



Newsletter

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FULBRIGHT INTERNATIONAL SUMMER INSTITUTE Tryavna, August 13 - 25, 2007



FISI Opening Session: From left to right: Fulbright Commission ED Dr. Julia Stefanova, Stefan Danailov, Mayor of Tryavna, Maria Kostova, Fulbright Commission Program Officer and PAO David Siefkin

The sixth Fulbright International Summer Institute took place in the historic town of Tryavna on August 13-25, 2007. This year, FIS I attracted 45 participants from the U.S., Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Armenia, Croatia, Russia and Azerbaijan.

The participants were offered ten courses in a wide variety of areas: "Negotiation and Conflict Resolution", "Saving, Investing, and Financial Planning", "Starting a Small Business", "An Investigation of Society and Culture as Management

Processes", "Teamwork and Teambuilding", "Intercultural Competence for Students in Global Times", "Communication Management and Managing Change", "American Foreign Policy and the International System in the Age of Globalization", "Globalization: Its Impact on Today's Students", and "Introduction to Bulgarian Culture".

The new group of Fulbright grantees from the U.S. also attended the summer program and studied different aspects of Bulgarian history, politics, economy, tourism, social issues, folklore, literature and the arts.

All courses were taught in English by distinguished American and Bulgarian professors, most of whom were Fulbright grantees and alumni. The lecturers represented prestigious universities and institutions from the U.S. and Bulgaria: Harvard University, the University of Michigan, Cleveland State University, Indiana University, Florida Atlantic University, University of Dayton, Sofia University, University of National and World Economy, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, New Bulgarian University, National



FISI participants in class

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FISI 2007 graduates

Academy of Arts, Media Development Center, etc.

FISI 2007 also offered an exciting cultural program which demonstrated the achievements of Bulgarian culture and the magic of Bulgarian nature. The highlight of the first weekend was a one-day trip to Sokolski Monastery, the open-air ethnographic museum Etara and the architectural reserve Bozhentsi. During the second FISI weekend the participants visited the historic town of Veliko Turnovo.

The educational background of 2007 FISI participants varied from natural sciences and medicine through law, business and economics, to Chinese and Turkish studies. This unique mixture, along with the very positive atmosphere, created a stimulating environment for exchange of knowledge, productive discussions on important and interesting issues, and, of course, a great deal of fun. After the end of the Institute, the participants created their own web-based group in www.facebook.com and organized numerous alumni activities to keep the FISI spirit alive.



FISI photo contest winner

BULGARIAN FULBRIGHT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM

Full name

Home address

Field, Academic Rank and Degree

Present Place and Address of

Employment

Phone, Fax

Type, Year and Duration of Grant

Place and Name of Host Institution

Please complete and return to the Fulbright commission office address.

FISI Impressions

Patricia Schofield

Fulbright Senior Scholar, Law

Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“, Sofia, Bulgaria

In August 2007, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission held its sixth annual Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI), orienting American Fulbrighters to Bulgaria and exposing young men and women from Bulgaria and other countries (Eastern European/CIS/USA) to American-style educational offerings and the Fulbright ideals. As an American Fulbrighter teaching in the law faculty of Sofia University this year, I attended FISI 2007.

What was the FISI program? Outstanding Bulgarian experts – often the „go-to“ person in their respective fields“ introduced the American Fulbrighters to Bulgarian history, ethnic minority issues, arts, letters, archeology in Bulgaria, folklore, and much more. Each lecturer generously shared his personal contact information and offered to provide additional information and help (I have already contacted several of them). The offerings for the young students who attended the Institute covered a variety of topics – U.S. foreign policy, personal finance, negotiation techniques, cross-cultural communication, and other subjects selected with input from the students.

FISI brought together young persons from America, Armenia, Romania, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Bulgaria; American Fulbrighters (both young graduate students and older senior scholars); former Bulgarian Fulbrighters; and other Bulgarian scholars. Although our backgrounds and scholarly interests were extraordinarily diverse, we studied together, ate together, hiked together through the fields with ripe blackberries and a beautiful copper



rakia still, and enjoyed free-time activities ranging from „American Trivia Night“ to visiting local museums to a poetry reading (in English) under the stars by a gifted young Bulgarian poet.

The non-American students enjoyed from the American teaching styles, with requirements to debate, make presentations (one about a wedding in Azerbaijan), defend opinions, and prepare for class discussions. In addition, they learned about the Fulbright program and its opportunities. One applied for a Fulbright after attending FISI. Other attendees have created an on-line community on Facebook and have had two post-FISI gatherings so far.

FISI promotes the Fulbright values of development of mutual understanding and educational opportunity and reaches a larger group of students and scholars than could otherwise be served. The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission's Fulbright International Summer Institute is unique and very special, the only program like it in the world. And, it was just plain fun!

Diary: The Life After FISI

Natalya Fedorova

Undergraduate Student, Education

Omsk State Pedagogical University, Omsk, Russia



... One step, the second one and... I am back home. How do I feel? I don't know. I haven't realized it yet. I am still somewhere there. In a place where I have left some part of me but from which have taken so much too. I am somewhere there enjoying the incredible atmosphere of FISI. Everything there was perfect: wonderful professors and their excellent courses, a lot of charismatic people, exciting excursions, the friendly staff and the flawless organization of the whole thing. And, of course, it's just impossible not to mention that small old town we lived in and its local citizens. Every spot was filled with friendliness and warmth.

... My parents are meeting me at the airport. They are asking me questions like "So, how was it?" and "Did you feel homesick?" and I can't possibly disappoint them saying that I really forgot about the existence of the other world during those 2 weeks. But it is true. And it is not only because at the very first studying week from 9 am till 7 pm I was involved in intensive studying and communicating with a lot of people but because in that terrific place among those wonderful friendly people I felt like home...

... A week has passed since I arrived back here.

What am I doing now? I am desperately trying to concentrate on my studies. A hopeless case... After several attempts to get down to some home assignment I finally decide to give it up. What then? I switch on my PC, load the folder with all the photos and videos and the endless slide-show begins... Here are pictures of many of us having fun in the swimming pool. Hilarious. I also enjoy these ones taken during one of the excursions. And here are some photos taken during the Farewell Dinner. That's unforgettable! Oh, and that's the one taken during one of the discos...Spicy!

... (In 3 hours after that) Okay...now I think I will go to Facebook and have some chat. Oh no! I haven't done my assignment yet. But... I can't possibly feel fine now if I don't keep in touch with my friends and remember everything all over again.

... Two weeks have passed. No changes from the last week.

... Three weeks already. See the note above.

... The present moment. What am I doing now? University studies related? No, again No! I am finishing writing this article now. My aim wasn't to tell you the entire story of how it was. I am only trying to express all my feelings which is much more difficult (but you have already noticed that, I guess :))) I miss everybody and everything so much that cannot be easily expressed with words. Try it yourself to understand it and you will feel what I feel now. It was an exceptional experience for me which I will always remember...

Two weeks of FISl

Albena Todorova

*Undergraduate Student, British and American Studies
New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria*

To be honest, when I was asked to write about FISl, my first thought was "HOW ON EARTH AM I GOING TO DO THAT?" And believe me it is not because I have nothing to say about it, on the contrary. But how can you truly describe a feeling? How can one express the mixture of emotions and the diversity of impressions that I am to carry for the rest of my life?

Actually, it all started as a joke. One of my lecturers from the university asked me if I wanted to attend this year's FISl, and of course my answer was "Yeah, sure, why not!" At first I wasn't very sure what FISl truly is. An International Summer Institute, ok... and so what? But after some further investigation and after speaking to some ex FISl participants, I came to realize it was something more. Something that you have to experience to understand. And so, I applied and I was approved.

My initial enthusiasm started to fade away when departure time approached. I was scared and nervous, constantly wondering "what have I gotten myself into?" I was going to a new place, I didn't know any of the participants, lecturers, organizers... no one. However, from the very moment I sat in the bus that was to be our ride to the beautiful town of Tryavna, all my fears vanished. I keep a very vivid memory of the list of names of the participants and to be more exact, of how long that list was, and since I was on the top of it, due to the alphabetic order, believe me when I am saying that it was a long list of names. And still, the smiling faces that surrounded me were not the faces of strangers - everyone was so friendly that all my worries started to seem stupid and pointless. Needless to say that by the end of the first evening I felt as if I have known some of those people my whole life.

For two weeks, I studied things that were way beyond my field of studies. For two weeks, I had the chance and the privilege to be a student of some exceptional lecturers, each with provocative and strictly individual approach of teaching. For two weeks I have learned more than I ever thought it possible. And not just random kind of knowledge, I am talking about learning things that are completely applicable to my future plans and in life itself. I can start my own

business if I want, or I can convince you to purchase sand, even if you live in the middle of the desert and even better, I know how you may try to trick me to buy that same sand so you might as well save yourself the effort. Been there, done that. That is what FISl can give you

from the educational point of view, practical knowledge! I even dare say that I came to understand foreign policy and why some events occur.

But FISl is so much more than that. Have you ever been in a place, where you actually fit? Well, that is how I felt during FISl. I was surrounded by friends and I was in my own waters. I am so tempted to tell you about my friends from FISl, but that means to start a novel. Indeed, FISl is so much more than just a Summer Institute. It was the turning point in my life. The parallel universe that helped me believe there is something more in life than just a monotonous existence. During FISl I had the chance to really understand my place on the scale of success. Now I do know the competition and how much more I have work and study to be half as good as the people I met.

As I said in the beginning, you have to experience FISl to understand it. It is not something you can explain in words. It is that fuzzy feeling that brings a smile to your face, a sweet memory of a time and place, where you are surrounded by friends of different nationalities and religions that want you to know more about them. FISl is something that you learn to treasure, for it is what makes you feel like a piece of a puzzle, where each piece is different in shape or color but put together fit perfectly in the grand picture. A picture that I will enjoy remembering throughout my life.



Fulbright Office News

CULTURAL ORIENTATION FOR AMERICAN FULBRIGHT GRANTEES



*Official Opening of the Orientation Program
(From left to right: Fulbright Commission ED Dr. Julia Stefanova and CAO Anthony Miranda)*



Cultural Orientation

The cultural orientation for the AY 2007-08 American Fulbright grantees was held at the Fulbright Commission office on September 27 and 28, 2007. It was officially opened by Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission, and Anthony Miranda, Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria.

The orientation was a two-day program including lectures, discussions, a special session dedicated to grantees' practical questions, a visit to the National History Museum and a one-day trip to Sueva Dupka cave, Glozhene Monastery and the village of Ribaritsa in Stara Planina Mountain. His Excellency John Beyrle, Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Bulgaria, and his spouse Joselyn Greene hosted the welcome reception for the new U.S. grantees, their contact persons and Bulgarian Fulbright alumni.



U. S. Ambassador John Beyrle (right) welcomes the American Fulbright Grantees



Trip to Sueva Dupka Cave



At Glozhene Monastery

Out of America

"F--- me." That was the first thing that crossed my mind when I sank into my strange double bed at some hotel in what I assumed was Sofia. I had been in Bulgaria for about 15 minutes. Between the airport and the hotel I had seen nothing but "real" communist buildings, "real decrepit" communist buildings, and a mess of signs I could not read. Or even take a guess at. Ah, here I was.

It was nice out so I decided to go for a walk. I have a mediocre sense of direction -- it gets me by. After two blocks I had never felt more lost in my life. I had never experienced anything like the absolute inability to read ANY street signs. I had an English map -- useless. Trying to match the map to reality was a charming exercise in futility. "Great idea, Brian. Let's move to a country where you don't even know the alphabet." After passing six shoe shops I decided to turn around. I couldn't even find a landmark in this place. Great.

My immediate hopes for the upcoming year were suddenly not very high. Thank God things changed pretty quickly. That evening we had a Fulbright dinner. I met the people that may or may not become my good, so-so, or not-so-good friends during the next year. It was quite a crew. One girl I had already met, who had showed me around town (my first step in the direction of sanity). The rest were new to me. A teacher who looked uncannily like my best friend from home; an artist with the largest sideburns I'd seen since I'd flipped through the hairstyles section of Jon Stewart's "America: Democracy Inaction"; a girl whose name I couldn't figure out; a charming slightly older professor; and, another young guy wearing a three piece suit and sunglasses - at 8pm. The Fulbright director was also there, who had (Thank God, again) waited for me at the airport despite my two-hour delay. Despite the jet-lag and the immediate, unanticipated culture shock, I felt much better sitting down with a group of people in a similar boat. Here we were. Ready to promote cross-cultural communication, foster understanding between nations, and eat things translated as "piece of goat head on a metal plate."

After a week spent sleeping on couches and looking for apartments-- a process during which I realized I did in fact have some helpful, courteous friends here-- I settled down into a charming apartment with its own industrial sized coffee/tea/hot chocolate machine, a full wall-sized forest mural, and a water boiler that was slated to blow up within the next fourteen days. The landlord was amazed by the fact that I

Brian McAllester is an AY 06-07 Fulbright teaching assistant at the First English Language High School in Sofia and a graduate of the English, Religious Studies, and Painting program at Kenyon College, OH.



was from the United States and greeted me with more grandfatherly warmth and affection than I ever would have expected in any country. "He said he will treat you like his own son," my friend translated. I got lucky in this department -- I have since become quite good friends my landlord's family, spent Christmas at their house, and go out with their son for beers weekly.

School was the next undertaking, and I suppose the main reason I was shipped off to Bulgaria. I would be teaching at the First English Language School in Sofia, touted as "the best school in Bulgaria." I did not know what to expect. I wasn't sure what to wear. Hell, I couldn't even find the school on a map. However, my meeting with the director went well. I wore a casual sport coat and felt appropriately dressed. I was not late, although I did have to take a taxi to arrive on time (more about those later). I listened intently. She described unintelligible things about the school's record keeping system and told me it was not a problem that I did not speak any Bulgarian. I told her I was excited to be teaching again and that I would be ready to start in a week. I felt I had earned a little buffer time. I still needed to learn the alphabet.

Things began to fall into place during that last week of unmitigated freedom. I oriented myself with the city, took 1,000 pictures, and learned how to order food. I got to know my fellow Fulbrighters and found a few neat bars in town. I began to notice familiar sights and recognize Bulgarian words. ☺

was an easy first. I saw strange things like street dogs, pizza without sauce, and businessmen poking through garbage dumpsters. I hadn't befriended any Bulgarians yet, but I could wait for that.

Between my first day of school and now, lots of things have changed. I've started learning Bulgarian, have grown to like salads made entirely from tomatoes and cucumbers, and am no longer uncomfortable performing the most otherwise mundane tasks, like buying shampoo or looking for a notebook. I have come to know plenty of my students although I still can't remember all of their names. I have realized that I need to approach my colleagues to initiate conversation. I also realized vodka—and surprisingly, not rakiya—is the quickest way to many of their hearts. I have traveled in and out of the country, and have made cultural comparisons that have been met with revelry, irritation, and ambivalence. I have gone on plenty of dates and have never left one without being confused. I have made plenty of friends and have been constantly intrigued by them. Indulge me for a moment and I will share some of the highlights from the past four months, in the various „categories“ of life, I suppose:

Friends. When you're a foreigner in a country that is friendly towards your own (Bulgarians have been pretty positive towards the US, in general), it is pretty easy to make friends—honestly. You make one friend, then you have two, and then you've met all their friends, etc. You wake up one morning and you've suddenly got 50 numbers in your unreliable, secondhand mobile phone: „Ivan I, Ivan II, Ivan III, Ivan IV“ and a slew of female names all ending in „-ina.“ People are interested in you because you're different. This is great, because people love talking with you. They want to learn about where you're from, how you came to be here, etc. And I want to know the same about them. It's strange, however, because in some ways you're not much more than a novelty. I'm not complaining, though. I have made some really wonderful Bulgarian friends here. People who have gone well out of their way to help me—oftentimes the hapless, clueless foreigner—and in the truly selfless sort of way. These friends I will keep for a long time. Also, I have made a large number of great acquaintances. I probably will not keep in touch with these people, but they are great fun for the moment, and give me a huge range of insight into Bulgarian people's thoughts, attitudes, etc. And, they are always ready to show up at the next dinner, bar, or party. Speaking of which:

Bars. Let's be honest, there probably is no better place for cultural exchange than in bars, restaurants, cafes, clubs, etc. People are relaxed, looking to have fun, and chatty. Subsequently, I try to spend, well, a lot of time at these various institutions. I made this statement at our midterm Fulbright review and some of the people quickly scoffed—„is this guy for

real??“ But then, the Fulbright director said, „No truly, this is one of the best places to learn about people, to meet them and talk with them!“ I smiled and agreed, whole-heartedly. Because it's true. I have had some of my best, most interesting, silly, and thoughtful conversations in bars across the country. With my friends, with the waitstaff, and with random people who we meet. As my Bulgarian progresses, I'm able to talk with more and more people. Plus, a few rakiyas always makes speaking a bit easier. Anyone who has ever learned a foreign language would agree.

School. This has been quite a trip. I arrived at school a few days after it officially began, and was subsequently introduced to absolutely nobody. I hadn't learned the ins-and-outs of anything, really, although the director had quickly tried to give me the rundown. However, when you're staring at a 3-foot long „teacher book“ that is used to keep track of everything in the school, written in a language and an alphabet that you can't even pretend to understand, „catching on“ is a bit tricky. While looking for help, I was startled by the reticence of my colleagues to speak with me. If I was going to have any conversations with anyone—at the First English Language School, where students are supposed to be taking all of their classes in English, and where I thought English chatter would abound—it was only if a) I initiated the conversation, or b) if I could muster up enough Bulgarian to keep a conversation going. I think there was a hesitancy on the teachers' parts to speak English with a native English teacher. This doesn't surprise me, really—if I were teaching French and a French person strolled into my classroom, I'd probably lock up—but despite my understanding, it still frustrated me. Things have changed since then, in part because people are simply getting used to me, and in part—I think—because the other teachers have noticed my concerted effort to learn Bulgarian. They have found my absurd attempts at their somewhat obscure language remarkably disarming, and have since then been much more open, chatty, and welcoming. A little effort goes a long way.

There are so many more things I could share about my time here. In the next newsletter, I will write about my charming, irritating, crazy, and startlingly intelligent students. And, depending on how things work out, I'll share a bit more about my constant confusion surrounding dating in another country. Until then, however, I will end on this slightly cheesy note: Taking everything into consideration—the good and the bad, the easy and the confusing—I have decided that I am extremely glad to be here. Fortunate, even, to be in this strange-to-me corner of the world. I'm looking forward to the rest of my time here, in the newcomer country of a hopeful, confused union, trying to make sense of itself and what it will become—sort of how I feel, really, during my time in Bulgaria so far.

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Please send contributions and comments to:

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