

NEWSLETTER

Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange



Fulbright at 75

**Cyber Silver Linings: Online Reunions
An Experience Well Worth the Wait
Surviving SNOVID and Celebrating Freedom**

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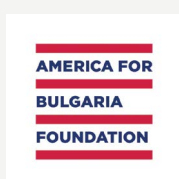
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Cover photo:

Still from the film "Kuker" by Ted Efremoff,
US Student 2008-2009

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Although the pandemic has made this year exceptionally difficult for academic exchange, the global Fulbright community does have one cause for celebration: the Fulbright Program turns 75 in 2021! To mark this milestone, the US State Department has set up a special website (fulbright75.org) and organized a series of "Country Days" to showcase

Fulbright programs around the world. It will come as no surprise that Fulbright Bulgaria chose May 24 as its country day, as that date also marks the Feast Day of Saints Cyril and Methodius, when Bulgarians celebrate their alphabet, literature and culture. For the online event, we invited a panel of Fulbright educators to discuss the future of post-pandemic education, offered a seminar on intercultural negotiation and debuted an hour-long film featuring Bulgarian and American grantees in the arts. Thank you to all our talented alumni who contributed to the program and everyone who joined us for the virtual celebration! Those who were unable to join us can read more about the event in this issue on Page 2.

Spring 2021 also saw a cautious return to exchange activities on a limited basis. Four Bulgarian scholars were able to take up their grants in the US this semester, despite Covid, Snovid and various travel challenges. Three US students and one US scholar also arrived in Bulgaria in May 2021 to conduct their research. We hope that despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic we will be able to safely allow more Fulbrighters to take up their grants in coming months.

The Fulbright Bulgaria team wishes you and your families a safe and relaxing summer! We hope to be able to see you at in-person 75th Anniversary Events in Bulgaria and the US later this year if the health situation permits.

Angela

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Fulbright at 75:

Bulgarian-American Visions and Voices

By Angela Rodel



On August 1, 1946, President Harry S. Truman signed the Act that launched the Fulbright Program. Thus, the year 2021 is the 75th anniversary of the program, which has allowed more than 400,000 scholars, teachers, artists, students and civil society leaders to take part in the prestigious exchange program.

As part of the year-long series of online and in-person events, the US State Department invited each Fulbright Commission or embassy to choose a “Country Day” to showcase the impact of Fulbright around the globe. Not surprisingly, Fulbright Bulgaria chose May 24, the Feast Day of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which is also when Bulgarians celebrate their alphabet, literature and culture.

Fulbright Bulgaria’s online Country Day 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: Dr. Ginny Whitehouse (US Scholar 2017-18), Dr. Vladislav Slavov (HHH 2020-21), Sirena Wurth (ETA 2015-16) and Mariya Stoyanova (FTEA 2019). The discussion 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. Audience members on Zoom and Facebook also chimed in with questions and comments throughout the discussion.

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 the Fulbright International Summer Institute. His online interactive lecture/discussion on cross-cultural communication, a topic at the heart of the Fulbright mission, was an entertaining and thought-provoking exploration, which offered food for thought for all of us as we navigate an ever more polarized communications landscape.



US Student Danielle Nutting performs "Pancho Vladigerov's Song"



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

The grand finale of Fulbright Bulgaria's Country Day 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, in which more than a dozen US alumni sang an arrangement of a Bulgarian folk song by the composer Philip Koutev. Another highlight of the film was former Executive Director Julia Stefanova's 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. The online audience who joined us on Zoom and Facebook responded enthusiastically to this showcase of our community's incredible talent and shared their own memories around their Fulbright experiences. We hope to be able to host a live screening in Sofia later in the year, but for those of you who cannot wait to view the film, please visit our Fulbright Bulgaria YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuB4K6WKYOA>

We would like to thank everyone who made the Fulbright Bulgaria 75th anniversary celebration a success: the US State Department, who generously supported the film with a grant; the US Embassy in Sofia and the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science; all the panelists and presenters who led the discussions; all our alumni who contributed their time and talent to the film; the Fulbright staff for their months of hard work in pulling this event together; and last but not least, Kalina Kokanova and Dimitar Iskrenoff, who created the film and enthusiastically immersed themselves in the spirit of Fulbright Bulgaria!

In Person Again:

Pre-Departure Orientation for Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

By Maria Kostova

On June 25, 2021, the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission held a much-awaited in person pre-departure orientation for the Bulgarian Fulbright grantees who will study, teach and live in the U.S. during the next academic year. Due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the cohort we were seeing off actually includes students and scholars from both AY 2020-21 and AY 2021-22.



Fulbright Orientation for BG Grantees 2021-22



Fulbright Party for BG Grantees

Eighteen Bulgarian grantees, including students, scholars, civil society representatives, professionals and PhD researchers, will be pursuing projects in fields as diverse as education, theater, computer science, law, applied math, biology, performance arts, philosophy, dance, public health, cognitive linguistics, English literature, psychology and sports education. Fulbright Executive Director Angela Rodel, Program Officer Maria Kostova and Financial Officer Anastassia Miteva presented the program structure and administrative details. Anna Todorcheva from the US Embassy offered useful information on the visa application process. The grantees benefited from the advice of Fulbright alumni, including scholars Iskren Ivanov and Grace Fielder, graduate students Elitza Koeva and Emmanuel Aprilakis, and visiting researcher Delyan Roussev. The orientation finished with a fruitful Q&A session and a discussion on cultural exchange and intercultural communication.

The Fulbright grantees and alumni had the chance to continue their communication informally during a garden party, where they also met other Bulgarian Fulbright alumni and current US grantees. The value of personal communication and the possibility of meeting old friends and acquaintances after some time drew a large number of attendees and encouraged a vivid exchange of ideas, plans and projects, gestures of mutual respect and appreciation and a sense of hope and encouragement.

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



AY2015 Cohort Online Reunion

A Cyber Silver Lining: Online Fulbright Reunions

By Iliana Dimitrova

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Fulbright program, and commissions around the world are finding various ways of celebrating the contribution of Fulbright scholars in science and research, art, health and technology.

As part of our celebratory activities, Fulbright Bulgaria decided to hold a number of online reunions with our American Fulbright cohorts via Zoom – our global virtual office, watercooler chat room, conference and meeting space and everything else we have all become accustomed to in the lack of possibilities for live interactions. The idea came about naturally as a desire to reconnect, check in with one another in these unusual times, catch up with news and stories and maybe even come up with ideas about how to support future projects and initiatives.

The three reunions we had held

so far have proved the idea was worth it – we met with alumni from cohorts 2015, 2016 and 2017 during March, April and May, and we had an amazing time, albeit virtually. As a throwback to our midterm “100 Days in Bulgaria” meetings, when we ask Fulbrighters to prepare presentations or videos, this time we were the ones to surprise them with a slideshow commemorating each cohort’s best moments together, our conferences, volunteer days, cultural trips and, well, of course – parties!

To see each other’s faces again after a long time was great, and it was even better to be able to share the

joy of personal and professional achievements of our alumni – new jobs, scholarships, engagements, published works, and awards. It was impressive how productively many of our grantees have used the quiet lockdown times for being creative, completing long-postponed goals or enjoying new hobbies. Joint projects did spring up, plans for visits were made and, later this year, we expect to see a few of our alumni back in Bulgaria, as they will be working on various projects in Europe. Last but not least, we are happy to report that all Bulgarian-adopted cats are doing great and have become completely naturalized and happy U.S. citizens!

EducationUSA Success Story

Junior, “Frederic Joliot-Curie” French Language High School, Varna, Bulgaria

By Kristina Nasteva



Kristina as an event management intern for the Third National Youth Choirs Festival in Varna



“Movement for Movement” Charity event organized by Interact Club Varna, with help from ChameleON Youth NGO Varna

My name is Kristina Nasteva, I am 17, and I am currently a high school junior. I joined the EducationUSA Virtual Cohort Advising Program at the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission in January 2021. Fulbright Bulgaria and EducationUSA help students focus on better understanding their strengths and interests and also on building a great college application package. Through the virtual group advising program we receive information, counseling and training that help us stand out when applying to U.S. colleges and universities. Our tasks include researching universities, creating a balanced school list, demonstrating interest in your prospective colleges, creating an impressive digital portfolio, presenting your personal college application website or other passion projects, controlling your social media accounts, building an outstanding college resume, writing effective college application essays, providing strong letters of recommendation, shining in a college interview and ultimately, sending a successful college application. All those steps in the holistic U.S. college application process are very important when it comes to contacting universities and preparing a standout college application. Before I started working with the Fulbright Commission, I already had some preparation for college applications, but I needed more direction and advice on how to actually stand out as an international applicant.

The first EducationUSA online event that I attended in the beginning of 2021 was the virtual U.S. College Alumni Fair where current Bulgarian students in the U.S. shared their college experience as well as helpful tips on how to live your college life to the fullest. We also had the opportunity to meet with Princeton admission representatives as well as with His Royal Highness Prince Kyril Saxe-Coburg, who shared his insights about the interviewing process for Princeton University.

The EducationUSA Advising Center also prepares its students for taking the SAT and the iBT TOEFL standardized tests. In April this year, they organized a one-week TOEFL training course. In addition, Mrs. Snejana Teneva, our EducationUSA Adviser, held a daily college prep workshop on “Demonstrated Interest in a College.” We presented our resumes, passion projects and letters of intent and received constructive feedback on how to further improve them. This July, EducationUSA will be holding a virtual SAT training course and also college prep workshops on U.S. Highly Selective Admissions. And the last of the three training modules offered by EducationUSA-Bulgaria will take place this September and will focus entirely on writing college application essays and completing college applications, which I am looking forward to.

The EducationUSA Advising Center provides virtual advising too. We receive weekly emails with information about upcoming events, the U.S. college application process and pieces, the college application timeline we follow, as well as other insightful materials. I believe that joining EducationUSA is the best way to successfully prepare for competitive U.S. college admissions.



Kristina at the International Summer Camp in New York City

And finally, I would like to share some tips for acing your application process.

1. Apply to the EducationUSA virtual advising program early so that your preparation goes smoothly and without stress. Some current participants joined the program in 8th grade.
2. Prepare for a long application process and manage your time effectively because you can easily burn out if you do not get enough rest regularly.
3. Follow or create a checklist for the coming academic years and summers. I recommend that you make your summer break matter by taking MOOCs (massive open online courses), starting a job, volunteering, playing sports or travelling. I find that one of the best things I could do in the summer has been taking pre-college programs at U.S. universities and doing internships, as well.
4. Enjoy the process because it will also show you who you are, what your strengths and weaknesses are, and the areas you'll need to improve on. In the end, you'll not only get satisfaction from your college admission, but you will also get to know yourself better.

Teaching Teachers: Media Literacy in the Classroom

By Iliana Dimitrova

Between March and June this year a joint project of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission and the Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria trained 78 teachers, school psychologists and school principals from 33 cities in teaching media literacy. While 43 of the participants were teachers of English, the rest were teachers of History and Civilization, Philosophy and Civic Education, Bulgarian Language and Literature, Geography and Economics, Mathematics, Informational Technologies, Music, Electric Machinery, French and German.



Rada Mihaylova and Radostina Mihaylova from "Ivan Vazov" FLS in Smolyan

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. Distributed over three days, the training content offered a good mix of presentations and theory, examples from recent media publications, case studies and work in small teams via virtual rooms. The last of the activities, together with the time at the end of each training day dedicated for group discussions,

was the favorite session for the participants, many of whom shared that they can't wait to try it with their students.

The project will continue over the summer with the creation of an online community of teachers interested in school journalism clubs and media literacy, followed by a short refresher course in the fall. We hope to be able to conduct a number of in-person workshops later in the year, finally bringing this eager and curious community together.

"I have always had an interest towards media and the journalistic profession, and even worked as a journalist for a local newspaper at some point," shares one participant.

I feel that in our times, when every person is literally a media themselves, and people have access to an enormous quantity of information, possessing media literacy is of extreme importance at every phase of human development. It also plays a huge role in forming opinions and building habits and knowledge in young people."



Fulbright Bulgaria Welcomes Back U.S. Grantees

By Rada Kaneva

After almost a year of the U.S. Fulbright Program being suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Fulbright Commission in Sofia had the pleasure to welcome three American doctoral students and one scholar, who arrived in the country in May to start work on their research projects.



Welcome lunch for US Grantees with Bulgarian Fulbright alumni

On May 11, 2021, the grantees were invited to the Commission office to discuss practical aspects of living and working in the country with a representative of the U.S. Embassy in Sofia and the executive director and staff members of the Fulbright Commission. After the discussion, they were invited to lunch with Bulgarian Fulbright alumni and then visited Boyana church to see the beautiful frescoes of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The US doctoral students will conduct independent research projects – Aurelian Tafani will be exploring the role mobility played among the Neolithic populations that inhabited the Lower Danube River Valley, both in Bulgaria and in Romania; Emmanuel Aprilakis will be assessing the traditions of the ancient theater space in modern-day Bulgaria and Greece; and Lindsay Folz will investigate homemade jarred foods in an attempt to document the agricultural biodiversity that is being preserved as well as the preservation of cultural practices and memory. U.S. scholar Jasmin Vassileva, who arrived a little later in May and was also greeted by Commission staff, grantees and alumni, will work on a cross-cultural adaptation and development of novel neuroscience-informed psychoeducational interventions for substance use disorders in Bulgaria. We are incredibly happy to be hosting such an amazing group of people working on such interesting and valuable projects, and we wish them an exciting, productive and rewarding stay.



Orientation for U.S. Doctoral Students, May 2021

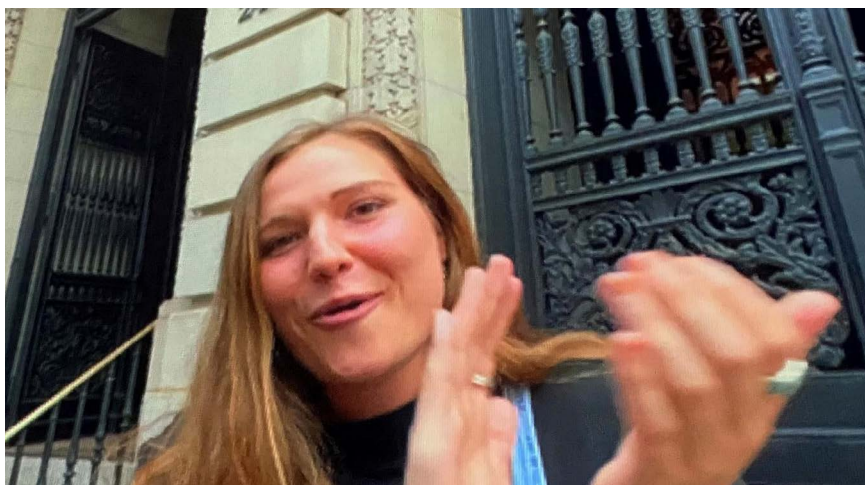
Filmmaking Talent Shines in Hollywood Pravets

By Sophia Kleinsasser

Young Bulgarian filmmakers, teachers, parents, friends and Fulbright staff attended the third annual Pravets Film Festival, whose organizers believe that Hollywood isn't the only place with rolling hills and filmmaking. Fulbright | America for Bulgaria English Teaching Assistant alumna Shauna Ricketts founded the student festival in collaboration with Stefka Atanasova and other colleagues at Aleko Konstantinov Foreign Language School, Pravets.

By tradition, this year's festival was held at Zarya-1895 National Chitalishte on Friday, June 11, with Aleko Konstantinov School students hosting and emceeing, while the school principal, members of local government and Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission Executive Director Angela Rodel presented the awards. This year a total of nine short films by students from Etropole, Gotse Delchev, Haskovo, Plovdiv, Pravets and Sofia were screened in competition for the festival's five award categories.

Teams of student filmmakers from all over the country were invited to submit three-to-four-minute films incorporating three elements from a master list of twenty, ranging from abstract notions like 'head in the clouds' and 'immortality' to more concrete subjects such as 'blueberries', 'graffiti' and 'helmet'. These submissions were judged by an international panel of artists, filmmakers, screenwriters and other industry professionals from Canada, France, Germany and the United States. Festival attendees and participants were greeted with a special video from the judges, who offered words of encouragement



Fulbright | America for Bulgaria English Teaching Assistant alumna Shauna Ricketts (virtually) applauds student filmmakers' submissions.



Participants and winners at the Pravets Film Festival on June 11, 2021.



Executive Director Angela Rodel and ETA Program Assistant Sophia Kleinsasser greet winners after the awards ceremony at the 3rd Annual Pravets Film Festival.

and wonder at the impressive talent that went into the films. Having the opportunity for their work to be recognized by a global jury of true professionals is a huge draw for aspiring student filmmakers.

The nine films were *High School Romance* by The CREATORS (Pravets), *Immortality* by Literally a Single Man (Etropole), *Why Do We Dream?* by WDWD (Plovdiv), *Suit Yourself* by VIVID (Gotse Delchev), *One More Page* by Cinematica (Stara Zagora), *Bike Therapy* by ProTeam (Sofia), *Blueberry Rush* by LZD Productions (Sofia),

Jealous by Team Popcorns (Etropole) and *The Inner Voice* by Team Procrastination Station (Haskovo).

The Boris Nikolov Award for Best Cinematography is dedicated to the memory of award-winning filmmaker (and Aleko Konstantinov School alumnus) Boris Nikolov. His parents presented this year's award to the Cinematica team of Sofia for *One More Page*. The Best Story Award is given to the film that most successfully crafts a story, masterfully integrating its chosen elements with creativity. Team WDWD took this

award home to Plovdiv for *Why Do We Dream?*. The Next Level Award for Innovation was a new category added during the 2020 Pravets Film Festival, for "the team that doesn't only think outside the box, but creates their own". It went to the short film with the most imaginative take on its chosen elements: *Blueberry Rush* by LZD Productions of Sofia. *Blueberry Rush* also took home the Runner Up for Best Film Award for its unique story, character development and meaningful cinematography. The grand prize, Best Film, was the second win for the team from Romain Rolland Foreign Language School in Stara Zagora, Cinematica. This award recognizes a film's creative integration of the festival elements, memorable and meaningful cinematography and well written and developed story. *One More Page* certainly did leave the audience on its toes right up to the end with its surprise twist!

Of course, all of the student films had their own unique spin on the festival criteria and memorable moments but, in the end, just three were awarded trophies in recognition of their excellence in cinematography, innovation, storytelling and overall creative mastery. Judging from the imagination and independent spirit on display in Pravets this spring, the future of Bulgarian film is in excellent hands.



Participants and winners at the Pravets Film Festival on June 11, 2021.



Winners of the Next Level Award for Innovation and Runner-Up for Best Picture, team LZD Productions from Sofia.



Emmanuel Aprilakis unearthing a discovery at the Roman Villa Mirovyane archaeological dig

An Experience Already Well Worth the Wait

By Emmanuel Aprilakis

Emmanuel Aprilakis is the recipient of the Fulbright Bulgaria-Greece Joint Research Award for his project “Traditions of the Ancient Theater Space.” Having won the 2020-21 award, his travel was postponed until May 2021 due to the pandemic, and he will carry out the Greek portion of his grant from May 2022, after his fellowship at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Originally from New York City, Emmanuel is currently a PhD candidate in Classics at Rutgers University.

I received this Fulbright to assess the traditions of ancient theater space in what is now modern-day Bulgaria and Greece. While I am writing my dissertation on the chorus-leader in ancient drama and visiting ancient theaters helps to reimagine aspects of ancient performance, this project continues my prior work on 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. To that end, I am endeavoring to visit every surviving theater site across Bulgaria, including those that are disputed in one way or another. I am based in Sofia, with primary affiliation under the guidance of Dr. Nevena Panova of Sofia University and secondary affiliation under Dr. Georgi Gochev at New Bulgarian University. Here, I have visited the amphitheater of Serdica, which was discovered under the Arena di Serdica Hotel, and I have also already made the trip to Plovdiv, home of the nation’s “crown

jewel,” the grand ancient theater of Philippopolis. Having visited dozens of ancient theaters across the Greek and Roman worlds, I can affirm that this magnificent theater is one of the top I have ever seen, a certain rival to those in Mérida or even Epidauros, my favorite site in the world.

Much travel still lies ahead as I will spend the summer traversing the country, especially to visit the theaters in Stara Zagora, Nikyup, Nesebar, and Sandanski, and also the excavation at

Heraclea Sintica (Rupite near Petrich), where Dr. Lyudmil Vagalinski believes that the theater will come to light imminently.

I am confident that such visits will be especially fruitful thanks to the incredible welcome I have received from my advisors and their efforts to connect me with their colleagues, such as the distinguished epigraphist Dr. Nikolay Sharankov. I already have proof of this as my visit to Plovdiv was seriously enhanced by my planned meeting with Dr. Veronika Kelbecheva, a native of the city who toured me around all places of interest. Back in Sofia, I met with Dr. Milena Raycheva, who invited me to the archaeological dig at the Roman villa in Mirovyane, where, for the first time in my life, I took active part in an excavation and even helped find plenty of interesting objects, including potsherds, animal bones, a metal clamp, and a rare glass spindle whorl! I was also very happy to be invited to give a seminar for the department at Sofia University, where I got to present some research findings from both my dissertation and my Fulbright project.

In addition to my interest in ancient theaters, I am also intrigued by the modern state of theater in Bulgaria and also its link with Greek theater from antiquity to the period of liberation. To that end, I have been all over Rakovski Street, or Bulgarian Broadway, and was delighted to find three successive ancient-inspired performances in one week in May. Monday featured “Phaedra” in the Azaryan Theater, a modern adaptation of Euripides’ *Hippolytus*; Tuesday featured “The Wound Philoktetes: Post-Truth Lemnos” in the Sfumato Theater, Heiner Müller’s interpretation of Sophocles’ play; and Wednesday featured “I, Sisyphus” in the Azaryan Theater, a one-man show treating the story of the mythological sufferer. Each of these was quite different and very enjoyable, but best of all for me was the *Philoktetes*—not only

because Sophocles’ play is my favorite Greek tragedy, but because the pair of spectators I interviewed afterward happened to be friends with the main actor himself, Deyan Zhekov, and called him to meet me after the show. Later that week, we met again and discussed theater and the acting life in Bulgaria and the Balkans for nine hours.

I also meet regularly with another famous actor in Bulgaria, Kiril Efremov, but in a very different context—when asked by Fulbright how I would engage with the local community, my first answer was via football, and that has proven to be a very strong avenue for creating friendships. On my first day here, I visited the Sportna Sofia 2000 complex in Borisova Gradina, where I met a group that has been playing football together since 1986 and was fortunate to have been accepted into their thrice-weekly games, which are always followed by much of the tasty local food and drink that I have fallen in love with. Thanks to this connection, fostered mainly by the geniality of my best new friend Alexander Petrov, I have met such footballing legends as Lyuboslav Penev and Emil Spasov, and have been invited to birthday parties, including in Capital Fort and also at the concert of Stefan Valdobrev and The Usual Suspects. Aside from this group, I have also joined a league

team and play occasionally with two other groups in Mladost and Boyana. Aside from playing, I have been thrilled to spectate with new friends as well and was invited to the Bulgarian Cup Final between CSKA Sofia and Arda Kardzhali, which the capital side won 1-0.

Thus far, I have been overwhelmed by the welcome I have received here and both the hospitality and helpfulness of just about everyone with whom I have interacted. In the academic realm, this is due in part to the efforts of Professor Denver Graninger, former director of the American Research Center in Sofia, who helped facilitate many of my contacts here from early in the application process. Moreover, that summer I also met Ilona Ilieva, a fellow Classics student originally from Sofia, who helped me prepare for my transition to living in Bulgaria and put me in touch with local childhood friends. Finally, I have also mingled with the large Greek community in Sofia, who have made me feel even more at home and excited me for the latter part of my Fulbright project. Before then though, I am much looking forward to what still lies ahead for me in Bulgaria, and am happy to confirm that my first month here already more than made up for the eight months of postponement.



Emmanuel Aprilakis in front of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral

Surviving SNOVID and Celebrating Freedom: A Bulgarian Fulbright Scholar in the Lone Star State

By Iskren Ivanov

My name is Iskren Ivanov, and I teach U.S. Foreign Policy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." It is an honor and a privilege to share how I became part of the great Fulbright family. And despite the pandemic, I was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Texas at Austin for the 2020/2021 spring semester. It was the most unique and unrepeatable experience in my professional and academic career.

Man is a political animal by nature,
He is a scientist by change or choice,
He is moralist because he is a man."

- Hans J. Morgenthau



Iskren Ivanov is his academic element in Texas

Being a Fulbrighter is an old dream of mine. I fell in love with America and Americans back in high school. Years later, I started working as a senior lecturer of international relations in the Department of Political Science at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and decided it was time to fulfill my dream. There is a golden rule in IR studies: if you want to be a real expert and an experienced professor, you need international experience. After having been a post-graduate scholar at the University of Delaware and an Erasmus scholar at the University of Lille, I could think of no better opportunity to boost my academic career than Fulbright. The problem was that every time I considered applying, a witty colleague would come up and say, "Oh, what can you tell the Americans about U.S. Foreign Policy?" However, I did not give up, and after I returned from Newark, I started looking for an institution to send me a letter of invitation. I went through at least ten interviews with chairs and deans who were highly interested in meeting an Eastern European guy who wanted to teach American politics for Americans at a U.S. institution. I finally got in touch with Professor Mary Neuburger,

Director of the Center for Russian, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies in the University of Texas at Austin, and also an alumna of the Fulbright Bulgaria program. After a short interview, she sent me a letter of invitation. A few months later, on July 4, I was informed that I was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar nominee for the 2020/2021 academic year! Finally, my dream came true.

Honestly, when the coronavirus hit, I was expecting the worst – I would not get a visa, and thus, I would lose the fellowship. Needless to say, I received much support from the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission and the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria. Those were the people who stood by my side all the time and persuaded me not to give up. And one day, I received a call from our coordinator who said that Fulbright scholars would travel to the U.S. after all! This was the beginning of the most incredible adventure of my academic career.

Many consider their trip to the United States a cultural shock. I reject this view. For me, the Fulbright program provides the unique opportunity to be more than a Visiting Scholar or an academic tourist. Being a Fulbrighter is like being a cultural ambassador of your country. My stay in Austin was advantageous and fruitful. For five months, I taught a course on International Relations and U.S. Foreign Policy for undergraduates. I enjoyed robust support from all the CREEES faculty. Despite the pandemic, we gathered for academic parties and visited Austin's most famous BBQ restaurants. Texas has the best BBQ in the world! I had a lot of in-person sessions with my students, and in the end I received a touching surprise – a huge THANK YOU which they painted in my honor during our last meeting.

While in the United States, I visited El Paso because I wanted to see the vast desert of Texas. This is a great town – you can see Mexico on the other side of the mountains. Returning to Austin, I experienced another exciting adventure – SNOVID. For your information, it snows in Texas once every 80 years. I was the “lucky” one to visit Austin during a snowstorm. For all of us, this was a massive shock as the city's infrastructure was severely damaged. But for me, it was also an essential cultural experience. For a week, Texans created perfect organization to clean up the city and take care of the vulnerable and socially excluded people left homeless from the storm. This solidarity touched me because I have always wanted to see it more often in Bulgaria.

To conclude, my academic visit to the United States was a major academic success for me as an early-career scholar and professional. I remember the many questions my colleagues asked me when I started writing my doctoral dissertation. Why did you choose the States? Why did you choose U.S. Foreign Policy? My answer will always be the same – because America is the brightest symbol of freedom, and only when you are indeed free can you reach your full potential. Bulgaria and America are very similar in that both Bulgarians and Americans have always desired freedom. Today, they are allies in this historic mission, in which Fulbright serves as the most significant symbol of academic, cultural, and professional freedom in the relations between the two nations.



Iskren Ivanov braves the challenges of research during the pandemic

U.S. Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2021-2022

SCHOLARS

Matthew Brunwasser

Field of Specialization: Journalism
Home Institution: Freelance Journalist, San Francisco, CA
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Association of European Journalists-Bulgaria, Sofia

Ryan Crehan

Field of Specialization: Environmental Sciences
Home Institution: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Essex Junction, VT
Host Institution in Bulgaria: World Wildlife Fund- Bulgaria, Sofia

Dr. Aaron Kleist

Field of Specialization: Education
Home Institution: Biola University, La Mirada, CA
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", Plovdiv

Dr. Ian MacMillen

Field of Specialization: Anthropology of Music
Home Institution: Yale University, New Haven, CT
Host Institution in Bulgaria: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Dr. Mariofanna Milanova

Field of Specialization: Information Sciences
Home Institution: University of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Technical University, Sofia

Dr. Cristofer Scarboro

Field of Specialization: History
Home Institution: King's College, Wilkes-Barre, PA
Host Institution in Bulgaria: American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad

Dr. Igor Sevostianov

Field of Specialization: Engineering
Home Institution: New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences- Institute of Mechanics, Sofia

Dr. Rebecca Singer

Field of Specialization: Public Health
Home Institution: University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Organization of Jews in Bulgaria "Shalom", Sofia

Dr. Elaine Struthers

Field of Specialization: Allied Health
Home Institution: Las Cruces Public School District, Las Cruces, NM
Host Institution in Bulgaria: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Dr. Jasmin Vassileva

Field of Specialization: Clinical Psychology
Home Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Bulgarian Addictions Institute, Sofia

Alexandra White

Field of Specialization: Business and Management
Home Institution: Luther College, Decorah, IA
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University, Sofia

Dr. Yanjun Yan

Field of Specialization: Engineering
Home Institution: Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Technical University of Sofia, Sofia

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Emmanuel Aprilakis

Field of Specialization: Classics
Project Title: Traditions of the Ancient Theater Space
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University, Sofia

Lucas Fagre

Field of Specialization: Anthropology, Global Health
Project Title: Analysis of Barriers to Measles Vaccine Access among Roma in Bulgaria and Romania
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Trust for Social Achievement, 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

U.S. Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2021-2022

Christopher Harper

Field of Specialization: Public Health
Project Title: An Empirical and Policy Approach to Hope and a Just Future for Bulgarian Orphans
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Cedar Foundation, Sofia

Danielle Jacques

Field of Specialization: Anthropology
Project Title: Representation and Authenticity in Bulgarian National Cuisine: A Study of Culinary Tourism
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Plovdiv University, Plovdiv

Anastasia Koumtcheva

Field of Specialization: Architecture
Project Title: Looking Towards National Revival Vernacular to Inform Sustainable Housing Design
Host Institution in Bulgaria: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Jose Fernando Rios

Field of Specialization: Political Science
Project Title: The Role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the Bulgarian Political Process
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University, Sofia

Katherine Ruprecht

Field of Specialization: Library Science
Project Title: Improving School Libraries in Rural Bulgaria and Romania
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University, Sofia

Mary Rzepczynski

Field of Specialization: Archaeology
Project Title: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Decorative Stone Elements of Nessebar's Medieval Churches
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Balkan Heritage Foundation, Nessebar

Gabriel Soileau

Field of Specialization: Music
Project Title: Studying Bulgarian Kaval and Accordion
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, 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

Eliot Usherenko

Field of Specialization: International Relations
Project Title: The Black Sea Front: An Analysis of U.S. Relations with NATO Allies in the Eastern Balkans
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Sofia University, Sofia

ENGLISH TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Amanda Adinolfi

Field of Specialization: International Relations
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Galabovo, Bulgaria

William Andriola

Field of Specialization: Government
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Lovech, Bulgaria

Madelyn Bjork

Field of Specialization: Law, Politics, and Society
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Varna, Bulgaria

Emily Bom

Field of Specialization: Communication Sciences and Disorders
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sofia, Bulgaria

Sophia Brewer Thompson

Field of Specialization: Religion & Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Gabrovo, Bulgaria

Malique Brunner

Field of Specialization: Bioengineering
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

Amanda Burau

Field of Specialization: Human Resource Development
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Montana, Bulgaria

U.S. Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2021-2022

Bjorn Carlson

Field of Specialization:

International Studies

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Smolyan, Bulgaria

Gabrielle Cascio

Field of Specialization: English and International Affairs

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sliven, Bulgaria

Adalyne Cummins

Field of Specialization: English

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Burgas, Bulgaria

Benjamin Custer

Field of Specialization:

Communication

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Jason Entingh

Field of Specialization: Linguistics

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Ruse, Bulgaria

Chase Forster

Field of Specialization: Biology

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Panagyurishte, Bulgaria

Bailey Galicia

Field of Specialization: Political Science

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Varna, Bulgaria

Giovanni Gamalong

Field of Specialization: Chemistry and Global Health Studies

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sofia, Bulgaria

Mahika Gopalka

Field of Specialization: Cognitive Science

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Ruse, Bulgaria

Samuel Henthorn

Field of Specialization: Classical Studies

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Silistra, Bulgaria

Savannah Jelks

Field of Specialization: History

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sofia, Bulgaria

Kadia King

Field of Specialization: Political Science

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Burgas, Bulgaria

Brenna Lewis-Slammon

Field of Specialization: English and Psychological Science

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Razgrad, Bulgaria

Julia Lynch

Field of Specialization: Finance, Legal Studies

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Dobrich, Bulgaria

Courtney Meissner

Field of Specialization:

Communication Studies

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Pernik, Bulgaria

Savannah Modesitt

Field of Specialization:

International Studies, Russian, Anthropology

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

Pearl Morttey

Field of Specialization: International Studies

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Sofia, Bulgaria

Christopher Nash

Field of Specialization: Psychology

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Dobrich, Bulgaria

Audrey Novak

Field of Specialization: International Development

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Pravets, Bulgaria

Jacob Pintar

Field of Specialization: Political Science

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2021-2022

Morgan Rowe

Field of Specialization: Political Science, English

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

Katerina Sankow

Field of Specialization: Russian and Eastern European Studies

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Haskovo, Bulgaria

Nathan Shearn

Field of Specialization: Anthropology

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Kardzhali, Bulgaria

Megan Siedman

Field of Specialization: Sociology and Mathematics

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Gotse Delchev, Bulgaria

Michael Smith

Field of Specialization: Communication

Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Kyustendil, Bulgaria

SCHOLARS

Ivan Dimov

Field of Specialization: Applied Mathematics

Project Title: Innovative Monte Carlo Algorithms for Large-Scale Problems

Home Institution: Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Host Institution: The University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Yulia Radanova

Field of Specialization: Law

Project Title: Mediating Family Conflicts Across Cultures

Home Institution: University of National and World Economy

Host Institution: Loyola University, Chicago School of Law

Elitsa Pavlova

Field of Specialization: Biology

Project Title: Role of Oxidative Stress, Antioxidant Capacity, and Inflammatory Cytokines on Resistin-induced Epithelial to Mesenchymal Transition in Breast Cancer Cells

Home Institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Host Institution: Lenox Hill Hospital, NY

Iva Boneva

Field of Specialization: Education

Project Title: Factors Influencing Formation of Positive Teachers' Attitudes Towards Equity- Lessons to be Learned from American Teachers

Home Institution: Association for Shared Learning

Host Institution: Arizona State University-Tempe

Alexandra Glavanakova

Field of Specialization: English Literature

Project Title: Modes of Reading Fiction Online on Social Platforms

Home Institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Host Institution: University of California, Santa Barbara

Eliza Ivanova

Field of Specialization: Psychology

Project Title: Towards an In-Depth Understanding of Health Anxiety and Death Anxiety: Constructions of Death and Health Risks.

Home Institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Host Institution: Cornell University, Medical College

Milena Kuleva

Field of Specialization: Sports Education

Project Title: Dual Career of Athletes

Home Institution: National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski"

Host Institution: SUNY, Empire College

SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE STUDY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Mira Todorova

Field of Specialization: Dance

Home Institution: DNK Space for Contemporary Dance and Performance

Host Institution: The Chocolate Factory Theatre, NY

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2021-2022

HUBERT HUMPHREY FELLOWSHIP

Elisaveta Geretto

Field of Specialization: Public Health
Home Institution: Medical University – Sofia
Host Institution: Emory University

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Iglika Atanassova

Field of Specialization: Education
Host Institution: Harvard University
Degree: EdM in Education Leadership, Organizations, and Entrepreneurship

Martina Novakova

Field of Specialization: Theater
Host Institution: New York University
Degree: MA in Educational Theatre in Colleges and Communities

Dimitar Kirilov

Field of Specialization: Computer Science
Host Institution: University of Southern California
Degree: MS in Computer Science

Lyubomir Avdjiiski

Field of Specialization: Law
Host Institution: Pennsylvania State University
Degree: LLM in Law

Tsvetelina Bayraktarova

Field of Specialization: Law
Host Institution: Harvard University
Degree: LLM in Law

VISITING RESEARCHERS

Yavor Gardev

Field of Specialization: Performance Arts
Project Title: Symbolic Manipulation and Its Opponents: Archetypal Plots and Performative Tactics
Home Institution: New Bulgarian University
Host Institution: Northwestern University

Velislava Todorova

Field of Specialization: Philosophy
Project Title: Formal Approaches to the Coding of Information Source in Natural Languages
Home Institution: Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
Host Institution: University of Connecticut

Bilyana Manova

Field of Specialization: Law
Project Title: Public International Law Aspects of the Freedom of Information
Home Institution: Southwestern University, Blagoevgrad
Host Institution: University of California- LA

Polly Petkova

Field of Specialization: Cognitive Linguistics
Project Title: The Cognitive Category HEDGE in Bulgarian and English
Home Institution: Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”
Host Institution: Georgetown University

FULBRIGHT TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

Spasina Staneva

Field of Specialization: Media Literacy
Home Institution: Bertolt Breht Foreign Language School, Pazardzhik
Host Institution: Kent State University, Ohio

Desislava Petkova

Field of Specialization: Media Literacy
Home Institution: Peyo Yavorov Language High School, Silistra
Host Institution: Kent State University, Ohio

AY2022-23 BULGARIAN STUDENT NOMINEES

PRINCIPALS:

1. Maria-Magdalena Markova (Law)
2. Gabriel Georgiev (Aerospace Engineering)
3. Alexander Leshev (Law)
4. Trayana Kaleycheva (Psychology)
5. Boris Alexandrov (History)
6. Krassimir Marinov (Computer Science)

ALTERNATES:

1. Yulia Konstantinova (Law)
2. Botyu Dimitrov (Materials Science)
3. Sonia Stoyanova (International Relations)



Keegan Scott introducing his mother (in the back) to middle school students from Galabovo

Kakva e klyukata?

An Interview with ETA Extraordinaire, Keegan Scott

By Rada Kaneva

Keegan, please introduce yourself.

Здрасти на всички! Originally from Delta, Ohio, I completed my BA in International Relations at Ohio State University in 2016, and, subsequently taught in the Republic of Georgia for a year before I began my three-year Fulbright Bulgaria career. Currently, I'm a graduate student at Georgetown University studying Eurasian, Russian, and Eastern European Studies!

Why Fulbright?

During my undergraduate studies, I loved my experiences studying abroad in Hungary and teaching in Turkey as well as my time interning

for the Columbus Literacy Council. Through all of these journeys, I met so many people and had the rather ambitious goal of turning all of my late night chats at home and abroad into lifelong friendships. Every person had a story to tell, and an opinion to share and I wanted to hear these things. Additionally, the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program happened to be the perfect dovetailing of my interests: learning, teaching, and, especially, exchanging through one of my favorite mediums--conversation (I think many of the readers who know me will attest to my penchant for gabbing). Fulbright was a natural fit!

You were originally selected as an ETA to Turkey. What inspired you to take the chance on Bulgaria?

As a Turkish scholar, I actually applied to their program twice—once in 2016 and again in 2017. The first time it was cancelled, I decided to take an opportunity in Georgia because I thought there might be some commonalities. I was both right and wrong in the best ways! My line of thinking was the same in 2017 when the opportunity to apply to Bulgaria presented itself. It wasn't a place I knew well, but I thought that was even more of a reason to try out Bulgaria. I did some quick Google searches and I loved perusing photos

of the different mountain ranges and sites like Tsarevets, Rila Monastery, and Buzludzha. To this day, I stand by the decision that choosing Bulgaria was one of the best I have ever made!

Teaching in Bulgaria, especially at your corporate-sponsored position at a professional high school, is quite different from teaching in the U.S.

What challenges did you face?

Honestly, the generally low English levels made my school stand out compared to other ETA schools in Bulgaria. However, this also presented an opportunity to play around with more basic level activities! One of my favorite lessons included simple brain teasers with toothpicks. I would use basic instructions and students would have to create different shapes. It was a great opportunity to practice beginning grammar while also honing critical thinking; it was a twofold challenge for my students!

What did you enjoy most when working with students at the Professional High School of Energy and Electrical Engineering in Galabovo?

Students took a lot of interest in learning by creating. In certain ways, I came to realize electrical engineering requires its own form of creative mastery and art. I loved watching students play around with simple items like spaghetti noodles and paper clips while using their language skills. One of my favorite moments was when my students—in groups—had to explain to me how to put lutenitsa on bread. The process was fun to watch because their frustration from my action-taking (imagine me literally putting a jar of lutenitsa on top of an unopened loaf of bread) led to brainstorming, and quick thinking.

As a Fulbrighter, you also started working with a middle school, initiated several extracurricular clubs, joined community activities,

and worked closely with Contour Global, the grant sponsor. Tell us more about these projects!

Ah, where to begin! I continued my predecessor's cooking club at the Contour Global house, which was an absolute delight; students and I gathered to make classic American recipes often with Bulgarian flair. You must try grilled cheese and lutenitsa! As for the community, I dabbled in the Esperanto Club and took horo lessons. It was a great way to speak with other community members (in both Esperanto and Bulgarian) while simply having fun. However, my most favorite activity and my pride and joy will be the two theatre productions I directed with my middle school students (more on that below!).

A Fulbright ETA grant is normally awarded for a year; in rare cases it can be extended to a second year, but you are one of the very few exceptions who received a third year award, as your hard work was recognized by your school, sponsors, the Fulbright Commission and ECA. How did this additional time spent in the country change your views, your teaching methodology, and your experience in general?

In some ways, I feel that my first year

as an ETA was almost like a trial run: what works and what doesn't? At the same time, I was building rapport with my students and colleagues (which is very nerve-wracking, by the way!) The second year was certainly more established, but I felt that my third year was really a moment for sustainability. Students knew what to expect from me, and they were not surprised about a seemingly unusual lesson plan. My students seemed more comfortable and confident, and, overall, I felt more optimistic about my community especially after my plays got off the ground. Of course, I got closer to my colleagues, and I certainly have friends for life! As for Bulgaria as a whole, I got to see more of it. There are so many places I managed to check off my list, and there are many more I still want to see.

When you started your Fulbright grant back in 2017, did you imagine your work would make such a significant impact in the town of Galabovo?

Honestly, I wasn't optimistic. Galabovo is a small place, and everyone seemed to be in their own rhythm. However, looking back, I have come to appreciate how much



Keegan with his mentor teacher Darina Vasileva

support I received to actually turn these ideas into reality. Whether it was Contour Global, my colleagues, or my students, they were the real movers and shakers behind all my grand schemes!

You received an Award of Excellence from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, which was a proud moment for all of us. But what are you most proud of from your experience as a Fulbrighter?

Definitely my plays! In 2018, my English colleagues, the school psychologist, our music teacher and I got together to put on *The Wizard of Oz*. I worked with the director of the local chitalishte (culture house) and the local shops to get boxes and other materials for costumes. I didn't have a budget, but I had eager students and a supportive staff which led to an excellent production. I was so happy to have 90+ audience members that night! The next year, I was amazed how the energy had



Keegan leading his younger students in a game

grown. *Cinderella* was twice as long and just as difficult! We ended up getting lights and sound and it was bigger than ever. We had a full house, and the students really gave them a show. I was so happy to see my interest in theatre turn into a community-wide event!

Where has life taken you after Fulbright?

After the onset of the pandemic,

I found myself spending the subsequent months with my family, and, in August 2020, I began my graduate school studies at Georgetown. As for the future, I have no idea where I will be, but I would love to return to the State Department and the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs to work with programs like Fulbright! One thing's for certain: I will be back to visit Bulgaria soon!

2021 Fulbright Bulgaria Alumni Scholarship

Congratulations to Dimitar Kirilov, recipient of the 2021 Fulbright Bulgaria Alumni Scholarship, an additional grant supported by generous donations from our alumni community.

Dimitar graduated with a BS in Computer Science from the American University in Bulgaria in May 2020 with a full scholarship from the America for Bulgaria Foundation. In August 2021 he will be starting his Fulbright-supported M.Sc. in Computer Science with a specialization in Artificial Intelligence at the University of Southern California. Dimitar is passionate about sharing knowledge with others, discussing technological topics such as how technology can solve societal problems and help improve people's lives.

Dimitar is the first Roma student to win a Fulbright grant in Bulgaria - we hope he will inspire other talented students from diverse communities to apply for Fulbright! If you would like to support promising young Bulgarians like Dimitar, please make a donation to the Fulbright Bulgaria Alumni Scholarship fund: <https://www.iie.org/Donate/Where-to-give/Fulbright-Assistance-Funds>



Fulbright Scholar in Microbiology Wins Prestigious Pythagoras Prize for Breakthrough in Science

By Professor Svetla Danova; translated by Sophia Kleinsasser



Svetla Danova (right) with colleagues at Northwestern University

"A little story about a Bulgarian microbiologist who loves microbes and her profession. May all the young people be unafraid to work passionately, and may your efforts be rewarded. Good luck!"

Scientists are like philosophers – seeking the truth behind the laws of the universe, nature and societies. The highest award for scientists in Bulgaria bears the name of Pythagoras for this very reason. On May 24 – the feast of the holy brothers Saints Cyril and Methodius, which is also the day of the Bulgarian alphabet, education and culture – the Bulgarian Ministry of Education awarded six Pythagoras Prizes in recognition of scientists and their contributions to scientific research as well as contemporary Bulgarian culture and traditions.

It was incredible to be among the 17 nominated scientists and to be selected by such an authoritative international jury. I can hardly convey the excitement I felt as an ordinary microbiologist, used to the everyday routine of my research laboratory behind a microscope or a desk. It was like being at the Oscars, hearing my name and walking the red carpet to the podium under the spotlights to receive the Pythagoras Prize for a Breakthrough in Science. The overwhelming joy I felt was indescribable. Twenty-five years of hard work flashed before my eyes: proving the antibacterial properties of *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* alongside my colleagues from the ENITIAA in Nantes, France; the difficulties and constant challenges of scientific inquiry; years spent living and breathing in rhythm with science; the busy daily life of the laboratory. Science is like the horizon: the closer you get, the farther and more challenging to reach it becomes.

This prize represented a moment of immeasurable happiness but also reflection; not only were my individual efforts and years of scientific dedication recognized, but the award also served to validate all Bulgarian microbiologists. Bulgaria may be a small country, but it's an immeasurably rich one. Among its treasures are the lactic acid bacteria of dairy products found only here – a centuries-old symbol of health and longevity. We have a duty to preserve this tradition, following in the footsteps of Bulgarian Dr. Stamen Grigorov, who gave the world *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*. It's wonderful that we are joined in this mission by young people – over 30 graduate students and seven recent PhDs have picked up the baton in search of new horizons in the fight for safe and wholesome food, for health and for longevity. We have the honor of taking those unique

microorganisms found in Bulgarian yogurt, delicious katuk and white brined feta cheese and using them in new products and formulas for health. We strive to give future generations of scientists a chance to help make a name for us in the world. The Bulgarian National Science Fund and the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission have proven to be invaluable partners in this respect. My Fulbright Visiting Scholar grant, although only lasting three months (September-December 2018), allowed me to collaborate with colleagues from the Institute of Healthcare Innovations (Professor Craig Woods) and Midwestern University (Professor Vanthida Huang and Dr. Murthy) in Phoenix. Together, for the very first time, we were able to characterize the parabiogenic beneficial mechanisms active in original strains of Bulgarian lactobacilli. Bulgarian lactobacilli have been confirmed as helpers in the fight against pathogenic bacteria

and in supporting the immune system when “bad bugs” pose a serious threat. These good bacteria can be used in a whole range of healing, prophylactic and health-boosting treatments and dietary supplements, fulfilling the recommendation made by Hippocrates: “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.” Probiotics represent the best strategy in pursuit of health and wellbeing. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that only together will we be able to defeat this invisible enemy. And I believe that the Fulbright family will have many future opportunities to do so.

The Pythagoras Prize is as much a great accomplishment as it is a huge responsibility. It proved that all the difficulties I ever had to overcome were worth it and made me proud to be a scientist. It is an invaluable reward for continuing to forge ahead bravely for a better and happier tomorrow.



Professor Danaeva visiting the Fulbright Bulgaria office



Spelling Bee competitions teach not only English, but teamwork and poise

CORPLuS -

A CORPS for EDUCATION and DEVELOPMENT

By CORPLuS Staff

One of Fulbright Bulgaria's long-standing partners is the Corps for Education and Development - CORPLuS, a Bulgarian non-governmental organization established in 2012 as a legacy organization of the United States Peace Corps in Bulgaria. CORPLuS believes that Bulgaria's future lies in the untapped potential of individuals, both young and old. Greater opportunities open up through innovative ideas and educational and development programs designed to encourage people to dream, achieve and inspire.

The purpose of CORPLuS is to respond to the continued needs in Bulgarian communities: to empower young people by providing opportunities for personal development through competitions, camps and workshops; to support the efforts of Bulgarian teachers by introducing innovative practices within the classroom and through extracurricular activities; and to help build the capacity of Bulgarian communities through exchange of ideas, resources, professional training programs and civil initiatives. CORPLuS Foundation (www.corplus.org) achieves these goals through its two main projects:

Bulgarian National English Spelling Bee

The Bulgarian National English Spelling Bee was developed and started in 2011 by two Peace Corps Volunteers. Similar to spelling bees in the US, the competitors spell words out loud letter by letter and are eliminated for misspelling a word. Students from the ages of 9 to 14 years prepare for their school competitions while studying the words from a list with 500 English words. The winners from the school bees participate in a regional competition, and the top three spellers from each regional bee advance to the national final. This year over 3,200 students from 165 schools participated in the school rounds of the competition. Although the regional rounds and the national final were organized online, the participants showed great motivation and excellent English spelling skills. The Spelling Bee Junior pilot program for primary

students (7-9 years) was carried out last year and continued successfully this year with 68 participant schools. Younger students had the opportunity to expand their English language knowledge, to boost their confidence, to learn the competition rules and to prepare for participation in the “big” Spelling Bee. CORPLuS Foundation highly appreciates the Fulbright ETAs’ assistance with the preparation for the competition in their communities, also their contributions as announcers for the regional competitions and camp counselors at the English summer camp for the national finalists and their teachers. For more information: www.spellingbee.bg

Bulgarian Creative Writing Competition in English (BCWC)

The BCWC was initiated in 2011 by Peace Corps Volunteers and is open to students from 6th to 12th

grades. The competition is intended to foster creative thinking and writing and to encourage the use of English in a fun way. Students have an hour to create their own unique pieces of writing and to think “out of the box”. Regional and national jury panels select the best pieces of writing from each grade level.

This year over 2,300 students from 126 schools participated in the 11th Bulgarian Creative Writing Competition. For the first time there was international participation – 92 students from Pakistan took part in the competition and impressed the jury with their wonderful stories. The winning works were awarded at an online ceremony in mid-March. Fulbright ETAs provide invaluable help with reading and evaluating the submitted works and supporting the students to better prepare for their participation in the competition. For more information: www.creativewriting-bg.com



Some excel in creating suspenseful stories, while others rhyme effortlessly



Delyan Roussev, Visiting Researcher, University of Chicago, AY 2018-19

Delyan completed his PhD defense at Sofia University with accolades. His thesis was dedicated to medieval historiography, entitled “From Medieval Bulgaria to Ottoman Rumelia: A New Consideration of Ottoman Historiography of the 15th and the Beginning of the 16th century.” We are glad that one more Doctor of Philosophy, who benefited from his Fulbright specialization, joins the Bulgarian academic community.



Elitza Koeva, Bulgarian PhD Student, Harvard University, AY 2018-19

Elitza continues her successful PhD studies at Harvard University in Urban Design, also producing synergic art objects and installations that capture the spirit of the past in the present. Her project Daedalus (Perdix) <https://elitzakoeva.com/DAEDALUS-PERDIX> featured at the Cambridge ArtLab is a kite-like structure, accompanied with sounds referring to the myth of Daedalus. Undoubtedly, Elitza’s imaginative and innovative works will be a true breakthrough for the Bulgarian architectural and artistic scene upon her return.



Vladislav Slavov, Hubert Humphrey Fellow, Pennsylvania State University, AY 2020-21

Professor Vladislav Slavov, vice-dean at Technical University, Sofia and a Hubert Humphrey Fellow in 2020-21, was included in the EU Commission Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence as a representative of Bulgaria. The aim of the group is to develop ethical guidelines regarding AI and the use of data in teaching and education as a whole. We are certain that Professor Slavov will represent Bulgaria and his home university brilliantly in this important mission.



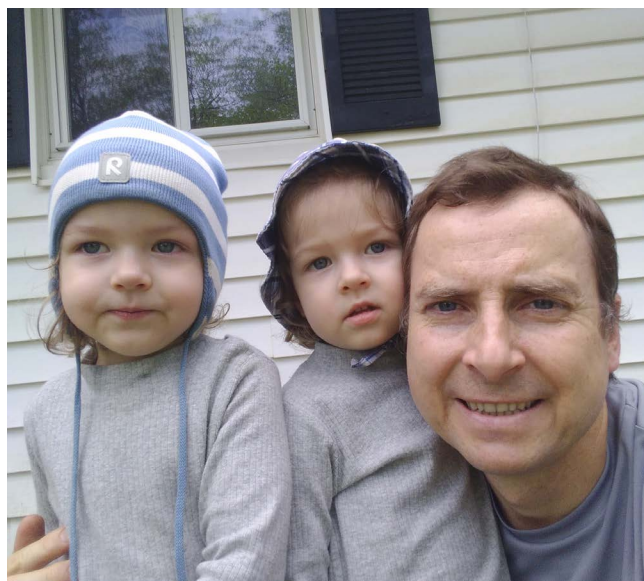
Cascade Tuholske, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Sliven, AY 2011-2012

Recently, Cascade published a very personal and touching piece about his dad’s legacy and climate change in Outside magazine. Read more about how personal struggles affect one’s general attitude to life and problem solving abilities here: <https://www.outsideonline.com/2423942/watching-my-dad-die-climate-change>



Dana Ray, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Dobrich, AY 2013-14

In May 2021, Dana Ray, who is now a communications consultant, gave a keynote presentation for Creative Mornings DC. The talk introduced the core framework she uses in her business to help unboxable leaders name their work so they can be heard and known. Creative Mornings DC is part of the international organization that hosts breakfast lecture series; the D.C. chapter is much beloved and regularly draws hundreds of attendees to locations around the U.S. capitol city. The opening story of the presentation comes from her year as a Fulbright ETA. Dana holds a Master's in Literature and Writing from Bucknell University. She continues to work internationally and is based in Washington, D.C. Her writing in art and business criticism can be found at danamray.com and in her weekly "Words Are Action".



Denis Vovchenko, Fulbright Scholar, Sofia University, AY 2017-18

In August 2020, Denis was promoted to full professor. Since his Fulbright time, he has published five articles and two book reviews, all on Russian-Balkan relations, including: "A Pan-Slav Frustration: the Russian Perceptions of the Bosnians and the Pomaks during the Eastern Crisis (1875-1878)," *Srpske Studije/Serbian Studies*, 11 (2020): 88-95; and "From Integration to Isolation: the Changing Status of Russian Diplomatic and Military Personnel in the Greek Lands (1905-1925)," *Balkanistica*, 34 (2021): 161-172; among others. Congratulations, Denis!



Ted Efremoff, Fulbright Student Researcher, National Academy of Arts, AY 2008-09

Ted Efremoff, whose artwork was featured in the Fulbright Bulgaria 75th anniversary film, has been recently working on films himself. *A Refugee's Guide to Rome* juxtaposes the story of Joseph, a contemporary refugee from Sierra Leone, and the Trojan prince Aeneas who in Virgil's Aeneid becomes the founder of Rome as a refugee from the Trojan war. This story is told by Joseph, as he guides fellow refugees through the Eternal City to support them in their new life. An excerpt from *A Refugee's Guide to Rome* was screened at

the University of Johannesburg's Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation's webinar, in collaboration with Nordic Africa Institute, titled "Centering the Voices of African Migrants" in a worldwide screening from Johannesburg, South Africa. The premiere of the film is scheduled for October of 2021 at Central Connecticut State University's panel on migration sponsored by the Center for Africana Studies at CCSU and Gallery Central.



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