

Final Nominations for Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2013-14

This year the Commission received 52 applications for Fulbright senior scholar and graduate study grants, Hubert Humphrey fellowships, Civil Society scholarships and non-degree grants for doctoral students.

The binational reviewing committees recommended 30 students and 19 scholars for interview. The applicants represented a wide variety of fields and were well qualified and motivated.

The following candidates for Fulbright and Hubert Humphrey scholarships in AY 2013-14 were nominated by the Commission Board:

Senior Scholars

Principal candidates:

1. Agata Manolova – *engineering*
2. Valya Vassileva – *molecular biology*
3. Krassimira Daskalova – *history*
4. Angel Angelov – *linguistics*
5. Stefka Kuncheva-Mihaylova – *theology*

Alternate candidate:

1. Dimiter Vatsov – *philosophy*

Hubert Humphrey Fellowship

Principal candidates:

1. Denitsa Boeva – *human trafficking*
2. Diliiana Markova – *law and human rights*
3. Lyubomir Lyubomirov – *media management*



Fulbright Interview, June, 2012

Members of the nomination committee (from left to right): Neda Kristanova, Board member, Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, and Angela Rodel, Board member

Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society

Principal candidates:

1. Liliana Drumeva O'Reilly – *music studies*
2. Todor Yalamov – *sociology*

Graduate Students – Degree Programs

Principal candidates:

1. Stoyan Kiryazov – *business administration*
2. Katerina Vaseva – *architecture (urban design)*
3. Maria Dimitrova – *law*
4. Ivan Genchev – *law*
5. Maria Petrova – *business administration*
6. Mariana Subeva – *screen-writing/journalism*

Alternate candidates:

1. Todor Raykov – *entrepreneurship*
2. Georgui Balinov – *graphic design*
3. Maria Pelovska – *law*

Non-Degree Grants for Doctoral Students

Principal candidate:

1. Liliana Marinova – *finance*

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International Education Week in Bulgaria

November 12-16, 2012

A highlight of the twelfth annual International Education Week in Bulgaria (November 12-16, 2012) were the visits of the Executive Director Dr. Julia Stefanova, the EducationUSA Adviser Snezhana Teneva and other staff members to 23 high schools, hosting ETAs. During the visits Snezhana Teneva gave presentations about educational opportunities in the US to over 1200 high school students, including teachers and administrators.

In addition, over 4100 students and professionals visited the Fulbright stand at the JobTiger 2012 National Career Days, the Technical University of Sofia Career Days, the University of National and World Economy Career Days, CIS Tour, the Education Beyond Borders International Education Fair in Sofia, and the EducationUSA

International Virtual College Fair.

During and around the IEW the Fulbright Advising Center was visited by representatives of three U.S. institutions of higher education: Yale University, CT, Carlton College, MN and Ramapo College, NJ. They presented their institutions and the American educational system to interested students, parents, school principals and teachers at the Fulbright Advising Center and the 2nd English Language High School in Sofia.

To sum up, over 5300 students, teachers, parents, lecturers and researchers joined in this year's IEW events and got exposed to study opportunities in the United States.

Visits of Fulbright Commission Staff Members to English Language Schools Hosting ETAs



Blagoevgrad



Blagoevgrad



Smolyan



Dobrich



Burgas



Burgas



Dimitrovgrad



Dimitrovgrad



Gabrovo



Gabrovo



Kardzhali



Kardzhali



Haskovo



Haskovo



Lovech



Lovech



Pernik



Pernik



Pleven



Pleven



Montana



Shumen



Russe



Russe



Sliven



Sliven



Razgrad



Razgrad



Sofia



Sofia



Stara Zagora



Stara Zagora



Turgovishte



Turgovishte



Varna



Varna



Vratza



Vratza



Yambol



Yambol



Vidin

U.S. University Visits to Bulgaria



Ramapo College, NJ

Participation in National and International Career Fairs



University of National and World Economy Career Days, Sofia



Carlton College, MN

Fulbright Office News

ETA Training and “100 Days in Bulgaria” Meeting

On December 13th, 2012 the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission held its annual “One Hundred Days in Bulgaria” meeting with U.S. grantees in AY 2012/13. Part of the meeting was a one-day professional training for current English Teaching Assistants. The event took place in the American College of Sofia, one of the oldest American educational institutions outside the United States.

The workshop was opened by ED Dr. Julia Stefanova, Ivanka Tzankova, Director Programs for Education and Libraries at the America for Bulgaria Foundation, and Paul Johnson, President of the American College of Sofia. The presentations and discussions covered a wide range of topics such as lesson planning, classroom man-

agement, teaching literature, Bulgarian grading system, gender dynamics, and handling prejudice. Among the speakers were Lisa Hundley, S-ELF at the University of Tuzla and Pedagogical Institute of Tuzla Canton in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Bulgarian English language teachers from the ETA hosting high schools in Stara Zagora and Blagoevgrad. Among the special guests were PAO and Board member Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, and CAO and Board member Richard Damstra. The Fulbright lecturers and graduate students also presented their projects.

The program concluded with a reception at the Art Gallery of American College of Sofia.



Official Opening: From right to left, Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Fulbright Commission, Paul Johnson, President, American College of Sofia, and Ivanka Tzankova, Director, Programs for Education and Libraries, America for Bulgaria Foundation.



Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, Counselor for Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Sofia, talking to the group of U.S. grantees



Lisa Hundley (right), Senior English Language Fellow, University of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, presenting on Lesson Planning



Krassimira Topuzova (left), English Language Teachers, Foreign Language Schools in Blagoevgrad, presenting on the Bulgarian Grading System



Classroom Management workshop



U.S. grantees' presentations and discussions

Bulgarian Fulbright Alumni Association Membership Form



Full name

Home address

Field, Academic Rank and Degree

Present Place and Address of Employment

.....

Phone, Fax

Type, Year and Duration of Grant

Place and Name of Host Institution

Please complete and return to the Fulbright Commission office address.



U.S. grantees' presentations and discussions



ACS students, presenting to the Fulbright ETAs their clubs for extracurricular activities and community initiatives

Bucharest Marathon

**Cassandra Bodkin,
Fulbright English Teaching Assistant**

Before I began my Fulbright adventure in Bulgaria I never dreamed I would be lucky enough to experience so much in the first two months. Traveling to Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and throughout Bulgaria has been eye-opening! However, running in the international half-marathon in Romania is a memory I will cherish forever. Running the half-marathon was the best way to truly experience Bucharest. We also ran for a Romanian charity, Hospice Casa Sperantei. The charity raises money to provide care for children with cancer, leukemia, and neural-muscular dystrophy. By the end of the half-marathon we were hot, sweaty, and exhausted, but crossing that finish line and getting that medal made every tiring second worth it!



Fulbright English Teaching Assistants Cassandra Bodkin (left) and Shelby Carvalho, jumping with their medals

Cultural Activities for U.S. Fulbright Grantees



A one-day trip to Rila Monastery

BULGARIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

2014 - 2015 FULBRIGHT GRANTS COMPETITION

The Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange is pleased to announce the 2014-2015 competition for:

- **Fulbright Senior Scholar Grants** – 3-5 months for research and lecturing
- **Fulbright Graduate Study Grants** – 10 months for Masters' and Ph.D. programs; up to 6 months for non-degree programs for doctoral students
- **Fulbright – University of Oklahoma Grant** – 2 years for an MBA program
- **Fulbright – Thanks to Scandinavia Institute Grant** – 10 months for a Master's program
- **Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowships** – 10 months for mid-career professional development
- **Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society** – 3-5 months for research and study

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

- Applicants must have Bulgarian citizenship. Green card holders and persons with dual (Bulgarian and US) citizenship are ineligible.
- English language proficiency is required.
- Applicants must hold at least a Bachelor's degree (for Masters' and Ph.D. programs), and be able to submit the official diploma by September 1, 2013.
- Applicants must be full-time Ph.D. students (for non-degree research program).
- Applicants must hold a Doctoral degree (for Senior Scholars program).
- Applicants should be under 40 years of age and in sound health (for Graduate Student categories).
- Applicants should be under 50 years of age and in sound health (for Hubert Humphrey Fellowships).
- High scores on the American standardized tests (TOEFL and GRE/GMAT) are required from candidates for Masters' and Ph.D. programs.
- High scores on the TOEFL are required from candidates for Hubert Humphrey Fellowships and non-degree research programs for doctoral students.

Students already studying in the U.S. are ineligible to apply for grants. Candidates who have resided in the United States for five or more consecutive years during the six-year period preceding the date of application are ineligible for a Fulbright grant.

University professors, researchers, university graduates, full-time doctoral students and mid-career professionals are invited to compete for the respective programs.

All candidates will be considered without regard to race, color, religion, and sex.

Deadline for submitting applications for all categories: May 7, 2013

Submitting test scores by May 7, 2013 is considered an advantage.
Final deadline for submitting official test scores is September 16, 2013.

More information can be obtained at www.fulbright.bg and at the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission
Sofia 1000, 17, Alexander Stamboliiski Blvd., 1st floor, Rooms # 9, # 15,
tel. (02) 980 8212 or (02) 981 6830, visiting hours: Monday - Friday 2:00p.m. - 4:00p.m.

FULBRIGHT LANGUAGE TRAINING CENTER

offers preparation courses for iBT TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, GRE, GMAT and English at all levels.
Sofia 1504, 1 Panayot Volov Street, floor 2, tel. (02) 944 04 41, e-mail: studycenter@fulbright.bg

To Chicago and Back

The Crow Tribe

Ivo Danchev

**Fulbright researcher, photography
Host institution in the U.S.: Crow Tribe Executive Branch,
Crow Agency (Baaxuwaaashe), MT**

About the tribe

Traditionally the Crow tribe was a typical example of a plains Indians nomadic culture. During the US expansion in the American west and the Indian wars from the second half of the 19th century the Crows were one of the few tribes to support of the US army. The Crow scouts led the cavalry against their traditional and much more numerous enemies - the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapaho. For the Crows it was a matter of survival to help the white man against their opponents, but in this changing world it was also wise politics for better future perspectives. When the hostile Indians were totally defeated and reservations established, the Crows got a big and rich piece of land from their traditional territory. Although they were faithful to the whites their reservation shirked in size significantly by 1904. Today the Crow tribe owns beautiful patch of land about 50 miles long and 80 miles wide located in southeastern Montana. The Crows are about 12 thousand people living mainly in the small reservation towns and around the bigger towns near the reservation. They have their own autonomous government and a chairman. The policy line set by the old Crow chiefs has been followed up to present days. Recently the US president Barack Obama has been officially adopted in the tribe and given the Indian name - Black Eagle.

The Crows own a small casino and a coal mine which provide the main part of the tribal income. In its southeastern part the reservation covers the northern part of the beautiful Bighorn Mountain range. Throughout summer life on the reservation is filled up with a variety of annual events awaited from all the people. Traditional camps, ceremonies, pow-wows and rodeos bring the Crows together to compete in dancing or singing, horse rides, games and undertake religious sacrifice or just to have great fun. In the short stories bellow I provide some background information and share some of my vivid impressions from the Indian summer.

I was 13 years old when I red my first book about Indians. At this time I didn't realize that it was the beginning of a long-lasting interest in the indigenous cultures of the North America. With every next novel or a movie my desire to get more and truthful information about the Native Americans was growing stronger. Later on, more serious literature and film productions gave me a better knowledge and I gradually transferred my interest from the romantic, glorious and tragic history of the American West to the present times and contemporary lifestyle of the Indian tribes. A need to establish personal contacts and obtain a first hand experience was born in my mind. At this point I had many questions answers to which could only come from the real, living In-





dians. Have they preserved their traditions and tribal spirit or it was all replaced by alcohol and depression of their lost culture? Do they still practice their old religion or converted to Christianity or atheism? Are they still proud of their origins or have they lost their identity and ancient knowledge? Do they still live according to their traditional values and how they have been transformed to meet the challenges of the modern world? The answers of these and other questions were important not just for me, but for all people in my country who grew up with the ideals of the brave and wise Native American leaders. Hopefully, by answering these questions I could contribute to the native culture itself, or inspire other people to preserve their cultures, yet there was one crucial question I had to answer - how am I going to do all that?

As a regular citizen of a poor post communist country my plans seemed to be impossible to implement, so I put them on a standby mode, with the hope that one day the opportunity will come. In 2006 I got a digital camera and started taking photos of people and animals. Ever since that moment, photography has become an obsession and eventually helped me to make my dream come true.

4 years later after becoming a professional photographer I have contacted the Fulbright foundation. They have eventually supported my photo-journalistic project about the Crow tribe and thus, on June 20th 2011 I left my small country and flew over the "big water". Two days later I was riding through the wide open plains of Montana, USA on a small "Tribal Transportation bus".

The Crow Indians and their reservation

The highway is surrounded by vast plains all bright yellow from the sprig flowers. At a great distance snow covered mountain ridges mark the horizon. As I look at the typical landscape so familiar from the wild west films, I expect to see buffalo herds, painted tipis and galloping warriors. Instead a big road sign saying "Welcome to Crow Country" passes before my eyes and reminds me I am in 21st century. A railway, modern houses, cattle and barbwire fences, church tower and, of course - a casino appear between the hills. Indians with wide jeans, basketball t-shirts and baseball hats. Here and there I see cowboy like dressed Indians driving pick up trucks with a bunch of kids in the back. I am in the reservation.

The sundance

The main traditional religious gathering among the Plains Indian tribes is just about to begin. The preparation began one year earlier when Cedrick Black Eagle – the tribal chair declared that he will sponsor a big Sundance next summer. This is a promise which comes with great responsibility to organize a complex ceremony, provide food for hundreds of people, build a special infrastructure and in the end to dance the sunceance yourself. To put up a Sundance means a lot of work and big expenses for the sponsor's family, but it is believed that this will bring special blessings and wellbeing for all of them. At the sundance ground a big round structure of pine logs is being erected. In the center of the circle a sacred cotton tree, symbolizing the tree of life is "planted". A staffed buffalo head and a golden eagle – the most sacred animals for the Crows are attached to the tree to evoke their powerful spirits symbolizing life and god. The "walls" of the Sundance "lodge" are covered with green branches and a symbolic door is left open to the east. Every dancer who will take part in the ceremony has a serious reason to sacrifice food, water, and dance under the hot sun for the next three days. The reason is the personal prayer he or she will be sending to the "Creator of all things" throughout the whole ceremony. It could be for the recovery of a sick relative or success in the college.



When everything is prepared the moment comes and the dancers line up around the lodge. Blowing their eagle bone whistles they walk around the lodge, at the fourth circle they enter the sacred space and the ceremony begins. The youngest dancers are as young as sixteen and the oldest are over seventy. At dusk the fire is lit and sacred songs are sung.

The dancers are dressed in special skirts and hold eagle plums in their hands. They, still full of energy, run to the center pole blowing eagle bone whistles then dance backwards to the walls and this move repeats hundreds of times. Occasionally people stand at the center and pray touching the powerful center pole and smoking cigarettes. They believe the tobacco smoke carries their prayers to the heavens. The ritual continues for three days till the dancers are totally exhausted.

Meanwhile the camp is full of relatives, friends and visitors, sitting in tipis, trailers, and tents, kids are playing everywhere. The ceremony ends with a big feast and giveaway.

The Sweat lodge

Every summer day, somewhere on the reservation somebody lights a big fire. It could be along the Little Bighorn River, near a trailer house in the country, or



even in the backyard in town. On top of big burning pile of wood he has built a stone pyramid. For the next two-three hours the flames will heat the rocks till they turn red. In the meantime the small round lodge built of willow sticks is being covered with blankets, canvas and even carpet. It was done with buffalo hides in the past, but the buffalos are now gone so as the hides. Several men get undressed

and crawl inside the small hemisphere of covers. They joke and laugh. The fire is low and the rocks are ready. A boy carries them to the lodge's door with a fork. Than they go to a pit in the ground by the door. Inside the lodge the men's bodies are shaped by the soft light coming from the door. They all sweat hard already. The man by the door throws cedar and bear root on the rocks and fragrant smoke fills the lodge. The rest are rubbing their bodies with the smoke as they wash themselves. When the pit is full of hot rocks the door is closed and you could see nothing but darkness.

One of the men needs a truck and this ceremony is devoted to his need. His friends and relatives will pray to the creator so he could get what he needs. The person by the door pours water in the pit. The steam is so hot that it makes the men lay closer to the floor. The prayers start as another cup of water is poured on the rocks. Taking turns the men pray for their brother who needs a truck. They used to pray for a good horse, but trucks are more useful nowadays. When the last man prays the heat is almost unbearable. When the prayer is over the door is opened. Cool air comes from the outside and helps the men get up and seat. Little drinking water is passed around and the door is closed again. That ritual is repeated four times. At the end everybody crawls out. Some of the men jump in the creek, others just lay on the ground till they gain strength to get up. When men leave, women arrive to go through the same ritual. The sweat lodge ceremony is the most frequent ritual practiced on the reservation. The Crows say that this is the oldest ritual they have.

The holly water of Little Bighorn river

After the service, they leave the church and head out to the near turn of the Little Bighorn River. When everybody has arrived by the water the baptizing may start. Most of the people have been baptized several times before, but they believe this is a good blessing and should be repeated. The kids are playing around and one by one everybody is baptized and blessed by Jesus Christ. The disabled are carried by men and the babies by their moms. Some people cry and hug each other, other raise hands to the sky and shout out loud "amen"! There are several different churches on the reservation with numerous members. Christianity has devoted followers among the





Crows, but being a church member doesn't mean you can't go in the sweat lodge regularly or you can not be a sun dancer. For many Crows the mixture of religions is just fine because they believe there is one god with different names. One of the most passionate sun dancers at Spearsiding sundance was the 70 years old white priest.

Crow Fair

In the beginning of August everybody is on the rush. The women are in a hurry to finish the beautiful beaded outfits, the men are cutting pine trees for tipi poles or cleaning up the campground from the spring floods, the young boys and girls are thrilled – may be they will find their loved one and the kids are just anxious to play in the river. By the middle of August the tipi capital of the world is being build. The Crow fair is the Crows' biggest pride, and one of the biggest pow wows in the US. The unique thing about it is that everybody puts up a tipi or two and camps with his big family during the fair. On the day before the Grant entry a huge tipi camp is set along the banks of the river by little town Crow Agency. Indians are arriving from all over the continent. There is a long line of people holding dollar bills by the dance ground. They are signing in for the dance and singing contests. The money goes to the prize fund which swells to thousands of dollars. The grant entry has attracted thousands of visitors. Drum groups from all over the Great Plains are set all around the arena. Beginning is announced and the local Black whistle singers sing the Crow flag



song. Hundreds of dancers enter the dance floor dressed in bright colors and decorated with feathers, beadwork and bells. Again people of all ages are present. Dancing and singing competitions will continue non stop during next week. In the gaps giveaway ceremonies take place - a family honors friends and relatives by calling them to come out and giving a beautiful blanket, "money tree" (a branch of tree decorated with 20-30 one dollar bills) or even a fine horse. Then the dancing continues. Every morning hundreds of Crows parade with their best horses wearing their traditional war shirts and elk tooth dresses. Trucks and cars covered with Pendleton blankets and buffalo hides accompany the riders. The Crows cannot hide their pride of their origins and traditions. In the evening the round lane around the dance ground is full of youth. They seem not to be interested in the traditional dances. All they do is hang around and chat. Their mothers and fathers met each other at a pow wow years ago.

At the yard of the local jail, a huge tent is set for everyone who was caught drinking beer. No alcohol use is allowed on the reservation. The first Crow fair took place in 1904 and today it is one of the greatest celebrations of the Native American Traditions in the US.

Indian Rodeo

At the Rodeo ground the public stands screaming. Several young men are galloping on their horses as a matter of life and death. The first one approaches the finish line where other boys are trying to calm fresh and nervous stallions. He jumps off his horse without even slowing down, rolls in the dust and jumps on the new horse as fast as a mountain lion. He runs away with the new horse as fast as the horse could go. The crowd explodes. The next boy does the same, so as the rest. They change horses two times and the winner is highly honored and awarded. This is what the Indian rally is about. The Wild West is still alive... Pius Real Bird is an 86 years old Crow elder and one of the most respected people in the tribe. He sits at the special place for elders and watches the races carefully. He was a bronco rider himself in his youth. In 1960, already an adult, he established the so called "All Indian rodeo" – open for Indians only, judged by Indians and including some typically Indian races, like the Indian rally and the ultimate warrior competition. This initiative was welcomed and soon became a tradition.



Here starts the next discipline – a big mean bull is released at the arena with a young boy trying to remain on his back. He is mad. Crazy jumps and deadly kicks hit the dusty air. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight long seconds of struggle between the human and the beast! The bell rings, the crowd yells and the boy falls down in the dust. The sharp horns turn around for revenge. Another boy runs and grabs the bull for the tail, a red dressed clown jumps in the game and disturbs the animal. In the meantime the bull rider already shakes hands with his friends. Rodeos with many different disciplines for kids and adults are organized almost every weekend during the summer.

“Arrow game tournament”

The small handwritten sign points to a side road disappearing between the yellow hills. It is in the afternoon and the sun is high above the skies. At the end of the side road there is a flat meadow, a trailer house and people walking and sitting around. An exiting sport game is about to begin. 30 men, each holding a set of four big, bright colored arrows are forming a line. 25 meters in front of them is the target – a white feathered arrow stuck in the ground. The game starts and the arrows fly out with a big parabola, hitting in a radius of a meter around the target. When all the arrows are thrown everyone gathers around to see the results. The judge uses a small piece of dry grass as a measurement tool. Depending on the side the arrow touches the target the teams get more or less points. The highest points are given if the target is pierced but this happens very rarely. Then they throw again to the other end of the field and the same thing goes on till a certain number of points are reached and one of the teams wins the game. Again there are spectators. Women make a special sound to encourage their boyfriends, brothers, kids or husbands. The arrow throwing was a traditional game to prepare the warrior for the real battle. Like everything else, it is believed that the success in the game depends on your personal medicine. The eldest player who is 50 managed to pierce the target three times! Such a success hasn't occurred for years, they say. An old man gets on his feet and sings a special song to honor the warrior.

Buffalo hunters

It is 3 am. The meeting point is the school at Wyola. A hunting party of six trucks is getting ready. Inside the cabin there are men and women, in the back of the trucks there are kids and young hunters dressed in their thickest jackets and winter hats. It is dark and very cold. They head out for the buffalo pasture. It is a 3 hour long drive on dirty roads climbing up to about 1800 meters a.s.l. to get to a high plateau in the Bighorn mountains where the Buffalo herds gather. It is a long, cold and dusty ride for those in the back. Just as they arrive the sunrise uncovers wide open meadows surrounded by a thick pine forest. Tyrell Old Coyote has just turned eleven and he is eager to kill his first buffalo. He has his gun ready on the top of the truck. The hunters spot the first buffalo herd and the chase starts. The animals run in and out of the forest. When his father manages to level the truck with the galloping herd, it is shaking so hard on the dirty road that Tyrell couldn't fire a shot. They missed, but the others were successful. Driving along the



other truck they see people on the ground surrounding a big brown body and pulling out skinning knives. They drive further and chase more herds without a success. Eventually Richard, Tyrell's father, decides to leave the truck and approach the herd on foot through a dry forest. It is dangerous to hunt buffaloes on foot so they are very careful. Sneaking through pine trees and bushes they spot a few buffaloes at a shooting distance. Tyrell takes his chance. He shoots. The clear shot behind the ear brings the animal down instantly. The buffalo is not big, but he is still happy. The difficult part has just started. The knives are out. Skinning and butchering takes about an hour of hard work for three skillful adults. Another truck of hunters arrives to help. The kids are playing with parts of the body and even help with the skinning getting all covered with blood. The successful hunters gather by a spring with four buffaloes in the trucks. Everyone is happy and the lever is put on the grill along with some guts. They have lunch together and head back home. They are going to deliver the meat to the local school at Wyola for a community feast and lunch for the kids.

During my stay with the Crows I met many remarkable people, proud with their native origins, history and traditions. I found out that their Native American culture and spirituality are changing and adapting in order to survive, but still they remain strong and authentic. I took loads of photographs and stories to share, and bring back to Bulgaria. It is so hard to leave when you have friends like Pius Real Bird, Jackie Yellowtail, Putt Thompson, Richard Old Coyote, Sam Takes the Horse, Simpson Little Light, Billie Backbone, Tommy Hawk and many more great people. It is so hard to leave when you started feeling home. They told me that there is no word for good-bye in the Crow language, so... thank you for being so hospitable and I will see you again.

Disclaimer: The text is published in its original and unedited version.



Out of America

My Experience as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant

Katie Seto

Assen Zlatarov Foreign Language High School, Haskovo, Bulgaria



Hello everyone. I am a Fulbright ETA for 2012-2013 academic year, and I was placed in Haskovo. It is in Southern Bulgaria near the Turkish and Greek border. It is a medium sized city, with around 80,000 inhabitants. The city center has everything you could possibly want, including restaurants, cafes, parks, mini-malls, and clothing and specialty stores. There are also parks, a youth center, and a zoo. The EU has subsidized many of these projects, so the region has become much nicer to live in over time. It's near Plovdiv, the second largest Bulgarian city and an important cultural and artistic center. It's great because I can go there if I need some excitement and a change of environment.

I live in an apartment close to the city center. It is smaller than the apartments many of the other ETAs have, but everything in it is new and modern (air conditioner, refrigerator, washing machine, TV, and shower.) Additionally, it's very close to the farmer's market, where I go almost every day to get fresh vegetables and fruit. There is also a small park by the main entrance to the apartment building. The only downside is that it is a 25 minute walk away from the school. But usually I don't mind the extra time to think in the morning.

At the foreign language high school I teach eighth, ninth, and eleventh

grade. I see the ninth and eleventh graders once a week and the eighth graders twice a week for a total of 16 45-minute lessons. The eighth graders are considered "beginners," even though most of them have had several years of English. The ninth graders are high intermediate, and the eleventh graders are advanced. Basically, my goal is to make the students speak as much as possible during our time together.

That's ideal because my teaching philosophy can be summed up in two words: active learning. That means that as many students should be as actively engaged in the activity as possible. Unfortunately, in my experience most teachers make the mistake of lecturing too much. After a while, these teachers get so used to a captive audience and listening to themselves talk that they actually discourage students from participating. In my class, I keep the ratio of teacher talk to student talk very low. That is, the students talk 70% of the time, and I try to talk 30% of the time. All activities are designed with this goal in mind.

While you might think getting students to participate would be challenging, for the most part it hasn't been. In all the classes the students are bursting with energy. They tend to know more than the Bulgarian teachers give them credit for, and they will eagerly participate in most activities I design for them. It means I can do all kinds of creative, out of the box stuff with them. For instance, I instructed the eighth graders to pass around pictures of celebrities and timed it. When time was up, the students with the named celebrities had to describe their physical appearance. I've also brought in my clothes and tossed the clothing item to the first student who could name it. Then I threw socks at students to review possession – "I have this sock. This sock is mine. Now you have the sock. This sock is [yours]."

During one lesson we read dialogues I wrote titled "My boyfriend is a jerk!" written for two girls to perform, and "What do we do on Saturday?" written for two boys to perform. Then they wrote a few short dialogues of their own and performed them for the class. Last week they did a crossword puzzle to learn words about space, and then they wrote sentences using their new vocabulary and shared them with the class. To practice past tense, I had them stand up. I started a story and passed a Christmas ornament to a student. The student needed to continue the story by saying a sentence with a past tense verb. Once he had uttered a sentence, he passed it to the next student to continue, and so on until

everyone sat down. It was good activity, but for some reason all our stories ended in murder and violence!

Every month we play 'Review Jeopardy.' Questions are worth 100, 200, 300, 400, or 500 points. Because the students are at different levels of English, they can choose easier or harder questions. One hundred point questions require a one word answer, 200 point questions a two word answer, 300 point questions three words, 400 point questions a sentence, and 500 point questions two sentences. They tend to enjoy this game and always ask to play it again. Throughout this game, it is gratifying to see many of the students get the right answer. It means they are learning and actually retaining the information from the lessons. But if they don't know the correct answer, we take a minute or two to go over it.

We do some 'interactive holiday presentations' too. By interactive, I mean that the students are encouraged to participate at every stage of the presentation; I won't ever lecture them for a prolonged period of time. Usually, I ask them about their prior knowledge (ie, Halloween symbols). If they really don't know about something, like the history of Thanksgiving, then I tell them about it and then ask them review questions a few minutes later. Recently, we had an interactive Christmas presentation. The students were asked to complete basic sentences about Christmas (ie, Christmas Day is celebrated on... or Christmas symbols include...), they named all the objects in a picture of a decorated living room (ie, Christmas tree, stockings, garland, wreath), and then they matched nouns to verbs to form 2 complete sentences – one in present continuous tense, one in simple past tense. For the last part, we talked about questions like 'What's your favorite part of Christmas?' and 'What are Bulgarian Christmas traditions?'

With the ninth graders, I've done many discussion based activities. During one lesson, we talked about big pictures taken from a photo collection of American life, emphasizing the English question words who, what, where, when, and why. Some of them included a rollerblader on a half-pipe, a woman riding a horse in a rodeo, scuba divers on the ocean floor, and Native Americans performing a traditional dance. Thank goodness, these pictures were given to all ETAs by the Fulbright Commission. They've come in handy multiple times, both with the eighth and ninth graders. They always get the students talking.

Along with the 'interactive holiday presentations' mentioned above (the presentations tend to be similar for the eighth and ninth graders), we've also discussed topics like green living, traveling to America, American idioms, peer pressure, etc. For the traveling topic, I had them pick either the Grand Canyon or Rocky Mountains based on two short articles and trip advertisements. They had to use at least four details total from the articles and advertisements in their one paragraph answers. They then presented their paragraphs to the rest of the class. For green living, the students took a 10-statement quiz about their lifestyles and then added up their scores. We used the rest of the time to talk about ways to live a greener life and why that was important, given some statistics about climate change. This was highly successful in two of the ninth classes; in the other two, it was like pulling teeth to get them to speak.

For American idioms, I gave them an idiom like 'play it by ear', the figurative meaning of that idiom, and an example like 'We didn't know what

we wanted to do over the weekend, so we played it by ear [made the decision during the weekend]. They had to think of their own examples in pairs in three minutes. Some pairs shared their examples with the class, and we repeated the activity four more times. All classes seemed to enjoy this and came up with creative scenarios, so at some point we will do more American idioms.

The ninth graders have to write, on average, two compositions a month. This usually extends the analysis done in class. At first I had them write about their personal experiences just to see how well they could write. Most of them can write well, with only a few grammar mistakes. They don't seem to need much guidance to write coherent compositions centered around one topic. However, in the future I will teach them about proper citations and how to write academic papers/research papers. One of the other Fulbrighters had an excellent method for doing this, and I will adapt her method to my student's needs.

The eleventh graders must focus on literature at least part of the time, so it's a bit more concrete for them. So far I've had them read some Robert Frost poems and *The Tell Tale Heart* by Edgar Allen Poe. Usually we read literature together, paragraph by paragraph, and then they answer comprehension questions as a class or in a group. In their homework they extend their analysis of the texts.

There are definitely difficulties with this. Some of the eleventh graders have extremely high levels of English and are eager to discuss the texts. Other eleventh graders have much lower levels of English and don't find literature interesting at all. For some reason, with the eleventh grade it seems like I only have students on the extreme ends of the English proficiency spectrum. That makes lesson planning complicated. On the one hand, I don't want to bore the advanced students. But of course I don't want to forget about the lower students. Because of this, I incorporate 'how does this relate to your life?' type questions for the lower students, and more detailed analysis questions for the advanced students. Sometimes that works to stimulate class discussion among a larger group of students, and sometimes it doesn't.

Partially because of challenges with literature, in October I started American Culture Week. Usually during the first week of the month we discuss some relevant topic like the Presidential Election or an upcoming holiday. Another reason for doing this is Bulgarians only know the US through TV shows and often have distorted perceptions of America and Americans. I can be useful to them by giving them American perspectives on different issues, and we can compare and contrast that to their experiences as Bulgarians.

The above give examples of lessons and describe what I do with the students in the classroom. Now for some other additional problems and challenges. First, classroom discipline was a big challenge for me at first. Especially during the first month, I lost control of the classroom several times. I lacked confidence and didn't know what to do when the students weren't cooperative or misbehaved. Now I've developed some strategies. The most effective is the "we are not leaving until every part of the activity is completed" strategy. In order to move the activities forward, students need to participate and speak. Otherwise, the activity will not move forward fast enough, and everyone in the class stays into their break to finish it.

This has worked wonders and can be adapted to different situations. For instance, there is an eleventh grade class that absolutely refuses to speak. It's always eerily quiet in the classroom, like they're all dead - seriously. At the beginning of one class in late October I told them no one would leave the room until they all said at least one sentence in English. I honestly wasn't expecting it to work so well, but - most students spoke that lesson! Some of them even said a few sentences, which had never happened before.

Meanwhile, there is a ninth grade class that refuses to shut up. They always talk over their classmates who are trying to participate (in Bulgarian, no less). As a result, the students who want to speak in English lose their train of thought and can't concentrate. So one day I told that class no one is leaving until they respect their classmates and listen to them during the class discussions and while presenting pair work at the end of class. At least ten students had to talk without interruption. If anyone spoke when another student was called on, it didn't count. The class was angry when they stayed into their break to hear the same students speak multiple times. Since then they've calmed down, but they continue to be a problematic class. Their incessant talking in Bulgarian is something I struggle with every time I enter their classroom.

Plagiarism is a major problem in Bulgarian schools. Especially at first, many ninth and eleventh grade students plagiarized their homework off each other and the Internet. When they did this, they made it completely obvious. They'd copy 100% off Wikipedia and put their names on the papers. I failed everyone who plagiarized and explained they needed to practice putting their thoughts in their own words, not to mention the severe consequences of plagiarizing in American college. Nevertheless, the same students did it again. Again, I failed them. It took a while for some of them to learn, and they would react with surprise when I failed them for plagiarism - for the third time. Honestly, it's an uphill battle that I haven't come close to winning yet. They plagiarize less often now, but there are still many instances in some classes.

Twice a week after school I run the English Club. At first we only met in the English Center at school, and I acted very professionally towards the students. But then Fulbright came and explained it was okay for me to take the students places and connect with them more as a person than a teacher. Getting the green light from Fulbright to do that made me feel better. Unfortunately in America, teachers are often told not to socialize with their students outside the classroom for fear of lawsuits. But after I understood this was permitted, I started taking the students places like a jazz café, a mall, and the outdoor Christmas market. In the future we plan to go to the cinema and see a movie. That should be fun!

Sometimes I go to the Youth Center to talk to the various high school students there and watch the activities. For instance, the Youth Center

put on a Halloween and Christmas party. They also hosted an English competition. Students had to explain different educational systems throughout Europe and give presentations about specific universities. Of course, the Haskovo foreign language school crushed every other school in the region and won that round. Our team will compete in the national round in Sofia in the spring. More recently, the Youth Center did a "flash mob" where high schoolers danced to show their support for a drug-free, violence-free lifestyle. It was very uplifting watching these students practice so hard after school.

Relationships with the Bulgarian teachers have come easily. If they don't speak English, then we usually communicate in Russian. In fact, sometimes they speak in Bulgarian, and I speak in Russian. At this point I understand conversational Bulgarian well but can only speak it with great difficulty. They are all nice and protective; it's like having forty mothers. At first I wasn't used to it, but I realized they have good intentions - especially when they scold me about not dressing properly for winter! My mentor teacher, Margo, is very helpful with Bulgaria adjustment issues. She greeted me when I first arrived and helped figure out how to open a bank account and pay utilities.

As a Russian-speaker, it is also easy for me to communicate with most older people in the apartment building. My neighbor is the perfect example. Like many older people, she studied Russian in school during socialism. From the first day I stayed in Haskovo, she invited me over. She is a warm-hearted woman and personifies the spirit of Bulgarian hospitality and generosity perfectly. We have gotten together several times to cook traditional Bulgarian dishes and watch Turkish movies.

Occasionally I travel. So far I've been to Poland, Turkey, and the Czech Republic. In Poland, a friend hosted me. We went to Warsaw, Bialystok, and Krakow. For Christmas break, I will go back to Poland to visit him again. It's easier than going back to the States, and luckily we are good friends. Istanbul, Turkey was probably the most exotic, beautiful place I've ever been and was so vastly different from Europe. It's relatively close to Haskovo, so before leaving the country I will go again.

Anyway, the Fulbright experience - especially the teaching - has been amazing. I couldn't be happier in Haskovo. If I am allowed to continue for another year, then I wouldn't consider moving anywhere else. Haskovo is my home in Bulgaria. After Bulgaria, I'll probably continue teaching ESL for several years. From the first moment in the classroom, it just felt so natural and so right, and it brings me great happiness.

Thank you to the Fulbright Commission and the Department of State for this wonderful opportunity. I hope I've lived up to your standards as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant.

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