

# The Fulbright World: Unity in Diversity

*Impressions from the 28th Annual Fulbright Conference «Connecting Fulbright Alumni: Achieving Global Results,» Baltimore, Maryland, November 2005.*

A lot has been written about the Fulbright Scholar Exchange Program — how the program was started, its role in supporting international relations among scholars, and its impact on the lives of many of us. You would think that the whole story has already been told. Recently I attended the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Fulbright Conference «Intellectuals and Political Power» held October 2005 in Lviv, and as President of the Ukrainian Fulbright Alumni Association, had to report on the Association's activities. There was a lot to report: conferences, seminars, round tables, publications of books and the Fulbright Yearbook, newsletters, etc. But, when I had a chance to attend the 28<sup>th</sup> Conference of Fulbright Alumni in Baltimore this November, «Connecting Fulbright Alumni: Achieving Global Results,» I realized that the world of Fulbright is a rich resource for building a world based on a foundation of reason and communicative fairness. I also realized that the Fulbright Alumni Association is only a small part of that world. For this reason, every new vision of our Fulbright community reveals new potential and possibilities for the world we all share. This so-called practical side of the Fulbright Program is what dramatically distinguishes the Program from other scholar programs and defines a personal mission for each alumni — to be accountable for applying one's knowledge in a concrete way.

Once again, the Baltimore conference demonstrated the multi-faceted nature of the Fulbright experience. Although the Fulbright Program unites all Fulbrighters under one goal — to create a world in which reason and rationality rule — each person achieves this goal in a different way. The Fulbright Program in Ukraine is itself an example, because even Fulbright projects are implemented differently by Ukrainian and American Fulbrighters. This includes differences in how project topics are defined, differences in motivation for projects, and even differences in what kinds of project results are expected. Apparently, the Fulbright experience is completely different for American scholars than it is for Ukrainian scholars. Discounting language and cultural or social differences, the principle difference seems to be in the scholar's attitude towards his or her role in the Program. American scholars usually come to Ukraine to teach, while Ukrainian scholars go to the United States in order to learn. So the questions we need to ask are, «to teach what/who?» «to learn what?» «when?» «how?» etc. These differences add up and define significantly different Fulbright communities, each one with its own structure and spirit.

In fact, the conference atmosphere was defined by a melange of different Fulbright communities present. The conference was organized by the American Fulbright Association, but guest alumni represented different countries including Chile, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, China, Spain, the United Kingdom, Niger, Thailand, and others. Each alumnus represented not only his or her country, but also gave testimony about how the Fulbright experience affected each country. Some alumni voiced their thanks, others presented publications, and some reported in detail about association activities or proposed interesting projects. Because next year's Annual Fulbright Conference will be held in Morocco, association members from the host country introduced topics and planning issues. Next year's conference is dedicated to the influence of

Moroccan art on European art culture. I thought this was an unusual topic for a Fulbright conference, but one that had interesting potential.

The presence of Fulbright Alumni from different countries at the Baltimore conference served a purpose. One of the American Fulbright Association's priorities is to strengthen relations with Association members of different countries. This focus on cooperation enriches personal experiences and opens new possibilities for the American Association which is comprised of 49 independent regional chapters. Each chapter sets its own priorities. One of these is cooperation with visiting Fulbright scholars from other countries. Another priority is advocacy, specifically, increasing the positive image or social prestige of the Fulbright Program. Today, nine thousand members belong to the American Fulbright Association. The Association includes not only Fulbright alumni, but anyone who considers himself or herself to be a «friend» of Fulbright. The Ukrainian Fulbright Alumni Association is also working on developing regional chapters and, to this end, has set up a Committee of Regional Representatives. I look forward to an Association of dynamic regional chapters, each with its own independent program.

Listening to the many different renditions of the Fulbright experience in Baltimore eventually influenced the topic of my presentation. I had come prepared to talk about our program and its «results,» just as did most of the other speakers representing Fulbright associations from other countries. But, rather than talk about how many conferences and seminars our program had organized, I decided at the last minute to describe what makes the Ukrainian Fulbright Alumni Association unique and different from the rest. Our Fulbright Yearbook was already a good record of program facts and successes. Instead, I wanted everyone to know what differentiates the Fulbright Alumni Association in Ukraine, and how this difference brings unique value to the world of Fulbright.

Recalling the Orange Revolution during the conference made me think about my own identity. For many Ukrainians, this event is without a doubt a wonderful memory. But there, in a foreign country, the Revolution's meaning and historic significance for Ukrainians and for many other peoples were felt much more keenly. This was echoed in the words of *Zbigniew Brzezinski* when he said, «the Orange Revolution has enormous global and universal significance» (*Interview, Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, No. 47, December 3, 2005*). It felt good to be proud of my country. Often when I travel abroad, I sadly realize how little people know about Ukraine, and what they actually remember: Chernobyl, soccer, and a couple of words in ... Russian.

While in America, I noticed a changed attitude towards Ukraine in other places, too. One of the taxi drivers in Washington DC, an Ethiopian, was surprisingly well-informed about Ukraine. I'm ashamed to admit that I was unaware of events following recent parliamentary elections in his country and how Ethiopian citizens, inspired by the idea of public rule, protested elections fraud. According to the website [1], many of the protestors, especially those who were journalists, were jailed and put to death. The driver told me details about «my» Orange events which he remembered seeing on television. This conversation made me realize how accountable we all are for what happens around us, to all of us. This accountability is not country-specific. The victory of ideas and democratic values which Ukrainians celebrated on Kyiv's Independence Square was won with the help of people from other nations as well. Our victory was backed not only by affluent western nations (something which opponents of the Revolution like to mention), but also by nations seeking democratic change. Kyiv's Independence Square signifies solidarity for some nations, and for others, hope for a better life.

[1] [www.freemedia.at/Protests2005/pr\\_Ethiopia08.11.05.htm](http://www.freemedia.at/Protests2005/pr_Ethiopia08.11.05.htm)

So, this is a good time to be looking for a self identity, especially since global history is being made within our borders. Given the conditions in Ukraine today, it's no wonder that many people are disillusioned or have lost faith in the potential for new ideals and values to become reality. But history is not made automatically out of instant values. Instead, history requires that values be defended and implemented, a long and painful process. Revolution is just the beginning of this process and creates historic possibilities. Unless we become responsible for our own history now, we could lose this unique opportunity to create our own story as we would like it to be recorded.

So, the mission of Fulbrighters in Ukraine today is to protect our democratic victories and to assign them powerful, influential social status. It is this opportunity to create our own history which makes us unique at this time, and which can make Ukraine interesting to others. «Creating history» is not just a responsibility, it is a very seductive idea, and not an opportunity that comes along every day. So, I invite the international Fulbright community to join us in building a strong, democratic society in Ukraine.

Finally, this conference allowed me to see opportunities for improvement in the way our Association functions. One area would be to increase our participation in the international community of Fulbrighters. Improving contacts with other Fulbright Associations will widen our sphere of opportunities and raise the professional and creative qualities of our activities. Many of the projects, training sessions, and lectures at the conference gave me ideas for making our activities more interesting. One important activity which we need to develop, is to organize volunteer events with the primary goal to promote the Fulbright Program and to help it develop prestige in Ukrainian society through advocacy.

Finally, we need to show the world how special we are. It's hard to do this alone. I hope that the spirit of this conference in Baltimore will continue to live within all of us as we define Ukraine's new role in the Fulbright community, and in the world.

