at six different universities around the country. His host institution was Ngurah Rai University in Denpasar, Bali. Following the grant, Fellner wrote a column for the Arizona Republic about the importance of the Fulbright program around the world.
Dr. Stefka Kancheva, specialist on Orthodox Christianity, published a research paper on “Virtual Museum of Russian Bells in Bulgaria” as a part of the Digital Preservation and Presentation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage Conference. The paper was co-authored with T. Todorov and G. Bogdanova. As in previous years, Dr. Kancheva took part in national and international conferences, including the Fulbright Open Lectures and the Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar.


Professor Dobrinka Georgieva from South-West University, Blagoevgrad, received Bulgaria’s largest Erasmus+ grant for her Speech Pathology Program, which supports co-operation with prestigious US universities like Michigan State University (MSU), East Carolina University (ECU) and University of Pittsburgh (UP) and includes US PhD students coming to Bulgaria on one-semester exchanges. This work is a direct continuation of her 2012-13 Fulbright fellowship at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. Recently, Professor Georgieva coordinated another Fulbright Specialist project on “Voice Disorders and Instrumental Voice Assessment” with Professor Robert Orlikoff from East Carolina University.
Walking down Boulevard Patriarch Evtimiy, I often passed a fellow playing harmonica, with a Styrofoam bowl in front of him collecting stotinki. The first few times, I thought he wasn’t playing an actual tune. Then one day, I recognized “Oh, Susanna.” I pulled out my harmonica and sidled up next to him, playing along.
We became friends, of a sort. When I needed a break from searching for and translating folktales, I’d wander up the street and play harmonica with Roman. He thought it was funny that an American woman spoke Bulgarian and was interested in folk culture. He told me jokes and stories, along with his opinions on Bulgaria and the world. I even used one of his stories in the “Blagolazh,” the joketelling and storytelling competition in Gabrovo. Here it is:

Clever Peter’s horse was plodding up a hill, pulling a cart.

“Ugh. I do not feel like pulling the cart up the hill,” the horse said.

The cart said, “Olele! I’ve never heard a talking horse before!”

And here’s another he told me:

Clever Peter was invited to be the best man at a wedding. He went to the restaurant for the party, but it was raining and on the way, his trousers got spattered with mud. When he arrived, he was completely ignored, see, he had all this mud on his pants. He saw what the situation was, you know, he was clever [Roman tapped his head]. He went home and changed his clothes.

When he came back, everybody said, “Clever Peter! Great to see you, come on in!”

Clever Peter asked what there was to eat and drink. “Roast lamb, whisky, rakiia, whatever you want!”

He was served and began to pour the whisky on his clothes, to smear the roast lamb all over his suit.

“Peter, what are you doing?”

“Feeding my clothes. Obviously, you invited them and not me.”

While I loved my official Fulbright research in the archives of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies and at the National Library, I treasured the everyday connections I made with people like Roman, people who might never have met a Bulgarian-speaking American storyteller. I’m deeply thankful for these experiences.