

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2014-15



ED Prof. Dr. Julia Stefanova, talking to the new group of Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

On June 27, 2014, the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission held a one-day pre-departure orientation for the Bulgarian Fulbright grantees who will study, teach and live in the U.S. during the academic year 2014-15.

Recipients of grants for AY 2014-15 are 5 senior scholars, 6 graduate students, one doctoral student in the visiting researcher category, and one researcher under the Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society. Projects and fields of study cover a wide range of disciplines:

In This Issue:

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2014-2015	01
Wrap Up Seminar for U.S. Grantees	03
Fulbright Office News	05
To Chicago and Back	10
Out of America	14

political science, law, environmental science, agriculture, public policy, sociology, international relations, sustainable development, architecture, entrepreneurship and literature.

The Fulbright Commission expresses its gratitude to the Bulgarian Fulbright alumni and the U.S. Fulbrighters in Bulgaria for their valuable contribution to the pre-departure orientation with comments, anecdotes and practical advice.

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

Senior Scholars

Assoc. Prof. Lyubov Mincheva

Field of specialization: Political Science

Home institution: Sofia University "St.Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy

Host institution in the U.S.: University of Maryland-College Park, D.C.

Duration of grant: 5 months, starting February 2015

Dr. Tzvetan Spassov

Field of specialization: Environmental Science

Home institution: National Employment Agency, General Directorate "European Funds and International Projects"

Host institution in the U.S.: Iowa State University, Ames, IA

Duration of grant: 5 months, starting in January, 2015

Prof. Zornitsa Popova

Field of specialization: Agriculture

Home institution: N.Poushkarov Institute of Soil Science Agro-technology and Plant Protection

Host institution in the U.S.: Chapman University, Schmid College of Science - School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Orange, CA

Duration of grant: 5 months, starting February 2015

Prof. Todor Tanev

Field of specialization: Public Administration
Home institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy
Host institution in the U.S.: Johns Hopkins University - Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health and the Study of Enterprise, Baltimore, MD
Duration of grant: 5 months, starting February 2015

Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society

Dr. Shaban Darakchi

Field of specialization: Sociology
Home institution: European Association for the Defence of Human Rights, Gender Program
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Hartford, Avon, CT
Duration of grant: 5 months, starting September 2014

Graduate Students

Yulian Tsolov

Field of study: Human Rights Studies
Home institution: The University of Belgrade, Serbia
Pursued degree: MA in Human Rights Studies
Host institution in the U.S.: Columbia University-Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, NY

Iliana Lazarova

Field of study: Sustainable Development
Home institution: University of National and World Economy, Sofia
Pursued degree: MEM (Master of Environmental Management)
Host institution in the U.S.: Yale University-School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, New Haven, CT

Vera Toncheva

Field of study: Entrepreneurship
Home institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: MS in Entrepreneurship
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Florida - Graduate School, Gainesville, FL

Elitsa Slavova

Field of study: Architecture
Home institution: University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia
Pursued degree: MS in Architecture
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, MI

Dimitar Velkov

Field of study: Communications/Media
Home institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: MS in Professional Media & Management Studies
Host institution in the U.S.: Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, IL

Fulbright-University of Oklahoma MBA Grant

Christo Shemtov

Field of study: Business Administration
Home institution: University of National and World Economy, Sofia
Pursued degree: MBA
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Oklahoma, Price Business School, Norman, OK

Non-Degree Research Grants for Doctoral Students

Katerina Kokinova

Field of study: Comparative Literature
Home institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Host institutions in the U.S.: New York Public Library-Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, NY; University of California, Berkeley-Graduate Division, CA
Duration of grant: 6 months, starting June 2014



Wrap-up Seminar for Fulbright English Teaching Assistants, AY 2013-14

This year's Wrap Up Seminar took place at "Sveta Sofia" Hotel on May 16. It gathered one Fulbright Senior Scholar, three Fulbright Graduate Students and 27 Fulbright ETAs who shared their achievements and experiences. Fun, informative and emotional, this last meeting of the American grantees to Bulgaria in AY 2013/2014 marked the end of another incredible year filled with rewarding experiences, personal and professional growth as well as the birth of friendships for life and many creative projects.

Official guests to the event were Richard Damstra, Attaché for Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Embassy and Member of the Fulbright Commission Board, Ana Todorcheva, Cultural Assistant at Public Affairs Office, U.S. Embassy, Natalia Miteva, Director, Programs for Education and Libraries, America for Bulgaria Foundation, Dimiter Tsekov, Executive Director, CORPlus - Corps for Education and

Development, Neli Koleva, Teacher Coordinator, "Zaedno v Chas"/Teach for Bulgaria Foundation.

Two round table sessions, one with current U.S. grantees and another one with Bulgarian school principals and ETA mentor-teachers, were led by Commission's Executive Director Dr. Julia Stefanova and Program Officers Rada Kaneva and Iliana Dimitrova. The discussions addressed various challenges and explored ways to further improve the Fulbright programs in Bulgaria.

Dimiter Tsekov, CORPlus' Executive Director, expressed his gratitude to all Fulbright English Teaching Assistants who have supported the foundation through volunteer work, and awarded them with certificates. Neli Koleva, Teacher Coordinator at "Zaedno v Chas"/Teach for Bulgaria, introduced the mission and goals of the foundation.



Official Opening: Prof. Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Bulgarian – American Commission for Educational Exchange



Official Opening: Richard Damstra, Attaché for Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Embassy and Member of the Fulbright Commission Board



Official Opening: Natalia Miteva, Director, Programs for Education and Libraries at the America for Bulgaria Foundation



Prof. Sarah Hobbs, Fulbright Senior Scholar at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski"



Carolyn Fado, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at Aprilov National High School, Gabrovo



Claire Sagstuen, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at "Ekzarh Yosif I" Foreign Language High School, Lovech



Morgan Murphy, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at the Foreign Language High School in Pleven



Alex Cox, Fulbright Graduate Student; Morgan Murphy, ETA at Foreign Language School, Pleven; Iliana Dimitrova, Program Officer, ETA, Fulbright Commission; Jake Turner, ETA at "Zaharii Stoyanov" English Language School, Sliven



Irma Kocer, ETA at "Hristo Botev" Foreign Language High School, Kardzhali; Emily Egan, ETA at "Ivan Vazov" Foreign Language High School, Smolyan; Victoria Weiss, ETA at "Dr. Petar Beron" Foreign Language High School, Kyustendil; Tzvetelina Nikolova, ETA at "Bertolt Brecht" Foreign Language High School, Pazardzhik; Athena Lao, ETA at "Acad. Lyudmil Stoyanov" Foreign Language High School, Blagoevgrad



U.S. Grantees AY 2013-2014

Fulbright Office News



Final Nominations for Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2015-2016

Interview for Bulgarian Fulbright grantees in AY 2015-2016, June 17, 2014

Members of the nomination committee (from left to right): Angela Rodel, Board Member; Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director; Richard Damstra, Commission Treasurer

NAFSA 2014 Annual Conference and Expo San Diego, CA

NAFSA 2014 Annual Conference and Expo “Pathways to Global Competence” took place from May 25 to May 31 in San Diego, CA.



The 2014 NAFSA conference was the largest so far with 10 000 participants from 89 countries, and offered a vast platform for promotion of the Bulgarian Fulbright program. Especially beneficial in this respect were the Community Networking receptions and sessions like “Building Connections with Fulbright”, where Fulbright Commission representatives offered information on program opportunities to US admissions and international officers. Pepperdine Law School - LLM course in Dispute Resolution, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon - Information Networking Institute were among the institutions that demonstrated concrete interest in forms of co-operation.

Throughout the meetings, recurrent emphasis fell on opportunities for graduate students and scholars in the STEM categories. The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission was represented by Program Officer Maria Kostova.

The visit to University of San Diego, global partner of 2014 NAFSA conference, showcased the strengths of campus internationalization, educational leadership and social engagement. Graduate student options that deserve special highlight are School of Law, School of Business and the highly prestigious School of Peace Studies. The campus illustrated the holistic approach to education, where environment is designed to enhance integration, well-being and achievement.

The present and future of academic exchange programs, and the Fulbright program in particular, were discussed during meetings with US decision makers in the sessions “Policy-making in International Educa-





tion: "The View from Washington" and "Open Meeting with Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board Chairman Tom Healy".

Focusing on global competence, the organizers invited as guest speakers leading experts in the field. Carl Hobert, Professor at Boston University School of Education and CEO of Axis of Hope, presented his field-work based approach to educating global citizens. Guest Speaker Lorelei Carobolante offered a thought-provoking session entitled "Required Skill: Good Communicator". Through examples and case studies, the HR specialist demonstrated why respectful and inclusive attitude, communication skills, and English language competence are high on the recruiters' list.

The Plenary sessions offered international educators the chance to meet peace-makers, politicians and activists, who had significant local and global impact. Speakers included Anna Deavere Smith - actress and playwright, Jose Manuel Ramos-Horta - former Prime Minister of East Timor and Peace Nobel Prize winner, Albie Sachs - lawyer who fought against apartheid, and member of South African Consti-

tutional Court, and Kakeniya Ntaiya - educator and activist, whose boarding school in her home Maasai village is refuge and source of hope for the local girls.

All lecturers emphasized the importance of courage, compassion, patience and perseverance, values instrumental in their struggle and success, and such that should inform global education.

The last day of the conference was dedicated to visiting the official Fulbright booth at the NAFSA Exhibition Hall, where at the invitation of IIE Fulbright Student Outreach Director, Toni Claudino, Program officer Maria Kostova, together with colleagues Alexandra Squitieri and Janice Feng, presented to interested visitors opportunities for hosting Bulgarian Fulbright students and scholars, and becoming a Fulbright scholar in Bulgaria.

NAFSA 2014 was a professionally enriching, productive and empowering experience, which has firmly put international education in global context.



Undergraduate Admissions and Scholarships AY 2014-2015

In 2014, 17 twelfth-graders, participants in the EducationUSA Program of the Fulbright Advising Center in Bulgaria, were accepted to U.S. universities and colleges with a total scholarship amount of over \$2 million (\$ 547,450 per year x 4 years = \$2,189,800). Students will be enrolled in the following colleges and universities: Harvard College, MA; Princeton University, NJ; New York University in Abu Dhabi (NYUAD); MIT, MA; Yale College, CT; Yale-NUS College, Singapore; New York University, NY; Middlebury College, VT; Grinnell College, IA; Furman University, SC; Pace University, NY; Eckerd College, FL; Columbia University, NY; Cornell University, NY; AUBG, Bulgaria.



Violeta Ivanovska, graduate from the American College of Sofia, Class of 2018, NYUAD



Five of the Fulbright EducationUSA Program participants have been admitted on full scholarships at the following U.S. summer schools:

1. Benjamin Franklin Transatlantic Fellows Summer Institutes: Wake Forest University, NC
2. Columbia University's Summer Programs for High School Students: Investigations in Theoretical and Experimental Physics, NY
3. Summer Academy at St. John's College, NM
4. Stevens Institute of Technology Summer Precollege Program, NJ
5. Yale University Summer Session: Politics and Law, CT

Five more participants in the Fulbright EducationUSA Program have been awarded the prestigious ASSIST and YES scholarships to attend a U.S. high school for one or two academic years.



Yulii Yuliev, 11th - grader at the Second English Language High School in Sofia, Benjamin Franklin Transatlantic Fellows Summer Institutes

Young Talent Awards



Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission (middle) and the two winners of "Young Talent" National Competition organized by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, and supported by the Fulbright Commission

Visit of Vanderbilt University to the Fulbright Advising Center



Presentation and interviews at the Fulbright Advising Center, Sofia



Presentations at the First and Second English Language High Schools, Sofia



БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН

УЧЕБЕН ЦЕНТЪР КЪМ КОМИСИЯ "ФУЛБРАЙТ"

- Подготовка за тестовете iB TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, IELTS
- Подготовка по английски език за граждани и фирми
- Подготовка по бизнес английски и бизнес кореспонденция
- Компютърна самоподготовка за iB TOEFL, GRE, GMAT
- Справочна библиотека

БЕЗПЛАТНИ УСЛУГИ ЗА КУРСИСТИ

- Разговорен английски с преподаватели от САЩ
- Отстъпки при записване за повече от един курс
- Безплатни 10 часа работа с компютър
- Консултации за обучение в САЩ
- Библиотека с учебна и справочна литература

За информация: София 1504, ул. Панайот Волов 1, етаж II, тел. 944 0441, E-mail: studycenter@fulbright.bg, www.fulbright.bg

Fulbright ETA Accomplishments

BFL Debate-Kurdzhali

Athena Lao

English Teaching Assistant

“Acad. Lyudmil Stoyanov” Foreign Language School, Blagoevgrad



ETA Athena Lao

The Bulgarian Forensics League held its April National English Speech and Debate Tournament at the American University in Bulgaria in Blagoevgrad from April 25-26, 2014. Approximately 246 students from 22 high schools across Bulgaria competed in the events of Dramatic Duo, Original Oratory, Prose Interpretation, Poetry Interpretation, and Karl Popper Debate. This tournament was the final competition of BFL's 2014 national tournament schedule, following two successful tourneys hosted by the Second English Language School in Sofia, and Hristo Botev Foreign Language School in Kurdzhali, respectively.

The overall school champions of the April Tournament were as follows:

Small Schools (1-5 entries) Division

- 2nd place: "Tsar Simeon Veliki" Secondary School – VIDIN, ETA Kaitlyn Lee
- 1st Place: "Simeon Radev" Foreign Language High School – PERNIK, ETA Rebecca Margolies

Medium Schools (6-11 entries) Division

- 2nd Place: "Ivan Vazov" Foreign Language High School – SMOLYAN, ETA Emily Egan

- 1st Place: American College of Sofia - SOFIA

Large Schools (12+ entries) Division

- 2nd Place: "Akad. Lyudmil Stoyanov" Foreign Language High School – BLAGOEVGRAD, ETA Athena Lao
- 1st Place: "Ekzarh Yosif I" Foreign Language High School – LOVECH, ETA Claire Sagstuen

Finally, the April Tournament featured a special opportunity: the winners of the US-Qualifier Divisions in Original Oratory and Dramatic Duo won an all-expenses paid trip to represent Bulgaria in the USA National Speech and Debate Association's National Tournament in Overland Park, Kansas from June 14-20, 2014. These 3 students will be the **first-ever** international entrants in this prestigious event. The winner in Original Oratory was **Nia Docheva**, of Ekzarh Yosif I Foreign Language High School in Lovech. The winners of Dramatic Duo were **Georgi Dumanov** and **Katherine Krem** of the American College of Sofia.

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



ETA Claire Sagstuen's students from "Ekzarh Yossif" Foreign Language High School in LOVECH won 1st place in the BFL competition.

To Chicago and Back

Mariya Dimitrova

**Fulbright Graduate Student, LL.M.
Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, D.C.
AY 2013-14**

Applying for the Fulbright Scholarship

Here I am four months into my Fulbright experience - and what four months these have been...a truly enriching experience!

I decided to apply for the scholarship because of what it stands for: educational exchange while enhancing one's cultural understanding and appreciation. Educational development and cultural understanding, the two main pillars of the Fulbright scholarship, are the terms that define my experience thus far. After filling in application forms, attending interviews and sitting tests, I was admitted to Georgetown University Law Center ("GULC") in Washington D.C. to pursue a Master of Laws degree in International Business and Economic Law with a Certificate in International Arbitration and Dispute Resolution.

Gateway Orientation

I was fortunate enough to be allocated to the Miami gateway orientation program. Landing at Miami International Airport in the penultimate week of August marked the start of my Fulbright experience. Miami Dade College was our host insti-



tution where we had our own "United Nations" with students from 42 countries taking part. We were presented with informative sessions on topics such as U.S. history, politics, culture and education system to ease our integration. All topics were directly relevant to what we would encounter at some point while completing our studies in the USA and I believe I am now well equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle those. In addition, representatives from the Institute of International Education ("IIE") and the State Department were also present to brief us on reporting requirements, health and visa issues and, most importantly, our role as Fulbrighters. The organizers and guest speakers were all very kind and friendly, going out of their way to make us feel welcome.

The gateway program involved not only informative sessions but also a range of team working activities, networking and social events. For example, during the first evening we attended an Argentinean steak house at the picturesque port of Miami. An exclusive boat trip was also organized with a historian to take us through the history of Miami. However, the highlight of my Miami social experience must be the Nikki beach dinner.

Most importantly, there were enough opportunities to get to know other Fulbrighters. I met students who were also LL.M candidates at the GULC which meant that during the first day of the orientation program at university I already knew students amongst the endless number of new faces. I believe that coming straight to my host institution would have been quite overwhelming without the one-week gateway orientation program.

Studying at the Georgetown University Law Center

The GULC has not only met but has exceeded my expectations. The lecturers are all distinguished experts in their fields worldwide, holding prestigious positions at leading international law firms, the U.S. State Department, the Supreme Court and international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Despite this, they try to bridge the gap between professors and students. For example, one of

my professors regularly took the time to enquire into how my studies were progressing, whether I struggled to assimilate any of the materials and my general experience of the LL.M program. I was also invited to a Thanksgiving dinner by one of my professors, which is a common practice in the U.S. and again speaks for the different relationship between students and professors. This could be contrasted to my previous experience of the European higher education system where lecturers put a lot of emphasis on their higher authority and the apparent segregation between professors and students.

Moreover, class participation is encouraged. Even though it does not impact the final grade per se (which is determined solely by either how well students do on the final exam or the coursework respectively, depending on their course requirements) some professors consider the extent of students' involvement when deciding on what grade to award them (which holds true only in relation to courseworks, given that all finals are graded anonymously). As a result, preparation for class is essential to be able to engage in class discussions which go beyond the assigned reading and consider the issues that stem from it.

The level of bureaucracy seems to be more contained as well. For example, student queries are automatically forwarded to the right point of contact, which ensures students get the information they need within a couple of days.

Apart from providing outstanding academic services, the GULC also offers superb career advice for foreign-trained LL.M students. They have the opportunity to submit their resumes and covering letters to have them reviewed by the career services advisers and receive individual comments. Weekly newsletters are also sent out to foreign LL.M students, containing information on upcoming networking events, internship opportunities, competitions and job postings. In addition, the careers services office also actively engages in an extensive marketing campaign to introduce LL.M students to attorneys in leading international organizations, private practice, the government and corporations.

I was very impressed by the language center services provided to foreign students which, apart from offering weekly speaking and writing workshops, also assist with develop-

ing students' legal writing skills which I found essential for the completion of my seminar papers. These services are complemented by the extensive library book collections held in the two GULC libraries - the John Wolff International and Comparative Law Library and the Edward Bennett Williams Law Library. They are open 24/7 during exam periods and study rooms can be booked for group study or presentation practice. During opening hours there are always a couple of librarians available at any one time who are able to check out materials and lend help should anyone struggle with the location of a given book. In addition to having an outstanding catalogue of resources, the GULC also participates in the inter-library loan program, whereby students can request books and articles from any participating university around the world. I have thus requested on a number of occasions study materials from libraries in the UK and the Netherlands which were necessary to complete my seminar papers. Moreover, research consultations are available with a reference librarian for assistance with papers and research projects where students struggle with identifying available research resources. Finally, the required books for each course are available on course reserve where they can be taken out for a period of two hours and then returned to ensure they are available upon demand.

In addition to my studies, I have been selected to serve as a Global Teaching Fellow to assist in teaching the one-week J.D. course, Law in a Global Context. My role would involve monitoring and facilitating student break-out sessions which would represent simulations where students would be assigned specific roles requiring them to collaborate with others on their team and negotiate with those on opposing sides. Moreover, I have been awarded the Institute of International Economic Law Fellowship, an honorary award, which provides me with a forum to present and discuss my research on international economic law issues with faculty members and other Fellows.

Living in the U.S. Capital

Living in the U.S. capital definitely has its advantages that no other city can beat. Situated in the very center of the city, the GULC is separated from the main campus, which is located

in the Georgetown area. Thus, being within easy walking distance of the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress and the Capitol, the GULC allows law students to embrace daily the legal atmosphere and be at the forefront of any legal developments. I have thus far attended two Supreme Court hearings which were very memorable because they concerned highly topical issues. In addition, cultural events abound. For example, I attended Shakespeare's play "Much Ado About Nothing" as part of the Shakespeare Theatre Company's free-for-all program, giving away tickets for a Shakespeare classic every year. In addition, I had the pleasure of attending the Labor Day Capitol Concert with the national symphony orchestra. Free admission to some of the nation's most famous museums is definitely one of the top attractions of the city, as well as the parkland of the National Mall in downtown D.C. which is perfect for morning and evening walks.

Fulbright Events and National Capital Area Chapter

Each Fulbrighter gets allocated an IIE representative who can be contacted with any questions (and I can assure you there were quite a lot of those, especially in the beginning). I had the chance to meet my IIE advisor at an ice-cream event at the local IIE offices (nothing beats ice-cream scoops of Ben & Jerry's).

The National Capital Area Chapter of the Fulbright Association, which is the Fulbright Chapter for the District of Columbia, is very active and plans events for Fulbrighters on a regular basis. For example, I attended a lamb roast event which was a great opportunity to meet fellow Fulbrighters and get connected locally. I had a chance to meet students from different universities pursuing different courses. The highlight thus far, however, must be the Fulbright Fall Gala at the Royal Embassy of Thailand, organized by Ambassador Vijavat Isarabhakdi, a Fulbright Alumnus, celebrating International Education Week 2013. In addition to the excellent catering, there were representatives from the State department and previous Fulbrighters, making it a great opportunity to mingle. Plenty of cultural events were also organized, such a visit to the American Holocaust Muse-

um which was of great interest to me given the Thanks to Scandinavia Scholarship which I was awarded. Moreover, we were invited to a non-public tour of the CNN Washington Bureau with a live show taping and an exclusive non-public FBI Tour with a shooting range demonstration.

Furthermore, Fulbright is organizing enrichment seminars for Fulbright Scholars in 2014, spaces for which are limited. Fortunately, my application has been successful and I will be attending a seminar in Atlanta for 4 days (February 27 - March 2) on Leadership in Action: Advocating for Civil Rights. I am really looking forward to it, given the high success of such events (such as the gateway orientation program in Miami). Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and administered by the IIE, the seminar will be a mixture of lectures, panel

discussions, site visits, community engagement opportunities and meetings with U.S. citizens. It will also present an opportunity to learn about Atlanta and interact with fellow Fulbrighters on professional and personal levels.

Concluding Thoughts

The first semester of my studies in the U.S. has been undoubtedly very challenging but fulfilling. It has also been a life-changing experience. I am looking forward to the start of the second semester!

Disclaimer

The text is published in its original and unedited version.

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.

Out of America

Morgan Rose Murphy

**Fulbright English Teaching Assistant
Foreign Language School, Pleven, Bulgaria
AY 2013-14**

When my high school and college friends reach out to me via social media, they usually mirror the final question of the following exchange that I encounter in person on a nearly daily basis. Regardless of the situation (in a store, on a train, in yoga class, at a bus station, or sitting on a park bench) I find myself being addressed in Bulgarian and fumbling to fit words together to make a somewhat coherent response.

- Bulgarski Bulgarski Bulgarski (too quick for me to comprehend)
- molyate, povtori po bavno, ne govorya mnogo dobre na bulgarski, no az moga da razbiram ako govorite po bavno.
- otkude ste? Ruski li si? Polski?
- ne, amerikanka sum.
- ot sasht?! Zashto ti si v Bulgaria!?

My reasons for being here are multiple and various... they expand far beyond that which my Bulgarian language abilities can provide as an answer, and they include my personal interests, educational developments, and professional experiences. In short, my reasons parallel and are supported by Fulbright, its missions and motivations, and the experiences and opportunities it has provided me thus far. When I reflect on the expectations I had when I first began studying at the university level, I realize how much I have grown and developed. I admit that as a nervous freshman getting dropped off at my cramped college dorm I hardly knew where Bulgaria was on

a map of Europe. I only knew I wanted to study the world, experience life abroad, gain global and cultural awareness, and become fluent in a new language. As an International Relations and Comparative Cultures & Politics double major with a minor in Spanish and specialization in Latin America and the Caribbean, for my first three years of college I was expecting to journey to somewhere south of the U.S. border. It is an understatement to say that Eastern Europe was not initially my first expectation for life after graduation until my final year of college, but I'm thrilled that my expectations changed and that I was introduced to the beauty that is Bulgaria and the vital global programs of Fulbright.

As a graduation requirement I worked for four months as an intern for a nongovernmental organization in Spain. While this in and of itself was out of my field of specialized study, I used my Spanish language abilities and gained cultural awareness and experience living and working abroad. The work itself changed my motivations for my future, as I assisted in providing social-integration and empowerment-based services for immigrants and refugees found in vulnerable situations in Madrid. My future changed as I worked alongside, under, and for Eastern Europeans that came from Moldova, Romania, Poland, Russia, and, you guessed it, Bulgaria. I returned for my final year of college with a new focus in mind. I changed my senior thesis topic from Bolivian President Evo Morales' utilization of rhetoric and discourse to Bulgarian

health, health care reform, and the state. I sought out any and every option I could think of to take me to the country I had only so recently been entranced by.

The university I attended provides its students with informational sessions on the Fulbright Programs offered around the world. Upon applying for Bulgaria and being accepted, my post-grad expectations changed from the broad ‘find a job, preferably abroad’ to ‘serve as an English teaching assistant and cultural ambassador in Pleven, Bulgaria through the Fulbright program’. Fulbright has been a supportive and astonishing program for me to work for, as they parallel my interest and passion for teaching English and American culture and values, and fostering mutual respect and understanding between cultures.

Months before the August day that I stepped off the airplane in Sofia as a sleep-deprived and jetlagged young woman filled with anxious excitement, the Fulbright Commission had already been more than helpful and supportive in the transition from life in the U.S. to life as an employee in Bulgaria. Four specific Fulbright-related experiences come to mind that demonstrate the presence and assistance that the Commission has for its grantees in Bulgaria. These include the Fulbright International Summer Institute, the Bulgarian Forensics League, the multiple gatherings and celebrations in Sofia, Rila, and Blagoevgrad, and the visit to the American Embassy for those interested in a career in the Foreign Service.



The Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) was extremely useful for a number of reasons as I prepared for life and work in Bulgaria. The Institute took place in a charming

resort in Pravets, Bulgaria, which is a city situated between Sofia and Pleven amidst lush tree-covered mountains. Many courses were offered that assisted in our preparation for life in our future homes. Among the most useful were courses with topics like the Bulgarian language, classroom management, setting goals, managing expectations, TOEFL training, and Bulgarian history. Aside from getting to know the Fulbright Commission directors and workers, nearly all of the Fulbright recipients of the 2013-2014 year were given an opportunity to mingle and get to know each other in an intimate and comfortable atmosphere. This has been most pivotal for me, especially as work began and advice and support were needed from others who find themselves in similar situations. My friends and family back home can only provide so much advice with regard to classroom challenges in Bulgaria, so having a supportive group of other Fulbrighters in Bulgaria is absolutely necessary for my success and sanity. We share ideas, suggestions, lesson plans, and spend free time and holidays together. I honestly see my FISI and Fulbright friends as my family here in Bulgaria.

Many of the members of my 'Fulbright family' take part as chaperones and coaches in similar extracurricular activities as I do here in Pleven. A great example of this is the Bulgarian Forensics League (BFL), which was founded by some of the Fulbright recipients of last year. These talented individuals have started a phenomenal project for Bulgarian high schoolers where they can learn, practice, and compete in English against other Bulgarians. This gives them the opportunity to expand their vocabularies, global awareness, and critical thinking skills in an exciting manner. The Fulbright Commission highly suggested that the Fulbright recipients take part in the League by coaching, judging, and mentoring students that are interested in competing nationally in English. Although this year we've only had one competition thus far, it was inspiring and eye-opening to see my students compete, learn, and support each other in and out of the competition. BFL has fostered my relationships with the other Fulbrighters who take part, has introduced me to the returning ETAs that founded the organization, provided me an opportunity to build additional rapport with some of my students and co-workers, and given me a newfound respect and appreciation for my former high school debate and forensics coach.



Similar to organizing the Summer Institute in Pravets, the Fulbright Commission has prepared many occasions for the recipients to get together, share their research and devel-

opments, exchange ideas, and support each other. A few to name are the '100 Days Celebration', where each researcher and English teacher presented on their projects, challenges, and triumphs so far in Bulgaria. The weekend was made even more exciting and useful with a visit to one of Bulgaria's most beautiful monasteries, Rila Monastery, and a visit and tour at the American University of Bulgaria (AUBG) in Blagoevgrad. This meeting was exceptionally useful, as I teach many students who are interested in receiving an American education in Bulgaria. I am now better equipped to explain the application processes and provide advice and information to my students.

While at a similar Fulbright event this fall, a handful of the Fulbright recipients expressed interest in visiting the U.S. Embassy for an informational visit on careers in the Foreign Service. The Fulbright Commission worked out a time and date with the Embassy and a few weeks later a group of us were being escorted around and informed about the application process and inner workings of the Foreign Service. As someone who wants to work abroad, gain experience first hand in the world, learn about languages and cultures, and serve as a cultural ambassador for American culture and values, it was extremely useful to spend the day at the embassy. We were able to ask questions, share our own experiences and goals, and better understand which sector of the service would be ideal for us as individuals.

Although my reasons for being here in Bulgaria are complex and multiple, it's clear and simple that many of my achievements so far in Pleven have been due to the hard work and dedication of the Fulbright Commission. Their events, support, and assistance when necessary ensure that the grant recipients here in Bulgaria have been and will be prepared to overcome any challenges that arise. I look forward to my continued work, growth, and development here in Bulgaria and with the Fulbright Commission.

Disclaimer

The text is published in its original and unedited version.