

The American Scholar Program with Ukraine: A View from the U.S.



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The establishment of the Fulbright Program with Ukraine followed quickly upon Ukrainian independence in 1992. Although Americans had participated in the U.S.-Soviet exchange program that started in the 1970s, only 12 U.S. scholars were placed at institutions in Ukraine before academic year 1992-93. By the end of 2004-05 almost 150 American professors and professionals will have gone to Ukraine. This rapid expansion of the program is only one aspect of a dynamic period in the U.S. Ukraine Fulbright Program. Equally dramatic changes have taken place in the character of the exchange and its impact. As Ukraine achieved independence, American academic and professional communities discovered that country. Not unlike previous explorers discovering “new” worlds, this process of discovery made Americans aware of the ancient and rich historical past of Ukraine and its significance in contemporary European and global affairs.

Similar to other programs in countries once part of the Soviet Union, the Fulbright Program to Ukraine began as a lecturing-only program. For much of the 1990s the program concentrated on those fields perceived as supportive of democratic and market reforms in the region: law, American studies, economics, business, political science, and public administra-

tion. Following Ukrainian independence, the number of U.S. applicants and grants awarded has grown steadily.

Approximately 20 grants are now advertised per year and the program reaches beyond the community of Americans with personal ties to Ukraine to the broader academic and professional community. This expansion of the Fulbright Program, supported by increased funding from the United States Department of State, has taken place within the context of significant changes in the Ukrainian higher educational system. Having inherited a centralized system of state-financed education with strict controls over curricula and faculty from the Soviet era, Ukrainian higher education exhibited a number of changes in the 1990s: some relaxation of state control, the emergence of new private institutions and curricula, including “humanities” institutions modeled after liberal arts colleges in the U.S., as well as tuition payments at some schools.

American professors in the humanities were attracted to opportunities to develop curricula in western civilization, classics, and Jewish studies to name but a few. In the natural and applied sciences, they offered courses in biotechnology, agriculture, and computer science. American academics and professionals also became involved in training public officials in law, public administration,

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As an academic exchange emphasis was placed on curriculum reform in the social sciences and humanities, Americans offered both substantive courses in subfields of their disciplines, as well as courses on principles and methods of scholarly inquiry. This emphasis on theory and methodology promoted dialogue between Americans and their Ukrainian counterparts and laid groundwork for future scholarly collaboration. The addition of research opportunities in the program through the establishment of lecturing-research awards in 2001-02 and research-only awards one year later assisted this dialogue.

and conflict resolution, often at the request of institutions, such as the Diplomatic Academy in Kyiv, that are attached to government bodies, in this case the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While some Americans lectured at the major state-established institutions, others worked in the newer institutions. Instead of a Kyiv-centered program, Americans taught or conducted research at institutions throughout Ukraine, including in such cities as Mykolayiv that were formerly closed to foreigners or Horlivka in the Donbass and Ivano-Frankivsk in western Ukraine that had never hosted a Fulbright professor.

In the past few years, the Fulbright program in Ukraine has given more attention to the challenges that higher education must address in this global information age. American Fulbrighters have taught in new library science programs and consulted with professional librarians, and have developed curricula in information systems, Web design for e-commerce, educational technology, and distance education. They are also participating in the development of new journalism faculties.

sharing their knowledge and scholarship on Ukrainian history, foreign affairs and security studies and learning from their Ukrainian colleagues. This dialogue reflects and further contributes to the growth of Ukrainian studies programs in North America, as well as comparative studies in post-Communist transformations. Americans and Ukrainians are also working on major issues of global concern, e.g. public health, environmental issues, the role of women. American Fulbrighters

As scholars and teachers, American Fulbright grantees to Ukraine have demonstrated the values of American higher education: an active teaching and learning pedagogy, critical inquiry, and interdisciplinarity. Within the highly structured and centralized Ukrainian system of education, through example they have promoted autonomy in education and championed greater responsibility on the part of both faculty and students in the educational mission. American participants in the

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Collaboration and cooperation between Americans and Ukrainians is now an integral feature of the Fulbright Program. The rapid increase in the number of Ukrainian scholars going to the U.S. after 1992 on Fulbright and other exchange programs and their work in new fields, in some cases areas of scholarly inquiry cut off from “western” scholarship during the Soviet era, has strengthened the possibilities for cooperation. American scholars have joined in debates about Ukrainian national identity and Ukraine’s place in the world,

and Ukrainians are cooperating to develop social work and special education programs, to train medical and public health practitioners working in the area of birth defects and AIDS, to introduce new scientific and planning curricula to safeguard the environment, and to promote research on the status of women. This collaboration takes place in the classroom, in common research activities, and in public forums. In the arts, it has resulted in joint creative efforts in fiction, poetry, and experimental theater.

Fulbright Program represent the diversity of institutions comprising the American educational system: community and liberal arts colleges, public and private institutions, and religious institutions and have shared with their Ukrainian colleagues the contribution of each of these types of schools to the educational mission. American professionals, many of whom also work as adjunct faculty, have shared their insights about professional standards and ethics and the connections between education and professional responsibility.



Martyrsky Park near the Parliament, Kyiv

Chernivtsi Opera House



American participation in Ukrainian higher education, regardless of specialization, has contributed to discussions about comparative approaches in higher education and the role of higher education to meet the challenges of globalization. Although these discussions may begin at the individual faculty or university where the American is placed, they become part of a larger debate that is taking place about the future shape of Ukrainian higher education. That system is facing an extreme financial crisis and is characterized by serious disagreements about a number of significant issues, not the least of which are the appropriate level of state control and faculty participation in university governance and curriculum design. American Fulbrighters have participated in a number of conferences at the national and regional level, organized

by an especially active Ukrainian Fulbright Alumni Association. The latter, in 2003, organized a national conference that asked the fundamental question “what is the idea of a university.” Other alumni conferences have explored such topics as information access in the university, security and area studies, as well as ethics, student cheating, and professional responsibility. At these conferences American and Ukrainian share their experiences and common concerns, for example the impact of the internet on scholarship, teaching, and student behavior or financial crises in education that both countries face. Through this common endeavor, American and Ukrainian Fulbrighters learn from one another and gain an important cross-cultural perspective of the challenge of higher education in the global 21st-century.



Carpathian Mountains

American Fulbrighters return to the United States and share their experiences with their students, faculty or professional colleagues, and the larger community. The dialogue between American Fulbrighters and Ukraine continues through networks established between individuals and institutions, including informal student and faculty exchanges. In their reports, American Fulbrighters, regardless of specialization, describe how they have gained new insights into their own work, even in the field of American studies and a better appreciation of the value of international education. As examples, they demonstrate the success of the Fulbright Program at promoting mutual understanding that is ultimately the objective of this international exchange.