Fighting Fake News with Media Literacy

Blues Without Borders
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Jeffery Warner  
Head of Teacher Support  
Teach for Bulgaria

**FULBRIGHT BULGARIA STAFF**

Angela Rodel  
Executive Director  
arodel@fulbright.bg

Anastassia Miteva  
Financial Officer  
amiteva@fulbright.bg

Tanya Petrova  
Accountant/Cashier  
tpetrova@fulbright.bg

Maria Kostova  
Program Officer, Bulgarian Grantees  
mkostova@fulbright.bg

Iliana Dimitrova  
Program Officer, ETA Program  
idimitrova@fulbright.bg

Rada Kaneva  
Program Officer, U.S. Grantees  
rkaneva@fulbright.bg

Snejana Teneva  
Educational Advisor  
steneva@fulbright.bg

Lyra Konstantinova  
Administrative Secretary  
konstantinova@fulbright.bg

Adrian Zlatanov  
Test Center Manager/IT Support  
stcsofia@fulbright.bg

**Cover photo:** Fulbright ETAs from the Balkans making bread after the Media Literacy Seminar

**Fulbright Bulgaria thanks its sponsors for their support:**

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It is hard to believe that 2018 – Fulbright Bulgaria’s 25th anniversary year – has come and gone! Contrary to the old adage that birthdays only come once a year, we managed to celebrate twice, once on either side of the Atlantic. In April 2018, Fulbright staff, grantees, alums, partners and friends gathered in Sofia to mark the occasion with a conference and concert. So as not to deprive US-based Fulbright grantees and alumni of all the fun, in December HE Tihomir Stoytchev, Bulgarian Ambassador to the US opened the gorgeous Bulgarian Embassy in Washington, DC, to us, where we were treated to a fantastic evening of piano music, speeches, delicious food and wine, and, of course, good company!

In addition to many celebrations, the AY2018-19 has also seen lots of other activities, especially related to various media literacy projects Fulbright Bulgaria has undertaken with the support and partnership of ECA, the US Embassy in Bulgaria, the America for Bulgaria Foundation, the Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria and many others. As Bulgaria once again ranked a dismal 110th out of 180 countries on Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index for 2018 (the lowest ranking for an EU member-state), we at Fulbright Bulgaria find it all the more crucial to teach Bulgarian students basic media literacy and critical thinking skills, while also encouraging them to explore careers in media.

Best,
Angela

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**Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange**

**VISITING HOURS:**
Monday – Friday, 02:00 – 04:00 p.m.
12 Vitosha Blvd, 5th floor, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria
Tel: +359 2 981 85 67  I  Fax: +359 2 988 45 17
fulbright@fulbright.bg  I  www.fulbright.bg
Fulbright Bulgaria hosts a Media Literacy Seminar for 70+ ETAs from Southeastern Europe

Did you fall for that clickbait headline? If so, you should have joined the Fulbright English Teaching Assistants’ Media Literacy Seminar in Sofia from November 1-4, 2018. OK, so those “foreigners” were American English Teaching Assistants, but they were quite a swarm: 32 from Bulgaria, plus 40 of their counterparts teaching in high schools and universities in Romania, Greece, Turkey, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. And on the evening of November 1, traffic in the city did get shut down on the way to a wonderful reception hosted at the residence of the US Ambassador to Bulgaria, Eric Rubin – but as far as we know those protests downtown were not aimed at our two boisterous busloads of Fulbrighters!

On Friday morning, the seminar opened with a welcome address by Deborah Guido, Fulbright Branch Chief for Europe from the US Department of State, as well as greetings from Angela Rodel, ED of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission. World Press Institute fellow Ivan Georgiev, an investigative reporter and news anchor for bTV, the largest private Bulgarian television network delivered the keynote speech: a fascinating if unnerving overview of the media environment in Southeastern Europe, which ended with a stunning excerpt from his own documentary film about press freedom in Turkey. Over the next day and a half, ETAs worked intensively with Newseum Vice President for Education Barbara MacCormack. They also got an inside look at the power of small local media with US Embassy lecturer Ed Kemnick, a long-time editor and reporter. The Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria, who have partnered with Fulbright to create a set of lessons for Bulgarian ETAs to use in class as well as for extracurricular journalism clubs, also presented their materials and elicited feedback from the Bulgarian ETAs, many of whom had already begun implementing the lessons with their students. Besides having a lot of fun, ETAs also came away from these workshops with practical tasks they can immediately put to use in their classrooms.

After intensive media-related work on Friday and Saturday morning, on Saturday afternoon ETAs chose between various parallel sessions addressing ESL and other topics. RELO Jen McArthur once again came to Sofia and delivered excellent...
workshops on teaching speaking, encouraging critical thinking and how to lead discussions on controversial topics. Current US Fulbright Scholar in Bulgaria, Tim Van Slyke, who teaches ESL at Plovdiv University, also led two sessions introducing online teaching resources and tips for working with multi-level classrooms. Courtney Moffett-Bateau, the coordinator for the European Fulbright Diversity Initiative and a former ETA in Germany, offered a very thoughtful session on Diversity and Tolerance Issues in which grantees could share and reflect on the ways their home and host countries differ and how to respond to expressions of intolerance in a culturally sensitive manner.

One part of the fake news headline is true, however – the ETAs did dance on the government’s dime, but we can assure you it was worth every penny! On Friday evening, Bulgarian dancer extraordinaire, Petar Iliev, offered an extremely high-energy workshop. In a mere sixty minutes ETAs who had never before tried Bulgarian folk dancing had mastered the Kukuneshko horo and were swinging and twirling their partners like pros in Dzhinovsko. Well, perhaps not like pros, but much fun was had by all – and after stumbling around and sweating together for an hour, any ice that remained had definitely been broken!

Other cultural activities included an introduction to BEST – the Bulgarian English-language Speech Tournaments, a program founded and run largely by ETAs in Bulgaria. BEST alumna Marieta Milusheva wowed the crowd with her original oratory about “What’s Wrong with Bulgaria,” while BEST leadership explained the program and invited their colleagues in surrounding countries to help recruit students to take part in the Balkan Voices competition in March 2019 at the American University in Bulgaria. While our guests were enjoying BEST, the Bulgarian ETAs had a chance to discuss teen psychology challenges with psychologist Anna Joukivskaia.

On Sunday morning, seminar participants chose between a walking tour of Sofia, a “royal tour” of Sofia with Fulbright alumnus Eric Halsey, and bread-making. During the latter, Bread House Sofia leaders taught ETAs how to make traditional Bulgarian bread, while also encouraging them to “knead” on a topic: what is something you would like to do more often in your life and what steps could you take today to do so? Participants drew pictures in flour, decorated their bread according to this theme, shared their hopes and plans – and even burst into song! Eating the bread is supposed to help make these dreams come true, so we look forward to hearing about all the creative initiatives the ETAs have embarked on after this workshop.

Fulbright Bulgaria would like to thank the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the US State Department for sponsoring this incredible opportunity for our ETAs. We are also grateful for support from the US Embassy in Bulgaria, the America for Bulgaria Foundation, the European Association of Journalists in Bulgaria, and all the other partners who helped make this event possible. Fulbright ETAs in Southeastern Europe are now equipped to teach their students to consume media critically and to fight trolls and troublemakers – which is big news, not fake news!
Fulbright Bulgaria Celebrates a Quarter-Century

by Angela Rodel

On December 7, 2018, the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission for Educational Exchange once again celebrated its 25th anniversary – this time in the US at the Bulgarian Embassy in Washington, DC, thanks to our generous host, HE Tihomir Stoychev, the Bulgarian ambassador to the United States.

More than 60 guests joined us for the festive occasion, including more than 30 US alumni of various Fulbright programs and from different moments in the program’s history, as well as friends and partners from the US Department of State, IIE, World Learning, the Fulbright Association, and the America for Bulgaria Foundation, among others. HE Stoychev opened the celebration with a warm address congratulating Fulbright for a quarter-century of successful public diplomacy, then gave the floor to the Honorable Susan Crystal, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Professional and Cultural Exchanges, who reaffirmed the importance of Fulbright as the US government’s flagship exchange program. Fulbright ED Angela Rodel briefly addressed the group to outline Fulbright’s achievements over the past 25 years and to offer a vision for the next quarter-century, while also...
thank you once again to the Bulgarian Embassy in the US, the State Department, the America for Bulgaria Foundation, our alumni and all of our other partners and friends who helped make this second birthday fete a success!
Hi Lazar, I haven’t seen you perform at a BEST tournament – what were your favorite categories to compete in? Were you any good? :)

Even though I started with Debate, my true passion is Original Oratory, which is an awful lot like a TED Talk. The opportunity to pick something I care about, take the audience on a journey, and teach them about it was truly amazing. And since you ask, I got 2nd place at a national tournament the first time I competed in OO. The second time wasn’t as successful, but we don’t talk about that.

We sure don’t. After spending a couple of years in England doing your bachelor’s degree – what made you decide to return to Bulgaria and BEST?

I suppose at one point of my studies or another I realized that I want to make more of a change back home in Bulgaria. I’d been with BEST throughout my entire college experience so it was a natural step forward to return to BEST and devote as much time as I could to it. In terms of applying for the position when I did, it was really fortuitous timing that I got the chance to do it straight after college.

What are the changes you want to introduce in this organization, and why do you feel they are necessary?

To borrow the old real estate adage, there are three things that matter in a Bulgarian NGO – sustainability, sustainability, sustainability. Since everyone else on our staff is a volunteer (either a Fulbright ETA or a Bulgarian high school or college student), institutional memory isn’t so easy to come by. My primary task for these two years is to standardize and optimize all the processes we have, so anyone coming into the organization can take them up. In terms of financial sustainability, we aim to secure enough revenue streams to allow us to expand programming even more – and that task isn’t easy for a non-profit. Last but not least, we aim to increase our social media presence and make it uniform across all platforms in order to have a solid and consistent reach for lasting impact.

How would you respond to the people who say that Bulgarian teenagers are lazy, functionally illiterate and apathetic?

In all honesty, that impression seems to be spot-on if you’re observing Bulgarian youth in an environment that doesn’t stimulate them. The issue with Bulgaria nowadays is that most of the environments we put our youth in aren’t stimulating. The perspective that most anyone who’s ever come to a BEST tournament has is directly contrary to the one in your question – so it’s all up to us to build a stimulating environment for our youth, and they’ll do the rest and flourish.

Lazar Lazarov became the new executive director of the BEST Foundation in 2018. He graduated from Newcastle University with a bachelor’s degree in Computer Science in 2018, and earlier, from Geo Milev FLHS in Dobrich in 2014. His BEST journey began in 2013 as a debate competitor. In the five years since, he has also been an intern, Alumni Relations Coordinator, Webmaster, Translation Coordinator, and Board of Directors member, while also dabbling in Tournament Logistics. As a relatively recent high school student, the closest he’s been able to get to putting a finger on why students love BEST is this: BEST addresses a glaring gap in the Bulgarian education system. Students need a community which they choose, one with which they identify, and one to which they belong.
Why I Chose Bulgaria as My Fulbright Destination

Dr. Tamara von Albertini, Professor of Islamic Philosophy at the University of Hawaii

by Dr. Tamara von Albertini

We were about 50 km away from the Danube that forms the natural border between Romania and Bulgaria when I noticed that the large Europe map I had kept folding and unfolding during the long trip from Switzerland showed only one bridge connecting the two countries. Moreover, that bridge was 300 km further east in Giurgiu. How can two neighboring countries that share 630 km of the mighty Danube river have only one crossing for motorized traffic? Rather than driving east, south, and then west towards Sofia, my husband and I decided to take our chances with the ferry-boat from Calafat to Vidin. How we eventually made it to Bulgaria after being stuck for 36 hours in a Romanian parking lot is another story. Don’t worry about making this crossing today – there now is a bridge.

We finally entered Sofia on a weekday around 6 p.m. There were hardly any cars, plenty of abandoned construction sites, and no one out in the streets except for packs of stray dogs. The iron sewer covers were missing, leaving gaping holes – they had been sold for scrap metal. As could be expected, everybody was blaming the Roma. Weeds were sprouting everywhere, and even bushes were growing atop homes. The city parks were almost engulfed by wild vegetation. I was profoundly intrigued by all I saw. There was a sense in which nature was taking over the city as if she wanted to reclaim her soil. Until then, I had
always wondered how the Roman Empire could have fallen into ruin within a few decades. Bulgaria was on the verge of full collapse only five years after the fall of communism. Why? The new government may have been democratically elected but was nonetheless dysfunctional. No one seemed to be in charge except for the busy bees in the schools and at the lower levels of administration – who happened to be mostly women. They kept track of transcripts and diplomas, birth and death certificates, marriages and divorces, adoptions, court decisions, property titles and sales, and so much more. All of it with no computers.

Things looked dramatically different when my husband and I returned to Sofia in 1998. Trimmed trees and no more open manholes. Cafes and bars filled with people and open till late at night. Children running in the parks and very urban-looking ladies walking their dogs even after sunset. People felt safe again. Life seemed to have returned to the city. In that year, my husband and I used Bulgaria as our starting point for a research trip on the Silk Road. Hardly any of the new Muslim republics that once formed the southern belt of the Soviet Union had embassies in the U.S. or Bulgaria. How to obtain visas? To our surprise, we found out that the Bulgarian police were authorized to issue them – one of those happy anomalies where some structures of the previous regime coexisted with new ones, and no one seemed to be aware of it.

While waiting for our visas, I took the time to inquire into the rich Muslim heritage of Bulgaria (it had been part of the Ottoman empire until 1878). I was fascinated with the diverse Muslim population it had (ethnic Turks, Pomaks/converted Slavs, and Roma) and by the fact that Bulgaria had witnessed a revival of Muslim schools. I visited two institutions, the Islamic College in Sofia (renamed Higher Islamic Institute in 1999) and an Islamic secondary school in Shumen. They both accepted female and male students and made great efforts also to include science subjects and foreign languages. Also, we traveled to a Turkish village near Razgrad to inquire about the educational opportunities for its children. The teachers were surprised to find out that anyone should care. Their sense was the Bulgarian majority was in denial that they even existed, although government-funded buses were still taking the village’s older students to high schools in the city. I will never forget the question one of the teachers had for me. “Why is it that some people are born in places with no hope of improving their lives?” What should I have said? That everyone could make it if they only tried hard enough? Later, my husband and I heard that some of the village women made the long journey to Turkey on foot to find jobs. Many returned after having suffered unspeakable abuse. I hope that at least some of them were able to rebuild their lives with dignity and respect.

For the outsider that I was, it may have been easier to see that everybody was disoriented in post-communist Bulgaria, whether they belonged to the majority population or a minority group and regardless whether they had fought for change or not. The Pomaks, although they form a minority within a minority, seemed the most serene community. Who is to say, maybe they were keeping their worries to themselves. Generally speaking, no one had a plan, and few knew how to reinvent themselves. And yet, the cultural resources needed to start a transformational process were plentiful. Perhaps, more importantly, the last generation educated during communism was highly skilled, especially in technical fields and natural sciences. Last but not least, women were well represented at all levels of society. In my view, these were some of Bulgaria’s most precious assets. I’m not an expert in nation-building, and besides, I’m a strong advocate for peoples’ right to self-determination. However, something was telling me that I might be able to make a little contribution by teaching Islamic philosophy and, generally, the subject of Islamic Studies...
in Bulgaria one day. Just enough to make young Bulgarians curious about the intellectual achievements, the artistic sophistication, and the cultural refinement of a civilization they usually only associate with the violence and long occupation endured during the Ottoman empire. Considering the Muslim populations living on Bulgarian territory, I find it essential that the majority be able to think of Islam without connoting “Turkish slavery” or the “Turkish yoke,” which are set phrases Bulgarian children learn in school at a young age. There is teaching history, and there is education for peaceful coexistence.

In early 2017, while thinking about my upcoming sabbatical, I realized that the time might have come to finally spend a more extended period in Bulgaria, preferably teaching at St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia’s leading university. Since I had participated in that same year in a Fulbright workshop at my home university in Hawai‘i, the route to take seemed clear. I spent most of the summer ruminating and writing feverishly to meet the Fulbright deadline of August 1. Needless to state how thrilled I was when I found out I was accepted!

The greatest challenge in my application was how to design courses that could help take down barriers between Muslims and non-Muslims in Bulgaria. I was looking for a way to project a scenario where different populations that once fought each other could not only live in the same territory but also proudly share the same cultural landscape. I ended up proposing an undergraduate course with a regional focus and a graduate seminar that links historical inquiries to contemporary issues. Considering that Bulgaria is a European country with Muslim heritage, I thought it might be of interest to offer an undergraduate course using sources once written by Muslims in another part of Europe. The region in question is Southern Spain from where the works of Muslim Andalusian philosophers and scientists exerted great influence on European intellectual and scientific development well beyond the Middle Ages. The course could thus increase students’ awareness of the importance and value of cross-cultural exchanges.

As for the seminar, I proposed a pool of thematic clusters, of which three could be realistically tackled in one semester. For instance, specific problems of Qur’anic studies and the question of Islamic legal reforms. Here the purpose is to show how immensely complex Islamic theology is and why instant fatwas, as they become more and more available on the Internet, are ludicrous; a well-trained Muslim magistrate takes time for reflection before issuing a legal opinion. Another cluster could cover the Sunni-Shi’a divide and its effect on the contemporary Islamic world. To say that Shi’ism is being neglected in current studies of Islam is an understatement. An exploration of this community of 240 million believers and how it differs from the larger Sunni world helps one get a better understanding of the current conflicts shaking Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Finally, Sufism (mysticism), both in the Sunni and the Shi’a traditions, and why fundamentalist Islam is targeting it. This topic would be the easiest to connect to Bulgaria since the country was once littered with ‘Tekkes’ (Sufi lodges), especially the ones from the Shi’a Bektashi order.

I am looking forward to asking my Bulgarian students about their knowledge of Bulgaria’s diverse Muslim population and whether they are aware of Islam’s rich intellectual tradition. Another question is whether they are aware of any Ottoman landmarks that we could visit together (some are right in Sofia!). Also, I am curious whether I might have anyone in my courses who is of Turkish descent, a Pomak, or a Muslim Romani. Doubtless, it would enrich the class discussion. Who is to say, one of my students might feel inspired to research the intellectual and literary achievements of Muslims in Bulgaria. The National Library in Sofia holds one of the largest collections of Ottoman manuscripts outside Turkey and would offer some untapped treasures for such research. Another participant might be interested in exploring the Shi’a elements in Bektashi theology or study the relationships among Bulgaria’s different Muslim communities. The possibilities are many. In my philosophy, teachers plant the seeds, but it is the student who grows the tree.
Dealing With North Korea’s Nuclear/Missile Challenges

As a Fulbright Visiting Scholar to Norwich University in Vermont, I have had the opportunity to become involved in various academic activities organized by the university. One highlight was the Norwich Peace and War Center’s inaugural Peace and War Summit held on September 17-18, 2018. The summit focused on North Korean nuclear and missile challenges, which are currently a central issue for peace and stability for the United States and the East Asian region.

The summit speakers covered the different perspectives of the key stakeholders involved in those challenges, including the United States, China, Japan and South Korea. In his keynote speech, South Korean Consul General in Boston Yonghyon Kim stressed that North Korea’s denuclearization is a prerequisite for peace on the Korean Peninsula. About measures concerning North Korea’s denuclearization, Mr. Yonghyon Kim said, “Even if sanctions were eased, we could simply strengthen them if the North tricks us. For these reasons, I say that the United States has nothing to lose if President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un continue their dialogue, based on a level of trust, after signing on to the broad promise of denuclearization.”
In his address, Japanese Consul General in Boston Rokuichiro Michii expressed his opinion that apart from nuclear weapons, Japan’s most consistent concern has been North Korea’s missiles. Despite the development of a two-layered ballistic missile defense system with the U.S., with many North Korean missiles on mobile launchers, there is no guarantee that Japan can detect every launch and defend against every missile.

In his presentation, Dr. Bruce Bechtol from Angelo State University presented the “US Perspective” paying particular attention to connections between North Korea and Iran and North Korea’s participation in the Iranian nuclear program. As a counterpoint, the “Chinese Perspective” was presented by Dr. Zhiqun Zhu from Bucknell University. While the United States is bent on putting maximum pressure on North Korea, China is more pragmatic and has recently eased all sanctions against Pyongyang. The fact that Kim Jong-Un met Chinese leader Xi Jinping three times in 2018 speaks the sign of how the two have repaired their relations.

After a number of other speakers, Mr. Yonghyon Kim provided an opportunity for all participants to experience Korean culture at Norwich University via a screening of the film, Ode to My Father, and by a special performance of traditional Korean music and dance.

For me, this summit was a great experience. I had the opportunity to meet some of the most prominent specialists on the North Korean nuclear program in the USA. As a lieutenant colonel serving in the Bulgarian military, I had of course known about the North Korean threat, yet I was not familiar with its scale and complexities.
VISITING SCHOLARS

Prof. Konstantin Balachev
Field of specialization: Chemistry
Home Institution: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution in the U.S.: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA
Fall 2018

Assoc. Prof. Georgeta Bocheva
Field of specialization: Pharmacology
Home Institution: Medical University of Sofia
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Alabama-Birmingham, Birmingham, AL
Fall 2018

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maya Cholakova
Field of specialization: Social Work
Home Institution: South-West University, Blagoevgrad
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL
Spring 2019

Assoc. Prof. Svetla Danova
Field of specialization: Microbiology
Home Institution: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Microbiology
Host Institution in the U.S.: The Midwestern University Institute for Health Innovation, Phoenix, AZ
Fall 2018

Dr. Alexander Feodorov
Field of specialization: Philosophy
Home Institution: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Literature
Host Institution in the U.S.: Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN
Spring 2019

Dr. Georgi Marinov
Field of specialization: Military Science
Home Institution: National Defence Academy, Sofia
Host Institution in the U.S.: Norwich University, Peace and War Center, Northfield VT
Fall 2018

Assoc. Prof. Petko Nedyalkov
Field of specialization: Astronomy
Home Institution: University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Washington, Seattle, WA
Fall 2019

Dr. Sylvia Nikolova
Field of specialization: Public Health
Home Institution: Medical University of Varna
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Illinois-Chicago, Chicago IL
Fall 2018

Prof. Todor Tanev
Field of specialization: Public Policy
Home Institution: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution in the U.S.: Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD
Spring 2019

SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE STUDY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Prof. Oleg Gochev
Field of specialization: Mural Art
Home Institution: National Academy of Art, Sofia
Host Institutions in the U.S.: San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco, CA
Fall 2018

Ivan Vassilev
Field of specialization: Cultural Heritage
Home Institution: Balkan Heritage Foundation
Host Institutions in the U.S.: Institute for Field Research, Los Angeles, CA
Spring 2019

Nikoleta Yoncheva
Field of specialization: Social Work
Home Institution: Friends of Karin Dom Association
Host Institutions: in the U.S.: University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Fall 2018

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Konstantin Georgiev
Field of study: Anthropology
Home institution: New Bulgarian University, Sofia
Pursued degree: PhD in Anthropology
Host Institution in the U.S.: Rice University, Houston, TX

Peter Georgiev
Field of study: Journalism
Home institutions: Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”; Newcastle University, UK
Pursued degree: MA in Journalism
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Missouri-Columbia, MO

Elitsa Koeva
Thanks to Scandinavia Award
Field of study: Urban Design
Home institution: University of Tokyo, Japan
Pursued degree: DDes in Design
Host Institution in the U.S.: Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Stoyan Madin

Thanks to Scandinavia Award
Field of study: Law
Home institution: Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”, Department of Law
Pursued degree: LLM in Law
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Texas at Austin, TX

Mira Stefanova

Field of study: Business Administration
Home institution: University of Twente, Netherlands
Pursued degree: MSBA in Business Analytics
Host Institution in the U.S.: Emory University-Goizueta Business School, Atlanta, GA

NON-DEGREE RESEARCH GRANTS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

Iva Nedelcheva

Field of study: Communications
Home institution: Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution in the U.S.: Pratt Institute, New York, NY
Fall 2018

Delyan Rusev

Field of study: Ottoman History
Home institution: Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution in the U.S.: University of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Fall 2018

SCHOLARS

Dr. Mariya Bobina

Field of Specialization: Business
Home Institution: University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Burgas Free University, Burgas

Michael Boock

Field of Specialization: Library Science
Home Institution: Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR
Host Institution in Bulgaria: University of Library Science and Information Technologies, Sofia

Edward Morgan

Field of Specialization: Theater
Home Institution: Freelance Director and Writer, Glendale, NY
Host Institution in Bulgaria: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Timothy VanSlyke

Field of Specialization: Language Teaching
Home Institution: Chemeketa Community College, Salem, OR
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, Plovdiv

Dr. Tamara von Albertini Vassileff

Field of Specialization: Philosophy
Home Institution: University of Hawaii, Manoa; Honolulu, HI
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Christopher Curran

Field of Specialization: Human Rights
Project Title: Empowering Members of Disadvantaged Communities
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Trust for Social Achievement, Sofia

Aleksej Demjanski

Field of Specialization: Political Science
Project Title: Transnational Diffusion in the Fight Against Corruption: Bulgaria, Romania, and the Balkans
Host Institution in Bulgaria: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Conor McCadden

Field of Specialization: Political Science
Project Title: A View From Bulgaria: Domestic Policy Implications of the Perceptions of Russia & the West
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Center for the Study of Democracy, Sofia

Kathryn Mitchell

Field of Specialization: Music (Vocal Performance)
Project Title: Enriching Cross-Cultural Awareness through the Synergy of Bulgarian Folk Song
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts, Plovdiv

Genevieve Ward

Field of Specialization: Art History
Project Title: Religious Syncretism and National Historiography in Bulgarian-Ottoman Architecture
Host Institution in Bulgaria: American University in Bulgaria, Sofia
U.S. Fulbright Grantees  
Academic Year 2018-2019

ENGLISH TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Azlin Armstrong  
Field of Specialization: English, Advertising, Broadcasting  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Kyustendil, Bulgaria

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

Moira Duffy  
Field of Specialization: Nursing  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Shumen, Bulgaria

Aidan Flanagan  
Field of Specialization: Biomedical Sciences  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Kardzhali, Bulgaria

Stephanie Galen  
Field of Specialization: International Economics, French  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Silistra, Bulgaria

Savannah Lusk  
Field of Specialization: Exercise Physiology  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Burgas, Bulgaria

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

Patrick Harchik  
Field of Specialization: Russian, International Studies, Security Studies  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Yambol, Bulgaria

Courtney Ibabao  
Field of Specialization: Biochemistry  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Varna, Bulgaria

Nathan Jacobson  
Field of Specialization: Religion, Sociology  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Gotse Delchev, Bulgaria

Samantha Johnson  
Field of Specialization: Environmental Science, Spanish, Political Science  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Smolyan, Bulgaria

Haig Manjikian  
Field of Specialization: Russian, Humanities  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Vratsa, Bulgaria

Olivia Melodia  
Field of Specialization: Philosophy, Hispanic Studies, Theatre  
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
U.S. Fulbright Grantees
Academic Year 2018-2019

Isaac Miller
Field of Specialization: History, Russian, East European Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

Ian Rush
Field of Specialization: International Relations, History
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Lovech, Bulgaria

Keana Mirmajlesi
Field of Specialization: Biomedical Engineering, Psychology
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Varna, Bulgaria

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

Yuliya Shyrokonis
Field of Specialization: Psychology, Studio Art
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Burgas, Bulgaria

Michael Sowell
Field of Specialization: English, Secondary Education
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sofia, Bulgaria

Margaret Sullivan
Field of Specialization: International Affairs, Gender and Women’s Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Silistra, Bulgaria

William Theodorou
Field of Specialization: English
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Razgrad, Bulgaria

Meghan Walters
Field of Specialization: International Relations, Public Relations
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sliven, Bulgaria

DOMA: the literary journal of Fulbright Bulgaria will launch its first issue in Fall 2019. Founder and editor-in-chief Caroline Murphy served as an ETA in Pernik from 2016 to 2017 and now teaches ESL at the American University in Bulgaria. We are currently accepting submissions for the inaugural issue of DOMA, to be published digitally in Fall 2019, from all current and former Fulbright Bulgaria grantees, both American and Bulgarian. This includes but is not limited to: researchers, students, English Teaching Assistants, scholars, and specialists. We are seeking submissions of poetry, prose, creative nonfiction, and photography. Cross-genre submissions are also welcome, and the primary language of submissions should be English.

Please view our submissions page for more information or contact us at:
domajournalbulgaria@gmail.com
https://domajournalbulgaria.com
I went to scope out Delta Blues Bar that night and saw they had an open jam every Tuesday. It seemed like the perfect opportunity to be a cultural ambassador off campus. But it would have to wait. We were heading to Blagoevgrad the next day to start work at the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG).

My Fulbright project, titled “Communication for Commerce and the Common Good,” sprang from the notion that communication, and especially persuasion, are essential skills for free citizens in a democratic society. Freedom of speech is the freedom to persuade, to advocate for ourselves and our ideas. It’s the basis for free-market economies and social progress.

For me, the study of communication is also deeply personal. I was a quiet kid. Introverted by nature, I never raised my hand in school. Only as an adult did I start seeking ways to express myself.

At AUBG, I taught two undergraduate courses (Dynamics of Persuasion and Strategic Communication) and an Executive MBA course (Business Communication).
speaking workshops for the English for Journalists program and the student-run TEDx and StartUP clubs. There were many rewarding experiences off campus as well, such as a guest appearance on Bloomberg TV and a tour of Sevlievo’s toilet factory.

But I could never make those Tuesday-night jams, because I taught early on Wednesdays. With the semester drawing to a close, I reached out to Delta Blues via Facebook to see if there was another night I could sit in. “What night is good for you?” asked the manager. I suggested early May. “The 16th will work,” he said. “I’ll put you in touch with some musicians.” He gave me the number of Miroslav Naydenov, a Sofia-based guitarist, so we could set up a gig.

Though nervous about making the call, I knew I had to try. I brought my sax precisely for such an occasion. Miro and I worked out the details and decided on a song list. He would hire the band. We’d have a short rehearsal beforehand. And then we would play.

From the blues scene in Chicago, I was familiar with this kind of spur-of-the-moment performance. Blues is an improvised art, but it has a standard repertoire, with familiar riffs and refrains—a kind of universal language. It allowed me to play with musicians I didn’t know, some of whom didn’t speak English. The music brought us together; the gig went off without a hitch. And as I looked out on the crowd of friendly faces at Delta Blues, I recognized the value of being open to life’s possibilities and improvising once in a while. It makes for a good Fulbright.
I have always seen education and art as a tool of liberation, as a way to travel across time, space and borders, and to forge a new way of thinking and a new future. This worldview is reflected in my cosmopolitan life, as well as my carefully theorized scholarly, artistic and entrepreneurial approaches that do not fall within conventional boundaries and which reflect an understanding of global history and African philosophies and art.

Through my multifaceted background in arts and humanities, global affairs and my Fulbright-Schuman fellowship at Harvard, I had the chance to conduct interdisciplinary research in Black Studies and Dance, and to translate my findings for the performing arts stage. In this way, I was able to put theories into motion through my activism for modern black studies in education and dance. I also felt extremely lucky to have the rare chance to become part of the Harvard Dance Center’s various performing arts courses and dance workshops. Through the center’s philosophy, creativity and “performed ethnography,” my engagement with dance in Africa and America – as performance and transnational social and educational practice for informed transformation – has forged connections across various borders.

My academic background and Fulbright-Schuman research opened doors to intellectual worlds in different times, diverse cultures and globalization.
spaces. Harvard provided the best possible home for my interests in interdisciplinary methods and investigations, as it was an ideal site to explore more fully all my ideas and to participate in seminars with Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Sven Beckert, Vincent Brown, Emmanuel Akyeampong and Jacob Olupona. Professor Brown’s study of Atlantic slavery enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the cultural-historical roots of “neo-slave” narratives. Professor Akyeampong’s extensive knowledge of African history and of African spirituality and Professor Olupona’s phenomenology played a crucial role in the development of my ideas.

The United States and Harvard University’s extremely stimulating environment also allowed me to relate my investigations into the iconic and spectral colonial experiment and the marking of bodies and imaginations in Congo to an artistic and social entrepreneurship project. As Fanon wrote: “Africa has the shape of a pistol, and Congo is its trigger.” My previous field research in Africa had already deepened my critical understanding of the complex social process of colonization in Congo and provided new thinking on the complexities of colonial history.

As a researcher and entrepreneur, I also became president and co-founder of a modern black dance art entrepreneurship project NDOMBE DANCE. This investment in a modern social and artistic project on the African continent will make young people aware of the cultural-historical roots of various narratives about Africa, opening them to crossings between scales and horizons of expectation, providing innovative ideas for change, young activism and art talent in Africa with extensive knowledge on how the weakest and the most abject can reshape the world through the power of art and education.
Tradition and Modernity in the Heart Of Plovdiv

by the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts and Angela Rodel

The Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv is one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in Bulgaria, a long-time active member of the Association of European Conservatories, Musical Academies and Higher Music Schools (AEC), International Organization of Folk Arts (IOV), the European Network Euraxess, the Association of Balkan Universities (BUA) and the Central European Initiative for Music in Higher Education. In its educational and creative work, the Academy combines classical and contemporary, traditions and innovations, creates opportunities for practical and creative approaches to art, science and academic knowledge.

The Academy provides high-quality education in the fields of musical-theoretical and performing arts of classical, folklore and modern profile, of visual arts and design, and arts pedagogy, attracting not only top Bulgarian students, but also Erasmus exchange students and other foreigners interested in studying Bulgaria’s unique musical and artistic heritage.

The Academy is located in the iconic architectural reserve of Ancient Plovdiv, which today combines the business rhythm of the big city with the feel of a feast of a tourist destination. It is a natural artistic space and a stage for creative expressions of students and lecturers.

The Academy houses permanent artistic ensembles: a folk choir, a folk
orchestra and a dance ensemble, which allow students of the folklore specialties to practice their performance, conducting and dancing skills.

In terms of facilities, the Academy is attractive not only with its unique architectural features but also with its high quality and abundant equipment, which meets contemporary requirements for education: a large concert hall, exhibition spaces, professional art studios, a specialized academic library with an information center, publishing house, recording and video studio, student dormitories and more.

AMTII-Plovdiv has been a long-standing partner of the Fulbright program in Bulgaria, hosting numerous US students and scholars researching Bulgaria’s folk music traditions. ED Angela Rodel had the honor of studying voice and choral conducting there in AY2004-2005 as a Fulbright-Hays Researcher, while AY2018-19 US student researcher Kathryn Mitchell is currently studying folk singing and dance at AMTII. Kathryn notes:

It has been a privilege to learn from phenomenal teachers and talented classmates at AMTII whose knowledge and love of folk music is elemental to the preservation of Bulgarian traditions.
I am currently a sophomore at Northwestern University, majoring in Economics and minoring in Business. I love every aspect of my college life and I consider my experience a huge success so far. I live on-campus in one of the nicest dorms, which was completely renovated just two years ago. Academics can sometimes be overwhelming, especially at a top-notch university which uses the quarter system. There are exams, quizzes, papers, and homework assignments more or less all the time, depending on the program and the courses. Strategy and time management are key, and that is why I love how academics work at Northwestern.

Extracurricular activities are another important part of my college life. There is an on-campus organization for every type of student. As a former tennis player, I quickly stepped into the management of Opportunity Funds:
the Northwestern Tennis Club and cannot be happier about it. Once I wanted to play at the varsity level, but now I realize that being a leader among friends who share the same passion is much more valuable and enjoyable than being an instrument in the hands of a varsity coach. It was also not difficult for me to become a VP of the Investment Management Club, a career-oriented organization which assists future investors.

I was not looking for an on-campus job, but the job found me anyway. Northwestern Recreation invited me to become an assistant coach in tennis, and as of now I spend eight hours per week working with a variety of players, from middle school to seniors. This job is a great way for me to take a break from studying and put some money aside.

I love Northwestern’s location in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, on the coast of Lake Michigan. The scenery resembles that of my home city of Varna on the Black Sea, except for the skyscrapers. That gives me strength. I was initially nostalgic about Bulgarian food, but there turned out to be a few Eastern European shops and restaurants not far away from the Northwestern campus.

Who knew that being admitted to and thriving in a top-tier university was so easy? Well, not exactly easy, but once you have the right ingredients, you are almost there. Many successful students share similar ambitions and qualifications. Some of these, like me, feel the vast support of their families. But only about a dozen per year get the chance to be sponsored by the Opportunity Funds Bulgaria program. More specifically, OF helped me navigate the entire application process, from the exams, through the essays and documents, to my first footsteps on Northwestern territory. Being selected as an OF scholar implies my potential to be successful in a world-class university, but my family and I would have never have been able to figure out each and every necessary step to tis final destination on our own. The financial support that OF offered also played a huge role in my success story. My family and I are extremely thankful to the US Department of State, to Fulbright, Education USA and everyone involved in the organization of Opportunity Funds Bulgaria, and especially to Ms Snejana Teneva who showed us the way to success. Without the Opportunity Funds Bulgaria program, I would have never been able to enjoy a single minute of my Northwestern experience.

Disclaimer: The text is published in its original and unedited version.
In May 2018, Amanda Petersen (Fulbright│America for Bulgaria ETA, Foreign Language High School in Pleven, 2016-2017) was awarded the Nebraska State Rookie of the Year Award for dedication, service, and excellence during her first year in the classroom. The Nebraska Awards of Excellence Program serves to recognize the contributions of the classroom teacher - identifies exceptional teachers, recognizes their effective work in the classroom, amplifies their voices, and empowers them to participate in policy discussions at the state and national levels.

The Academy of Legal Studies in Business (ALSB) selected Professor George Siedel (Fulbright Scholar, Sofia University, 2001-2002) of University of Michigan, for the 2018 Distinguished Career Faculty Award. The award recognizes members of the Academy who are exemplars of excellence in research and teaching the legal and ethical environment of business. Professor Siedel received the award at the ALSB annual conference banquet on August 13, 2018 in Portland, Oregon. For his outstanding work, Professor Siedel also received the 2018 Executive Program Professor of the Year Award from a consortium of thirty-six leading universities committed to international education.

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Fulbright Bulgaria biology graduate from Georgia Institute of Technology, Peter Penev published a number of articles in highly prestigious peer-reviewed editions: “Translation: The Universal Structural Core of Life,” Molecular Biology and Evolution, Volume 35, Issue 8, August 2018; and “Circular Permutation Obscures Universality of a Ribosomal Protein,” Journal of Molecular Evolution, October 2018, Volume 86, Issue 8. Peter also presented a poster on the 20th NASA Astrobiology Institute celebration at GATech and a poster at the ELSI Astrobiology symposium in Tokyo, Japan.
Jamie Dahman (Fulbright Student Researcher, Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, 2011-2012) is currently an Assistant Professor of Music at Delta State University in Cleveland, MS. During Summer 2018, he curated and edited an anthology of Bulgarian art songs, published by Classical Vocal Reprints. It includes songs by Dobri Hristov, Pancho Vladigerov, Ljubomir Pipkov, Georgi Zlatev-Cherkin, Parashkev Hadzhiev, and Ivan Spasov. A collaboration with Dr. Gabriela Hristova of the University of Michigan-Flint, this 16-song curation is the first such anthology in the United States. In addition to the songs, it includes a brief history of the development of Bulgarian art song, a chapter on lyric diction, and an information sheet about the composers represented in the volume.

In December 2017, the story “At the Center” by Delaney Nolan (Fulbright Student Researcher, Elizabeth Kostova Foundation, 2016-2017) was published in Tin House magazine – the story was finished during her Fulbright grant. In January 2018, she was a Vermont Studio Center fellow and had a residency there for one month. Delaney was a Fulbright specialist at RANEPA (Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration) in Moscow during the summer, teaching creative writing and literature for five weeks. She currently lives in Brussels, where she is beginning to collaborate with Passa Porta, an international literary organization that is involved in refugee issues as a continuation to the volunteer work she did in Sofia and Thessaloniki during her Fulbright grant.

Prof. Ivan Mladenov received the Pythagorean Award – the highest academic award in Bulgaria for Humanities and Social sciences. The award was given to the Bulgarian Fulbrighter for “spreading the knowledge on the American philosopher and polymath, Charles Sanders Peirce in Bulgaria and in Europe”.

https://www.mon.bg/bg/news/3032

(Photo: courtesy of the Ministry of Education website)