



FULBRIGHT
Bulgaria

BULGARIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION
FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE



Academic Year

2020-2021

ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

Contents

History & Mission	03
The Fulbright Commission Board	04
Messages from the Executive Director and the 2021 Board Chair	05
Fulbright at 75	06
Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees	08
U.S. Fulbright Grantees	08
BEST Debate Camp	09
U.S. Scholars and Students	10
The US English Teaching Assistant Program	12
Bulgarian Scholars	14
Bulgarian Students	15
Fulbright Bulgaria Goes Online	16
Fulbright Bulgaria Goes Digital	18
Fulbright Testing and Training Services	19
EducationUSA Advising Center	20
Budget	22
Staff & Sponsors	23

History & Mission



US Congress established the Fulbright Program in 1946 with an ambitious goal — to increase mutual understanding and support friendly and peaceful relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. Over the past 75 years, the Fulbright Program has enabled more than 360,000 scholars, students, educators, artists, professionals and civil society representatives to participate in international exchanges.

The Fulbright Program awards approximately 8,000 grants annually, seeking out individuals with potential who represent the full diversity of their respective societies and selecting nominees through open, merit-based competitions.

“ International educational exchange is the most significant current project designed to continue the process of humanizing mankind to the point, we would hope, that men can learn to live in peace – eventually even to cooperate in constructive activities rather than compete in a mindless contest of mutual destruction.... We must try to expand the boundaries of human wisdom, empathy and perception, and there is no way of doing that except through education.”

– **Senator J. W. Fulbright,**
from remarks on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fulbright Program, 1976

Educational exchange between the United States and the Republic of Bulgaria under the Fulbright program started as early as 1967. In 1993 the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange was officially inaugurated under a ten-year bilateral agreement between the governments of the United States and the Republic of Bulgaria. In 2003 a new bilateral agreement was signed, establishing the Fulbright Commission in perpetuity. Between 1967 and 2021, nearly 1,400 American and Bulgarian citizens have taken part in Fulbright exchanges between the two countries.

The mission of the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange is to increase intercultural communication and understanding through academic and cultural exchange, to build long-term relationships between American and Bulgarian citizens and institutions, to raise the visibility of the Fulbright program in Bulgaria and worldwide through initiatives and partnerships with a broad variety of public and private institutions in the sphere of education, civil society, business, culture, science, technology and government. Our ultimate goal is to change lives!

The Fulbright Commission Board

The Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission board consists of ten members, five American citizens and five Bulgarian citizens. They represent the major areas of state and public activity: government, education, the arts, and business. The Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Bulgaria and the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria serve as honorary chairpersons of the Commission and appoint the regular board members. The board members during Fiscal Year 2021 included:

Honorary Chairs

Krassimir Valchev (until May 2021)

Professor Nikolai Denkov (after May 2021)
Bulgarian Minister of Education and Science

Herro Mustafa

Ambassador of the United States to Bulgaria

Chair

Drake Weisert

Public Affairs Officer, US Embassy in Bulgaria

Treasurer

Brent LaRosa

Cultural and Educational Affairs Officer,
US Embassy in Bulgaria

US Members of the Board

Richard T. Ewing, Jr.

President, American College of Sofia

Sarah Perrine*

Executive Director, Trust for Social Achievement

Eric Halsey*

Managing Director, Halsey Company

BG Members of the Board

Karina Angelieva

Deputy Minister of Education and Science

Radostina Chaprazova

Country Director, Arete Youth Foundation

Georg Georgiev

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

Julia Stefanova*

Former Executive Director
of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission

Tzvetomir Todorov*

Managing Director, Bulgarian American
Management Company

**Fulbright alumni*

Front cover photo:

Fulbright Virtual Choir

Back cover photo:

Fulbright Digital Presence



From the Executive Director **Angela Rodel**

In March 2020 when Covid-19 first made headlines and the Fulbright program was suspended worldwide, very few of us imagined the pandemic would continue affecting Fulbright exchanges, travel and our daily lives for such a long time to come. Yet here we are in the third academic year affected by Covid. Despite the difficulties we have faced, I would like to think Fulbright Bulgaria has been able to find some silver linings. The pandemic has forced us to find new ways to connect to our grantees, alumni and partners and to explore new ways of community building through online and hybrid events. This year's annual report highlights some of the online conference, reunions and even storytelling events that we experimented with to help us all feel less isolated during this time!

The Covid crisis has also made us realize how blessed we are to work with such incredibly supportive partners and sponsors. The US State Department and US Embassy in Sofia have worked tirelessly to give us and our grantees support and up-to-date information during a dynamic time, and have been incredibly flexible in allowing unprecedented deferrals to accommodate both US and Bulgarian grantees. The Bulgarian government also showed its strong commitment to the Fulbright program by doubling its allocation to the Fulbright program from \$182,000 to \$364,000 in May 2021. Special thanks go to Fulbright alumnus and interim Deputy Prime Minister Atanas Pekanov for his key role in securing this additional funding. Our friends at the America for Bulgaria Foundation and our other private sponsors once again showed their generosity and understanding during this unprecedented year; their support and advice was invaluable as we explored ways to resume programming in a way that was safe and effective for both grantees and the students and communities they serve.

Thank you to all of our grantees, alumni, partners and friends who joined us this year for online or hybrid events! We wish you health in the coming year and look forward to the Fulbright program returning to its full capacity soon.



From FY 2021 Board Chair **Drake Weisert**

The 2020-2021 academic year was another challenging time for international exchanges, including the Fulbright program. Due to Covid-19 safety concerns and travel restrictions, many Fulbright grantees had to delay or defer their grants. Luckily, by the spring of 2021, we were cautiously able to begin welcoming American scholars and students back to Bulgaria and sending Bulgarian scholars to the US.

A successful and safe resumption of our Fulbright exchanges would not have been possible without the support of our partners and stakeholders. I would first like to thank the Commission staff, who have worked tirelessly to respond to dynamic and quickly changing situations in order to ensure our grantees have both safe and fruitful Fulbright experiences. We are grateful for the flexibility and generosity of the America for Bulgaria Foundation, which supports the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program in Bulgaria – they and our other corporate sponsors have been exceptionally understanding as we navigate the ongoing challenges of restarting the program. I would also like to recognize and commend the Bulgarian government's expanded commitment to the Fulbright program. This past year, the Ministry of Education and Science agreed to double their allocation to Fulbright, which will allow even more Bulgarian students and scholars to take part in the program, beginning next year.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Fulbright board members for their dedication to the Fulbright program – it has not been an easy year, but together we were able to find creative and impactful solutions to the challenges we faced.



Fulbright at 75

Fulbright Bulgaria joined the global Fulbright Community in celebrating the program's 75th anniversary with a number of events throughout the year.



Mural by Kong Ho, US Scholar at the National Academy of Art, AY 2008-9

Bulgaria Country Day on May 24

As part of ECA's year-long initiative to mark the 75th anniversary of the Fulbright program worldwide, Fulbright Bulgaria held an online country day celebration on May 24. The event kicked off with a panel entitled "After the Pandemic: The Tools Educators Will Keep," which featured Bulgarian and American alumni educators from a variety of programs and touched on the challenges and opportunities of online learning, classroom tools and skills of the future, and the benefits of cross-cultural experience for educators. The panel was followed by an interactive seminar "Negotiating for Success Across Cultures," led by Fulbright Distinguished Scholar George Siedel, professor emeritus at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, who was a beloved instructor for many years at Bulgaria's Fulbright International Summer Institute. The grand finale was an hour-long film "Fulbright at 75: Bulgarian-American Visions and Voices," featuring Bulgarian and American alumni musicians, dancers, filmmakers, visual artists, actors and writers. The

film mixed music with stunning visual images, and culminated in a performance by the Virtual Fulbright Choir. The film also included Former Executive Director Julia Stefanova comments on the founding of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission and its early days, as well as the reminiscences of Ekaterina Dimova, one of the oldest living Bulgarian Fulbright alumni, who undertook her grant in Austin, Texas, in 1968. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuB4K6WKY0A>

Gala at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC

On November 30, 2021, the US Department of State hosted a gala event and reception in honor of the Fulbright program's 75th anniversary. Following strict pandemic protocol, Fulbright Bulgaria ED Angela Rodel had the honor of joining hundreds of alumni, staff and partners at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. The ninety-minute program featured reflections from prominent Fulbright alumni such as renowned soprano Renee Fleming and former Brown University president Dr. Ruth Simmons, while luminaries including Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Second Gentlemen Douglas Emhoff offered video addresses congratulating the Fulbright program on its rich history, diverse present and ambitious future. Newly confirmed Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Lee Satterfield joined the event in person, sharing her enthusiastic commitment to academic and cultural exchange programs. The program showcased five key areas where the Fulbright program has had global impact: the environment; science, technology and public health; education; public service; and the arts.

Fulbright Bulgaria wanted to share the 75th anniversary excitement with our small but dedicated alumni community in the DC area, thus we hosted a small cocktail evening on Friday, December 3. More than a dozen alumni joined, primarily former ETAs and student researchers, as well as one current Bulgarian grantee. I was truly inspired by their current work in public service and education – they are certainly continuing the Fulbright mission of furthering cultural understanding in their post-Fulbright careers!



Fulbright Happy hour with former US Ambassador to Bulgaria Eric Rubin (second from left) and America for Bulgaria Foundation President Nancy Schiller (third from left)



Vic Schiller (left) and ECA Country officer Scott Righetti (right)

We were honored to also be joined by two former US Ambassadors to Bulgaria, Eric Rubin and Marcie Ries and their spouses, as well as ABF President Nancy Schiller and her husband Vic. The event was made complete by the participation of ECA Country Officer for Bulgaria, Scott Righetti, who has been a longtime friend and supporter of the Bulgarian Fulbright program, as well as other colleagues from the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. We would like to thank everyone who came out to help us celebrate Fulbright's anniversary – here's to many more decades of global impact!

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2020-2021

U.S. Fulbright

Academic Year

SCHOLARS

Denitza Toptchiyska

Field of Specialization: Law

Home Institution: New Bulgarian University

Host Institution: Notre Dame University, IN

Kristina Todorova

Field of Specialization: Economics

Home Institution: University of National and World Economy

Host Institution: University of Missouri—Columbia, MO

Iskren Ivanov

Field of Specialization: Political Science

Home Institution: Sofia University

Host Institution: University of Texas at Austin, TX

Iva Manova

Field of Specialization: Philosophy

Home Institution: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Host Institution: Dickinson College, PA

HUBERT HUMPHREY FELLOWSHIP

Teodora Trifonova

Field of Specialization: Journalism

Home Institution: BTV

Host Institution: Arizona State University, AZ

Vladislav Slavov

Field of Specialization: Education Management

Home Institution: Technical University-Sofia

Host Institution: Pennsylvania State University, PA

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Mariya Ivanova

Field of Specialization: Linguistics

Title of Project: MA in Applied Second Language Acquisition

Host Institution: Carnegie Mellon, PA

Tsvetelina Bayraktarova

Field of Specialization: Law

Title of Project: LLM

Host Institution: Harvard University, MA

Lazar Lazarov

Field of Specialization: Business Administration

Title of Project: MBA

Host Institution: University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, MN

Vesela Petrova

Field of Specialization: Architecture

Title of Project: MS in Advanced Architectural Design

Host Institution: Cornell University, NY

SCHOLARS

Dr. Jasmin Vassileva

Field of Specialization: Clinical Psychology

Home Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

Host Institution in Bulgaria: Bulgarian Addictions Institute, Sofia

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Emmanuel Aprilakis

Field of Specialization: Classics

Project Title: Traditions of the Ancient Theater Space

Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University, Sofia

Lindsey Foltz

Field of Specialization: Anthropology

Project Title: The Bank of the Burkan: Jarred Foods and Biocultural Preservation in Bulgaria

Host Institution in Bulgaria: Plovdiv University, Plovdiv

Aurelien Tafani

Field of Specialization: Archaeology

Project Title: Understanding Diet and Mobility in the Lower Danube Valley during the Fifth Millennium BC

Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University, Sofia

ENGLISH TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Emilie Ehrman

Field of Specialization: Public Relations
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Yambol, Bulgaria

Danielle Harris

Field of Specialization: History, Social Science, Education
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Burgas, Bulgaria

Sara Huzar

Field of Specialization: History and Global Affairs
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

Lukas Koester

Field of Specialization: Film and Media Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Varna, Bulgaria

Mathew Lauer

Field of Specialization: Cultural Studies, Comparative Literature
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Ruse, Bulgaria

Allison Rice

Field of Specialization: Biblical and Theological Studies, English
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Lovech, Bulgaria



Since 2013, the BEST (Bulgarian English Speech and debate Tournaments) Foundation, a Fulbright legacy organization, has empowered students to think critically, express themselves creatively and create a dynamic community that truly cares about the future of Bulgaria. Speech and debate teams compete in four regional and one national tournament each year; there is also an international tournament in the spring. Coaching and judging these events are some of the most important activities carried out by our 32 Fulbright|America for Bulgaria English Teaching Assistants.

From August 1 through August 7, 2021, the BEST Foundation hosted its first ever Summer Camp with support from the Fulbright Commission. The Camp, aimed at developing participants' critical thinking and public speaking skills, took place at the Bulgarian Red Cross's National Training Center in Lozen and gathered 29 students from all over Bulgaria. Camp director Dr. Timothy Yaczo, an American professor at the University of Amsterdam, taught students how to properly organize and articulate their thoughts and how to best defend their point of view. Other lecturers included Fulbright alumni Dr. Ronald Harvey (American University in Bulgaria) and Jesse Scinto (Columbia University), while Fulbright Commission representative Rada Kaneva, a former debater and tournament judge, provided feedback and advice to campers in their practice debates.



"BEST'S CAMP WAS THE PERFECT COMBINATION OF FUN AND LEARNING... AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE!"

– Ekaterina Valeva, Foreign Language School, Plovdiv

US Scholars and Students



Jasmin (second from left to right) with the BAI team



Meeting at the Fulbright Commission Office



Visit to Boyana Church

In AY2020-21, unfortunately US Scholar and Student exchanges to Bulgaria were suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Following recommendations from ECA that encouraged each country to evaluate the local COVID-19 situation, the Fulbright Commission board, in close consultation with the US Embassy in Bulgaria, voted to allow US grantees to begin returning to Bulgaria no earlier than May 1, 2021. One US Scholar, **Jasmin Vassileva**, took advantage of this “late start” possibility. Dr. Vassileva collaborated with the Bulgarian Addictions Institute on a cross-cultural adaptation and development of novel interventions for substance use disorders in Bulgaria, based on the revolutionary advances in addiction neuroscience over the past 20 years. They worked on standardizing their neurocognitive assessment instruments for the Bulgarian population; on translating and adapting for Bulgaria a neuroscience-informed psychoeducational intervention for substance use disorders; and on developing novel intervention modules that target neurocognitive domains of impulsivity. In recognition of this important work, the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) agreed to provide five more years of funding for Dr. Vassileva’s study “Varieties of Impulsivity in Opiate and Stimulant Users” that she has been working on since 2008 with colleagues from the Bulgarian Addictions Institute. Fortunately, the other four US scholar nominees for AY20-21 have elected to defer their grants and come to Bulgaria in AY21-22.

Like US scholars, US student researchers were only allowed to take up grants in Bulgaria as of May 1, 2021. Thus, three doctoral students arrived in Bulgaria in May 2021 to start work on their projects. **Lindsey Foltz** (anthropology), supported by the Department of Ethnology at the University of Plovdiv, documented agricultural biodiversity that is being preserved through use (looking at the supply chain of plants that go into the canning jar) as well as the



Aurelien Tafani exploring chemical composition of bones



Emmanuel Aprilakis visiting an archaeological site



Lindsey Foltz celebrating Enyovden with a horo dance

preservation of cultural practices and memory. As part of her project, Lindsey visited villages to observe traditions related to food preservation, discuss them with the local residents, and analyze whether preserved foods function as “memory carriers.”

With the help of his colleagues at Sofia University and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, **Aurelien Tafani** (archeology, on a Bulgaria-Romania joint award) was studying the chemical composition of bones of the Neolithic populations that inhabited the Lower Danube River Valley. He also analyzed soil and faunal samples in order to map variations in elemental and isotopic data over the whole region, and compare it with the values found in ancient bones to study the mobility of Neolithic individuals. Since digital maps of the bedrock, superficial sediments and soil properties do not exist for Bulgaria, Aurelien applied for and received a mini-grant to purchase a digital tablet to create such from existing scanned maps. Once completed, Aurelien will make these digitalized maps available to his Bulgarian colleagues.

Emmanuel Aprilakis (classics, on a Bulgaria-Greece joint award) received a Fulbright award to assess the traditions of the ancient theater space in the lands of modern-day Bulgaria and Greece. While he is writing his dissertation on the chorus-leader in ancient drama and visiting ancient theaters helps to reimagine aspects of ancient performance, this project continues prior work that he had done visiting ancient theaters in Greece, Italy, and Spain, with an aim toward understanding regional differences in the architecture, decoration, and layout of these spaces across the ancient world. Emmanuel visited ancient theater sites across Bulgaria, but since he was also intrigued by the modern state of theater in Bulgaria and also its link with Greek theater from antiquity to the period of liberation, he also watched classically inspired performances at Sofia’s contemporary theaters.

Overall, despite the late start and changed timeline of their grants, AY 2020/2021 student researchers were able to do most of the things they have outlined in their projects. We truly hope to see the results as part of their dissertations, and we wish them best of luck in their academic pursuits.

The US English Teaching Assistant Program



Returning ETAs meet with Lina Jarad (left)

Despite the global suspension of the Fulbright programs for the first semester of AY 2020/ 2021, we were one of the few lucky commissions in Europe who were able to still host a limited number of grantees in the beginning of the academic year.

Despite the global suspension of the Fulbright programs for the first semester of AY 2020/ 2021, we were one of the few lucky commissions in Europe who were able to still host a limited number of grantees in the beginning of the academic year. On September 3, 2020, we were excited to welcome back our six returning English Teaching Assistants – Allison Rice, Danielle Harris, Emilie Ehrman, Lukas Koester, Matt Lauer, and Sara Huzar, for the tiniest of all Fulbright Bulgaria Orientations. Instead of the large halls filled with the chatter of over 40 grantees from various corners of the US trying to get to know each other, this time we all fit into a cozy small meeting room, trying to get used to our new appearance, and our smiles hidden behind face masks. But the enthusiasm was the same if not greater, and the

time passed quickly in catching up with each other's news and brainstorming on how to best navigate the brand new situation we had found ourselves in. Angela Rodel, Fulbright Executive Director, and Nancy Schiller, President & CEO of the America for Bulgaria Foundation, greeted the group and spoke about some of the challenges ahead. Just before lunch we were joined by Drake Weisert, Public Affairs Officer; Brent LaRosa, the newly appointed Cultural Affairs Officer; and Ivanka Ivanova, Cultural Affairs Assistant at the US Embassy in Sofia. The meeting also included Eve Gower, a health practitioner at the embassy, who, together with a Bulgarian colleague, joined us online to touch upon various medical issues. In the afternoon the group met for the first time in person with Lina Jarad, Executive Director of the



Nancy Schiller greets the group



Meeting with US Embassy representatives



"Zorba the Greek" ballet

BEST Foundation, who gave us a detailed overview of the activities planned by the organization during the upcoming year. A special treat awaited us in the evening – a trip to the village of Belchin, where, amidst the ruins of the Tsari Mali Grad fortress, we enjoyed a beautiful ballet performance by Sofia National Opera and Ballet: "Zorba the Greek" by Mikis Theodorakis.

Our six returning ETAs were able to spend almost two months in the classroom with their students in Lovech, Ruse, Burgas, Dimtrovgrad, Yambol and Varna, as the pandemic situation remained relatively stable in the early autumn. However, by late October, case numbers in Bulgaria, as in much of Europe, began rising precipitously, putting unprecedented pressure on the healthcare system and forcing schools to switch to online teaching. In partnership with the US Embassy and our program sponsors, in November the Fulbright Commission made the difficult decision to suspend the ETA program once again, and all ETAs departed Bulgaria by late November. We were extremely grateful to our six ETAs who returned this fall and spent another few months teaching – you were a welcome ray of light to your schools and communities in what has been an otherwise very difficult year. We wish our AY2020-21 ETA cohort all the best and hope to see them in Bulgaria again at some point in the future!

BG Scholars



Iskren Ivanov enjoying Austin, TX

The AY 2020-21 Bulgarian scholar program was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting program suspensions, as no Bulgarian scholars were allowed to take up their grants in the fall of 2020. However, as the pandemic situation improved and vaccine roll-out began in late 2020, four Bulgarian scholars traveled to the US in Spring 2021 to begin their grants.

Dr. Iskren Ivanov made the most of his stay at the University of Texas at Austin, combining political science research with highly popular online lectures for the UTA students. In addition to Covid challenges, he also faced “Snovid”: severe weather conditions and extended power outages in Texas. See the Fulbright Bulgaria Spring 2021 Newsletter for a detailed recounting of Dr. Ivanov’s adventures in the Lone Star State!



Kristina Todorova at the University of Missouri

Associate Prof. Denitza Toptchiyska completed her research on the legal framework of intellectual property at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. She found the resources and facilities of the university impressive and conducive to in-depth academic studies. Upon her return, Prof. Toptchiyska took part in the Fulbright International Seminar on Democracy in September 2021, presenting a workshop on e-democratic engagement and models of moderation of digital environment.

Dr. Kristina Todorova returned with optimism and positive research results in the field of economics from her visit to the University of Missouri—Columbia.

Dr. Iva Manova’s research in philosophy at Dickinson College, Pennsylvania was perhaps one of the most smooth and yielded considerable positive feed-back.

Some of the deferred scholars from 2020-21 started their grants in Fall 2021, the rest in Spring 2022.

“ I had the amazing opportunity to be a Fulbright research visiting scholar at the Law School of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. My five-months stay there turned out to be an impressive journey on discovering not only topics related to my professional interests, but also experiencing the living presence of Catholic religious tradition, bringing ethical and moral perspectives to the education process.”

– **Denitza Toptchiyska**

BG Students

The AY2020-21 Bulgarian degree-seeking students program was perhaps the least affected by the Covid-19 restrictions, as four of the original five principal nominees were able to begin their US master's programs in the late summer of 2020.

Mariya Ivanova started her studies in Applied Second Language Acquisition at Carnegie Mellon. **Lazar Lazarov** specializes in Business Administration at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, where he was immediately recognized as a leader among international students and elected as International Representative to the MBA Association. **Vesela Petrova** started her studies in Advanced Architectural Design at Cornell University and managed to adapt to the academic environment well. **Tzvetelina Bayraktarova** completed her Fall 2020 semester at Harvard Law School online as Harvard did not accept students in person in 2020. However, Tzvetelina was given the option to defer her second semester to Spring 2022 to be able to attend Harvard in person.

All Bulgarian student grantees have been active contributors to the Commission activities: publicity campaigns, Commission outreach webinars, including media campaigns of the US Embassy, newsletter publications, seminars, reviews, and video messages. Unfortunately, AY2020-21 Visiting Researchers were unable to take up their grants during FY2021 due to concerns or lack of in-person instruction on the part of their host institutions.



2020 BG Students meet online in the US



Mariya Ivanova explores Carnegie Mellon (Pittsburgh)



Lazar Lazarov at the Carlson School of Management



Vesela Petrova proudly displays her Fulbright swag at Cornell



Fulbright Bulgaria Goes Online

Since in-person events were not feasible during most of FY2021, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission developed a series of online/hybrid events to keep grantees, partners and alumni engaged. We kicked off the online series with a hybrid conference in November 2020 entitled “Digital +/- Presence”.

The goal of the conference was to explore the transformation of communication from personal to digital or hybrid in spheres directly related to the Fulbright mission: education, culture, and society. The conference was streamed live from the Launchee space in Sofia and included nineteen speakers (all Fulbright Bulgaria alumni), two musicians, and a platform for discussion for the more than sixty participants who watched the event online. The conference opened with HE Ambassador Herro Mustafa, the US Ambassador to Bulgaria and Honorary Chairwoman of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, and Scott Righetti, a long-time friend of Bulgaria and an Academic Exchange Officer at the US Department of State. The Fulbright Commission has published conference proceedings, which are available online free of charge and in hard copy.

In December 2020, the Fulbright Bulgaria community gathered for a Zoom performance of storyteller Priscilla Howe’s favorite Bulgarian folktales. Priscilla spent five months in Sofia in 2015 as a Fulbright Scholar, collecting folktales, which were published in 2020 by Parkhurst Brothers Publishers, in a book called *Clever, Kind, Tricky and Sly: A Bulgarian Folktale Sampler*. <https://youtu.be/MbbDfDfVQCA>.





FIS organizers with Prof. Ivaylo Ditchev (from left to right: Rada Kaneva, Lyra Konstantinova, Maria Kostova, Ivaylo Ditchev, Angela Rodel, Stefan Radev)



EU MP Radan Kanev and writer Dimiter Kenarov discuss interaction between communities and the media

One of the Fulbright Commission's ongoing priorities is media literacy education, which we were able to continue online. Between March and June 2021, Fulbright and the Association of European Journalists — Bulgaria held online **Media Literacy Trainings for Teachers**. Four training sessions attracted 78 teachers, school psychologists and school principals from 33 cities interested in teaching media literacy. The online training covered topics such as the role of free media in a democratic society, distinguishing facts from opinions, journalistic genres, fighting disinformation and being a responsible media consumer. Each training lasted three days and offered a mix of presentations and theory, examples from recent media publications, case studies and work in small teams via virtual rooms.

Throughout the spring of 2021, we took advantage of the pandemic lockdown by holding a number of online reunions with our American Fulbright cohorts via Zoom. We met with alumni from cohorts 2015, 2016 and 2017 during March, April and May. The Fulbright Commission surprised attendees with a slideshow commemorating each cohort's best moments together, our conferences, volunteer days, cultural trips and celebrations. Some alumni also volunteered to give short presentations about their post-Fulbright experience. Participants shared personal and professional achievements of our alumni — new jobs, scholarships, engagements, published works, and awards.

EducationUSA activities included extensive virtual outreach. EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva conducted 41 virtual group advising meetings with over 600 participants. Sixteen U.S. institutions of higher education "virtually" visited the Fulbright-Bulgaria EducationUSA Advising Center during and around the 2020 International Education Week. The

first **Virtual U.S. College Alumni Fair in Bulgaria** took place on January 31–February 1, 2021. The event was organized by the Fulbright Commission in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section and with the assistance of the Fulbright intern Ilia Curto Pelle, a Princeton junior in A.B. in Classics with a concentration in Ancient History. The two-day event attracted over one hundred academically-qualified students from Bulgaria, France, the Czech Republic and Moldova, interested in U.S. study. The event was a great resource as the students prepare for their future studies.

Perhaps the highlight of our "online year" was our **Bulgaria Country Day celebration on May 24**. See pages 6-7 of this report for more details. Last but not least, we were proud to host yet another Fulbright **International Seminar for Strengthening Democracy** on September 24-26, 2021. This hybrid event attracted nearly 40 participants live and several dozen more online to discuss how to strengthen democratic institutions and encourage inclusion and transparency. The official opening featured HE Herro Mustafa, US Ambassador to Bulgaria, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Fulbright alumnus Atanas Pekanov, while keynote speakers included UT Austin history Professor Dr. Jeremi Suri. Many current US Fulbright scholars, students and ETAs took part actively in the discussions and workshops, and got to know Bulgarian alumni and NGO representatives over the course of the seminar.

Although we would have loved to see more of our alumni and grantees in person, this past year has also opened our eyes to the opportunities that online events offer for community building. Fulbright Bulgaria looks forward to continuing a series of hybrid events in the future, even when the pandemic subsides — we hope you will join us!

Fulbright Bulgaria Goes Digital



Fulbright staff with XPlora trainer Georgi Malchev

Since the pandemic made our usual avenues for in-person recruitment for Bulgarian Fulbright grants at universities, conferences, job fairs and other events unfeasible in FY2021, the Commission hired a professional digital marketing firm, Verto Digital, to help us develop a holistic strategy for improving our organic visibility online and for launching targeting recruitment campaigns. In late 2020, we worked with Verto to optimize our website for digital traffic (SEO), then developed copy, visuals and channel-specific content for social media for our Bulgarian degree-seeking student campaign, which ran from January-May 2021. We saw immediate results from this investment, as we saw an increase in applicants in comparison to the total number for graduate students and visiting researchers in the previous academic application cycle. The general quality of the applications was extremely high, demonstrating a diversity of fields: humanities, arts and social sciences, with an emphatic increase in STEM candidates and improvement in terms of regional diversity.

From December 2020 (when we began our new tracking of stats) until September 2021, the fulbright.bg website had overall 45,697 users who completed over 62,000 sessions. Of these, 45,340 were new users, and there were over 10,000 different pageviews. This means that more than 85% of the website visitors are new and some 14% are returning, which indicates that the digital campaigns that were rolled out in the late winter and spring were quite successful, both in terms of targeted advertising and organic visibility of the Fulbright Commission.



Given the success of the degree-seeking student campaign, we followed up with a targeted Hubert H. Humphrey digital marketing campaign from May-September, which resulted in a record number of applications.

To support our efforts with Verto Digital and to improve the Fulbright Commission staff's digital literacy, the commission organized a four-month (February-May 2021) **intensive digital media training course** with Xplora Academy experts Georgi Malchev and Lenko Grigorov. The weekly half-day training sessions focused on: 1) developing branding and creative strategies to understand how to promote the Fulbright brand and examine real-life examples to see effective strategies in action; 2) launching a successful advertising campaign and training on how to measure campaign performance; 3) building skills in social media marketing to discover how to run creative campaigns that get results and develop an understanding of the strategies and principles that should be used to make the online activity more effective.



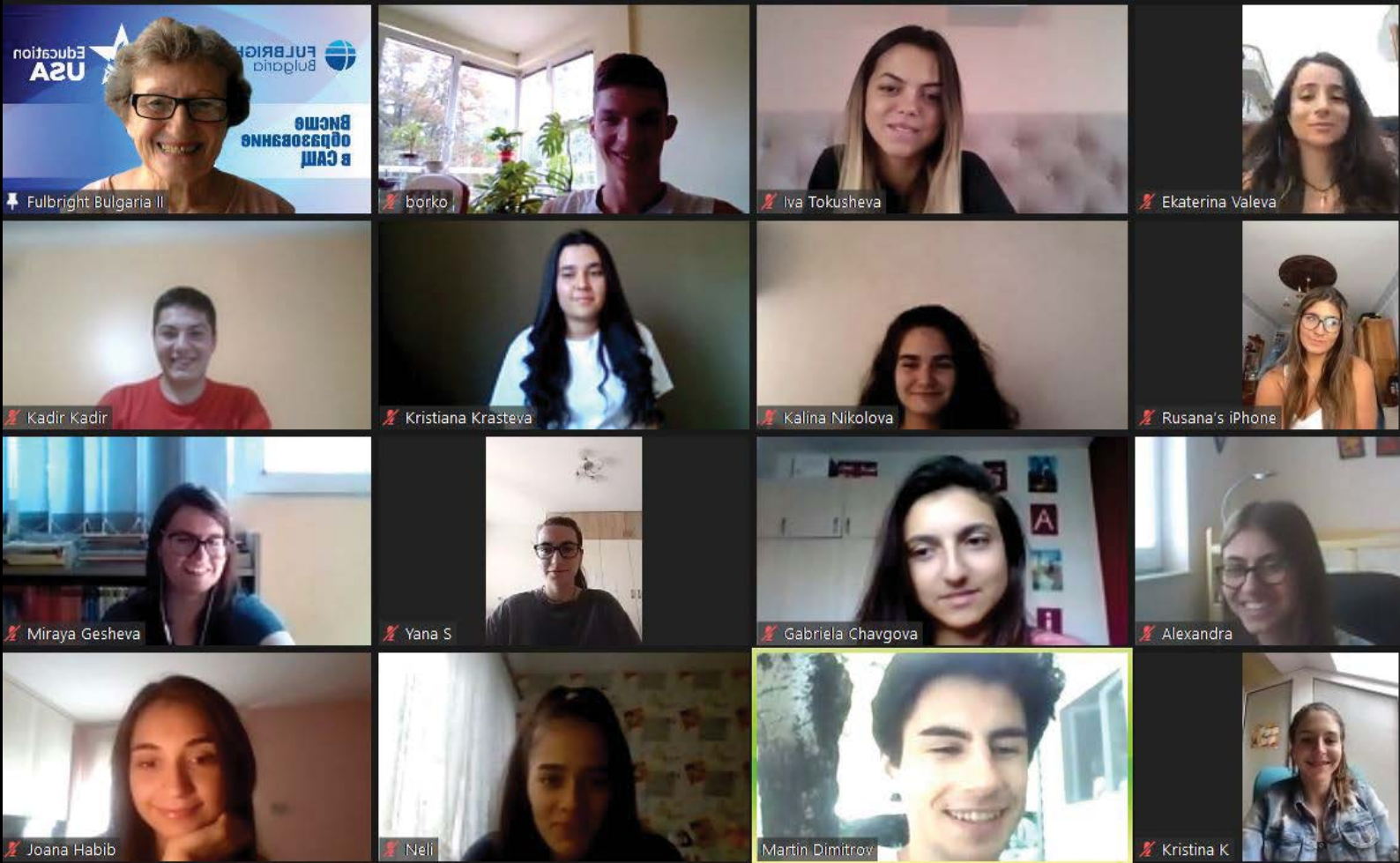
Tackling a case study in digital marketing

Fulbright Testing and Training Services



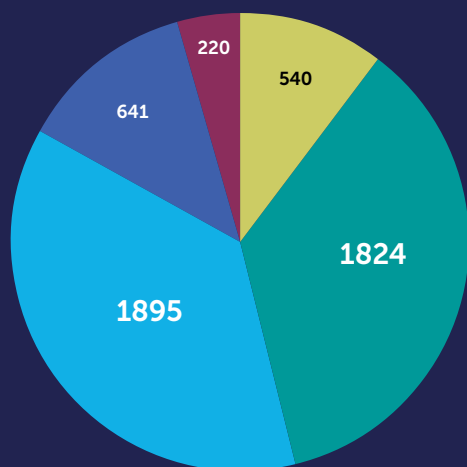
During FY2021, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission continued to operate a Prometric Testing Center in Sofia, which is the only place in the country where prospective candidates can take the GRE and TOEFL exams. The center is also the exclusive national provider of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO). In recent years, our test center has consistently been ranked as one of the top three Prometric Test Centers in Europe and for the months from February-August 2021 was ranked first in the region. A total of 736 tests were administered at the Fulbright Test Center this year, an almost 100% increase over the previous pandemic year, thanks to newly implemented safety procedures.

The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission continues to offer GRE, GMAT and other test preparation courses to a limited extent. Yet despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Fulbright Bulgaria's project management training program continued to deliver quality training. Throughout the year we conducted seven training sessions with a total of 86 participants as well as in-house advisory services by Fulbright PMP trainers. A highlight was the two-day Project Management Fundamentals training course, prepared for the needs of the Trust for Social Achievement, a major Bulgarian NGO working to support the Roma community, to help them more effectively tackle their complex project work. Twenty-six TSA employees took part in the training.



Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center

EducationUSA Advising



- Virtual Individual Appointments
- Advising by Phone
- Advising by Email
- Virtual Group Advising Attendees
- Virtual U.S. College Alumni Fair Attendees

The EducationUSA Advising Center at the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission is a full-service center which offers on-site, as well as virtual, individual and group advising. EducationUSA advising is a major component of the Commission's grant supporting activities. It is an effective and time-tested instrument of promoting the EducationUSA brand, the strengths of the U.S. educational system and the Fulbright program in Bulgaria by providing up-to-date information and competent guidance on educational opportunities in the U.S., admission procedures at U.S. universities, financial aid, testing, language training, the annual Fulbright and other competitions. The Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center has acquired an even greater importance in the context of Bulgaria's integration with the European Union and the strong competition from European universities. Annually, the center services over 5000 inquirers.

In FY2021, the Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center continued to expand its virtual outreach all across Bulgaria and particularly in the underserved regions. Our attention was focused on three target audiences: university students, high school students, and underserved audiences, including low-income and at-risk student populations.

EducationUSA Virtual Group Advising Program

Since 2013, the EducationUSA advising center has implemented an innovative virtual educational group advising program which prepares high school students from all over the country to successfully apply for admission with financial aid to fully accredited U.S. colleges and universities. The program is run in partnership with the American English Teaching Assistants, the American Spaces, Fulbright students/scholars, and others. It has both a virtual and in-person component and was developed by the adviser to make educational advising available to students beyond Sofia. Currently, the advising program has had very good results. This past academic year, there were 304 students in the program: 157 twelfth graders, 94 eleventh graders, 32 tenth graders, 17 ninth graders and 4 eighth graders.

In 2021, sixteen program participants were accepted to 27 U.S. HEIs (the University of Pennsylvania, PA; Cal Poly; Purdue University, IN; Minerva Schools at KGI, CA; Vanderbilt University, TN; Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, FL; University of Evansville, IN; Hamilton College, NY; Stanford University, CA, etc.), with a total scholarship amount of \$443,953 USD for the first academic year (\$1,775,812 for the four years of Bachelor's education), including one full-ride scholarship to Vanderbilt University, TN. They will be studying Business, Computational Sciences, Computer Science, Economics, Engineering, Mathematics, Public Relations and Software Engineering.

Opportunity Funds-Bulgaria Program

The Opportunity Funds-Bulgaria program, which helps ten to twelve talented students from economically disadvantaged communities apply to U.S. universities, has again showed strong results. Columbia University, NY; Duke University, NC; Rice University, TX; St. John's College, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Bard College New York, Berlin, Germany and John Cabot University Guarini Campus, Rome, Italy offered acceptance to five program participants with a total scholarship amount of \$279,310 for the first academic year (\$1,117,240 for the four years of their Bachelor's education), including one full-ride scholarship to Columbia University, NY. The admitted students will be studying Aerospace Engineering, Architecture, Liberal Arts, and Statistics/Mathematics.

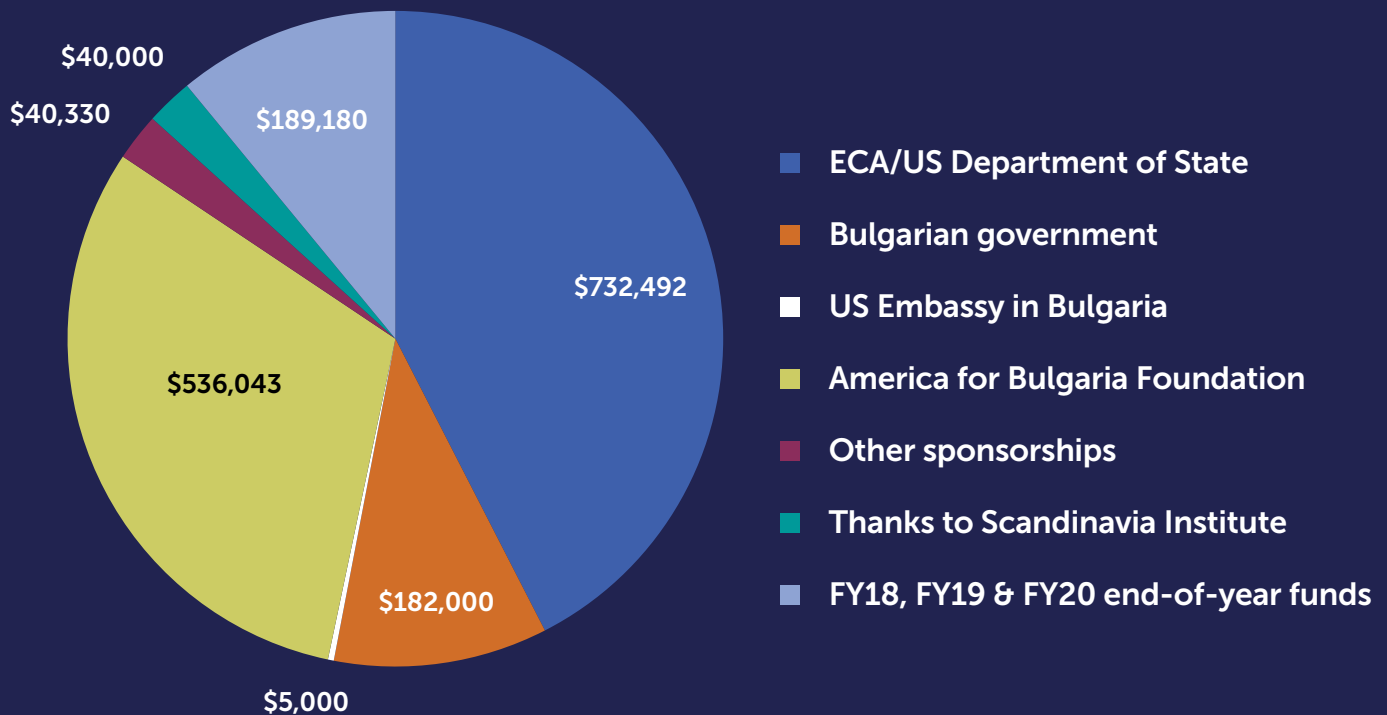
FY2021 EducationUSA-Bulgaria Academic Advising Statistics

- **Over 5000** students consulted
- **540** virtual 1-on-1 advising meetings
- **1824** consultations by phone or SMS
- **1895** targeted, mass emails sent
- **41** virtual group advising meetings
- **641** virtual group advising attendees
- **4908** Facebook Page Likes
- **220** Fulbright-Bulgaria Virtual U.S. College Alumni Fair attendees
- **304** EducationUSA Virtual Program participants
- **11** Opportunity Funds Program participants

EducationUSA-Bulgaria Scholarships

- **\$2,893,052** USD for 21 EducationUSA-Bulgaria Virtual Advising and Opportunity Funds-Bulgaria Program participants for their four-year Bachelor's programs
- **2** full-ride scholarships to Columbia University, NY and Vanderbilt University, TN
- **21** program participants accepted to 33 U.S. HEIs
- **6** students admitted on Early Decision plans

Fulbright Bulgaria Budget FY 2021



Bulgarian Allocation Increase



The year 2021 saw the Bulgarian government expand its commitment to the Fulbright program. We are proud to announce that with Decision No. 645 of September 2, 2021, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers voted to double its Fulbright allocation from \$182,000 to \$364,000 annually, beginning in 2022. Interim Deputy Prime Minister Atanas Pekanov, who is a Fulbright alumnus (2019-20 Visiting Researcher at Harvard University), was key in moving this proposal forward. The Fulbright Commission intends to put these increased funds towards additional and more generous grants for Bulgarian students and scholars.

FULBRIGHT BULGARIA STAFF

Angela Rodel

Executive Director
arodel@fulbright.bg

Anastassia Miteva

Financial Officer
amiteva@fulbright.bg

Iliana Dimitrova

Program Officer, ETA Program
idimitrova@fulbright.bg

Rada Kaneva

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

Lyra Konstantinova

Administrative Secretary
konstantinova@fulbright.bg

Maria Kostova

Program Officer, Bulgarian Grantees
mkostova@fulbright.bg

Tanya Petrova

Accountant/Cashier
tpetrova@fulbright.bg

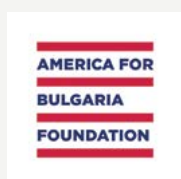
Snejana Teneva

Educational Advisor
steneva@fulbright.bg

Adrian Zlatanov

Test Center Manager/IT Support
adrian.zlatanov@fulbright.bg

Fulbright Bulgaria thanks its sponsors for their support:






FULBRIGHT
 Bulgaria
 BULGARIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION
 FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

 12 Vitosha Blvd, 5th floor, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria
 +359 2 981 85 67
 +359 2 980 82 12
 fulbright@fulbright.bg
 www.fulbright.bg