



The Fulbright Programs and the Future of Hellenism in America

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The Fulbright program that was established in 1946 reflects the vision of Senator J. William Fulbright (1905-1906) who declared, “Education is a slow-moving but powerful force.” A broad overview of the Fulbright efforts in Greece and in the US offers examples of how the program promotes mutual cultural understanding between our two countries—the US and Greece—and contributes to the future of Hellenism. As Executive Director of the Fulbright Foundation in Greece, words of praise from me regarding the program’s successes would not be surprising. Therefore, I have chosen to quote extensively from Fulbright recipients (alumni) who have written on how the program has affected their lives.¹

The Fulbright program is now the largest scholarship program in the world and operates in more than 155 countries. Fulbright Greece, the oldest Fulbright program in Europe and the second oldest in the world was established in 1948 through a binational treaty between the United States and Greece as a non-profit, non-political, autonomous educational organization. Since its inception, the Foundation has awarded scholarships to approximately 5,000 Greek and American citizens. These highly competitive, merit/need based grants are offered to graduate students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists and artists of Greek and American citizenship to study, lecture or conduct research in the United States and Greece.

Speaking about the educational and cultural exchanges between Greece and the United States, Antonis Samaras, the current Prime Minister of Greece recently noted, “. . . Senator Fulbright saw ‘beyond the horizon’ of his time. He didn’t remedy the tensions of the Cold War. But he helped build a world, able to live and prosper despite great differences among nations. He helped build a necessary common context for the

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survival of mankind: a culture of coexistence, communication, understanding and mutual trust. Now the Cold War is over for 24 years. But the Senator's vision is not outmoded. We probably need it now as much as we did 65 years ago....People are different. We cannot become the same. Probably, we should not become the same. But this is all the more a good reason to keep building bridges among ourselves." Similar sentiments have been expressed by other Greek officials. Athanassios Kyriazis, Secretary General, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, for example, has noted, "Fulbright's work is exemplary and makes everyone optimistic about the future; it is a solid program that delivers results."

The Fulbright experience is meant to be transformative as it addresses global challenges, advances knowledge, builds community, fosters mutual understanding, and empowers future generations. The Fulbright Foundation in Greece seeks to develop tomorrow's leaders by enhancing their international skills and cross-cultural capacity. Scholarships for American citizens are varied in nature. They include scholarships for Graduate Students (Academic Program, English Teaching Fellows), Scholars - Core Fulbright Scholar Program, the Greece Summer Classics Program, the Fulbright Specialist Program, and inter-country lecturing awards.²

The Fulbright Scholarships available for Greek citizens consist of programs for Graduate Students, Visiting Scholars, Artists, Secondary School Educators Summer Institutes for European Student Leaders, and Fulbright-Schuman Program Fellowships for EU citizens. These programs can be thought of as a brain gain for Greece as following completion of their studies in the US, Fulbright scholarship recipients are required to return to and reside in Greece for at least two years. The home residency requirement ensures that recipients transfer valuable knowledge as well as broaden and strengthen mutual understanding.³

Greeks Studying in America

Programs for Greeks who wish to study in the USA are supported by an extensive advising and outreach structure that offers accurate, comprehensive, and current information about accredited colleges and universities in the United States. This involves the free advising services by the only approved EducationUSA Advising Centers in Greece. The Greek EducationUSA is a component of a network of hundreds of advising centers around the world that are supported by the US Department of State. Two testimonies speak to the nature of this program.

Miltiadis Vratimos, EducationUSA advisee from the Second General High School of Tripoli (Peloponnesus) currently at the University of California-Berkeley has written, "The EducationUSA services at the Fulbright Foundation played a critical role in my decision to study in the US. My meetings with the advisor helped me understand the intricacies of the college application process and the importance and methodology of

selecting my ideal university, based on criteria such as my interests, studies, and background. A university fair organized by the Fulbright Foundation with alumni from US colleges provided a great opportunity for me to understand which universities I should focus on."

These sentiments are echoed by Educational Advisee, Evangelia Spiliopoulou, graduate of the Third General High School of Volos and currently at the Georgia Institute of Technology, "When I started searching universities [in the US], I had no idea how things work. ...The role of Fulbright was very important, as the advisors provided me with plenty of information about US education and suggested universities that were suitable for me. Furthermore, they helped me a lot in choosing the right university according to my possibilities and strengths. Finally, they helped me to figure out what I truly wanted to do, as I was really confused [at] that time about my future. "

The long term impact of the Fulbrights is evident in statements by two recent Fulbright the recipients. Emmanuela Truli, Commissioner-Rapporteur, Hellenic Competition Commission-Lecturer of Civil Law, Athens University of Economics and Business and a 2001-2002 Greek Fulbright Graduate Student in Law at Columbia University, observes that, "More than ten years after my LL.M. Studies at Columbia University, made possible thanks to a Fulbright Scholarship, I am still very conscious of the benefits of my excellent education, and hence, the responsibility that goes with it. In this time of crisis which my country is going through, I remain committed to the public sector and I have the confidence that my skills, put to use either in the forefront of public administration striving for economic development or as a teacher of the next generation of managers, add to the collective efforts of many in Greek society working toward a brighter future."

The Fulbright program's impact on public health issues is emphasized in comments by Aphroditi Veloudaki, Programme Director of Prolepsis, Institute of Preventive Medicine Environmental and Occupational Health. She was a Fulbright graduate student in 2004-05 who studied, Communication & Mass Media at Emerson College in Massachusetts. She writes, "When asked 'What exactly *is* health communication?' the Fulbright Foundation in Greece knew exactly how to respond: They believed in me and provided me with a unique opportunity to pursue my postgraduate studies. Six years later, having graduated from a MA program at Emerson College and Tufts Medical School, I am leading the Food Aid and Promotion of Healthy Nutrition Program that provides free, daily meals and nutritional education to more than 300 schools located in Greece's most underprivileged."

Another dimension of the Fulbrights involves the arts. Artis Flevotomos who took part in the 2012-13 program writes that, "Since last September I have had the opportunity to attend a series of newly created classes that make visual art accessible to

people with disabilities. These classes took place at the New York Public Library and at some of the city's major art museums. As a Fulbright artist I also had the chance to design and take the lead in organizing a collaborative event between the Metropolitan Museum, the Whitney, the Guggenheim and the NYPL." Since his return to Greece last June, Flevotomos has been developing an educational model following his New York experience that can be implemented in Greek museums and libraries. For example, his *The Avenue that Leads to the Sea*, a multi-sensory workshop addressed to children who are blind or partially sighted and their families will take place at the Benaki Museum.

Americans Studying in Greece

A binational approach is the hallmark that distinguishes the Fulbright academic exchange program from most others, either public or private. While support from both the US and Greek governments secures the basis of the operation, the growth of the program relies on private and cooperative support from individuals, corporations, foundations and institutions in both countries. All the programs are involved with building the future, fulfilling the vision of Senator J. William Fulbright who wrote that, "Education requires a continuing act of faith."

The ability of the Fulbright programs to capture and advance understanding Hellenism and its future in America is found in various fields. Emil Penarubia, Teacher, Boston College High School, MA and participant in the Summer Seminar at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens in 2006 writes, "Because of my Fulbright, the students know about the ancient Olympics, the Labyrinth, and Apollo's Oracle from my first-hand experience."

Katie Oxnard, Educator, CT Douglas School, Acton, MA and a member of the Summer Fulbright-Hays Cultural Enrichment Seminar: Greece-Turkey in 2011, observes, "To say that my experience in Greece has influenced my students and my classroom is an enormous understatement. I am a sixth grade teacher who teaches all subject areas to approximately 25 students. Ancient civilizations are part of the sixth grade curriculum, and I am successfully turning all of my students into ancient Greek fanatics like myself! The curriculum project that I developed takes students deep into the topic of Greek temples; as a culminating project, students are grouped into city-states such as Athens, Sparta, Corinth, etc. and compete to build a temple dedicated to their patron god or goddess."

The experience of Liza Mathews, Teacher, Corte Madera, CA, and a member of Summer Fulbright-Hays Cultural Enrichment Seminar: Greece-Turkey, 2011, expresses similar sentiments, "Fulbright 2011 study trip to Greece and Turkey continues to deeply impact my teaching. I have now incorporated Understanding Culture as a major thought-line of my curriculum . . . Truly, the theme of building bridges across the sea has come to fruition in these learning experiences for our students. Finally, as a more

informed citizen of the world, I am able to share with my colleagues, friends, and family, knowledge which helps create a more full, balanced, and real picture of what has been happening politically, socially, and economically in Greece over the past two years. I've been able to persuade friends and family who were tentative about visiting Greece in the current political climate to absolutely go there - that it is a safe, inspiring, historically rich, and incredibly beautiful culture. "

Another important dimension of Hellenism involves minorities and specific diaspora cultures. Annette B. Fromm, Museum Specialist - Folklorist, Florida International University, Miami, and a Fulbright Student in 1983-1984, is author *We Are Few: Folklore and Ethnic Identity of the Jewish Community of Ioannina, Greece*.⁴ She writes, "The future of Hellenism in America? I think the fact that, often in quiet ways, in far off corners, descendants of the Jews of Ioannina continue to recognize their essential 'Greek - Jewish' identity. Hellenism has this pluralistic component; though small, it is significant and deeply proud."

Tina Bucuvalas, Curator of Arts and Historical Resources at Tarpon Springs and Fulbright Research Scholar in 2006-2007 has become the leading expert on the community of Tarpon Springs and its connections to Hellenic counterparts in the Caribbean and Greece proper. Her work has been published in Greece and the United States.⁵ She states, " The Fulbright award absolutely changed my life by directing me back towards working as a cultural advocate for the local Greek community. I now work for the city of Tarpon Springs, Florida, where I am the Curator of Arts and Historical Resources. As an ethnographer, I have essentially turned much of this job into documenting, presenting, and preserving aspects of the very active Greek culture here through exhibits, events, writing, workshops, and historic preservation activities. I am both oriented towards educating about Greek culture, and also trying to ensure that the next generation will have some of the knowledge and skills to continue their heritage."

Dan Georgakas, the editor of this journal, was a Fulbright Student in 1962-1963 and a Fulbright Specialist in 2001. Among his many interests has been the promotion of Greek language films in the United States. Working with contacts he developed on his Fulbright, he coedited an issue devoted to Greek cinema in *Film Criticism*.⁶ He wrote to me at the time of publication noted that the intended audience was not limited to those already interested in Greek film but those who needed to be aware of its vitality, " I don't think our issue says anything new to a Greek audience, but it is a breakthrough in terms of the American readers. Most of the subscribers to this magazine teach in university film programs and have no Greek heritage. The material on Greek film in English is extremely limited, so this should help."

Alexis Stamatis, who took part in the Greek Artist Scholarship Program, 2004-2005, is the author of the novel *American Fugue* which in 2007 won the First International Literary Award by the US National Endowment for the Arts.⁷ He was able to present his book in a tour that included fifteen American universities. He writes, "The Fulbright grant gave me the opportunity as a writer to become a representative of contemporary Greek literature and to expose new audiences to this writing. It is very important to be able to communicate the contemporary Greek culture to the world and especially to US audiences, since Greece and the USA share a very valuable historical past which is embedded in the present and the future."

Translation of literary works from Greek to English is another aspect of programs involving Americans. Two outstanding examples of how not to have literary works "lost in translation" involve Karen Emmerich and Karen Van Dyck. Emmerich, Assistant Professor, Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon was a Fulbright student in 2000-2001 when, she studied at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She has been recipient of translation grants and awards from the NEA, PEN, and the Modern Greek Studies Association.⁸ Van Dyck is Kimon A. Doukas Professor of Modern Greek Literature, Classics Department, Columbia University. She was a Fulbright Research Scholar in 2000-2001 and a Fulbright Specialist in 2012 where she worked on a project to create inter-university programs between Greece and the United States. She is coeditor of *The Greek Poets: From Homer to the Present*.⁹ This landmark volume captures three thousand years of Greek poetry with more than 1,000 poems and 200 poets.

A basic thrust of all the Fulbright programs is to deepen and enrich the relationship between Greece and the United States. US Congressman John P. Sarbanes, who was a Fulbright Student in Independent Research in Greece in Law and Political Science in 1984-1985, summed up the international dimensions of the program when he wrote, "In many ways, my experience as a Fulbright Scholar in Greece motivated me to seek public office. So many of today's international and domestic conflicts stem from cultural misunderstandings. In this globalized world, it is critical that we collaborate on discovering and promoting innovative solutions to problems that span geo-political borders."

What these testimonies reveal is that sixty-eight years after the first Fulbright program was established in Greece, the vision of Senator Fulbright and all those who supported him has proven to be an invaluable dimension of American foreign policy. Our aim is to build tomorrow's leaders. Our growth relies on private and cooperation support from individuals, corporations, and institutions. To learn more about how to help the future leaders of Greece or to query about other Fulbright matters, feel free to contact us at your convenience.¹⁰

¹ I would like to thank the many Fulbright alumni who responded to my request for feedback on their Fulbright experience. I would like to have included them all, but I was constrained by space considerations.

²To review scholarships awarded to American citizens for academic year 2013-14 consult: http://www.fulbright.gr/documents/Scholars2013_American.pdf.

³ To review scholarships awarded to Greek citizens for academic year 2013-14 consult: http://www.fulbright.gr/documents/Scholars2013_Greek.pdf.

⁴ Annette Fromm, *We Are Few: Folklore and Identity of the Jewish Community of Ioannina* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

⁵ A summary of her work has been published as "The Greek Communities of the Bahamas and Tarpon Springs: An Intertwined History, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* Vo. 39 #1/2 (2012). The essay was subsequently translated and published in Greece in *Eniamese Perioche*.

⁶*Film Criticism: Special Issue – Greek Cinema* V. 26 #3 (2002-03). Contributors: Penny Tselentis Apostolides, Stratos Constantinidis, Dan Georgakas, and Andrew Horton (co-editor).

⁷ Alexis Stamatis, *American Fugue* (Youngstown, OH: Etruscan Press, 2008).

⁸Her recent translations include the forthcoming Yannis Ritsos, *Diaries of Exile* (Brooklyn: Archipelagos Press, 2014 which is co-translated with Edmund Keeley; Margaret Karapanou, *The Sleepwalker* (Northampton, MA: Clockroot Books, 2010); and Ersi Sotiopoulos, *Landscape with Dog and other Stories* (Northampton, MA: Clockroot Books, 2009).

⁹ Peter Constantine, Rachel Hades, Edmund Keeley, and Karen Van Dyck (eds.), *The Greek Poets: From Homer to the Present* (NY: Norton, 2009). Keeley is a Fulbright alumnus

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