



FULBRIGHT
Bulgaria

BULGARIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION
FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE



Academic Year

2023-2024

ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

Contents

History & Mission	03
The Fulbright Commission Board	04
Messages from the Board Chair and the Executive Director	05
Year At-A-Glance	06
Maps of BG and U.S. Grantees' Host/Home Institutions	07
U.S. and BG Fulbright Grantees	08
Bulgarian Scholar Program	12
Bulgarian Student Program	14
Civil Society Program and FTEA in Media Literacy	16
Awards Ceremony for AY24-25 Bulgarian Fulbright Cohort	17
U.S. Scholar Program	18
U.S. Specialist Program	20
U.S. Student Program	22
The English Teaching Assistant Program	24
Ukraine: War and Resistance	26
Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center	27
Community Building	29
Major Program and Enrichment Events	30
Camps and Workshops	32
Fulbright Media Presence	33
Budget	34
Staff & Sponsors	35

History & Mission



Dep. Min of Culture Victor Stoyanov, Dep. Min of Education Natalia Miteva, US Ambassador Merten, and ECA Rep Scott Righetti at the Media Literacy Seminar.

US Congress established the Fulbright Program in 1946 with an ambitious goal — to increase mutual understanding and support peaceful relations between the peoples of the United States and other countries. Over the past 75 years, the Fulbright Program has enabled more than 400,000 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, with approximately 180 grantees between 1967 and 1993. In 1993 the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange was officially inaugurated under a bilateral agreement. With nearly 40 Americans and 25 Bulgarian grantees annually, the Fulbright Bulgaria alumni community currently numbers nearly 1,500 strong.

OUR MISSION:

Through innovative and inclusive educational exchange, Fulbright Bulgaria invests in human potential, teaching excellence, advancing scientific and cultural knowledge, and building a community of like-minded individuals who remain intellectually curious and committed to contributing to a just, prosperous, and peaceful future for the peoples of the United States and Bulgaria.

OUR VISION:

A robust and inclusive educational exchange program that promotes teaching and learning, open communication, and collaboration between just, peaceful, and prosperous partner nations.

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 AY23-24 included:

Honorary Chairs

Professor Galin Tsokov

Bulgarian Minister of Education and Science

Kenneth Merten

Ambassador of the United States to Bulgaria

Chair

Karina Angelieva

Former Deputy Minister of Education and Science
Head of the Political Cabinet
of the Minister of Energy

Treasurer

Eric Brassil

Cultural and Educational Affairs Officer,
US Embassy in Bulgaria

US Members of the Board

Eric Halsey*

Managing Director, Halsey Company

Emily Sargent-Beasley

President, American College of Sofia

Dr. Traci Speed*

Associate Professor,
Sofia University Department of English

Jeff Weinshenker

Public Affairs Officer, US Embassy in Bulgaria

Bulgarian Members of the Board

Doriana Basamakova

(as of December 2023)

Chief of Staff, Trust for Social Achievement

Radostina Chaprazova

(until December 2023)

Country Director, Arete Youth Foundation

Dr. Svetla Danova*

Stephan Angeloff Institute of Microbiology, BAS

Dr. Neli Koleva

(as of December 2023)

Chief Officer of Public Partnerships
at Teach for Bulgaria

Advisor to Ministry of Education and Science

Dr. Guenka Petrova

Deputy Minister of Education and Science

Dr. Tzvetomir Todorov*

(until December 2023)

Managing Partner,
Bulgarian American Management Company

**Fulbright alumni*

Front cover photo:

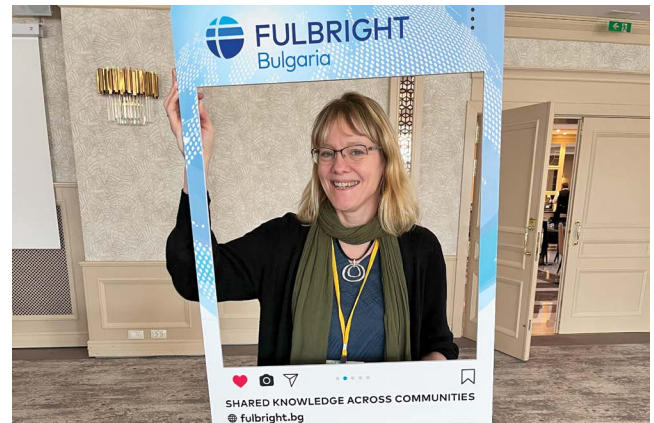
Bulgarian Fulbright AY24-25 grantees with US Ambassador Kenneth Merten and Deputy Minister of Education Natalia Miteva at the spring 2024 awards ceremony



From the AY2023-24 Board Chair Karina Angelieva

If I can sum up in one word the greatest value of the Fulbright program, it is "people." With around 40 American and Bulgarian scholars and students annually and 30+ ETAs, the Fulbright Bulgaria program has a profound impact on creating mutual understanding and long-term partnerships between American and Bulgarian societies. Last year, we prioritised investments in critical areas of research, education and innovation where exchange of knowledge, practice and role models are bringing both countries closer in their understanding of the cultural, scientific, and societal aspects of our nations and people. Through different educational instruments such as visiting scholars, civil society scholars, graduate students, visiting researchers, Humphrey Fellows and English teaching assistants we develop a showcase and celebration of human talents, and we promote humanity, democratic values and peace. An essential aspect of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission is to share a common understanding of the core principles of quality education, based on excellence of teaching and practice, transfer of knowledge and research results, and last but not least equipping the younger generation with adequate skills to communicate, share, listen and be competitive. The Fulbright Bulgaria team is working hard every year to be in line with social and global trends posing challenges to our young people as they seek to become independent and responsible participants in society, encouraging them to support local communities, and to participate in raising awareness on topics such as climate change, inclusive education and social inequalities.

That is why the launch of the Bulgarian Fulbright Leaders Grants program this past year is so important. It demonstrates the Bulgarian government's commitment to cultivating the next generation of innovators and social thinkers through academic collaboration – in other words, investing in Bulgaria's future. We are proud to work with our American partners to build on this program through exciting new exchanges in fields like STEM, cultural preservation, media disinformation and education for persons with disabilities. As we celebrate our rich history, I'm certain that Fulbright will continue to play a central role in shaping our shared future towards prospective and tolerant societies.



From the Executive Director Angela Rodel

In 2023, for the first time in our history, Fulbright Bulgaria completed a strategic planning exercise led by US Embassy PAO Jeff Weinshenker. Conversations with a broad range of stakeholders including alumni, grantees, board members, staff, and governmental and NGO partners resulted in the identification of four strategic goals for the period 2023-2026: 1) Expanded Media Engagement and Brand Recognition; 2) Leveraging Alumni Potential; 3) Expanded Commission Capacity; and 4) Expanded Grant Opportunities. (The full Strategic Plan can be found on our website.)

The Commission began actively implementing the plan in AY23-24, and I am happy to report that positive results are already in evidence: Fulbright Bulgaria's media visibility has improved significantly (see p. 33); our alumni networks in both Bulgaria and the US have been reinvigorated, thanks to a series of in-person and online initiatives (see p. 29); and commission capacity has strengthened thanks to staff training and internal reorganization. Although we still have considerable work ahead to meet our goals, we can nevertheless say with confidence that Fulbright Bulgaria is prepared to tackle new challenges with creativity and confidence as it enters its fourth decade!

We offer our profound thanks to all our alumni and partners – especially the US and Bulgarian governments and the America for Bulgaria Foundation – who shared their insight during the strategic planning process and who continue to support Fulbright Bulgaria's programming. Of course, none of the work we do would be possible without the tireless dedication of the Fulbright Commission staff, for whom I am deeply grateful. I would also like to thank our new Fulbright grantees, who bring so much passion and wisdom to the work they do and who continue to inspire our community and expand our impact. We look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen our core values of inquisitiveness, transparency, inclusiveness, and enthusiasm!

Fulbright Bulgaria's YEAR AT-A-GLANCE:

75

FULBRIGHT
BULGARIA
GRANTEES

51 US/24 BG

GRANTEES BY CATEGORY

U.S.: 51

6 Scholars

8 Specialists

5 Students

32 ETAs

BG: 24

9 Visiting Scholars

2 Civil Society Scholars

7 Graduate Students

4 Visiting Researchers

2 FTEAs

80

IN-PERSON OUTREACH
VISITS TO 30+ CITIES:

31 for Fulbright Competition
(including FTEA)

32 for ETA School Visits

17 to Schools and American
Corners for EducationUSA
in 8 cities

* Plus dozens of online information sessions
for Bulgarian students, scholars, teachers,
NGO reps and candidates for all awards

9,000

BULGARIAN
STUDENTS

taught by

32 ETAs

in 27 cities

18,320

Classroom Contact
Hours at:

19 Foreign Language High
Schools

4 K-12 Schools

4 Math And Sciences Schools

4 Professional Schools

1 University

PMP STATS

Program Highlights

- 6 Training Sessions
- 64 Participants
- 100% Exam Success Rate
- 2 PM Community Events

Volunteering

- PMI Bulgaria Chapter
- Pet Sisters Animal Shelter

Fulbright.bg Website YOY

User acquisition rose by
25.35%

Engaged sessions grew by an
incredible **195.93%**

Trackable key events rose by
31.39%

(such as 'Apply' outbound clicks
and 'mailto' clicks)

Event count per user increased by
4.65%

Social Media Impact

LinkedIn growth from
3329 to 4169 followers

Facebook returning viewers
rose by **110%**

Instagram content interactions
rose by **100%**

New FB page followers **716**

New Instagram followers **503**

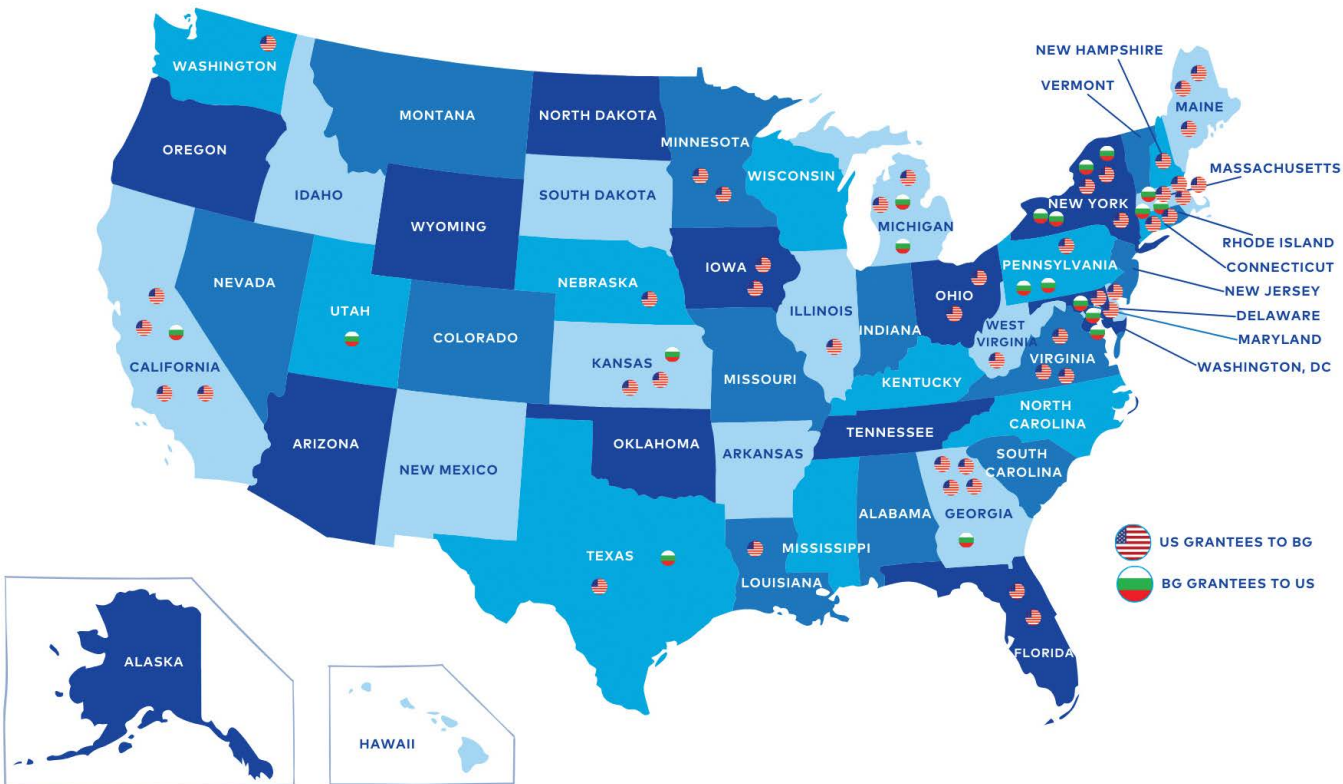
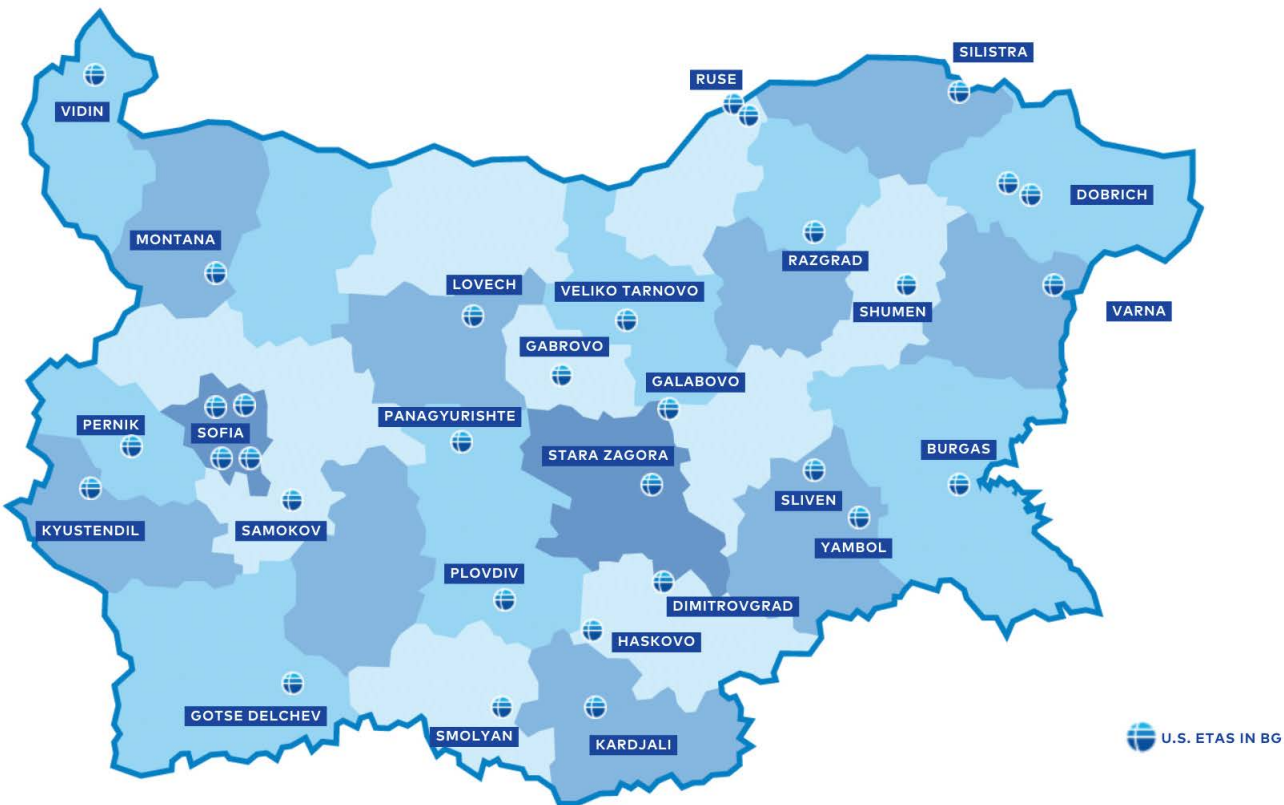
Email marketing
8,301 subscribers

EducationUSA Undergrad Scholarships

Around **\$450,000**
in annual scholarships
offered to six students in
the Opportunity Funds-
Bulgaria program

2 full-ride scholarships
to UPenn and Harvard
University

Maps of BG and U.S. Grantees' Host/Home Institutions



U.S. Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2023-2024

SCHOLARS

Blase Billack

Academic Field: Medical Sciences, Pharmacology
Project Title: Improving Speech and Communication Disorders through Evidence-Based Pharmacology Strategies
Home Institution: Saint John's University, New York, NY
Host: Medical University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv

Jonathan Calame

Academic Field: Architecture, Cultural Preservation
Project Title: Leveraging International Support Mechanisms for Bulgarian Heritage Protection
Home Institution: Maine College of Art, Portland, ME
Host: Balkan Heritage Foundation, Sofia

Graham Griffith

Academic Field: Journalism, Communications
Project Title: Sustainable Strategy for Informing International Media Organizations of CSD's Work
Home Institution: Self-employed Journalist, Portland, ME
Host: Center for the Study of Democracy, Sofia

Julie Kiernan

Academic Field: Theatre
Project Title: Telling Your Story: Using Theatre to Address Issues of Identity and Connection through Storytelling
Home Institution: Salem State University, Salem, MA
Host: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Elana Resnick

Academic Field: Anthropology, Cultural Anthropology
Project Title: Refusing Sustainability: Life Beyond Waste at the Edges of Europe
Home Institution: University of California-Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA
Host: Trust for Social Achievement, Sofia

Rebecca Thomas

Academic Field: Social Work
Project Title: Program Evaluation for Social Workers: Implications for Research, Policy, and Organizational Development
Home Institution: University of Connecticut, Hartford, CT
Host: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Laura Carrig

Academic Field: Herbalism, Music
Project Title: Musical and Botanical Rites of the Traditional Bulgarian Calendar
Host: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, and Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, Plovdiv

Hannah Ivanov

Academic Field: Fine Arts
Project Title: Non-Conformist Modes in Bulgarian Painting Between 1960 and 1990
Host: National Academy of Arts, Sofia and Burgas

Tyler Lecours

Academic Field: Archaeology
Project Title: Unearthing Thrace: Greek Expansion in the Ancient World
Host: Balkan Heritage Foundation, Sofia

Rebekah Mills

Academic Field: Law
Project Title: Digging into History: Cultural Heritage Conservation Efforts in Bulgaria
Host: Balkan Heritage Foundation, Sofia

Rachel Neale

Academic Field: Slavic Studies
Project Title: Preservation of Bulgaria's Oral-Traditional Epic and Women's Roles Therein
Host: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, and American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad

ENGLISH TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Finlay Adamson

Host: Dr. Petar Beron Mathematical School, Varna

Veda Balaji

Host: Vocational School of Tourism, Samokov

Sarah Bennefield

Host: Vassil Karagyozev Foreign Language School, Yambol

Grace Bird

Host: Geo Milev English Language School, Ruse

Eric Budd

Host: Petar Bogdan Foreign Language High School, Montana

Margaret Cavanaugh

Host: Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov Foreign Language School, Shumen

Andrea Childs

Host: Ekzarh Yossif Foreign Language School, Razgrad

U.S. Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2023-2024

Chloe Duval

Host: Baba Tonka Mathematical School, Ruse

Rebecca Ercolani

Host: Professional High School of Energy and Electrical Engineering, Galabovo

Annabelle Fortine

Host: Elisaveta Bagryana 51 Secondary School, Sofia

Angelina Gasparov

Host: Yordan Radichkov Foreign Language School, Vidin

Hannah Gilson

Host: Peyo Yavorov Foreign Language High School, Silistra

Anna-Maria Gueorguieva

Host: Dr. Petar Beron Foreign Language School, Kyustendil

Sonja Haakonsen

Host: St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Veliko Tarnovo

Samuel Hearn

Host: Ivan Vazov Foreign Language School, Smolyan

Marci Heatherly

Host: Romain Rolland Foreign Language School, Stara Zagora

Emily Kasky

Host: Zaharii Stoyanov Foreign Language School, Sliven

Giana Loretta

Host: Thomas Jefferson Second English Language School, Sofia

Kyle Louder

Host: Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov Foreign Language School, Haskovo

Nithya Mahakala

Host: Vocational School for Computer Programming and Innovation, Burgas

Steve Maravillo

Host: Simeon Radev Foreign Language School, Pernik

Laura Meloy

Host: Hristo Botev Foreign Language School, Kardzhali

Jonathan Phalen

Host: Acad. Mihail Arnaudov 119 Secondary School, Sofia

Devon Rancourt

Host: Aprilov National High School, Gabrovo

Efren Serra

Host: Ekzarh Yossif Foreign Language School, Lovech

Grace Sinsel

Host: 33 St. Sofia Foreign Language School, Sofia

Lydia Smith

Host: Yane Sandanski School of Mathematics and Science, Gotse Delchev

Sofia Syed

Host: Acad. Kiril Popov School of Mathematics, Plovdiv

Price Tarbet

Host: St. Kliment Ohridski School of Arts, Dobrich

Kelsey Walock

Host: Dr. Ivan Bogorov Foreign Language School, Dimitrovgrad

Ariana Wheeler

Host: Geo Milev Foreign Language School, Dobrich

Rebecca Winton

Host: Professional School of Industrial Technologies, Management and Tourism, Panagyurishte

FULBRIGHT SPECIALISTS

Gena O'Keefe

Project Title: Support for Designing and Scaling Effective ECD Practices
Host: Trust for Social Achievement, Sofia

Ivan Manev

Project Title: Capacity Assessment and Consulting for AACSB Accreditation
Host: Sofia University, Sofia

Colin Meghoo

Project Title: Respond to Disaster with Knowledge
Host: University Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov, Burgas

Maria Ellen Powell

Project Title: Health and Voice: Physiologic Therapy Approaches
Host: Medical University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv

Natalia Velikova

Project Title: OIV Master of Science in Wine Management
Host: University of Food Technologies, Plovdiv

Zhijun Qiao

Project Title: Nonlinear Integrable Dynamical Systems and Soliton Theory
Host: Euro-American Consortium for Promoting the Application of Mathematics in Technical and Natural Sciences

Matthew Boyse

Project Title: Addressing Risks in the Black Sea Region
Host: Sofia Security Forum

Meglana Zapreva

Project Title: STEM for Primary School Education
Host: University of Plovdiv, Plovdiv

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2023-2024

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Maria Atanasova

Thanks to Scandinavia Award

Academic Field: Public

Administration

Host: University of Maryland –
College Park

Degree: MA

Rukiye-Ayshe Egeli

Bulgarian Leaders Award

Academic Field: Material Science
and Engineering

Host: Cornell University

Degree: MA

Ashod Derandonyan

Thanks to Scandinavia Award

Academic Field: Public Policy

Host: Gallaudet University

Degree: MA

Ekaterina Fakirova

Bulgarian Leaders Award

Academic Field: Law

Host: University of Pennsylvania

Degree: LL.M.

Evangelia Gkaravela

Academic Field: Aerospace
Engineering

Host: Stevens Institute of Technology

Degree: MA

Alexandra Mileva (Lexi Fleurs)

Bulgarian Leaders Award

Academic Field: Visual Arts

Host: School of Visual Arts, New York

Degree: MA

Ivan Shopov

Bulgarian Leaders Award

Academic Field: Education

Host: Harvard University

Degree: MSc.

VISITING RESEARCHERS

Veselina Dzhumbeva

Academic Field: East European
Languages and Literature

Project Title: In Search of Identity:
Gender, Exile, and Maternity in
Ekaterina Bakunina's Тело and
Любовь к Шестерым

Home Institution: Queen Mary
University of London

Host: Columbia University

Gyulten Huseinova

Academic Field: Neuropsychology

Project Title: The Role of Hand
Gestures and Mental Imagery across
Creative Cognitions

Home Institution: Koç University

Host Institution: University of
Pennsylvania

Diana Manchorova

Academic Field: Reproductive
Biology

Project Title: Study of the Role
of HLA-F Molecule in Human
Implantation

Home Institution: Institute of
Biology and Immunology of
Reproduction, BAS

Host: Wayne State University

Nia Toshkova

Academic Field: Evolutionary Biology

Project Title: Why Do Bats Age So
Slowly?

Home Institution: National Museum
of Natural History, BAS

Host: University of California-Los
Angeles

VISITING SCHOLARS

Radostina Angelova

Academic Field: Entrepreneurship

Project Title: High-growth Enterprises
and Scale-Ups in Different Social
Contexts: A Comparative EU-USA
Perspective

Home Institution: Sofia University St.
Kliment Ohridski

Host: Bentley University, Boston

Albena Bakratcheva

Academic Field: Comparative
Literature

Project Title: Transatlantic
Discourses: Margaret Fuller in Trans/
National Context

Home Institution: New Bulgarian
University

Host: Harvard University

Atanas Gotchev

Academic Field: Computer Science/
Optics

Project Title: Computational Light
Transport

Home Institution: Tampere
University, Finland

Host: University of Utah, UT

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2023-2024

Tsvetoslav Koynarski

Academic Field: Veterinary Medicine
Project Title: Development of Subunit Vaccine for African Swine Fever

Home Institution: Trakia University, Stara Zagora

Host: Kansas University, KS

Angela Popivanova

Academic Field: Applied Mathematics

Project Title: Studying the Dynamics of Complex Systems via Cellular Nonlinear/Nanoscale Networks (CNN)

Home Institution: Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, BAS

Host: Texas A&M University, TX

Aneta Vasileva

Academic Field: Architecture

Project Title: Retrofitting Utopia: Postwar Heritage, Identity and the Green Deal

Home Institution: University of Architecture and Civil Geodesy, Sofia

Host: University of Georgia, GA

Gergana Yordanova

Academic Field: National Security

Project Title: The Hawala Remittance System: Economic Policy and Civil Society Implications

Home Institution: Rakovski Defense College, Sofia

Host: George Mason University, Washington DC

Katerina Zlatkova-Doncheva

Academic Field: Special Education

Project Title: Mentoring Program for Children and Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

Home Institution: Veliko Tarnovo University

Host: Michigan State University, MI

VISITING SCHOLAR AWARD IN MATHEMATICS AT UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

Venelin Todorov

Academic Field: Computational Mathematics

Project Title: Innovative Stochastic Algorithms for Large-Scale Problems of Computational Mathematics

Home Institution: Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, BAS

Host: University of Miami, FL

CIVIL SOCIETY RESEARCHERS

Stefan Krastev

Academic Field: Anti-Corruption Policies

Project Title: Comparing Strategies of Audience Development and Impact in Non-profit Investigative Journalism Outlets

Home Institution: Anti-Corruption Fund, Sofia

Host: ProPublica, New York

Veneta Novakova

Academic Field: Civil Engineering

Project Title: Study of Standards and Good Practices in Building Envelopes in Tall Buildings in the US

Home Institution: Façade Engineering Association, Sofia

Host: Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, Chicago, IL

FTEA IN MEDIA LITERACY

Maya Mitsova

Academic Field: TEFL

Home Institution: Geo Milev English Language School, Rousse

Host: University of Wisconsin – Madison

Desislava Todorova

Academic Field: TEFL

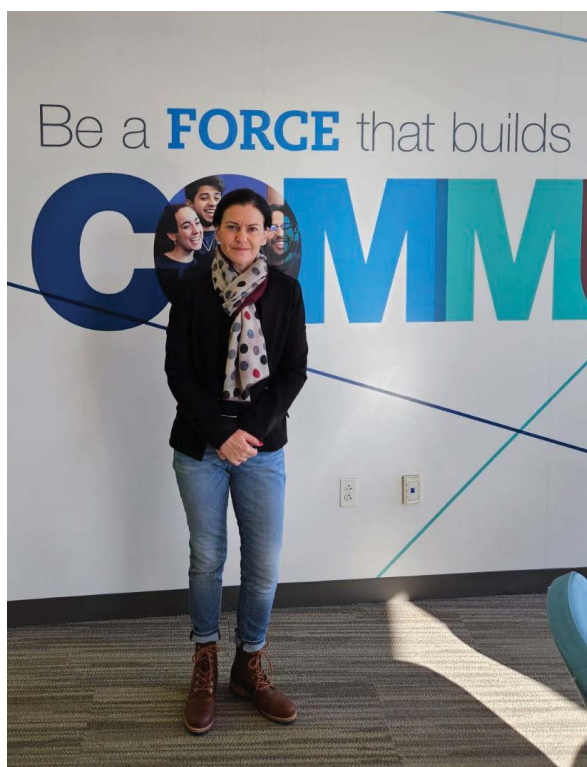
Home Institution: Second English Language School, School

Host: University of Wisconsin – Madison

Bulgarian Scholar Program



Prof. Tsvetoslav Koynarski at Kansas University



Dr. Radostina Angelova at Bentley University

In **AY 2023-24**, the highest number of participants (9) took part in the Bulgarian scholar program.

A diverse group of specialists in veterinary medicine (**Tsvetoslav Koynarski**), computer science/optics (**Atanas Gotchev**), special education (**Katerina Zlatkova-Doncheva**), architecture (**Aneta Vasileva**), national security (**Gergana Yordanova**), entrepreneurship (**Radostina Angelova**), applied mathematics (**Angela Popivanova**), and comparative literature (**Albena Bakratcheva**) made up the illustrious cohort of Bulgarian academics. **Dr. Venelin Todorov** from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, recipient of the Pythagoras Grand Prize of the Ministry of Education and Science for 2021 and the John Atanassov Award of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, was selected for the University of Miami Award for Mathematicians.

They had also impressively diverse US hosts: our 2023-24 scholars worked in Kansas University, University of Utah, Michigan State University, University of Georgia, George Mason University, Bentley University, Texas A&M University, Harvard University, and the University of Miami. From development of swine fever vaccine through computational light transport, mentoring of children with intellectual disabilities, exploring architectural utopia and the hawala remittance system, to high-growth enterprises, cellular nanoscale networks, and American literature in trans/national context, our Bulgarian scholars found at their host institutions the support and access to information that allowed them to complete their innovative research projects.

After successful and productive stays at their US host institutions, our scholars immediately started contributing to the expansion and visibility of the Fulbright program upon their return. Prof. Tsvetoslav Koynarski graciously shared his impressions and key take-aways from his visit at the Kansas University College of Veterinary Medicine with the Bulgarian Fulbright community in a video interview and a newsletter article. Prof. Aneta Vasileva and Prof. Albena Bakratcheva took part in the video series promoting the Fulbright Scholar Program. Prof. Vasileva also initiated public discussion

on the topic “Make Architecture Great Again: The New Bulgarian Architectural Populism.” Dr. Radostina Angelova won a Fulbright alumni grant for 2024 with her follow-up project “Growth and Organizational Development: A Pilot Empirical Study of Bulgarian Firms.” Prof. Katerina Zlatkova-Doncheva enjoyed a busy and highly successful stay in the US, where in addition to her host institution Michigan State University, she managed to visit and develop institutional links with Kansas State University. Her mentoring program for youths with intellectual disabilities is now supported by her US colleagues, while she herself has been promoted to the position of Head of the Pedagogy Department at the University of Veliko Tarnovo.

Prof. Zlatkova-Doncheva is also a key contributor to our Fall 2024 Fulbright Newsletter, where she shared her impressions of her Fulbright visit.

Prof. Tsvetoslav Koynarski not only worked on developing vaccines for African Swine Fever and Japanese Encephalitis virus, receiving the highest level of bio safety access, but also had the time to appreciate the dynamic and inclusive academic environment at Kansas University.

“ It was a great honor for me to be a part of the team and the academic community of Michigan State University in East Lansing as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar. I had dreamed of dedicating myself to pure science for some time, and as a Fulbrighter, the dream came true. I embarked on an incredible research journey in the world of Special Education. It was truly inspiring to see how science and practice can go hand in hand.”

- Katerina Zlatkova-Doncheva

“ I would like to thank the Fulbright program for the opportunity and the academic freedom I was given. As an academic person, I am not just interested in research, but also in policies for the improvement of life for all humanity. It is extremely important for me to be part of the most developed democracy in the world and make contacts with the brightest minds in my field. Hopefully, someday I might be given a chance to harness everything learned for the better future of Bulgaria.

- Tsvetoslav Koynarski



Prof. Katerina Doncheva in Washington, DC



Arch. Veneta Novakova studying the tall buildings in Chicago

Bulgarian Student Program



Ashod Derandonyan at Gallaudet University

The **AY 2023-24** Bulgarian degree-seeking students program included seven impressive participants. Our drive to make Fulbright opportunities accessible and beneficial for diverse communities yielded results in the student selection. An inspiring representative of the Roma community **Maria Atanasova** is pursuing a degree in Public Policy at the University of Maryland, College Park, while a leader of the deaf community in Bulgaria, **Ashod Derandonyan**, is specializing in Public Administration at Gallaudet University, Washington DC. The outstanding public service commitment of these grantees was also acknowledged by our partners – the Thanks to Scandinavia Fund, who awarded both of them their annual top-up grants. Maria Atanasova's community presence is already visible, as her academic success was highlighted by the online project *People of Sofia*, featuring people of diverse backgrounds with outstanding achievement. Meanwhile, Ashod Derandonyan keeps working on the incorporation of sign language into higher education as a member of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education's Sign Language Council.

This cohort also includes an inspiring woman in science, specializing in aerospace engineering. **Evangelia Gkaravela** was admitted to Stevens Institute of Technology, New York, where she is pursuing her dream of becoming a space systems engineer.



Rukiye-Ayshe Egeli enjoys academic life at Cornell

The newly established **Fulbright Bulgarian Leaders Grant** allowed us to send more students to prestigious graduate programs with adequate funding. This grant sponsors students who are admitted to top-ranked universities in their field, either by applying on their own, or already selected for the regular IIE-placed grant. The first cohort of recipients in the fields of law, education, material science and engineering have already graduated from Harvard University (**Ivan Shopov**), Pennsylvania University (**Ekaterina Fakirova**) and Cornell University (**Rukiye-Ayshe Egeli**), while our student in visual arts **Lexi Fleurs** (Alexandra Mileva) continues in her second year at the School of Visual Arts, New York. Both Ekaterina and Rukiye graduated with honors from their top institutions. Currently, Lexi Fleurs is working on a film dedicated to effects of ballistic attacks on the civilian population in Ukraine.

Here is what Maria Atanasova shares with the numerous readers of the People of Sofia project:

“ I am grateful to my parents for the care and support they gave me to be the person I am today - with ambition, awareness and dreams. I want to thank every person who believes in Roma children and their potential. To everyone, a teacher and educator, who treats their pupils and students with dignity. Especially, I want to thank the Arete Youth Foundation, the Trust for Social Achievement and, above all, the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Program, which is currently supporting my studies in the United States.”

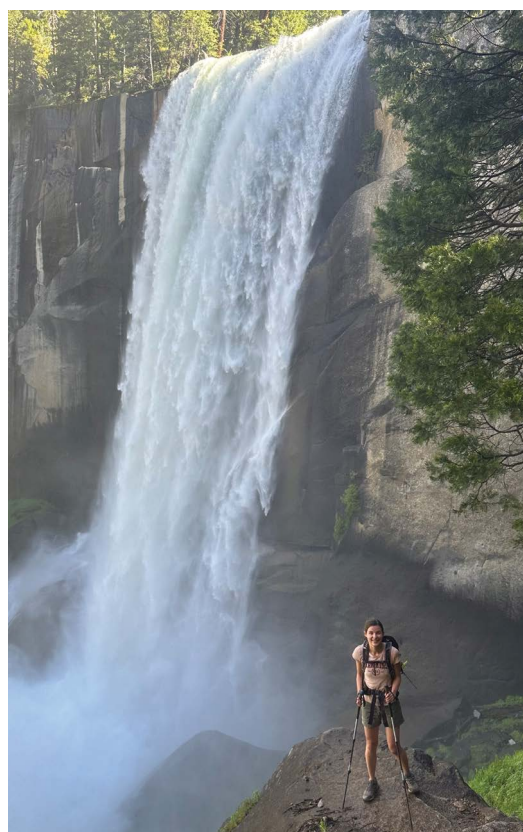
The **2023-24 Visiting Researcher** program produced impressive results. Four Bulgarian visiting researchers with inspiring and diverse doctoral projects took part in this cycle. **Niya Toshkova**, a specialist in evolutionary biology from the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, had the chance to expand her knowledge on bat longevity at the University of California-Los Angeles. **Gyulten Huseinova**, a doctoral student in neuropsychology from Koç University, Turkey, carried out her successful research at the University of Pennsylvania. Gyulten was also a key resource person at the Pre-Departure orientation for the 2024-25 cohort of Bulgarian grantees. **Diana Manchorova**, an expert in reproductive biology from the Institute of Biology and Immunology of Reproduction, BAS, completed her research visit at Wayne State University successfully and managed to defend her thesis and receive her doctoral degree from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The fourth participant, **Veselina Dzhumbeva**, represented the humanities. As a PhD student in East European Languages and Literature at Queen Mary University of London, UK, she used her time at Columbia University productively and participated in prominent international conferences.

Niya Toshkova returned from her research visit to the University of California – Los Angeles filled with confidence and inspiration:

“ We had a wonderful time at UCLA, and I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity. I learned a lot and was able to contribute to bat ageing research, both with my laboratory skills and ideas. Dr. Sears was a wonderful host, and it was inspiring to work with such a kind and devoted scientist who is successfully balancing personal life and career, which is quite rare in our field. The positive energy all around was simply impressive. Thank you once again for everything! Being a Fulbrighter has been an honor!”



Gyulten Huseinova at a research seminar



Niya Toshkova explores the longevity of bats

Civil Society Program



FTEA participants are top!

Our two **2023-24** Civil Society grantees had very successful grant periods. **Stefan Krastev**, a representative of the highly esteemed Anti-Corruption Fund NGO, expanded his knowledge on audience development and impact in non-profit investigative journalism at the award-winning independent journalist organization ProPublica in New York. His newly acquired skills are much needed at his home institution, as rule of law and anti-corruption activities remain top national priorities.

Representing the Façade Engineering Association, architect **Veneta Novakova** had the chance to study standards and good practices of building facades for tall buildings thanks to the hospitality and assistance from the Council of Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat in Chicago. Veneta's visit was also productive in establishing contacts with US Fulbright alumni, and she has been an active participant in the selection process for new Fulbright participants.

FTEA in Media Literacy

Fulbright Bulgaria continues its successful participation in the Fulbright Teaching Excellence Awards in Media Literacy. The recruitment, selection, and administration campaign targeted Bulgarian high-school teachers interested in developing their students' media literacy skills and learning about innovative teaching technologies.

The **2023-24** cycle included two dedicated and committed teachers: **Desislava Todorova** from Thomas Jefferson Second English Language School – Sofia, and **Maya Mitsova** from Geo Milev English Language School – Rousse, both demonstrating

exceptional passion for teaching and innovation. Their visit to University of Wisconsin – Madison, starts in the first half of September 2024. We expect them to return full of enthusiasm for sharing their newly acquired knowledge.

The **2024-25** campaign yielded impressive results. A strong pool of applicants submitted their documents. Out of the top eight nominees, two were selected by IREX to take part in the program: **Enitsa Karpicheva** from the Profiled Mathematics and Natural Sciences High School in Burgas and **Stela Vasileva-Petkova** from Geo Milev Secondary School in Varna.

Awards Ceremony for AY24-25 Bulgarian Fulbright Cohort

Thanks to generous support from the Bulgarian government, Fulbright Bulgaria was able to expand its programming with the newly established Fulbright Bulgarian Leaders Grant, which supports graduate study at top US universities. In addition, the active recruitment, publicity and consultation campaigns convinced more candidates in the various categories to invest their time and hopes in applying for a Fulbright award. Additionally, Fulbright's community building academic and social events foster a friendly and inspiring environment for the Bulgarian alumni, who are excited to volunteer their time and expertise supporting new cohorts of Fulbrighters.

The **Pre-departure orientation** for the departing AY24-25 Bulgarian students and scholars was held on June 26, 2024, in hybrid format (in person with online access). The dynamic, friendly, and informative PDO was followed by our first-ever **Awards Ceremony** to introduce the outgoing cohort to our alumni community. US Ambassador Kenneth Merten and Deputy Minister of Education Natalia Miteva spoke and handed out certificates to the new Bulgarian Fulbrighters, while recently returned alumni from the first cohort of Bulgaria Leaders Grantees shared their advice and experience.

Seventeen participants had the chance to receive their certificates and get their pre-departure farewells at the ceremony. Seven graduate students and one visiting researcher will be pursuing diverse specializations at four top US universities, with Columbia University hosting four Bulgarian Fulbrighters in 2024-2025; six visiting scholars and two NGO representatives will be conducting research at universities based in the states of Massachusetts, California, Texas, NY and Kentucky; our Hubert Humphrey fellow will depart for the state of Arizona.

A crowd of more than 120 attendees, including grantees and their families, as well as Fulbright alumni and partners, then enjoyed a celebratory cocktail party in a lovely historical hall in downtown Sofia.



Alums, friends and family applaud the new cohort



Ambassador Merten and Dep. Min Miteva with the new cohort



BG Leaders grantee Rayna Emilova in the spotlight



Fulbrighters and friends enjoy a networking cocktail

U.S. Scholar Program



Cooking class for US scholars and students

Six U.S. Scholars were awarded Fulbright grants to teach and conduct research in 2023/2024.

Independent journalist **Graham Griffith** spent nine months working with the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) under a Special Award in Journalism. He connected CSD experts with international counterparts, guided Bulgarian analysts in storytelling, and contributed to improving knowledge dissemination. Graham participated in strategic planning, supported analysts with editing and advice, and explored regional perspectives by lecturing and presenting in Austria, the UK, Poland, Finland, and Czechia. Graham also arranged for the deputy managing editor of Project Syndicate to hold an op-ed writing workshop in Sofia and is working on developing two podcast series in collaboration with Bulgarians.

Jonathan Calame, an adjunct professor at the University of Southern Maine and a specialist in cultural heritage preservation, collaborated with the Balkan Heritage Foundation to secure grants from international organizations like the World Monuments

Fund and UNESCO. His efforts brought attention to high-priority projects in the Balkans, helping them gain visibility with major donors. Jon also contributed to planning discussions, suggested partnerships with American universities, and helped connect his Bulgarian colleagues with institutions in the US. He plans to create online lecture series to share his research findings with American colleagues.

Rebecca Thomas, a professor of Social Work at the University of Connecticut, presented on Social Enterprise and Economic Development at the Schools of Business and Economics in Sofia, Bulgaria, and Prague, Czech Republic. Rebecca also engaged in policy forums, mentored doctoral students, and collaborated with faculty. She conducted research on Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, interviewing both service providers and refugees. Recognized as a Global Scholar by the Council of Social Work Education, Rebecca credits the Fulbright Scholarship for helping her achieve this recognition.

Associate Professor **Julie Kiernan** from Salem State University aimed not only to teach theatre at New Bulgarian University (NBU) but also to use theatre to connect with underserved communities. Her project, a theatre workshop for Roma youth, was a collaboration between the MIR Center (a local NGO), NBU's Theatre Department, and herself as a Fulbright Scholar. Twenty youth from four MIR centers participated, each paired with an NBU theatre student as a mentor. The workshop, held over four Saturdays in March, culminated in a public presentation at NBU Theatre on April 14, 2024, attended by family, faculty, and Fulbright scholars. During her stay, Julie also encouraged NBU students to apply for Fulbright programs, presented on US theatre training, and worked on establishing an MOU between her home and host institution.

Professor **Blase Billack** from St. John's University, NY, collaborated with the Medical University – Plovdiv's Pharmacy Department to teach two elective courses: Pharmacology Principles and Autonomic Pharmacology, and Pharmacology of the Endocrine and Reproductive Systems. He also presented on improving speech and communication disorders through pharmacology during workshops at the Department of Speech Pathology and participated in a round table titled "Fulbright and Health: New Perspectives," featuring keynote speaker Professor Harris Pastides, chair of the US Fulbright Advisory Council. His joint research with the Department of Speech Pathology established that there is a need for pharmacist training on drugs affecting speech and communication. He developed new animal models and 3D tissue cultures to advance the field of logopharmacology.

Elana Resnick, assistant professor of Anthropology at UC Santa Barbara, undertook research at the intersection of environmental anthropology and critical race studies, exploring how "racialized disposability"—the idea that certain communities are seen as expendable—supports "progressive" environmentalism in Europe. Building on her previous work with Romani women involved in waste collection, Elana's research reframes waste as a means of survival rather than pollution and will contribute to her forthcoming book titled "Refusing Sustainability: Life Beyond Waste at the Edges of Europe."



US Grantees in front of the Alexander Nevski Cathedral

"I have been recently recognized as a Global Scholar by the Council of Social Work Education and there is no doubt in my mind that as a Fulbright Scholar that my global contributions have been recognized."

- Rebecca Thomas

"I ... had the opportunity to see a lot of professional theatre. This has shown me differing aesthetics to the production of theatre and different ways to structure theatre seasons. It has been intriguing, and I feel confident it will impact how I direct, teach, and produce theatre in the US in the future and for the rest of my time as a creative individual. I am excited to bring these creative and curricular insights into my professional work in the future."

- Julie Kiernan

"Embedding in an unfamiliar culture has introduced me to important new ways of looking at the world...including the US. And developing friendships and partnerships across languages and cultures provides me with a whole new set of ideas and understandings."

- Graham Griffith

U.S. Specialist Program



Matthew Boyse presenting at Sofia University

Thanks to ECA's generous offer of additional, fully funded Specialist slots, the Specialist Program in Bulgaria thrived in AY 2023-2024, as it added three more slots to the standard of five that we try to utilize every year.

The project "Addressing Risks in the Black Sea," created by Sofia Security Forum with Specialist **Matthew Boyse**, was a huge success. A career member of the Senior Foreign Service, Matt Boyse shared valuable insights about Black Sea region security, giving public lectures and participating in numerous interviews, which increased the Program's visibility.



Maria Powell teaching a class at the Medical University of Plovdiv

Another project in ECA priority fields was "Respond to Disaster with Knowledge," submitted by University Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov in Burgas. The Specialist that was matched with the project, **Colin Meghoo**, significantly contributed to curriculum development for university-level disaster education and risk assessment. He delivered lectures on disaster protection to undergraduate and medical students and collaborated on research ideas in risk mitigation and disaster management with his Bulgarian counterparts.



Natalia Velikova teaching at the University of Food Technologies

The third fully funded project aimed at curriculum development for a Master's program in Cybersecurity at the University of National and World Economy, was matched with Specialist **Patrick Kyhos** - Data Privacy, AI, & Cybersecurity Attorney.

From the standard country allocations for 2023 and 2024, we had Fulbright Scholar Alumna and now Specialist **Gena O'Keefe**, an independent consultant, who worked comprehensively on a stakeholder engagement plan with the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) team at the Trust for Social Achievement, expanding the work she began on her core Fulbright grant.

Specialist **Ivan Manev** from Maine Business School conducted a capacity assessment and consulting for AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) accreditation of Sofia University's Department of Business and Economics. Ivan delivered multiple seminars covering various aspects of the AACSB accreditation process and standards.

Maria Powell from Vanderbilt University Medical Center visited the Medical University of Plovdiv to teach voice disorders evaluation and therapy to first- and second-year medical speech pathology students, and to participate in a Fulbright/Erasmus Round Table with other Fulbright and Erasmus team members and key members of the University of Plovdiv's Department of Education.

Former Fulbright Scholar **Natalia Velikova** from Texas Tech University engaged in numerous activities with her hosts from the University of Food Technologies in Plovdiv. She led a training program for students focused on the practical application of basic marketing principles within the wine industry context, supervised the students' final marketing projects, advised on curriculum development, and visited local wineries for consultations.

Mathematician **Zhijun Qiao** (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) participated in an International Seminar organized in cooperation with the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, where he delivered a colloquium talk on Integrable Peaked Models. He also co-organized and conducted two special sessions with colleagues from China during the 16th conference AMiTaN'S'24 in the Black Sea resort of Albena.

Meglana Zapreva (Ramaz School, New York) was invited by the University of Plovdiv to provide consultations on effectively implementing STEM curricula in primary school education. Meglana instructed faculty members from the Department of Education on developing standards-aligned STEM curricula, implementing STEM classroom design to support that curriculum, and planning activities to help students improve their math and science scores and prepare for a tech-savvy workforce.



The Fulbright Specialist Program has significantly contributed to the development of our OIV Master program and enhanced our English language education capabilities. We greatly appreciate the tremendous expertise provided by Professor Velikova. Having another academic from the USA with similar expertise would be immensely beneficial for our future endeavors in the academic field, so we will definitely apply again."

- University of Food Technologies, Plovdiv

The most important outcome of the project is the overall expanding of University Asen Zlatarov's educational capacity, by gaining global perspectives from our guest – an experienced U.S. specialist, with practical knowledge and great expertise in the area of Disaster protection and medical care. As the first Fulbright grantee in the University, Dr. Meghoo became our appreciated ambassador for building sustained relationships with individuals and institutions in the U.S., contributing with his professional abilities to our specific curriculum, expert practical knowledge, positive attitude and support."

- University Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov, Burgas

The Fulbright Specialist Program helped immensely with the visit of Prof. Manev in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. It enabled a "technology transfer" of the AACSB accreditation know-how, and if (or rather when) we manage to get the AACSB Business Accreditation, Fulbright will have played a major role in the process specifically due to this visit."

- Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia

U.S. Student Program



US Grantees at the Opera

Five U.S. students conducted independent research in Bulgaria during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Our five talented US student researchers completed their grants, with two receiving extensions to continue their work in Bulgaria.

Hannah Ivanov, a visual artist, studied painters from the National Academy of Arts who resisted Socialist Realism. Despite challenges in connecting with older researchers, she gathered valuable information, established relationships with curators and artists, and consulted for “The Artist at Play” collective, enhancing their festival presence.

Rachel Neale focused on Slavic oral-traditional epic and women’s roles within it. Initially studying Bulgarian at the American University in Bulgaria, she switched to collaborating with the Institute of Ethnology

and Folklore Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her research on women’s cultural practices in epic songs helped her successfully defend her master’s thesis, and she plans to present her findings at the ASEES Annual Conference.

Laura (Lou) Carrig explored traditional music and herbal healing in relation to the Bulgarian folk calendar. Affiliated with Dr. Ina Aneva from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, she attended classes at the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts in Plovdiv, gathering rare books, field notes, and archival recordings. Lou collaborated with local musicians and herbalists and was granted a two-month extension to participate in a summer project collecting folk songs in Rhodopi villages.



Trip to Melnik for US Scholars and Students

Tyler Lecours and **Rebekah Mills** received Special Awards in Archaeology/History, working with the Balkan Heritage Foundation. Tyler conducted field research at Emporion Pistiros, studying ancient colonial patterns. He contributed to archaeological excavations and was granted a month-and-a-half extension to continue his work, with some discoveries displayed at the Archaeological Museum in Sofia.

Rebekah focused on cultural heritage conservation, studying best practices at several Bulgarian sites. She participated in international conferences, co-authored publications on cultural heritage and female archaeologists, and is working on a report on cultural heritage reconstruction in Bulgaria.



The Fulbright experience... has given me a great deal of skills and understanding of how to move forward as a researcher and how to navigate this kind of environment and community as a young graduate."

- **Hannah Ivanov**



I expect my experience as a Fulbright student to impact my career because it allowed me to focus especially on cultural heritage research. I learned more about how expansive this field is and how much I still have to learn. There are many disciplines that fall under the culture heritage umbrella, and the different sectors must all work together to preserve a site. Being in Bulgaria, I got to see a lot of different types of preservation and site displays. It was a unique experience to be able to visit so many sites and gain knowledge from the firsthand encounters that I had."

- **Rebekah Mills**



Fulbright Scholars and Students Tasting Bulgarian Wine



US scholars and students visit Rozhen monastery

The Fulbright|America for Bulgaria English Teaching Assistants Program

Thirty-two ETAs arrived in Bulgaria for their in-person Orientation in September 2023, for a training that included an intensive Bulgarian language course, methodology and cultural adjustment sessions and joint activities with their mentor-teachers. At the end of a week filled with learning, new friendships and fun, ETAs headed to their cities together with their mentor-teachers. Between October and the end of January, commission staff members visited each ETA, met with principals and mentor teachers, audited classes and provided feedback, and inspected school-provided housing.

In AY 2023-2024, three ETAs represented Fulbright Bulgaria at two international Fulbright events in Brussels, the Fulbright Seminar on the European Union and NATO, (February 2024), and the EU-US Young Leaders Seminar, focusing on the Security Implications of Climate Change (March 2024). In November 2023, the Fulbright Commission hosted its fourth ETA Seminar on Media Literacy in Sofia, funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the US Department of State. The event gathered 68 ETAs currently teaching in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, and Montenegro.

Personally, working as a Fulbright teacher has provided me with so many new friendships and connections within Bulgaria that I am so thankful for. I was able to see a totally new side to Bulgaria through working in schools and was able to understand deeper what it is like to grow up in Bulgaria. Professionally, working as a teacher has provided me with valuable communication skills to be able to teach concepts to a wide range of learners (and has taught me lots of patience!).

- Anna Maria Gueorguieva, Kyustendil



Wrap-Up Seminar, Burgas



ETA Media Literacy Seminar



ETA Eric Budd at a Spelling Bee Competition

Close to 12,000 BGN in mini-grants were awarded this year to ETAs to lead their own extracurricular activities such as PenPal exchanges, sports, arts & crafts, and book clubs, organizing cultural trips for children from underserved communities, Model UN events, theater clubs and performances, and more. As judges, team coaches and management team members, ETAs are a vital part of the BEST Foundation's English speech and debate tournaments, attended by over 500 students from all corners of the country. ETAs continued to serve as role models and promote a healthy lifestyle by running sports and wellness clubs in their schools. Many ETAs also joined choirs, folk dancing groups, hiking groups, horseback riding and tennis clubs; they ran marathons, attended local culture and sports events and cheered for their students at Olympiads, sports competitions and concerts. ETAs were very proactive this year in establishing their own community connections with NGOs and grass-root organizations in their cities.

The Commission hosted its annual Wrap-Up Conference for U.S. grantees on June 6-9, 2024, in Burgas. School principals and vice-principals, mentor teachers and sponsors attended the event and enjoyed a variety of presentations. Bulgarian educators participated in training sessions on finding motivation and inspiration in the classroom, and successful interaction with Gen Z, led by an experienced teacher trainer.

While we were enjoying the current cohort's successes, the Commission was also busy selecting the lucky AY24-25 ETA finalists from more than 100 applicants. After holding interviews in February, 26 new finalists and four returning ETAs were chosen. The Commission conducted three pre-departure Zoom meetings with the new cohort to provide details on grant documentation, visa application and travel, security and DEI concerns. Additionally, the returning ETAs held two webinars on travel, packing and life in Bulgaria for the new cohort.

In recognition of the crucial importance of this ETA program, the Commission created a new ETA Program Assistant position. The new Fulbright Bulgaria team member, Viktoria Dailova, joined us in August 2024. Welcome onboard, Vicky!



ETA Hannah Gilson with fellow choir singer

“My Fulbright experience taught me how to be independent, explore new relationships, immerse myself in a new language and work in an environment that I was unfamiliar with.”

- Rebecca Ercolani, Galabovo

“Bulgaria is such a fascinating blend of cultures, and I really look forward to going home and showing my home culture everything, I have learned. Knowledge is never wasted. As Ted Lasso once said, ‘He’s on a path towards becoming a better man and I am to help him along that path.’ And I think that applies to me as well.”

- Margaret Cavanaugh, Shumen

“My teaching and the students’ individual and corporate hard work and smart risk-taking have helped them further develop their English reading, writing, and speaking skills, as well as their ability to work in teams, empathy for others, and self-confidence - all of which will be of support to their school and the institution’s objectives.”

- Samuel Hearn, Smolyan

Ukraine: War and Resistance – A Powerful Fulbright Initiative To Fight Disinformation



Ukrainian Ambassador Olesya Ilashchuk opened the exhibit



Organizers Iliana Dimitrova, Mariia Kravchenko, and Milena Berbenkova



Visitors to the exhibit in Plovdiv



US Ambassador Merten viewing the exhibit

In recognition of the two-year anniversary of the horrific full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Fulbright Bulgaria was honored to organize and curate the exhibition “Ukraine: War and Resistance.” Thanks to the joint initiative of the Fulbright Academic Exchange Program in Ukraine, the Institute of International Education – Kyiv Office, the Bulgarian–American Fulbright Commission, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture and the US Embassy in Bulgaria, photographs by US and Ukrainian Fulbright alumni and staff capturing the tragic and heroic, devastating and hopeful moments of present life in Ukraine were presented at Sredets Gallery in Sofia between February 20 and March 1, 2024. Members of the public were invited to visit free of charge and engage with this powerful and personal testimonial to the true horrors of the Ukraine war.

The exhibition was curated by Bulgarian Fulbrighter Milena Berbenkova and Marian Luniv, Communication Coordinator at Fulbright Ukraine, and made possible through close collaboration between Fulbright Bulgaria and Fulbright Ukraine staff — particularly Iliana Dimitrova and Mariia Kravchenko from the Kiev Office, the latter of whom traveled for nearly two days to the official launch reception in Sofia. The exhibit opening, marking the two-year anniversary of the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, was attended by 80 guests from the greater Fulbright community and our esteemed partners including Viktor Stoyanov, Deputy Minister of Culture; H.E. Olesya Ilashchuk, Ukrainian Ambassador to Bulgaria; H.E. Kenneth Merten, US Ambassador to Bulgaria, Justice Kalin Kalpakchiev from the Supreme Court of Cassation; and America for Bulgaria Foundation President Nancy Schiller and Executive Director Desislava Taliokova; as well as other distinguished figures from Bulgaria’s intellectual, cultural, academic, and political spheres.

In the following months, the exhibition was hosted also by the Regional Library of Burgas and the Bishop’s Basilica in Plovdiv, reaching a wider national and international audience. In all three cities, the event was widely publicized on national media, and in Plovdiv the exhibit was even visited by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center

EducationUSA-Bulgaria Virtual Group Advising Program



Advisor Filip Lyapov with Opportunity Funds cohort

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 Opportunity Funds and other competitions.

Since 2013, the EducationUSA Advising Center has implemented an innovative **Virtual 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 Fulbright ETAs, the American Spaces, Fulbright graduate students/scholars, and others. It has both a virtual and in-person component to make educational advising available to students beyond the capital city of Sofia.

The virtual component of the program relies on reaching prospective students via social networks and social media, the Fulbright Commission's website, email marketing, online webinars and meetings, as well as individual 1-on-1 Skype/Zoom/Teams sessions. In addition to the growing virtual component of the program, EducationUSA advisor Filip Lyapov personally visits schools from which EducationUSA's main pool of participants come from, fostering excellent relations with students, teachers and the administration in those schools. This past academic year, 230 students in grades 8-12 took part in the program. Some of the program participants were accepted to prestigious U.S. colleges and universities where they received generous financial aid packages.

Opportunity Funds-Bulgaria Program

Since 2016, Bulgaria has hosted the Opportunity Funds (OF) competition, which provides small grants to 10 to 12 academically talented students who are economically disadvantaged. This year again, the OF program has showed strong results. The American University in Bulgaria, New York

University Abu Dhabi, University of Pennsylvania, Minerva University, and Harvard University offered acceptance to six 2023 OF program participants with a total scholarship amount of more than \$450,000 USD for the first academic year, including a full-ride scholarship to UPenn.

Fulbright Testing and Training Services



Trainer Stefan Radev (top left) with PMP course takers and Fulbright Bulgaria staff

Unfortunately, due to the extremely unfavorable financial conditions offered by Prometric and their refusal to negotiate a better contract with a partner of nearly 30 years, the Commission was forced to close its test center in December 2023. This was the only place to take the GRE exam in Bulgaria, and one of the only reliable centers for TOEFL testing, so this will unfortunately affect a small number of Fulbright candidates and grantees going forward, as they will need to either travel to a neighboring country or take the online/home edition of tests to satisfy US university and State Department testing requirements. We hope to see the quality of delivery of home/online tests improving as well, as that could be a good solution for candidates and grantees.

The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission continues to offer GRE, SAT, and other test preparation courses primarily targeting grantees and EducationUSA participants, but this remains challenging due to new test formats and the transition to online, at-home testing. However, Fulbright Bulgaria's project management training program continues to deliver quality training. Throughout the year we conducted six training sessions with a total of 64 participants, as well as in-house advisory services by Fulbright PMP trainers. The team also organized two Women in Agile/Fulbright Bulgaria community meetings with more than 160 attendees.

Community Building

The new Fulbright Bulgaria Mission statement reads: “Through innovative and inclusive educational exchange, Fulbright Bulgaria invests in human potential, teaching excellence, advancing scientific and cultural knowledge, and building a community of like-minded individuals who remain intellectually curious and committed to contributing to a just, prosperous, and peaceful future for the peoples of the United States and Bulgaria.” Inspired by this new mission, over the past year we have experimented with a diverse array of in-person and hybrid programming to strengthen our alumni and partnership networks on both sides of the Atlantic.

As part of the **30th Anniversary Celebration** throughout Fall 2023, Fulbright continued its partnership with a Bulgarian, female-led tech start-up Orbiit, whose platform matched alumni based on compatible goals and experiences for a 30-minute virtual conversation. Nearly 460 alumni opted in, and more than one hundred conversations took place over the course of the initiative. Given the positive feedback, we will continue to seek opportunities to give alumni a sense of belonging to Fulbright Bulgaria no matter where they might be in the world.

In November 2023, we revived our **Fulbright Open Lectures** for the first time post-pandemic. This TED-talk-style forum featuring recently returned Bulgarian alumni allowed the audience to learn about cutting-edge research in the spheres of the humanities, hard sciences and professional fields. After the lectures, speakers and guests had the chance to enjoy a glass of wine together at our **Thanksgiving Cocktail Celebration**.

ED Angela Rodel’s visit to the US in January/February 2024 offered an opportunity to reconnect with US alums. Fulbrighters on the East Coast and in the Midwest joined book discussion events, while in Washington, DC, the **Bulgarian Embassy kindly hosted a reception**. Bulgarian Ambassador to the US Georgi Panayotov and US State Department Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary Marianne Craven both offered welcome addresses to the alumni, partners and friends of Fulbright Bulgaria who attended.

In March, we had the honor of welcoming the wider **European Fulbright Community** to Sofia for a three-day staff training. Nearly 50 Fulbright staffers from 23 commissions exchanged best practices and had fun, which only goes to show that Fulbright is truly a global community of like-minded individuals working together for a better world!



ED Angela Rodel with Fulbrighters at DC reception



Fulbright staff from across Europe exchanging ideas



Gallaudet President Roberta Cordano in Sofia

Major Program and Enrichment Events

**US GRANTEES
ORIENTATION IN SOFIA**

**OPPORTUNITY FUNDS
MODULE: Essay Writing and
Common App Training**

**VISITS TO ETA
PARTNER SCHOOLS**

ORIENTATION for Fall
Semester US Scholars

**LAUNCH OF AY24-25
CAMPAIGN** for BG Scholars,
VRs and NGO Reps

**FULBRIGHT OPEN
LECTURES AND
THANKSGIVING PARTY**

**REGIONAL ETA
CONFERENCE ON
MEDIA LITERACY**

**STAFF DEIA
TRAINING**



Sep

Oct

Nov/Dec



MID-TERM MEETING
for US Grantees
in Sofia

ORIENTATION
for Spring Semester
US Scholars

ONLINE INTERVIEWS
with US Candidates
for AY24-25

UKRAINE:
War and Resistance
Exhibit

FULBRIGHT EUROPE STAFF TRAINING

BEST NATIONALS TOURNAMENT
at UNWE

STUDY TOUR
for US University
Reps

PDO AND AWARDS CEREMONY
for Bulgarian
AY24-25 Grantees

WRAP-UP SEMINAR
in Burgas with US
Grantees and Hosts

sCOOL MEDIA BOOTCAMP
for High School
Students at Veliko
Tarnovo University

BEST DEBATE CAMP in Lozen

OPPORTUNITY FUNDS MODULE:
IELTS/TOEFL
Preparation



Jan/Feb Mar/Apr May/Jun Jul/Aug

Camps and Workshops



Summer camps are a time-honored tradition in the United States that combine learning and personal development along with tons of fun. Thus, Fulbright Bulgaria was proud to help sponsor two week-long camps for Bulgarian high schoolers in July and August 2024.

The fifth annual **sCOOL Media Summer Bootcamp**, in partnership with the Association of European Journalists—Bulgaria, was held from July 1-8 at Veliko Tarnovo University.

A group of 19 inquisitive students tested their skills through a series of teambuilding exercises, workshops and lectures led by experienced journalists who represent news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and Radio Free Europe. Guided by their mentors, our budding journalists were tasked with seeking out newsworthy local stories; at the end of the week, seven groups presented their media projects to a jury. The winning groups covered stories about cultural heritage preservation, the challenges facing children with autism in Bulgaria, and Veliko Tarnovo's green public transport initiative. Their work was later published

on the sCOOL Media platform.

From August 11-17, the peaceful village of Lozen became a hub of intellectual energy as 30 speech enthusiasts from 18 schools across Bulgaria gathered for a dynamic **debate summer camp**. Under the guidance of enthusiastic facilitators from the BEST Foundation, the students immersed themselves in a packed schedule of workshops, practice sessions, and thought-provoking discussions. The facilitators brought the debates to life, turning complex topics into engaging challenges that the students tackled with impressive zeal. A highlight was the inspiring visit from Nikolay Angelov and Rumen Marinov, chair and vice-chair of the Bulgarian Debate Association. They captivated the audience with their journey to the finals of the world debate championship, sharing tips, strategies, and personal anecdotes that left everyone motivated to aim for the stars.

Huge thanks to our partners from AEJ-Bulgaria, the BEST Foundation, the US State Department and the America for Bulgaria Foundation for making these incredible summer camps for the future leaders (and Fulbrighters) of Bulgaria possible!

Fulbright Media Presence



This year, we saw a notable increase not only in media presence but also in overall online visibility. Partner institutions as well as grantees' home and host universities made efforts to publicize information about U.S. Fulbright grant recipients. For example, Journalist Graham Griffith was featured in articles by the University of Southern Maine and in the America for Bulgaria Foundation newsletter, while Professor Rebecca Thomas from the University of Connecticut gained attention from her institution after receiving a prestigious award for Advancing Education in International Social Work upon returning from Bulgaria. Dr. Blase Billack participated in a Fulbright conference at his host, Plovdiv Medical University, along with Fulbright Specialist Maria Powell, which concluded with an official visit to Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov University in Burgas, covered by local news outlets.

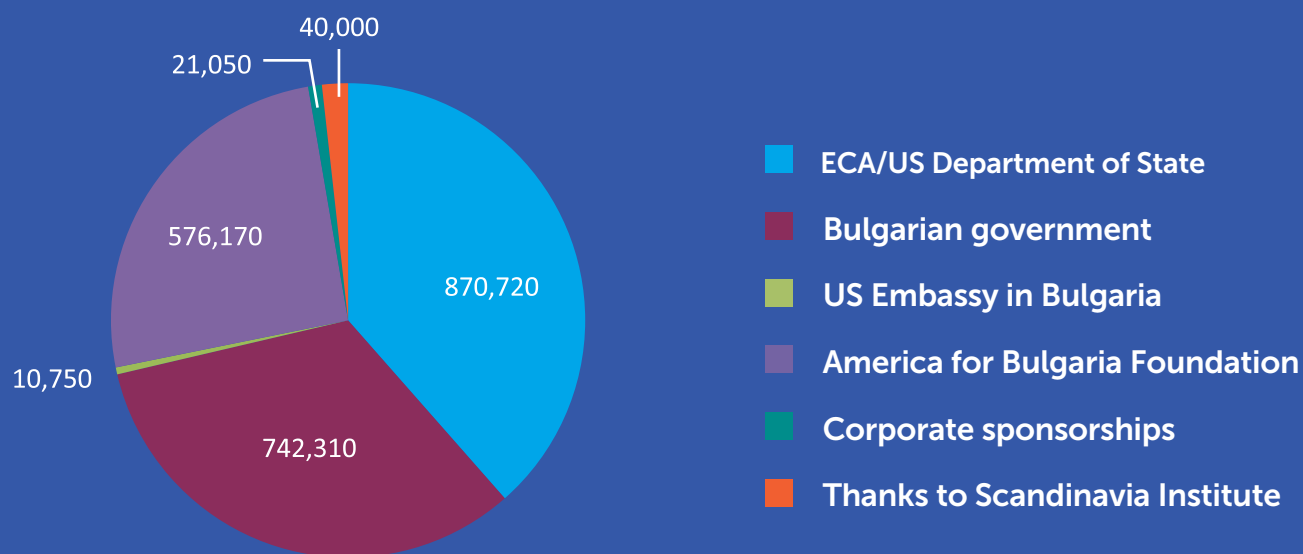
Fulbright Specialists also enjoyed strong media coverage. Meglena Zapreva's training for colleagues in the Ministry of Education was covered by multiple local news outlets, including Plovdiv 24, Plovdiv Online, Marica, Plovdiv News, and My PR. Former senior foreign service officer Matthew Boyse received the most media attention, with interviews in major national outlets such as Dnevnik, Nova TV, Bulgarian National Television, and the Bulgarian National Radio.

English Teaching Assistants have once again attracted very positive reporting and featured in a total of 37 media publications in online media, local and national television and radio channels, and local newspapers. To highlight a few of our media stars: returning ETA in Razgrad Andrea Childs, was interviewed by her local newspaper Ekip7, and featured in a few materials by the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency and Bulgarian National Television as part of her local choir Zhelezni Struni (Iron Strings), which celebrated its 120th anniversary last year; Margaret Cavanaugh was featured on TV Shumen (at 22:09') with her students who are junior EU parliament ambassadors; Kyle Louder's launch of his own show on the school's radio, Spill the Coffee with Kyle, was introduced by Haskovo.Live; Grace Bird, ETA in Ruse, but also alumna of the YES program in Bulgaria, talked about her experiences as a teacher on Bulgarian National Television; Finlay Adamson, who volunteered at the Our House community center in Varna, was interviewed by Bulgarian National Television; Kelsey Walock and her high school Model UN conference in Dimitrovgrad was reported in local newspapers (Bgvesti, Xnews); and in an interesting twist illustrating the program's reach, former "bestie" (BEST Foundation competitor) from Blagoevgrad, Tsvetelina Petrunova, who is now a professional TV reporter, interviewed our first ETA in Samokov, Veda Balaji, on national television: <https://bit.ly/4dEFrm7>.

Fulbright Bulgaria Budget

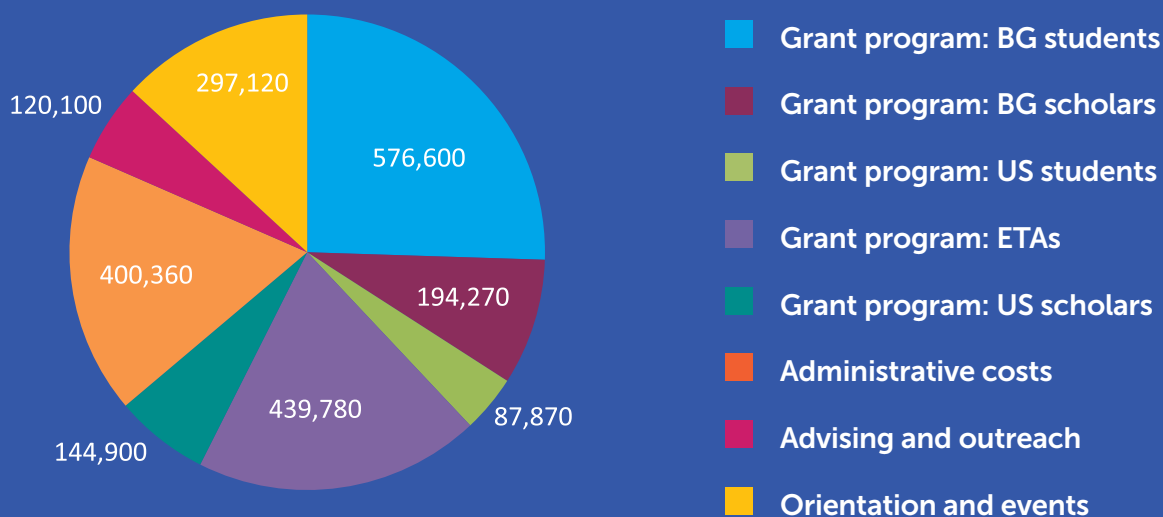
Fulbright Programs Funding Sources

Total Funding (Oct 2023- Sept 2024): 2,261,000 USD



Fulbright Programs Costs

(Oct 2023- Sept 2024): 2,261,000 USD



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Back cover photo:

The Fulbright Commission board gives academic exchange the thumbs up!

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