

## Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2009-2010

On June 25, 2009 the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission held a one-day pre-departure orientation for the Bulgarian Fulbright grantees who are to study, lecture and do research in the U.S. during the academic year 2009-2010.

Recipients of grants for AY 2009-2010 are 6 senior scholars and 7 graduate students. The director of a non-governmental organization for the promotion of citizens' initiative was awarded the Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society. We are particularly proud that for a second time a Bulgarian scholar has been selected to participate in the highly prestigious New Century Scholars Program.

The Fulbright Commission expresses its gratitude to the U.S. Fulbrighters in Bulgaria for their participation, comments and practical advice.

We wish all grantees a very successful and rewarding experience in the U.S.



Pre-departure Orientation for Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees, AY 2009-2010, June 25, 2009

### Senior Scholars

1. Georgui Dimitrov – *Sociology*
2. Ivan Mladenov – *Bulgarian Studies*
3. Damianka Getova – *Pharmacology*
4. Petya Osenova – *Computer Linguistics*
5. Nikolai Naidenov – *Political Science*
6. Svetlana Nedelcheva – *Applied Linguistics (English)*

### Graduate Students

1. Antonia Gurkovska – *Art (Thanks to Scandinavia Scholarship)*
2. Georgui Tsonchev – *law*
3. Dimitar Kaldamukov – *Law (Corporate Business Law)*
4. Dimitrina Dimitrova – *Communications*
5. Maria Ivanova – *Law (Antitrust Law)*
6. Kristina Stoyanova – *Art*

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### New Century Scholars Program

1. Elena Marushiakova – *Ethnology*

### Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society

1. Daniela Bozinova – *Bulgarian Association for the Promotion of Citizens' Initiative*

## Fulbright Office News

### NAFSA 2009 Annual Conference & Expo Los Angeles, CA, May 24-29, 2009

The NAFSA 2009 Annual Conference on "Fostering Global Engagement through International Education" was held in Los Angeles, CA, on May 24-29, 2009. Over 7,500 international educators from more than 100 countries discussed the most crucial topics in international education and exchange today, from study abroad and international student and scholar advising to global education trends and international education policy.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus, visionary founder of the Grameen Bank who leads a global network aimed at ending poverty around the world and journalist Ray Suarez, senior correspondent with The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, were among featured speakers.

A major highlight of the conference was the International Edu-



From left to right: Jakub Tesar, EducationUSA advisor, Czech Fulbright Commission; Hana Ripkova, Executive Director, Czech Fulbright Commission; Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, and Snezhana Teneva, Education USA advisor, Bulgarian Fulbright Commission.



Bulgaria's stand at the Education USA Country Fair.

cation Expo Hall, which featured exhibitors representing more than 450 organizations from around the world, including colleges and universities, study abroad and intensive-English programs, embassies and government agencies, and more.

Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission and EducationUSA advisor Snezhana Teneva attended the conference and made use of the many opportunities to obtain new information, network and promote the Fulbright Program in Bulgaria. Bulgaria was represented at the EducationUSA Country Fair with a special stand which was visited by over 200 participants.



Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, made a presentation on the activities of the Fulbright Commission at Veliko Turnovo University on May 12, 2009.



Meeting of ED Dr. Julia Stefanova with students from Harvard University, members of the WorldTeach organization, and representatives of the Step for Bulgaria Foundation, on June 23, 2009.

## FULBRIGHT INTERNATIONAL SUMMER INSTITUTE 2009 August 10-22, Tryavna, Bulgaria

The Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) is an academic and cultural program created by the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission in 2002. FISI offers one- and/or two-week intensive courses in a wide variety of subject areas. All courses are taught in English by distinguished professors from the U.S., Europe and Bulgaria, and are addressed to undergraduate and graduate students, university faculty and professionals. This year FISI is scheduled to take place from August 10 to August 22 in Tryavna. Prospective participants have the unique opportunity to make their own selection of courses. A tentative program with brief course descriptions and biographical notes for the lecturers is posted on FISI website ([www.fisi-bg.info](http://www.fisi-bg.info)). Applicants can choose between the following courses:

### Business, Economics and Finance

**Course 1:** The Financial Crisis: What Insights Can Modern Microeconomic Theory Provide?  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Dr. Ann Fender, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA, USA

**Course 2:** Challenging Times in Capital Markets and Strategies for Saving & Investing  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Dr. Chenchuramaiah Bathala, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH, USA

**Course 3:** Multimedia Business Case Studies  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nancy J. Scannell, University of Illinois at Springfield, Springfield, IL, USA

**Course 4:** Investment and Portfolio Management  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Dr. Miroslav Mateev, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

**Course 5:** International Career Planning in a Globalized Economy  
**Lecturer:** Dr. Gary L. Schnellert, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND, USA

### Political Science and Philosophy

**Course 6:** American Foreign Policy and the International System in the Era of Globalization  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Dr. Mark Kramer, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

**Course 7:** Decision-Making and Foreign Policy: Southeast Europe in the Trans-Atlantic Relations  
**Lecturers:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dinko Dinkov, University of National and World Economy, and Stoyan Stoyanov, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria

**Course 8:** Contact-Conflict Zones in Southeast Europe  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Benedict DeDominicis, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

**Course 9:** The U.S. Since 9/11  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Roderick A. Ferguson, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, MN, USA

**Course 10:** Logic in the Continental Tradition  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Gungov, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria

**Course 11:** Technology of Imagination  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kristian Bankov, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

**Course 12:** The Philosophical Issues of the XXI Century  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lidia Denkova and Prof. Dr. Hristo Todorov, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

### Law

**Course 13:** Negotiation and Conflict Resolution  
**Lecturer:** Prof. George Siedel, University of Michigan, Ross School of Business, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

**Course 14:** D.A.R.E. --- Debate. Argue. Reason. Examine.  
**Lecturers:** David M. Korn, Phelps Dunbar LLP, New Orleans, LA

**Course 15:** The Regulation of International Business  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Jason W. Levine, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

**Course 16:** Protection of Human Rights in the Council of Europe  
**Lecturer:** Dr. Maria Zhurnalova-Jupunov, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

**Course 17:** The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Dr. Paul Newman, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA

**Course 18:** European Union Citizenship: Current Trends and Developments  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Jo Carby-Hall, University of Hull, and Diane Ryland, University of Lincoln, UK

### Social Studies, Communications and Media

**Course 19:** Public Relations: It Can Make or Break an Organization  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Dan Fellner, Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA

**Course 20:** Human Impact on Environmental Science  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. James E. Hollenbeck, Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, IN

**Course 21:** Media and Globalization: a Multidisciplinary Approach  
**Lecturer:** Dr. Miglena S. Todorova, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

**Course 22:** Projects Writing and Projects Management  
**Lecturer:** Danail Danov, Media Development Center, Sofia, Bulgaria

**Course 23:** Web 2.0 4 U: How to Handle Information Technologies in the 21st Century  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Plamen Miltenoff, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN

### Art and Culture

**Course 24:** Prospering in Tough Times: How Does a Young Person Summon Up the Compassion, the Focus, the Strength, and the Wisdom to Launch New Careers during These Difficult Times?  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Timothy J. Ilg, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH

**Course 25:** Immigration, Education, and National Identity in the United States, 1890-1955  
**Lecturer:** Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Mirel, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

**Course 26:** The Art of Seeing (Honing an Artistic Vision; Capturing an Idea with a Click)  
**Lecturer:** Martha Grenon, Freelance Photographer and Graphic Designer, Austin, TX, USA

**Course 27:** Regional Culture in the United States  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. James Deutsch, Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Washington, DC, USA

**Course 28:** Visual Semiotics  
**Lecturer:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Boyan Dobrev, National Academy of Arts, Sofia, Bulgaria

**Course 29:** Byzantine Religious Art and Architecture in South-Eastern Europe  
**Lecturer:** Dr. Clemena Antonova-Crombois, American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

### Bulgarian Studies

**Course 30:** Introduction to Bulgarian Culture (history, politics, economy, folklore, literature and the arts)  
**Lecturers:** Team

Deadline for applications: April 30, 2009

If you want to participate in this event, please visit [www.fisi-bg.info](http://www.fisi-bg.info) for practical information and application forms. You can also obtain general information from: Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange, 17, Alexander Stamboliiski Blvd., Sofia 1000, Bulgaria, Tel.: +359 2 980 82 12; E-mail: [rkaneva@fulbright.bg](mailto:rkaneva@fulbright.bg)

## To Chicago and Back

### Myuzhde Myumyun Fulbright graduate student, East Asian Studies Columbia University, NY AY 2008-2009



*Myuzhde Myumyun in front of the Columbia University*

I have been already for four months in New York, at the Columbia University, and I'm very glad to be one of the lucky Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees that had the chance to be in touch with the American culture particularly in New York. In the last six years I have lived in many countries, like Germany, Russia and China. However, New York is the peak of my best experience abroad. With the arrival in New York City one can feel the metropolitan culture and the multicultural mixture of people of various backgrounds. New York offers a rich cultural and social life that is incomparable to any other city in its variety.

What did impress me in New York since I arrived? The New Yorkers; the lifestyle in the city; the Metropolitan Opera; the New York Ballet; the New York Philharmonic; the random Jazz bars all over the city; the vivid East Village that never sleeps; the wonderful museums; Brighton Beach covered with snow in the winter and hot like the Mediterranean countries in summer; Brooklyn that is ethnically so colourful; Harlem that makes people feel scared about their security, but a real part of the metropolitan city; the heart of New York: Manhattan; and last but not least the Columbia University district that is very close to the Central Park and gives the students perfect opportunities for an effective education and a high quality lifestyle. That has been New York for me in the last four months, full with a lot of positive impressions and unforgettable moments which began already in the first month.

I spent the first days in the U.S. at the Fulbright gateway orientation in Manhattan where I met all my best friends here, my "Fulbright family" in New York. That is how we call each other and how much we trust each other. At the gateway orientation I realized that Fulbright is not only a scholarship, it's a networking for my whole life that opens many doors. The moment you say to anybody: "Oh, you are also a Fulbrighter" you know that is somebody you can rely on and you can share with a lot. What is a typical Fulbrighter like? Intelligent, open minded, with distinctive character, knows how to combine enjoying life and working effective, reliable and promising. These are the features that connect most of us, Fulbrighters, and make it easy for us to trust each other without really knowing each other.

A good example for that is my first month here. I was one of the lucky New York students that got housing easy and had a home with the very first day of arrival. However, that was not the case for all the Fulbrighters and New York is famous for its limited housing opportunities. I offered to four of my fellow Fulbrighters my house for a month and we had incredible time with them, sharing the first four weeks together. We had our nice breakfasts in the kitchen looking through the window to New Jersey and enjoying the sun in the Riverside Park, and we delicious dinners at the Broadway. Now we are the small "Fulbright family" in the city that sticks together and organizes the Fulbright gatherings at least once a month. We eat



*Fulbright students from Spain, Bulgaria and Russia*



*Fulbright students at a picnic in Central Park*

together, we study together, we plan together road trips, we go together to concerts, and we live together although we are not any more in the same house. We have the feeling we know each other for years and we share a lot of common values, although we have met just four months ago. It is Fulbright that brought us together, it is Fulbright and the way the Fulbrighters are selected out that makes us feel similar and belonging to each other.

Fulbright has been a good experience not only to have a networking with the Fulbrighters. It has been also a positive experience to get in touch with Americans. Fulbright scholarship is well known in the U.S. and people highly respect us whenever they hear we are Fulbrighters.

Columbia University is one of the best universities in the country. I was amazed by the quality of the education. It is very career oriented and effective; it is the best choice for people that want to be professionals in their jobs and live during the study time in a wonderful city. Professors are not only scholars teaching at the university, they work also for the government or for big companies and offer helpful advice for career opportunities. We have a lot of visits



*Manhattan view from Central Park*

of famous Foreign Ministers and Head of States from different countries that hold speeches and you have the possibility as a Columbia student to ask them directly questions about the world politics. The library of the university has great capacity and good conditions for study. The classes are small and the students eager to improve themselves. The opportunities for sport activities are plentiful and you have various choices. I have fulfilled the dream of my life, to dance ballet. I have begun dancing ballet at the Columbia University and learnt once more that it is never too late in life to begin something from the beginning. The next semester I plan to begin canoeing, one of the best canoeing teams is Columbia University's team.

Central Park is the place where I can relax from the weekly stress and enjoy the nature. The end of the summer was hot and we could go sunbathing and picnicking there, the fall was amazing with the expressive and distinctive colours that the leaves in



*Fulbright students in front of the main library of Columbia University*

Central Park have. One of the unforgettable Central Park memories for me was the day when I met the French President Sarkozy jogging in Central Park. That is New York, you see well known people just randomly on the street. There is the boat café in the Central Park where you can have wonderful Sunday brunches in the fresh air and sit on a boat in the lake for hours in summer; and enjoy the fireplace of the café with a scene to the lake and Manhattan in winter.

Now I'm sitting in a warm American house in Lake George. An American fellow student of mine invited me to celebrate Christmas with her family and I was glad to be able to see how Americans celebrate this time of the year. Lake George represents for me the "real America", since New York is very different in its nature from the rest of the U.S. The house is big and white, well decorated for Christmas; it is full with children and gifts for everybody in the house. There is a fireplace in the house where the grandfather of the family reads books to the children and the dinners are prepared in an American style with cheese burger and ham. It is the Christmas in my life that is similar to a fairytale, too good to be real and so unforgettable in my memories.

## To Chicago and Back

*Dr. Temenuzhka Seizova-Nankova is an Associate Professor in Linguistics at Konstantin Preslavski University in Shumen, Bulgaria. As a Fulbright visiting scholar in AY 2008-2009, Dr. Seizova-Nankova taught and conducted research in the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literature at Ohio State University, OH.*



To me personally to be a Fulbrighter is a once-in-a-lifetime chance and has meant so many unique things to me, not only in my profession and research but also otherwise. As a teacher of English, visiting the United States was something I did not dare dream would ever come true. Here I have had the opportunities to study, conduct research, attend conferences, travel, and improve in communicating in the language, learning to cope with different pronunciations, accents, speech tempos, and even vocabulary use. It was inevitable, considering the background I come from, that I would experience some culture and technology shock, even while making persistent efforts to cope with it, and being aware of similarities and differences. Some basic features which strike one is tolerance to the great diversity and a sense of freedom to achieve what you aspire to. It is a realization that being different is something to be respected and not to be afraid of.

Travelling is getting to know not only other people, places, customs but also to get to know oneself better by comparing your value system, including your moral judgements to the value system of other people. Furthermore, it is a well-known truth that travelling opens one's mind. For me this was an unique chance to visit a country which people dream of visiting, for different reasons. My reasons can be said to be basically professional but not only. Here I would like to expound a little bit on the non-professional part of my experience. I haven't been to a lot of places even in my own country. I wouldn't like to say that in our culture travelling is not a priority, most likely that is because of financial reasons, and it is a general situation with most people in Bulgaria. Now I am happy to say that in that respect things are changing slowly here. Otherwise, I have travelled a little abroad, for a limited period of time. But visiting US is an experience that cannot be compared to anything I have had before. And I don't mean it only professionally. Visiting US opened my mind to an extent that no other place has ever done. In the first place, I learnt a lot more about myself. It helped me to make a revision of my home values as compared to other people's values in a country as different from home as can be. Divergent cultures, tolerance, and open opportunities – all that is something Americans have been used to live with. I can see tolerance everywhere even in the lecture halls when students listen to foreign lecturers, i.e. lecturers from other counties

whose English is not the Standard American. Another thing is that being different is something that is really looked up to, valued of its own, while at home to be different is a disaster, there is no tolerance, This reminds me of a poem "Little boxes, all the same" (forgot the name of the author, an American). As a result of my experience, I find I have grown more critical of a lot of things after coming back home. First, personal relationships – they all or almost all rely on interest and superiority. I cannot stand that anymore. To be direct, to speak your mind, to avoid using other people in achieving your goals and many more issues have become so important with me and have found place in my heart so much so that I have started reconsidering my own relationships. This made the time after my return more difficult to adapt and accept all things that before I had taken for granted. I know now that it is up to oneself, if you are young and have the talent and know your mind, want to preserve your individuality it's up to you to try to get what you deserve. No matter the difficulties. To conclude, USA is a country with enormous possibilities for a person to develop and perfect oneself. It's a country of choice and freewill. This does not mean that I am trying to draw a romantic picture of the life in the USA. It's certain that enormous effort is needed in order to succeed, you have to exert yourself to the limit of your abilities to achieve your aim. The point is that you have that chance to do it if you really know what you want to do with your life. You feel the energy in the air somehow, and then you realize that it's up to you to decide how to use the energy in you.

Travelling to your own self is a life-long process. I still have the feeling that whatever it is I have seen and learnt when visiting US will take some time to crystallize and form shape, it will take some time for the impressions to surface as kind of generalizations so that innovative ideas become part and parcel of your own self, and influence your behavior. Hopefully, all this will happen with time, time is precious.

Friendship – a wonderful but long-forgotten and rare feeling for me. It is unique when it happens. I have no idea as to why and how but I got to know people from Russia, Estonia, Ukraine, Macedonia, Serbia and other countries. Never have I visited Russia or any Balkan country and never have I experienced the kind of feeling of being so related to people that speak a language different from yours but

which you can easily understand. A unique feeling that you belong to the big Slav family which I felt there for the first time. This is only part of the story. To strike a friendship with native Americans is even more difficult to explain. It's like a journey in which you start alone but gradually you find partnerships and friendships and as you go your way you find help in overcoming obstacles assisted by your companions. Problem solving is an important part of this process. Instead of being confused and frustrated, and hence unable to make decisions, by being surrounded by friends and being well-informed you are more likely to choose appropriate strategies to avoid conflicts, and reconcile differences in culture and overcome spontaneous denial of the other in all of its manifestations.

Another thing that strikes me is the role of the church. It plays an important part in the lives of the people there. They all or almost all belong to some church community and this is their safe world. I consider ourselves lucky being born Christians and a great privilege too but to appreciate it you have to see how things stand elsewhere. In US people have so many possibilities for choice as in anything else that making the 'right' choice is so difficult. I feel excited by the stories of some American friends who visit the Orthodox church in Ohio and who after a long time of wavering have come to the conviction to choose the Orthodoxy. Amazing!

I have heard and read a lot about this country. But as is always the case, life is richer and surpasses all that I thought myself prepared for. My first contact with US, excluding the customs and changing planes in Chicago, was the city of Columbus, where I spent most of the time of my grant.

In the first place, this is where the Ohio State University is, with its enormous campus and wonderful possibilities, and most of all its people, the faculty with whom I was to work for the time of my stay. My advisor, Dr. Brian D. Joseph, Distinguished Professor of Linguistics and The Kenneth E. Naylor South Slavic Linguistics, a person of knowledge and expertise helped me and directed me in my work. The possibility to attend classes and lectures, participate in discussion/interest groups and become acquainted with current and future plans of outstanding scholars and professors, offered me a feeling one experiences only very rarely in one's life. For me it was a unique opportunity. About the students, I was really fascinated by the way the students work all through the quarter, getting together to study and prepare for the exams at special conference places in the numerous computer halls.

The city of Columbus has been for me also the very environment where I lived and spent many entertaining hours meeting friends from all over the world. Being used to a different kind of a city environment, I found the place enormous, out of proportion almost. To visit shops or some of the places of interest you have to devote almost a whole day. It took time and effort to get used to this and to start to really feel 'at home'. Very slowly and little by little I felt more and more secure and inclined to go beyond the usual paths I took every day to the University and back home. I enjoyed the different places of interest. I visited the German Village area with its historic red-brick houses that take you back to the times of the first settlers in Columbus. The Zoo at Christmas is a fantastic scene. I visited COSI, the Center for Science and Industry, and was transported back to the American past, to what once was but is no more. This is a place where

families can spend a whole day together with their kids, toddlers and all. There are interesting things for all ages to see and learn. I have always thought that the US is the best place especially for children and young people. Having a son of 10, I have always wished that he could experience the life here, the American educational system, so that he could avail himself of the advances of pedagogy in education where you learn by experiencing and creating, i.e. mainly by doing and not by memorizing and reproducing. /2 photos/

I had a chance to travel in the state of Ohio and I visited the two other biggest cities: Cleveland and Cincinnati. While Columbus seems to be situated on flat land mostly, Cincinnati impressed me with its rolling hills that reminded me with its great parks and beautiful view of the Ohio river of my country. I enjoyed the Cincinnati Art Museum in Eden Park, a fascinating place worth spending as much time as one can afford, enjoying the art of world-famous artists. Another important museum that reflects the history of America is the National Underground Railroad Center where slaves from Kentucky were helped cross the Ohio river into freedom. Another exciting place for me there was the house of the famous author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Cleveland is to the north of Columbus and in travelling that direction one could feel the difference in climate. It is situated on Lake Erie and is the site of the famous Saint Theodosius Cathedral of the Orthodox Church in America. I had some plans to travel outside the Ohio state but had to give them up for reasons of unforeseen/unexpected health problems. /3 photos/

I was fortunate to be in the USA at a historic time, namely the presidential election campaign where people had to vote for their president-elect. It was really a big event, not only for the people of America but for the world at large as well. I was really surprised to find out the extent to which this event was reflected also in my own country by talking with my family. I was present at the time of the election process and witnessed the enthusiasm and the crowds of millions of people in the squares and streets when the American people chose to vote and elect the first African American President of the USA. I was also present on inauguration day of the 44 President of USA, January 20, which reminds me of the famous words: 'Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.' as well as '...that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth...' Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863. Truthful words even now, more than ever! This event, if I can find a word, was incredibly touching - not only the procedure, the President's Inaugural address, the program, but most of all the spirit of the people, this was something so overwhelming, so unforgettable. No words can express it, you can only feel it when you are present, and no wonder, so many people wanted just to be present at that historic moment.

At OSU I found out that Bulgaria and the Bulgarian language were something familiar and that was extremely exciting for me. The Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures with Prof. Delic as acting chair for the academic year 2008/09, which is not Russo-centric but a truly Slavic and East-European Department, the Center for Slavic and East-European Studies headed by the newly elected director the tenured associate professor Dr. Yana Hashamova - a Bulgarian, and the Hilandar Research Library with Director also a

Bulgarian and a former Fulbrighter Dr. Lyubomira Parpulova Gribble are all islands for enlightenment and places that focus attention on and contribute to an understanding and appreciation of the region of the Balkan peninsular's history, political, social and cultural realities. I feel so proud being a Bulgarian.

About the different bank holidays, I would like to mention but one, Thanksgiving, since it impressed me in the way that families reunite and the opportunity it provides for everybody to be appreciative and thankful. It allows everyone to say "Thank you" to people that played great role in their lives, including those that society depends on. This is also great time for charities. In US the well-to-do feel guilty for the existence of poor people and they really try to do something for them. In fact, everybody wants to be helpful and charitable and so is with students. They engage in all sorts of activities to make that day memorable. This reminds me very much of a great Christian tradition called 'Proshki' (asking for forgiveness), before the beginning of the Great Easter Lent. This is a custom in Bulgaria when everybody asks for forgiveness family and friends for things they might have done to others hurting them or their feelings willingly or not. We need to be forgiven and we ask for forgiveness. This is a time of looking at yourself and the others in a different, new way. In your mind and your heart you feel remorse for, feel sorry for what you might have inflicted to your near and dear either in your thoughts or doing. I find our

culture thus comparable to US culture even though it may be that the accents are different.

Surprises about American culture: 1. The way Americans write the date starting first with the month, then the day; 2. Another source of frustration and misunderstanding can be body language, especially head movement. In Bulgaria we use nodding with the head in just the opposite way this is done here. Both these characteristics can be frustrating and can sometimes become a reason for misunderstanding. 3. To come from culture where computers are just making their way more and more to culture completely computerized, where even human relationships and communications are based and depend very much on computers – sometimes it is difficult to understand, you feel it kind of impersonal. 4. Referring to names of whatever kind can sometimes be confusing for you cannot be sure what is meant: e.g. Georgia - Georgian; Cambridge US or Cambridge UK, etc. Another specificity is naming of streets, using numbers plus one of the direction of the compass: E/W/N/S. 5. The car issue – it is hardly possible for a US citizen to live without their car – this is another big difference from my country. 6. Value judgement. I suspect that there are cultural nuances in the way people in US conceive and think of things. Most important is in that case to really start communicating most effectively in the language so that nobody feels hurt and so that one's behaviour is not considered to anyone in any way impolite.

## Out of America

### Carolyn Emigh

Fulbright English Teaching Assistant  
First English Language School, Sofia, Bulgaria  
AY 2008-2009

When I first arrived in August in Sofia, I had studied Bulgarian with a tutor for six weeks, I had read as many guides to Bulgaria as I could get my hands on, and still I was completely unprepared for the country.

Everyone felt the need to feed me. I ate shopska salad after shopska salad. I was quizzed on the difference between kufte and kebapche. I was told about white cheese and yellow cheese—sirene and kashkaval—both of which actually seem to me to be white in color but very different in texture and flavor. And I drank my fair share of rakia both homemade and store bought. Everything was new to me.

But I quickly learned that this county was more than tomatoes, cucumbers and sunflower seed oil. This is a country with a complex past and a complicated future.

Here in Sofia, I am an English Teaching Assistant and I teach at the First English Language School conversation classes to all of 8th graders at the school—about 210 students. These students are 14



and 15 years old. They were born after the changes but they are still keenly aware of the influence of communism on their lives.

The thing that is the hardest for them to understand is why I came to Bulgaria—if I had the rest of the world to choose from, then why did I make the choice to come here? They ask me these questions out of curiosity but also a desperate need to understand why I would pick their country.

My first week of teaching I had the students write down questions that they had for me. They were too shy at this point to do much talking. I got home with 100's of little slips of paper with small neat handwriting. Many of the questions the students posed asked me some version of: do you like it here? Why? Others were exactly the same questions that high students in the United States might ask.

- When is your birthday?
- What's your favourite film?
- What do you think about the students at First English Language School?
- Can you write me a word in Bulgarian?
- Do you say the "n" word??
- What is it like to live in America?
- What do you think about Sofia?
- Are the people in Bulgaria more friendly than USA?
- Where do you live now?
- Have you got a boyfriend?
- Do you know any other languages?
- Is the Bulgarian language so difficult for you? (can you understand a few words?)
- Where did you graduate?
- What is it to be American?
- What is the difference between the USA and Bulgaria?
- What kind of music do you listen to?
- Do you like to live in Sofia?
- Do you like our class and school?
- What's your favourite animal?
- What's prom like in the USA?
- Do you like living in Sofia?
- What is the last dream you had?
- What did you dream when you were young?
- What type of music do you listen to?
- Have you been at Las Vegas?
- Do you like to watch TV?
- What do you think about Bulgaria and is there something which is better here than in the USA?
- Have you read Harry Potter?
- What's the life in USA? Is it cool?
- Do you like working with us?
- Do you live in a house?
- How do you feel in Bulgaria? Are you feeling ignored or not understood by others?
- Is the blond original colour of your hair?
- Do you watch football?
- Why there are so many things in America that we don't have in Bulgaria?

I read all of these questions and more. I decided that I had to type up the students' questions. They are grouped together in "stanzas" here which represent the questions that each student wrote to me. I've eliminated some of the repeat questions for the sake of brevity.

Notably, not one of these students asked me about whether or not I liked shopska salad or if I knew the difference between sirene and kashkaval. They cut straight to the quick. They asked me personal questions as well as hard questions about life in America. They revealed themselves to be sharp, funny and self-critical. Oh and for 8th graders whose first language is Bulgarian they also demonstrated an impressive command of the English language.

I guess this means that now I have to try to answer the question: do you like it here?

The short answer is yes. But when I tell this to Bulgarians they raise their eyebrows with a heavy dose of skepticism. The look is you just said that but you can't really mean it—you must be saying it because you think that's what I want to hear. So they fellow this look up with: no really you can tell me what you actually think, I won't be offended. The thing is when many Bulgarians ask it, it's a trick question—they want to me to confirm what they believe about their country (that it's not a very likeable country).

This said, I think it's a very likeable country. The physical country is beautiful, the food is simple and fresh (I am still lobbying who ever will listen that the country would do well to make a beautiful Bulgarian cookbook with bold colored photos—I would argue that the cuisine rivals that of the rest of Europe.), and the people are incredibly friendly (something that runs counter to the stereotype of Eastern-Europeans).

Sure, I haven't always found life easy here. I am still getting used to the fact that the grocery store wont always have the same things in stock each week, that no one posts schedules in advance and that if you ask a question in three different ways very likely you will get three different answers. Still I love that people in shops and cafes talk to me in Bulgarian—even when I am clearly not Bulgarian—and they know English.

I think that's what it boils down to. I am trying.

I am trying to live here, I am trying to teach English, I am trying to speak Bulgarian and I am trying to have fun doing all of it. Moreover, I am living in a country that's trying. Bulgaria is trying to figure out how to navigate a path into the 21st century, it's trying to govern itself, it's trying to make sense of its membership and role in the EU and while the country struggles with all of this, it's trying. And, I appreciate this.

I am here it turns out because I wanted an adventure, I wanted a new challenge and I wanted to eat, sleep and breath in Eastern Europe for a year. I have not been disappointed. If anything, I've been pleasantly surprised by this place there is so much here in terms of history and culture which often is overshadowed by crumbling block buildings, corruption, uneven sidewalks and trash on the streets.

## Out of America

### Theodore Efremoff Fulbright graduate student, Installation Art Assignment in Bulgaria: National Academy of Arts, Sofia Project Title: Temporal Monuments AY 2008-2009

On my first day in Bulgaria, Bulgarian poet Lyubomir Levchev said to me: *This country is a strange place. Both Russians and Americans are liked here.* To a Russian/American like myself who grew up in the Soviet Union during the cold war, this statement sounded unlikely but hopeful. Since that time, I have traveled to Bulgaria two more times, and his assertion is beginning to ring true.



Although the pull of Russian influence in the region is waning, I am still reminded of my motherland everywhere I go. If I cannot explain myself in Bulgarian, Russian gets me out of a jam. If I need to explain myself to someone over thirty-five years old, I can freely use Russian and engage in conversation. When I attempt to speak Bulgarian and no Bulgarian word is available to me, my strategy has become to throw out a Russian word and hope for the best. In many cases, the word closely matches Bulgarian and the conversation goes on.

If I am speaking with a person under thirty-five years old there is a good chance they will speak the new universal tongue - English. I met a young guy whom I had a conversation with in English. At the end of the conversation, he asked me if I understood everything he said. I said sure, did you study English in school? No, he said, I play video games online and players from around the world speak English to each other. He was surprised that his English had gotten so good.

Regardless of the language, among many questions the question I am asked the most is *Why did you come to Bulgaria?*

**So, why did you come to Bulgaria?** asked a bewildered Bulgarian student while shooting me an inquisitive glance as we were taxiing towards Sofia Airport. The question hung like so much stale airplane air while I composed my answer. At the end of my family's twenty-hour air-odyssey from Hartford to Philadelphia to London and finally Sofia my mind was slowly churning through the reasons. The answer is not simple.

#### **I like the Language.**

It reminds me of a time in history when the Bulgarian language was the first to be written among the Slavic tongues thanks to St. Cyril and Methodios and St. Clement of Ohrid. Church Slavonic came from that written language and was used in most of the Slavic countries. When I first came to Bulgaria I was amazed that I could understand a large portion of the written language. The spoken language however had a vague familiarity from which I could pick up select Slavic words here and there. In Bulgaria, I hear words used in Ancient Russian, but did not make their way into the contemporary tongue.

One of these words is живот – life. *Живот* in Russian these days means *stomach*. Yes, our life is closely tied to our stomach, but to hear the word as it was originally used in Russian makes me feel as though I am uncovering the past life of the Russian language.

**So why are you in Bulgaria?** Asked my waitress at the Veda House Café.

#### **I am interested in Reincarnation.**

It seems that Bulgarians are experts in it. Coming from the Pamir Mountains, to the steppes of today's Ukraine and Russia, to the Balkans to form a state, be under the yoke for 500 years, to survive behind the Iron Curtain and to be reborn again is no easy feat.

Being so close to extinction makes you passionate about preserving your culture and history.

Orpheus, who it is said, was born in the Rhodopy Mountains preached reincarnation and monotheism, played the lyre and healed. His presence has been embodied in songs, poems, and plays since his time.

#### **What are you doing in Bulgaria?**

#### **I am exploring the landscape.**

In the Rhodopy Mountains witnessing the power of two work-horses as they pulled tree trunks connected to them by chains down a path they beat through the woods while their master whistled instructions at them. The coughing, grunting animals foamed and bent under the weight of the trunks. The landscape did not betray that this was the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**I am listening to music.**

Serafim, the 16-year-old *gaida* (bagpipe) player was performing for us, but was heard by all in the surrounding mountains. Standing in the meadow with the mountains in the background his mother and sister sang in the unique and beautiful Rhodopy Mountain style. The *banitsa* was in front of us and we were drinking beer, soda, and water.

The wedding *hora* we joined in the middle of the smallest square in one of the smallest villages continued for many hours with people laughing and dancing around the two *gaida* and one accordion player. The melody carried us into the night.

**Learning about traditions.**

We climbed into the bed of a 1965 ZEEL Soviet Army Truck with what felt like the whole village and heading straight up the mountain to a *perclis* (small church) where a *kurban* (animal sacrifice) was made for a saint's day. These animals have been sacrificing their lives for human beliefs from Orpheus, to Tangra to today.

**What kind of art, are you making in Bulgaria?**

My project in Bulgaria is entitled *Temporal Monuments*. I became interested in creating a kind of public monument that is not permanent but relatively fleeting, ephemeral in its existence. This temporal memorization can take form in actions, performances or temporary objects.



The Spine at the Solar Eclipse  
Performance, Tryavna, Bulgaria, 2008

the realm of galleries and museums and bring my art into the everyday.

The students created one-word responses to the word *hate* that were then created into the following poem which I wrote onto their

Thanks to my fellow students at the Fulbright International Summer Institute in Triavna, I experienced a new way of working. I was looking for a way to create, think, enjoy the collaborative moment and release the control – trust others. We created a performance in a square in Triavna, which inspired me to work outside

bodies in the Triavna Town Square.

СИЛНА СТРАСТ ЗА ЛЕСНА ПЕЧАЛБА  
INTENSE PASSION FOR EASY PROFIT

НАДЗЕМНА ПОХОТ ЗА РОЗОВИ БЕЗРАЗЛИЧНИ УСМИВКИ  
OVER-GROUND LUST FOR PINK INDIFFERENT SMILES

МИРЪТ СТРАДА, ОБСЕБВАН ОТ МИНАЛО И НАСИЛИЕ, БОЛКА,  
РЕВНОСТ, ДИСКРИМИНАЦИЯ  
PEACE SUFFERS OBSESSED WITH PAST AND VIOLENCE, PAIN, JEALOUSY, DISCRIMINATION

ВОЕННА МАШИНА, ДРЪН- ДРЪН  
WAR MACHINE, BLAN-BLAN-BLAN

НЕВЕРНИТЕ ДРУГИ СЕ БОРЯТ С УЖАСЯВАЩАТА ГЛУПОСТ  
UNFAITHFULL OTHERS FIGHT HORRIBLE STUPIDITY

In Sofia, we have formed *Brigada* which is an Art Taskforce consisting of a group of art students, graduate students and professors. All the members of *Brigada* are artists willing to work in new and collaborative ways. They are left to right: myself, Boyan Dobrev, Georgi Gogev, Nikola Grozdanov, Ivan Genov, Stanislava Penelova.



Art Removal Poster, February 2009

So far, we have completed one Art Removal Project in Bulgaria. The project consisted of erasing a photograph of the Soviet Army Monument. To me, the project has less to do with politics and more to do with satirizing censorship, although I do find it ironic that during Soviet times Socialist Realism was the accepted art and most others were censored. In this case the Socialist Realism is getting censored.

The idea for Art Removal came from an experience with censorship I had in the US. It stemmed from indignation by shop owners regarding street art a group of my students created to help homeless people. In response to the negative reaction we created the Art Re-



Erasing the Memorial. Art Removal Taskforce,  
Performance, Video Installation, Union of  
Bulgarian Artist, February 2009

removal Taskforce. The Taskforce is a satirical representation of agents of censorship. Art has been a powerful propaganda tool for many centuries. The removal of art has also been a powerful way for various interests to assert themselves. For instance, Hitler instigated infamous book burnings and censored, banned and held exhibitions of **Degenerative Art**, which he considered most modern art of his age. Likewise, despite worldwide protest the Buddha statues of Bamiyan province, Afghanistan were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 as they were considered idols.

Art Removal Taskforce is presented as a multinational company.

**What did you do in Berlin?** asked a fellow Fulbrighter.

For the Fulbright Conference in Berlin I created a performance at the Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse.



Monument to the Hopefull Beggar. *ICH BITTE SIE FUER 1 WORT / I BEG YOU FOR ONE WORD*, Performance, Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, Germany, March 2009

In many countries especially in the West, begging is considered a contemptible occupation practiced in order to receive money dishonestly for obtainment of food, drugs or alcohol. Historically however, the western tradition has been known for respecting beggars such as Diogenes of Sinope and Lazarus. *I am the least of these*, were the words Jesus had spoken in the bible about less fortunate people, beggars included. In many countries of the east like India, Japan and others begging can be considered a spiritual occupation, which frees the beggar from material concerns such as labor for money and keeps them on the path to enlightenment.

My decision was to beg for something considered non-material – a word. I was interested in the attitudes and behavior of people towards someone in a position of a supplicant. What kind of poem



28 words collected at Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, Germany, March 2009

could come from the words collected in a specific location in a specific city? In this case, it was the Friedrichstrasse train station in Berlin.

The experience was humbling. Many people did not realize I was begging for a word and thought I was asking for money. They avoided my gaze, completely ignored me, or walked a large circle around me. I felt that I was putting them in an uncomfortable position of having to make a decision about giving. On the other hand, twenty-eight people chose to give a word. This relationship between those in need and those with resources plays out on a regional and world scale and the decisions to give or not to give are crucial to our future.

**What kind of art, are you looking to make in Sofia?**

To make art in Sofia I am looking for the spaces between spaces. I am trying to figure out the potential, the possibilities. I am searching for the margins of the built environment for the places not yet resolved. Those spaces are alive with possibility. Can you catch fish in a puddle in Sofia? No, but you can catch lots of smiles, greetings and the proverbial *Кълве ли?* (Culve li?), *Are they biting?* What are you getting? *Som* (catfish).

They are bottom feeders – opportunists. Just like so many have to be. It is a fruitless activity, but somehow full of hope. Yes. They are biting. The opportunities to be inspired, to figure it out, to create are everywhere in Bulgaria.



Monument to the Hopefull Fisherman. *Кълве ли?/Are they biting?* Performance, Sofia, Bulgaria, March 2009