

# NEWSLETTER

Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange



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Professor Orlikoff, Professor Georgieva, and Professor Deliyski

## Professor Dobrinka Georgieva: Fulbright is My Scientific Camelot

**“Don’t let it be forgotten, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot” - from JFK’s favorite song.**

The first word that comes to mind when meeting Professor Dobrinka Georgieva is “passionate” – indeed, this speech language pathology (SLP) and logopedics expert is every bit as devoted to her cause as Knights of the Round Table were to the Holy Grail! While visiting her in her office at South-West University in Blagoevgrad, I spied a prominently displayed photograph of a handsome man and asked if he was perhaps her husband? “Of course not!” Professor Georgieva exclaimed. “He is the only disfluent

MP in the Bulgarian Parliament!” Dr. Georgieva’s teaching, research, and clinical interests are in the area of fluency and voice disorders. She has authored numerous research and clinical papers, chapters in books and books on stuttering, stuttering intervention and voice disorders. She is also the main editor of the *Bulgarian Journal of Communication Disorders*. Last decade she was a founder and director of the University Stuttering Research Center at SWU, a true SLP “shining spot” in Bulgaria.

As part of her mission to help Bulgarians with speech disorders receive the support they need, as well as to train a new generation of speech-language pathologists, she currently coordinates many international and national projects and initiatives at South-West University (World Bank project; National Science Fund; Erasmus+ and Fulbright). Georgieva was the lead person developing the Bulgarian Logopedics specialty in the field of Public Health. Given her extensive international experience, it is not surprising that she served as SWU’s Deputy Rector of International Relations (2004-2011). Since 2011, she has served as Head of the International Relations Office.

### When and where was your Fulbright scholarship?

In 2013 I had the privilege of conducting a Fulbright specialization at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC) – one of the three most prestigious research children’s hospitals in the US. Part of my time I spent at the University of Cincinnati Medical School, Barrett Head and Neck Center. I was deeply excited to see the important work being done at Cincinnati Children’s Speech Language Therapy Clinics – the biggest one in the States. I was very grateful to and humbled by the many others who invest in SLP work and research related to voice assessment and therapy.

For a five-month period, I was part of the team of Professor Dimitar Deliyski, who then led ENT’s world-renowned voice lab. Deliyski’s state-of-the-art lab was the largest in the US and one of the most technologically advanced for laryngeal imaging. His team of leading specialists focused on improving voice disorders, which can have a tremendous impact on the lives of patients from different age groups.

**After your Fulbright grant in 2013, were you able to build your own “Camelot” here in Bulgaria?**

After my stay in the States one of the main goals of my administrative, educational and research work has been to continue expanding the communication disorders program in SWU's Public Health Department through the creation of a national speech and voice center. I especially emphasize the adoption of a public health approach to SLP practice in my work. Over the last decade, the drive to integrate population approaches and public health education into university-degree programs for allied health professions has been growing in the USA and EU countries. There is an increasingly popular belief that allied health professionals, including speech-language pathologists, should develop skills and knowledge in population approaches and public health as part of their core education.

The second concept I am trying to implement in SLP clinical practice in Bulgaria is an evidence-based practice approach, which emphasizes that the provision of services for clients with different communication disorders should be based on scientific evidence. A clinical education program must include skills and tools for the student to explore, inquire and develop assessment and intervention practices that meet the appropriate levels of evidence in the profession. We must emphasize the need to integrate patient values and preferences along with the best current research evidence and clinical expertise in making clinical decisions.

**What is the present state of logopedics in Bulgaria? How can people with communication disorders improve their quality of life?**

There are 350-400 speech therapists in Bulgaria, working predominantly in educational settings. Nationally, there more than 150,000 people who stutter and two-thirds of them have no access to speech therapy services. Unfortunately the Bulgarian healthcare system does not offer

speech-language treatment for adolescents and adults with severe communication disorders such as aphasia/dysphasia, neurologically-based communication disorders in children, severe voice disorders....

The research component of my work makes an attempt to introduce a gold standard into logopedical practice and applied research to measure the quality of life of persons with fluency disorders (stuttering) and voice impairments. Quality of life is a modern multidimensional construct that covers health, medical, psychological, social and economic factors. Severe communication disorders can affect many aspects of a person's life. The specific concept of the quality of life of persons with a stuttering disorder is the core of the clinical logopedical practice in the SWU University Stuttering Research Center. There is a paucity of empirically based research concerning stuttering treatment outcomes in adults in Bulgaria. An objective evidence-based evaluation of the effectiveness of some treatment approaches in SLP in Bulgarian conditions was done over the last few years. This is one of the items we are developing together with Professor Yaruss from the US – one of our former Fulbright lecturers.

**Besides your own scholarship to the US in 2013, how else has the Fulbright program helped your research?**

I have received enormous help using Fulbright Program opportunities, developing six Fulbright Specialist projects. Leading American specialists have been involved in the teaching process at the SWU Logopedics program: Dr. Judith Custer (Mankato University), Prof. K. O. St. Louis (West Virginia University), Prof. Edward Conture (Vanderbilt University), Assoc. Prof. J. Scott Yaruss (Pittsburgh University), Assoc. Prof. Bernice Klaben (Cincinnati University), and

Prof. Robert F. Orlikoff (East Carolina University). *The Fulbright program not only strongly shaped my professional development, but created a new contemporary model of university academic culture.*

Last year I was very concentrated on expanding Fulbright opportunities and combining them with the European Union Erasmus+ program. In 2016-2017 we developed very useful SLP collaboration with Michigan State University and Pittsburgh University. The first visitor within the program was Professor Deliyiski last September. The next researcher we are looking forward to hosting this academic year is Dr. J. S. Yaruss. *The Fulbright program is an ideal instrument for the internationalization of educational, scientific and cultural products originated by a creative university milieu.*

**Tell us more about your most recent Fulbright Specialist visit?**

In September of 2016, Professor Orlikoff introduced topics related to voice disorders and instrumental voice assessment. I was very impressed by this internationally recognized scientist, whose work focuses on the acoustic and physiologic characteristics of normal and abnormal voice production. Currently he serves as a dean of the School of Allied Health Sciences at East Carolina University, Greenville. This extremely fruitful Fulbright visit was the second such visit by a leading research scientist in the clinical voice area and positively impacted our knowledge base about the nature and treatment of different types of voice disorders. *My students and I had the honor and opportunity to be touched by Professor Orlikoff's generous scientific spirit within the Fulbright program.*

Without any doubt the Fulbright program will continue to support fruitful collaborations between American and Bulgarian academics.