

## Fulbright International Summer Institute Tryavna, August 11 – 23, 2008



*FISI Opening Session:  
Fulbright Commission ED Dr. Julia Stefanova and Eng. Dragomir Nikolov, Mayor of Tryavna*

The seventh Fulbright International Summer Institute took place in the historic town of Tryavna on August 11-23, 2008. This year, FISI attracted 46 participants from the U.S., Bulgaria, Albania, Azerbaijan, Canada, China, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Italy, Lebanon, Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine.

The participants were offered ten courses in a wide variety of areas: "Negotiation and Conflict Resolution", "Starting a Small Business", "Debate. Argue. Reason. Examine.", "American Foreign Policy

and the International System in the Age of Globalization", "Decision-Making and Foreign Policy: Southeast Europe in the Trans-Atlantic Relations", "Public Relations: It Can Make or Break an Organization", "The West and the Others: Western Views of Other Cultures and Civilizations, from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era", "Logic in Continental Tradition", "The Philosophical Issues of the XXI Century" 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.



*FISI participants*



*FISI class*

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*FISI class: lecturer David M. Korn, Phelps Dunbar LLP, LA, USA (center)*



*FISI class*



*FISI class*

All courses were taught in English by distinguished American and European 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, Arizona State University, Graceland University, Sofia University, the American University in Bulgaria, University of National and World Economy, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, New Bulgarian University, Phelps Dunbar LLP, etc.

For the first time, FISI students had a chance to enroll courses that are part of a regular M.A. program. Based on special agreements

with Sofia University and New Bulgarian University, the courses "Logic in Continental Tradition" and "The Philosophical Issues of the XXI Century" provided their students with university credits.

FISI 2008 also offered an exciting cultural program which demonstrated the achievements of Bulgarian culture and the magic of Bulgarian nature. The highlight of the weekend was a one-day trip to Sokolski Monastery, the open-air ethnographic museum Etara and the architectural reserve Bozhentsi.

FISI participants represented 15 countries and their background varied from natural sciences and medicine through law, business and political science, to philosophy. 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. FISI 2008 reaffirmed the validity and potential of the Fulbright idea of building mutual understanding through exchange of knowledge and cultural values. It obliterated cultural differences providing a wonderful opportunity for students and faculty to demonstrate and share their knowledge, professional expertise, teaching and learning skills, enthusiasm and good will.



*At Shkoloto Museum in Tryavna*



*Student performance*

## FISI Impressions

### Aleksandra Krstevska

Undergraduate student, E-business, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius", Skopje, Macedonia

## My FISI experience

**F**ISI 2008 program will stay in my memories forever because of the sincere people, extraordinary experience and valuable knowledge. This may sound as a cliché, as something a participant in any international summer program will write and it may as well be true but here I will write about the things that make FISI different - therefore unforgettable.

### How it all started

I can say it begun before Tryavna, before Sofia, before Bulgaria. Actually it was on "Facebook" almost everyone joined the FISI group, so we started our friendship even before we met. This way it was even more exciting to meet someone in person and than try to continue the conversation we have started online. As a result - from the very first day of FISI 2008 we all felt close friendship.

### FISI spirit

Each and every one of the days spent at FISI could give me enough inspiration to write a whole book, but for now only a quick glimpse of the FISI spirit. During the week we had lectures that were fun and interesting, but most importantly professors were friendly and the barrier between a student and a professor that usually exists was gone. I was sure I could ask about anything and get the most sincere and most complete answer.

Also I was truly fascinated by the open comments made by students about different issues and problems. Many of the opinions were making me see different perspectives and approaches students from different national and academic backgrounds have. The evenings were a lot of fun. It made no importance whether we are by the pool playing cards or at the mehana (restaurant in Bulgarian) either way I had the best time.

### At the end

It is very arguable the usage of the term – end, since I do feel that FISI 2008 hasn't ended and each and every time participants are on the internet help in keeping the FISI 2008 alive. I have participated in many international programs but the only time I cried was at the "end" of FISI 2008. Believe me I am not a big crier, so maybe it is wrong to say that FISI is unforgettable for me - it has become part of me and part of who I am.



### Irena Pereša

Undergraduate Student, Law, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

## A Letter to FISI Organizers

**D**ear organizers of FISI '08, I would like to thank you all for the amazing experience that FISI '08 provided to me (and to all of us). It was a great combination of interesting courses, individual and group work, interactive discussions, sightseeing, art and (last but certainly not least) after hour bonding.

The courses that you offered this year were simply amazing! Having participated to various international seminars previously, I can honestly say that FISI was one of the best (in terms of the academic and also non-academic content). All of the professors were very helpful and willing to engage in discussions (on and off record), the assignments were demanding yet not overwhelming, and it is actually amazing how much we

have learned and discovered in such a short period. Personally, I was particularly thrilled with the US Foreign Policy course, because I was always interested in the Cold War issues and never had the opportunity to participate to any similar course. I was expecting a lot, and I got even more. The D.A.R.E. course was also really interesting and dynamic (not typical for legal courses, I have to say), revealing many talented actors within FISI students! PR was tremendously helpful for me, because I'll be doing both press-releases and job interviews in the upcoming period....and I'll be thinking of Dan's dress-code and other suggestions quite a lot!

Coming to the Negotiation & Conflict Resolution course...well, it made me realize and accept the facts: I am a lousy negotiator! Or at least,



not as good as I should be. Many thanks to prof. Seidel AND my negotiations exercise partners, for revealing this fact and encouraging me to work on it (I most definitely will).

FISI students have all broadened their team-work experience, and made a lot of new amazing friends! It is not always easy to work in a team under pressure – I am sure each one of us learned how to compromise for the benefit of the whole. Another thing that we have learned is that competing is more fun than actually winning the competition! Especially if you are part of the awesomest (I know that's not a word) team ever, where people look after each other and bring tons of watermelon in emergency cases...!

I am also really proud of our (I am sure Ted wouldn't like me to call it Ted's) art performance project, that for most of us it was a once in a lifetime experience. Lying in the street, all sticky, for a long time....all for a higher purpose....that's no piece of cake! It is hard to describe the vibe in the air after we all stood up and realized what we had just done.

Now, I would be very unfair not to mention the DELICIOUS food at the hotel restaurant. I have to admit that I fell in love with Bulgarian cuisine, and that I will never forget my mornings with "banicas"....what a way to start a day...!

What starts smoothly usually ends up even better – I am sure most of the students will agree that the best part of the FISI days were – nights. It is still really hard to believe I actually had tons of fun while listening to turbofolk music – and it just means that people around me were just too good to be true :)

It is because of everything aforementioned, that I will always think fondly of FISI '08. I am already daydreaming about trips to Baku, Walla Walla, Bucharest, St. Petersburg, and other cities that I had a small taste of, in Tryavna. I will also be expecting FISlans in Croatia!!!

Thank you all once again, people. It was a true pleasure.

## Nelli Rayanova

Undergraduate Student, International Business, Omsk State University, Omsk, Russia

# What is Fulbright International Summer Institute (Fisi) in Bulgaria?

***It took only two weeks of my life but those were two weeks of the greatest time I have ever had. Now I have friends in almost every capital of Eastern Europe, numerous fond memories in my mind and a new and very valuable line in my Resume.***

After two long days of traveling from Sofia to Omsk I am at home now in Siberia. I am feeling like in exile because I am far away from Tryavna, Bulgaria, from all of my new friends. I still cannot start thinking about something else than FISI: our classes, our presentations and preparation for them till late at night, our parties, evenings near the pool at the Sezoni hotel, our art performance on the central square in Tryavna and many other precious moments that I will enjoy remembering throughout my life.

It is really hard to put in words all that I feel about FISI because you must live through it to understand it. What does FISI mean to me? FISI is from 3 to 6 one- and/or two weeks very interesting courses that you can choose yourself according to your interests in a wide variety of subjects. FISI is a way to experience American style of teaching as courses are taught by professors from top universities in the USA, including Harvard University, and Bulgaria. FISI is an exchange of knowledge and opinions among people from different countries with different backgrounds. FISI is a chance to get in touch with Bulgarian culture, people and nature. FISI is new friends all over the world... Now I have friends from Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Croatia, Albania, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Italy, Lebanon, Turkey, China, Canada, the USA.... I was the only from Russia. FISI is a hard time studying sometimes but just real fun for all two weeks it lasts... and FISI is something else...something that is hard to explain. When young people from different parts of the world, all

inspired by the opportunity to see, to learn, to understand something new, gather together in a small but comfortable hotel in a nice town somewhere in the middle of Bulgaria up in the mountains and are studying, working on the projects, hanging out, eating together that creates truly incredible atmosphere. That makes you think and feel differently about everything that is going on around you and gives you new ideas about what you are going to do in your life. People from other countries are not just abstract notions anymore, but real persons, very talented, very interesting, very creative and all of them are your friends now, whom you miss so much. It was a terrific experience in my life and I think more people should try it.



## Fulbright Office News

### Cultural Orientation for American Fulbright Grantees

The cultural orientation for the AY 2008-09 American Fulbright grantees was held at the Fulbright Commission office on September 25 - 26, 2008. It was officially opened by Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission, Sherry Keneson-Hall, Cultural Affairs Officer and Board Member, and Errick Goodman, Security Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria.

The two-day orientation included lectures, discussions, a Q & A session, 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 Mountains. Her Excellency Nancy McEldowney, Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Bulgaria, attended the welcome reception in honor of the new U.S. grantees on September 25, 2008.



*Official Opening of the Orientation Program  
(From left to right: CAO Sherry C. Keneson-Hall, Errick Goodman, Security Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria, and Fulbright Commission ED Dr. Julia Stefanova)*

*Cultural Orientation*

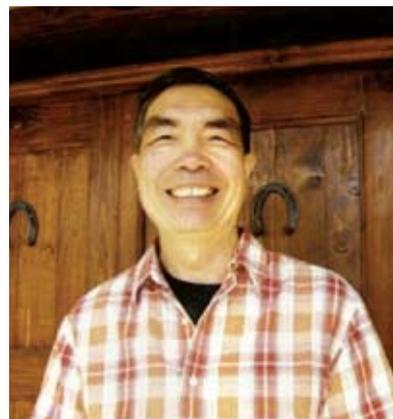
*U. S. Ambassador Nancy McEldowney (left) welcomes the American Fulbright Grantees; Dr. Julia Stefanova, Fulbright Commission ED (center); Prof. Kamen Velez, Fulbright Board member (right)*

### Painting in a Changing Culture

#### Exhibition of Brad Guarino and Christopher Zhang

*Works created at their Griffis-Orpheus Residency in Polkovnik Serafimovo, July 2008*

**B**rad Guarino holds a master's degree in fine arts from the University of Connecticut. In AY 2006-2007 he came to Bulgaria as a Fulbright graduate student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia. He has also been in Bulgaria as a resident of the Orpheus-Griffis foundations' Artists Exchange Program. His preferred genre at present is mainly narrative figurative works dealing in masculinity.



**C**hristopher Zhang was born in China, Chanhui. He has been living in the United States for 20 years. He is a professional artist. He took his BA in the East China University and his MFA in Rhode Island College. He is mostly working in the field of painting focusing on the local landscape and the local people. This is his first visit to Bulgaria.

## To Chicago and Back

### Nadezhda Varbanova

Fulbright graduate student at Harvard Law School, Cambridge, MA  
Major: LL.M. (concentration in corporate and commercial law)  
AY 2007-2008

I worked hard to deserve the honor of being a Fulbrighter. And I do not regret the sacrifice.

I am a student at Harvard Law School.

Not many people had dared to aim so high. But I did. And thanks to Fulbright, Harvard is not a dream. It is a reality for me. This is not just an end post in a long run...this is also the beginning of a life of responsibility to always be up to the standards of Fulbright and to one of the best law schools in the world.

I had never before been to the States. Therefore, the orientation program in July 2008, sponsored by IIE, was a very useful introduction into the education system of the US, the legal order and the details which a student needs to be familiar with at the outset of university studies. The program was organized at Georgetown University in DC. It was a very well balanced mixture of classes in political sciences and law, as well as workshops on immigration law issues and settling down tricks. We had a panel of former LL.M. students who provided useful hints to adjusting to US academic life and choosing classes during the academic year. There was plenty of time for social interaction, for studying and sightseeing. At the end of the four week-program I felt that I was ready for my studies which began only a couple of weeks later.

Massachusetts is the centre of the world knowledge. You think this sounds too bold? This is what I myself thought before coming here. Now, I very much agree with that statement. And it is not exaggerated at all. Cambridge and the area are a home of some of the best and world renown universities. To mention only some of them – Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Wellesely College, Lesley University, Boston University...and so many more. Boston is also a center of medical sciences and research. Moreover, it is one of the cultural capitals in the States. It hosts and blends different people, ideas, lives and art. And after spending some time here, you feel like having seen the whole world in just a few months.

Being a student at Harvard is not only an academic privilege. It is a responsibility. And every day people work for the honor of being part of the "crimson" world. It is also a life - time experience of living and studying among some of the brightest students and professors in the world. The university has vast resources and applies them to make students' life easy and productive. There are plenty of social activities, so there is no risk of feeling home sick or not having anything to do. My LL.M. class includes representatives of sixty-seven



world nations. It is an amazing sample of cultures, languages, personal profiles, dreams for the future and experiences from the past. After the program, I would have friends from all over the planet. This alone is a major asset. And a great cultural experience.

In addition, Fulbright organizes a series of enrichment seminars in different locations in the US. This is a very good opportunity to interact with other Fulbrighters and to get a variety of samples of American life and culture. I am looking forward to going to New Mexico. The seminar is dedicated to the presidential election system and process in the US. 2008 is a very exciting year for the States since in November Americans vote for president. The campaigns have already started and are heating up. It is quite interesting to be in the midst of the debates and to follow the progress of the individual candidates.

On a final note, my Fulbright year in the US is a high hill in my academic life. I took it as a challenge and I will have it as a life-long memory.

## Out of America

# A Fulbright Experience in 4WD

**William Porter**

Director of College Counseling, Freire Charter School, Philadelphia, PA

Fulbright Exchange School Administrator, Aprilov National High School, Gabrovo, AY 2007 - 2008

The rental car agency had made a mistake and given away the Suzuki Swift that I had reserved a month earlier. As the desk agent offered a variety of other subcompacts as a replacement, I finally was able to have her understand that I can only operate an automatic transmission, an essential feature of the Swift. Despair filled my mind as I knew that departed Swift was the only automatic rental car I had found after searching a dozen agencies. Sensing my woe, the agent comforted me by telling me that she did have another vehicle with an automatic transmission in stock, and that even though it was in a different vehicle class, she would give it to me for the same price as a consolation. Eagerly I asked what it was, and she pointed out the window to the sweetest ride on the lot: a Suzuki Grand Vitara 4WD.

During my six weeks in Bulgaria on my School Administrator Exchange, my Suzuki 4WD and I were inseparable. While most of my fellow Fulbrighters thought I was absolutely insane and possessing some sort of death wish for driving on Bulgarian roads as a foreigner, I would not have toured Bulgaria any other way. Sitting up high behind the wheel of that Sport Utility Vehicle (or "Jeep" as they call all SUVs in Bulgaria), I accumulated hundreds of kilometers driving from coast-to-coast and almost everywhere in between. At the time, having 4WD granted me access to more adventures than I could have had with a subcompact—like driving off-road through the woods of the old Gradishte Fortress up in the hills of Gabrovo! Now, after reflecting upon my time in Bulgaria, I see 4WD as a metaphor for a way of living one's life in Bulgaria.

Even though people around the world do not have the best view of Americans these days, I think many Americans live their lives in 4WD. By this, I mean that the people of the United States have had—at least historically and the current looming recession aside—an optimistic view of both the country and each individual's potential in that country. Be it through parenting or schooling, young American children learn that they can be anything they want to be if they work hard enough. The possession of a home, two cars, multiple electronic gadgets, and a closet (or two) full of clothes seems to be a right guaranteed to all Americans along with the greats of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

For better or worse, Americans are taught that they can overcome any obstacle that gets in their way. This cultural attribute makes some deem us to be determined while others see it as pushy. Our cars are a great symbol of this spirit nonetheless. Immediately, one can imagine the enormous (by European standards) SUV 4WDs in America, vehicles that probably fill the driveways of at least fifty percent of American homes. These SUVs give us freedom, access and the mental state that we can run over any obstacle that gets in our way. The names alone—Pathfinder, Explorer, Expedition, Land Cruiser—convey a sense of limitless potential. While I have never thought about it before until my Fulbright, these 4WD vehicles represent



*Talking about college*

very specific values of American life. I do not even drive an SUV back in the States but this 4WD mentality is a part of me by essence of being an American. This mentality is also something I discovered was absent from the Bulgarian culture.

If 4WD SUVs define the landscape of American roads, Bulgaria is awash in a sea of subcompacts. These petite cars are not ones that scream, "I can take on any challenge that comes my way!" Rather, these cars represent a way simply to get from Point A to Point B in life. Their small size allows them to go unnoticed as they slip down the side alleys of Sofia, avoiding the spotlight of the main arteries. During my six-weeks in Bulgaria (which was my second visit, but not my last as I am currently in Bulgaria again as I write this), I observed the Bulgarian people collectively to act in a similar manner as these vehicles. Bulgarians seem to take each day as it comes with little belief that they can change the paths of their individual destinies. Obstacles in life are viewed as insurmountable, permanent, and almost cynically relished as part of the Bulgarian *joie de vivre*.

To illustrate this point, I vividly remember first moving to Gabrovo for my exchange. The town itself was absolutely adorable. Divided by the Yantra River and situated at the foot of the central Balkan Mountains, natural beauty mixed with a bustling commercial district and a colorful history in a harmonious juxtaposition. While I was nervous to be so far from the capital and my long-term boyfriend, Nikola, living there (he always saved me from many translation messes!), I felt lucky to have the opportunity to reside in such a magical place. The magic quickly disappeared, however, when I was shown the apartment reserved for me on the outskirts of Gabrovo. As I pulled the Suzuki into the apartment complex, I saw that weeds and



*Students*

abandoned cars littered the parking area. Graffiti—mostly referencing the names of American rap artists—marred the entrance and lined the walls of the corridors. Inside the apartment, I discovered that the phrase “luxury apartment” did not translate internationally, for here luxury signified the presence of an iron in the apartment—even if it did not have a refrigerator.

I knew I could not spend six weeks in an apartment like this since back in Philadelphia a neighborhood like this would be one where you drive through it as quickly as possible out of fear for one’s safety. Nik and the realtor, however, explained to me that this was your typical Bulgarian apartment outside of a major city like Sofia. I was shocked that people would find it acceptable to live here and demanded to see other places—even if that meant having no where to live temporarily but a hotel. Well, I must have seen a dozen places—none to my liking and I have pretty simple taste! Each time the new realtor would say in essence: this is Bulgaria, get used to it. Yet, I could not accept my plight, for I had a 4WD mentality. I absolutely knew there had to be a place out there for me, one with a refrigerator, a stove, internet access, working plumbing fixtures, and a clean façade. In the realtor community, I became known as the “demanding American” because I refused to settle for what was considered acceptable by Bulgarian standards. I was truly shocked that I, a simple American educator, could ever be considered particular in my tastes since I live so meagerly back home. I refused to be the subcompact car in my mindset, and I persevered until I found the most beautiful house. Sitting on a hill overlooking downtown Gabrovo, my house was breathtaking with its fruit trees, wildflowers, rose garden, stone walls, and even sheep in the neighboring pasture. I loved every second in it, but I only achieved it because I was willing to push through, in 4WD, every obstacle that got in my way.

Another example of the difference between the American and the Bulgarian mentality comes from the perspective each has on his native country. In the United States, people rarely blame America for their ills and misfortune. As Americans, we might blame our parents, our bosses, our spouses, and sometimes even rightly ourselves. In Bulgaria, however, Bul-

garians seem to savor pointing the finger at “Bulgaria” for all that ails them. “Bulgaria” I would hear time and time again as if the country can transform itself into some person, some person who is actively plotting against you. From one’s wife cheating on him to not winning at the casino, Bulgaria is to blame. With a mentality such as this, how can one ever overcome the obstacle if one cannot escape it? In the United States, if one blames his spouse for his failures, he gets a divorce. If one blames his parents, he stops speaking to them. One plows his ways through his problems in the United States to get on to a brighter side of life. In Bulgaria though, by blaming the country—something inanimate—one will always be able to play the role of a stagnant victim.

With great pride, I was able to witness during my Fulbright exchange perhaps the greatest show of moxie, of 4WD determination, in decades in the arena of Bulgarian public education. For almost my entire stay (and lasting well past my return to the States), the Bulgarian school system was shut down on a strike. Teachers finally freed themselves of their subcompact mentality of laying low and taking each day as it comes and began to question the system and demand real change. Being paid virtually nothing, the teachers collectively realized that accepting their circumstances in life was no longer satisfactory. The ideas of “this is Bulgaria, accept it” and blaming “Bulgaria” rather than the true sources of one’s problems went out the window as teachers seized a 4WD spirit and sought to run over any obstacle that stood in their path of getting a better life.

It is clear, however, that living one’s life in 4WD is still a novel concept here for most. It took three weeks before the Ministry of Education even considered the possibility that the teachers would be steadfast in their strike. Apparently, remaining determined in one’s fight against the system has not gone well in the past as people give up standing out in the spotlight and quickly fold back in the predictable and comfortable steady stream of invisible subcompacts. Yet, the strike went on—well after I left Bulgaria at my Fulbright’s end. It was inspiring to see teachers hold rallies to fight for their rights. At my exchange school, teachers united and felt unified with their educator brothers and sisters across the country. In the end, the teachers might not have received everything that they wanted, but they did learn to find their voice and to use its power.

I look forward to many more trips to Bulgaria over the years and having the opportunity to see its market economy grow, its middle class ascend, and a can-do attitude flourish amongst the country’s citizens. Life will be good in 4WD.

*Aprilov National High School, Gabrovo*



The Bulgarian Fulbright

## Newsletter

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