

American Fulbright Student Alumni Profiles



Christina Crawford

Christina Crawford spent the 2002-2003 academic year at the Ukrainian Academy of Art and Architecture and at the University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Her project was titled "Nation-Building: The Search for Identity in the Architecture of Independent Ukraine." Christina writes, "I established wonderful contacts within the Ukrainian architectural and planning community. I found the design professionals and students to be extremely helpful and open. Through these contacts, I was able to

conduct interviews and eventually publish a series of articles about the redesign of Kyiv's center city. It was a fantastic opportunity for me to push my own abilities as a researcher and writer. I hope that this information-sharing will produce more interest on the part of the West in Ukraine's built environment." Now back in the U.S., Christina's work has received steady accolades. Her photographs of Ukraine were exhibited as part of a Ukrainian Institute show in New York. At Harvard, her Master's project was nominated for a thesis prize at the Graduate School of Design and was selected to be placed in the library's permanent collection. This past spring semester, she was named a Visiting Critic at Harvard for an urban-planning design studio that had Kyiv as its site. Publications from her Ukrainian research include "Urban Space or State Monument? The Maydan in Kyiv" (Archis, Vol. 2, 2003), "Kyiv's Underground Malls" (Art, City, Construction, Vol. 1, 2003), and "A Declaration of Independence" (Metropolis, December 2002)



Esther Long

Esther Long, a 2002-2003 Fulbright recipient,

conducted fieldwork for her doctoral dissertation on National and Transnational Identity Formation in Protestant Ukraine. Although Esther's primary affiliation was with Odesa National University, she spent most of her time on the road, spending two months in five different cities. Her research involved participant observation, focus

groups, and individual interviews with people in eight churches. Now back in the United States, Esther is busy writing her dissertation. As she looks back on her Fulbright experience in Ukraine, Esther writes, "It was wonderful to get to know people of another culture. Those cross-cultural friendships are more challenging but often more rewarding than friendships with other Americans."

Renata Harmatiy

2002-2003 Fulbright student at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy
Research Field: East European Politics
Project Title: Strategic Options for Ukraine in the Far East and its Consequences for the West
The Fulbright Graduate Program: An Opportunity of a Lifetime, A Life of Opportunities



Skimming my fingers atop the row of history books of a secluded library on the last day of my tenure in Boston, I wondered when I would ever have such a close relationship with books again. It was graduation day, and my family was waiting for me to receive my one-way ticket out of this building. Not only would I no longer be paying for the privilege of using this library, but my career as a student — a career which legitimized countless hours of meandering between bookcases — was over. I could no longer approach global issues with an academic perspective. So when an opportunity arises to do just that — study worldly questions and incorporate academia into world affairs — it is one that should not be forgone: It is an opportunity of a lifetime.

I had heard of such opportunities — various internships, philanthropic organizations sponsoring research that interested them, etc. However, I always viewed these programs with an air of suspicion — everyone had their own agenda, and the research they would support would only go towards investigating their own platform. Marriage, a baby and two years in the "real" world did not eradicate my desire to study the world beyond playpens and tax brackets. The experience of a

family allowed me to view my future with a new optimism: my work would go towards improving not only my future, but also my child's. I had previously heard about Fulbright Scholars — it was a very prestigious prize, and hence one of the reasons I underestimated my ability to receive it. But somehow the tragedy of my country on September 11, 2001 extinguished my self-consciousness and fueled my determination that the efforts of international educational "ambassadors" were increasingly necessary to ensure better cultural understanding. So I applied. I became a finalist, and to my pleasurable surprise I became a Fulbright grantee heading off to Ukraine for the following year. This proved that some organizations do not have an "agenda" and that their selection process is truly meritocratic. Although I was not back in graduate school during my Fulbright year, I was working with universities. I did not have a research supervisor, but I had the biggest research laboratory I could ask for. Here I had primary sources, immediate access to information and direct interaction with those who determined the answers to the questions I was studying. In addition to his own work, my husband was a fabulous research assistant. My daughter — at

age one year — earned her rent each day by providing comic relief. My mother understood the value of the Fulbright grant and gave up half a year of teaching piano in order to travel across the Atlantic and provide the best quality babysitting a parent could ever hope for. This year became a family project that gave me ample opportunity to focus on my work. As a result I learned some invaluable lessons about the role and benefits of a Fulbright, the mistakes to avoid and the opportunities to seize:

1. A Fulbrighter's relationship with her research subjects is the Embassy's worst security nightmare. It is also the Embassy's greatest asset in public diplomacy. This is an opportunity to represent the USA at a completely grass roots level and to present an alternative to the image created of Americans by the local media. After our security briefing in Washington D.C. and later in Kyiv, I felt confused: I was not supposed to talk to strange people, encourage strangers to talk to me and never travel in suspicious vehicles. Had I followed this advice blindly, I would have missed some of the major research issues surrounding my topic. A Fulbrighter should never put herself in danger's path or neglect rules of common sense, but part of the Fulbright experience is turning strangers into resources, colleagues, and maybe even friends. One arrives in Ukraine with the questions, not the answers. In this journey of intercultural exchanges, I not only came to understand Ukraine's foreign policy makers more as individ-

uals (the institution in itself still remains a mystery to me), but I also discovered more about myself.

In studying a system of foreign policy, I was unavoidably comparing it to other systems. A basis for comparison cannot exist without first defining that base. Ultimately, that base became my identity as an American. Regardless of one's field — literature or political science — one will be forced to understand herself better before she attempts to understand Ukrainians. In the process of being a cultural ambassador, I discovered aspects of my identity that I had not previously questioned. By describing America and Americans, I realized there were more exceptions than rules. I found I no longer lumped anyone into any predetermined category, and I did not like being "categorized" myself. As do many ex-pats, I found myself swinging more left than my traditional conservative viewpoints would usually allow me. I discovered that respect comes before criticism and investigation comes before accusation - only these rules could lead to informed research which could lead to answers for difficult questions.

2. The success of our Fulbright grant depends on our initiative and reactivity, giving one the opportunity to fully realize personal goals and ambitions. A Fulbright is an opportunity for liberty — the freedom to choose, define and develop any question any way you want to. Becoming a mother made me more independent. Yet when it came to academics I had grown accustomed to an advi-

sor — someone who could compensate for my lack of experience. The Fulbright offered me a lot, but I was initially upset at being in the pool without a lifeguard. No one was checking up on me and throwing me a lifeline when I felt I was sinking. Now I understand why. No advisor could dive into a project with the enthusiasm of the project's author. I molded the question in my application and now it was up to me to carve out the answer.

In my case, I realized that I did not even get the question right. Obviously I could and did seek advice, but not having someone tell me what course to choose also prevented them from having me question my own questions. I had the opportunity to reevaluate my questions. In analyzing Ukraine's foreign policy towards the Far East I realized that I was a step ahead of myself. In order to determine what Ukraine's foreign policy was I needed to determine who made it and how. After a couple of months of research and interviews I discovered that no one in Ukraine except a few conspiracy theorists could tell me exactly who formulated Ukraine's foreign policy. At the end of my grant I still did not know how Ukraine's foreign policy was made, but I had found out how to pose my questions in a way that elicited the best available answers.

3. Intuition, data, information and education play a role in good research. Gathering and obtaining each is an art in itself. Do not violate ethical standards or good manners, but do try to go directly to the

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best source of the needed information. Secondary testimony is never as effective as primary experience. There are creative opportunities for meeting people and gathering information. Little on Ukraine's foreign policy is open to the public. In order to discover more about my topic I needed creative alternatives for information. This meant interviews, surveys and knocking on doors that had "Do not enter" signs. To get government officials and public scholars to talk about topics that interested me, I organized round table discussions for them. This was my opportunity to contact and gather individuals who might otherwise not give me the time of day. The discussion among the participants gave me leads, information and perspectives that were not necessarily evident in the scarce literature on the topic. My enthusiasm for collecting information from ordinary and extraordinary people grew and I traveled to various cities in Ukraine with Chinese populations. I even traveled to Hong Kong and Beijing in my quest to understand Ukraine's

current and potential relationship with China. By the way, I met with higher ranking officials in China than I did in Ukraine. In the end I organized a large conference on the topic of Chinese-Ukrainian relations

4. A Fulbright will ultimately be only as effective as the trail you left to commemorate it. You think you'll remember, but you won't. If you cherish it, write it down. If it's important write it down. If it's just a hunch, an idea, or a note to self write it down! A Fulbright is a unique opportunity not only to understand, but to directly experience history in the making. I discovered that Fulbrighters are really good at talking, consuming massive quantities of cookies and coffee (espresso not Americano). But all of that talk remains just that if we don't take the opportunity to put our pens to use. With word processing, portable offices and wireless technology (and fabulous web pages from Fulbright-Ukraine and IIE) there is nothing to stop a Fulbrighter from sharing her experience with the world. Articles, editorials and presen-



tations are not just opportunities to enhance resumes; they are the ticket to synthesizing knowledge, experience and intuition. As I reflect on my Fulbright year from my basement in Cleveland, Ohio, I wish more than anything I could do my Fulbright year all over again. Maybe I am just nostalgic about youthful fervor, or maybe it was really one of those years filled with so many opportunities that I can only reflect on it, but not try to replicate it. I have been blessed with a few life-changing events — marriage, two births and getting a Fulbright award — metaphysically speaking, my third child. Luckily each has rewarded me with opportunities and given me a sense of fulfillment. I can only show my gratitude by encouraging all scholars to put aside inhibitions or apparent obstacles and turn Fulbright into your own opportunity.

