

THE Bradley HERALD

Impact of the Civic Education Workshop

Seeing Ourselves as People Who Can Change the Fate of Nations

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I was very lucky to be chosen for the 2003 FLEX Civic Education Workshop in Washington, D.C. The week of February 23 - March 1 was the best week I have ever had. This program taught me many lessons, which I will try to put into practice throughout my life. I couldn't imagine that this workshop would be so interesting. I can say for sure that it changed me and my opinions on many important issues.

The program showed me what democracy really is and how it works in U.S. society. I could see with my own eyes how many wonderful choices are open to U.S. citizens, and unfortunately how little most American people use those choices, or even appreciate them. For example, it was very surprising for me to see the House of Representatives and the Senate in session, passing bills and resolutions--the actual laws according to which people are supposed to live. In Russia, I would never be allowed to attend such sessions without a special pass. To even earn such a pass requires a special position in society. I was surprised how easy it was to meet with any of the politicians and just talk with them about the current events going on in the world or in a certain state or city. Every U.S. citizen can do that without indeterminable waiting for months or maybe years, which sometimes happens in my country. I wondered why American people don't take advantage of this great privilege that the government gives them. At the same time, I asked myself how it is that Russian people select their governors, without meeting them personally, and without knowing what those people are doing in their offices, in their comfortable chairs, or even if they are doing anything at all.

When I returned from my Washington, D.C. trip, I wrote to a very good friend of mine, who is from my hometown of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. I informed her of my decision to study at one of the universities in Moscow. I said that I want to help my country to develop, and to make it better in some ways. My friend sent me an answer

that frustrated me very much, but with which I would probably have agreed a month ago, before I visited the U.S. Capitol. She said that I could never do anything in our country, and that I couldn't possibly change it in a better way. Then I talked to another person, and he said that Russia is hopeless, that we common people can't influence the fate of our country. He told me that many people have tried without progress. He also mentioned that when those people got tired of struggling with all the difficulties in their way, they gave up and moved to other countries. They moved from their motherland to countries that promised them a better life and better money for their effort. Such people leave because they don't really want to face difficulties and failures before they succeed in changing their country.

Another important lesson that all the FLEX students learned at the workshop in Washington, D.C. is, "A small, highly committed group of individuals can change the world; it is the only thing that ever has" (Margaret Mead, cultural anthropologist). The workshop helped us understand that when we try to make changes to improve our countries, we must believe in ourselves and our cause. No matter how small our first steps, they will be a start to a great and definitely better future for our countries. At the workshop, we began to see ourselves as people who can change the fate of nations. We began to see ourselves as the very future leaders that the FLEX program proclaimed us to be.

A final lesson to me was realizing how great my love for Russia is, and how much I am willing to do for the sake of it. Russia is not worse than other countries, it is better -- better in many ways. Like any country in the world, it has its positive and negative sides. However, it is in the power of the common people to turn its negatives into positives. With such great potential before them, Russian people will make the difference in the development of Russia, if they start believing that it is possible. I look forward to returning to my country to show my people just how great our country is.

I thank all of you who made it possible for this program to occur. ■

FUTURE LEADERS EXCHANGE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

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Letter from the Editor

Dear FLEX Alumni,

Many alumni have contributed moving articles for this issue of *The Bradley Herald*, which focuses on the impact of the Civic Education Workshop. Alumni who are dedicating their professional lives to the development of civil society shared their experiences. Recently returned alumni convey the energy and inspiration that the workshop has given them. I think you'll also enjoy hearing from Close Up Foundation staff, who lead the Civic Education Workshop and one of the FLEX volunteers, who comments on his experience reading essays and selecting participants to come to the Washington workshop. The timing of this issue coincides with recent elections in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia and may also stimulate your thinking about the elections processes which have already taken place or are scheduled for the coming year in your countries.

The autumn season is closely associated with recruitment in the FLEX world. By our rough calculations, based on reports from FLEX alumni assistants and FLEX recruiting staff - many of whom are themselves FLEX alumni - more than 600 alumni assisted in advertising the program, speaking at public meetings, and assisting during registration at testing centers in the 170 cities in all twelve countries where the FLEX program is administered. Many thanks to all of you who spent your weekends this fall helping recruit the next group of FLEX students. Your participation is critical to the success of American Councils' recruitment efforts. By talking about your U.S. experiences and sharing the program's impact on your life, you spark the imagination of many teenagers and give them the impetus to compete for this exchange opportunity.

Please accept our apologies for the delayed printing of this issue of *The Bradley Herald*. The FLEX tenth anniversary summit **FSA FLEX: Ten Years of Service and Leadership**, which was held in Kyiv, Ukraine October 31-November 2, 2003, demanded the attention of the FLEX alumni staff throughout the fall. Please look for a full report on this exciting tenth anniversary event in the next issue of *The Bradley Herald* - which will be printed immediately on the heels of this issue! We plan to publish highlights and photos, including excerpts from Bill Bradley's speech, the twelve alumni delegations' power point presentations, training sessions, roundtable discussions and Global Youth Service Day project proposals.

Be sure to check the American Councils website (www.americancouncils.org) and the State Alumni website (<https://alumni.state.gov>) for the latest alumni news, upcoming events and opportunities. You'll also find this year's "Faces of FLEX" winning photos posted on both sites. We've updated the summit website, which can be viewed at www.fsaflexsummit.narod.ru. Be sure to participate in the forum. Right now alumni are discussing their Global Youth Service Day projects, which are planned for April and May.

Sending you all warm wishes for a successful and healthy 2004!

Mary Shea
Editor

Did it Show Democracy? Much More... It Showed Me Direction!

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Eight years ago, I took part in the FLEX program's Civic Education Workshop. In retrospect, this part of the FLEX program was one of the best, most important, and most exiting experiences of my life. As I understand it, the goal of the workshop was to introduce students to a functioning democracy: its elements, and institutions. This aim was perfectly achieved.

In my case, it was much more. Experiences, such as the Civic Education Workshop, my U.S. Government class at Mills E. Godwin High School, and relationships that developed during my stay in U.S., greatly influenced me. It showed me that freedom and positive progress really can foster growth in a democratic society. But...

It was the Civic Education Workshop that helped me to choose my occupation and find my professional passion. I decided to become a lawyer, specializing in human rights, election laws, and lobbying. At the present moment, I am writing my Ph.D. in Law at the University of Hamburg. The theme of my doctoral dissertation is "Legal and Practical Strategies and Precautionary Measures against the Falsifications of Elections in Russia." This is a very real issue for my country at the present time. Unfortunately, analysis of sociopolitical and legal tendencies shows that this issue will continue to occur in the near future.

I chose this theme, because it is very important to me to support the democratization of the transforming Russian Federation. I feel that this transformation will occur if the government would observe the human and civil rights of the residents of our country. I believe that if the alumni of various democratic-oriented programs would join together and make a concentrated effort to modernize Russia, it would result in a modern, liberal, individual-oriented, and prosperous state. Russia could become a state, which respects the rights of individuals and cares for them.

When I ask myself, "Why did you choose this way of life? Why did you choose such a dangerous occupation and specialization? Why do you enjoy legal science? Why is it so important to you to protect human rights?" I simply recall that day in D.C. during the Civic Education Workshop. We were sitting in the Supreme Court of the U.S. The guide was explaining something to us, but I was deep in my own thoughts. I think I was absorbing the energy of the chamber. I was thinking about the precedent cases that took part in this chamber, how they influenced the past and the future. At that moment, the decision was made...

7 September 2003 Hamburg

P.S. I would like to express my gratitude to Senator Bradley, the initiator and supporter of the FSA program. I would also like to thank the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and American Councils for International Education, which made the experiences described in the article possible, organized the excursion to the Supreme Court of U.S., and wonderfully administered the FLEX program in 1994-95. ■

Bringing Democratic Principles and Prosperity through Active Citizenship

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During the FLEX program, I was able to spend one week in the capital of the United States of America, which was one of my life dreams. I attended a week-long Civic Education workshop on government studies, which was organized by the Close Up Foundation.

I knew that the workshops were useful, but I did not realize how useful until I attended them myself. The experience gained during there is the experience of a lifetime. I learned more about how democracy works in the United States and how it can possibly work in Georgia. During the workshop, I understood how citizens can influence the government by exercising their rights to bring about changes in the government. Viewing the historic monuments in Washington D.C., I found out how this democratic country was started. During the discussions, I asked questions about social equality and how the principles of democracy could be developed in my own country.

After completing the workshop, my vision and feelings were not the same as before. My ambition was to bring something new and valuable to my people my country, and find

something interesting that would bring welfare and prosperity to us.

I returned to Georgia filled with all the new and valuable ideas gained during my one-year stay in the United States and during my workshop in Washington D.C. I went to the youth parliament and shared with my experiences and new ideas. I told everyone around me about the true principles of the democratic system and about the rights of individual and independent citizens who live in the heart of a democratic country.

Today, I am an active citizen of the country of Georgia. I am enthusiastically involved in many activities and projects. This year, during the election process, I was an observer and tried to help hold fair elections. I actively took part in registering citizens for the elections to gather the correct data of voters. Georgian voters do not believe in elections and thought that the elections would be false. I helped some NGOs hold trainings of observers on how to monitor the elections. We tried to persuade citizens to go to the elections and to cast their vote and that if they didn't go the elections, their vote would be lost. Hopefully this time Georgian people will have fair elections with the assistance of foreign aid.

I am a member of the Students' Union at my university, where I try to come up with new projects to change the students' lives and solve their dilemmas. I show them what true freedom of speech means, and how American people are proud of their human rights. Sometime ago, I made a survey. I asked students to freely express their idea about the lecturers, who they thought were not suitable to educate future generations. After the survey was done, I got a really interesting picture of the situations going on at the university. I took the list of teachers to the deans' office and asked him to change the lecturers, as this was the will of majority of students. We were all happy that we reached our aim. This was a huge change for all of us.

I am sure that my contribution and active involvement in society will be successful and effective, and Georgia will become one of the democratic countries in the world arena and will also amaze the world's nations with its highly developed economic growth. I am very thankful for my exchange experience and education I gained in Civic Education Workshop in the United States, which gave me an opportunity to be an active citizen of the 21st century. ■

Exploring Washington, D.C.

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I never thought that one year could completely change a person's perspective on life. During my year in the U.S., I was not only given the opportunity to experience American culture, history, and lifestyles, but also to learn about U.S. democracy in the nation's capital, Washington D.C. My local representative informed me about a special civic education project for FLEX students in the U.S.. I was impressed when I read that there were 524 applications among the 1997-98 FLEX scholars for the 88 participant positions available. I was thrilled to be one of the finalists and was ready to make my contributions to the seminar.

Two main concepts that we learned at our Washington D.C. Civic Education Program opened a completely new way of thinking for me. On the one hand, this civic program gave me an understanding that education is as an integral part of the newly developing society of the 21st century. During that week in Washington D.C., I also realized



that the main core of world-oriented education comes in the form of inspiration of students and development of citizens. Most importantly, lectures, seminars, and workshops were combined with field trips around Washington D.C. We visited the Smithsonian museum and the White House, met Hillary Clinton at an official presentation, watched a Supreme Court hearing, and spent an evening at the opera. Direct experiences like visiting the House of Representatives and United States Senate chambers, interviewing our Senators, and discussing democratic concepts with gov-

ernment officials functioned both as a foundation module of professional development and as a comprehensive independent course of civic education. Moreover, with the help of this Civic Project in D.C., it became evident to me that it is possible to raise interest in involvement and understanding of different cultures. During our sessions, we learned a lot about opportunities for young leaders who want to participate in the process of increasing public awareness and strengthening cultural bounds. Shortly after this seminar, I was confident that a new system of civic education could promote the flow of new ideas, which would henceforth stimulate youth to take part and make a difference.

This wonderful civic program in the capital of the U.S.A. gave me additional skills for serving as an ambassador of my country in the States, and supporting civic education reform and the general democratic transformation of Ukrainian society when I returned. This was a true gateway to the United States and a window to the world. ■

Anything You Can Dream of You Can Do

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When I was studying in Guthrie, Oklahoma, I received a letter from Washington, DC inviting me to take part in the Civic Education Workshop competition. All I had to do was write an essay about the issue that interested me most. Well, that was a problem! I was interested in many issues and it was difficult to pick one. At last the choice was made, the essay about volunteerism was written, the letter was sent, and my host family and I waited for the reply.

I received a letter, which requested my arrival in Washington, D.C. on April 11, 1999. There were 100 young, energetic students. We all had new ideas and a great desire to find out more about everything from politics, economy, and leadership skills to ways to improve our countries. We found it all there at a one-week program. We explored Washington, met with senators and representatives, went to workshops, and argued and discussed our ideas. I met with Kyle Loveless who worked in state representative Ernest Jim Istook's office and with Oklahoma senator, James M. Inhofe. We talked about environmental problems and public works, because he served on the Environmental and Public Works Committee. He also took me to a Department of Defense hearing about land withdrawals and environmental problems. We, the 100 students, had a week to discuss almost every subject we thought was important: politics, democracy, economy, and the role of free press. We tried to find ways out of the difficult situations our countries face, and we came up with some reasonable solutions. We also had time for fun. We went shopping, sightseeing, and had a great final banquet and dance. Before the departure to Oklahoma, I knew I could use the skills that I learned at the Close Up Program. Although I knew I had to stay active to use and develop my new skills, it was quite difficult to decide how to start. My host father suggested writing an article in the local newspaper about my experience, and that's how I started making a difference. I became a member of the Key Club, a youth civic service organization. My work with the Key Club included delivering assisting needy families, entertaining people at nursing homes, and organizing an "Easter Egg Hunt" for local children. We also worked with the third graders from the Fogarty Elementary School, taught them Russian folk dances, and played educational games with them.

I even had the chance to meet the Governor of Oklahoma and talk to him about how volunteers can cooperate with the government to

solve society's problems. When my year in USA was over and I got home I had sort of a shock. I didn't know what to do next and how to start making a difference here in my hometown of Volgograd. Russia was and still is facing many problems that need to be solved. At first sight this magnitude scared me and made me feel tired and helpless. Not all people are nice and friendly to those who offer their help and time. People are not used to thinking about others and caring about anyone but themselves. Things cannot be changed all at once. It has to be changed slowly and one step at a time. The advice and hints that the staff of the Close Up program gave became very helpful when I was faced with these difficulties.

The staff of the Civic Education Program taught us how to make a difference by following some rules. They told us that we should be active citizens within our communities, stay informed about current issues, become active in politics, and finally develop one's own community service project.

When I returned to Volgograd, I wanted to be an active citizen and stay informed about problems and developments in my community. I found out that one of the hospitals in my region was short of nurses, so I volunteered to help. With the help of four of my friends we did the necessary chores around the hospital for a three or four month period, until the situation changed.

I wanted to do more for the community and to start programs at my school. When I returned for my senior year of Russian high school, I made a lot of presentations about my year in the USA. I tried to highlight all its aspects and give some lectures specifically about the U.S. government. I also started a discussion club at school for teenagers. Getting together and finding solutions to different problems became a very important social activity for about 20 high school students. We talked about anything and everything, from love and marriage, to country politics and corruption. The club exists now even though I graduated and am in my fourth year of studies at Volgograd State Medical University. I also decided to start a clean-up the environment program when I got back from the USA. I gathered a group of people who agreed to help me clean the beaches where little kids like to go to in the summer. While we were cleaning, I noticed that other people were interested in what we were doing and would stop by to help us. We also had a lot of camp outs and there we cleaned forests and parks. It was always funny to see people's reactions. First, the sight of 10-15 teenagers collecting trash astonished them, then they asked

whom we were working for. Once they found out we were working for ourselves, they would immediately start helping us!

My next step was to get involved in politics. Now that I am old enough to vote I will be sure to vote and become educated about the candidates. With the Volgograd elections coming up, I am trying to find out more information about the candidates and their programs and trying to share this information with the other first-time voters so all of us will make the right choice.

I am now ready to develop my own community-service project. I think this is the best step in the process and that we, as alumni, should all take advantage of it. We can really make a difference in the world around us. Right now I am working on my project, but it is far from being done. I want my project to be in the medical field, because I am going to be a doctor. The idea alone makes me start thinking about helping people and improving the conditions around me. It has really given me the drive to become a more active citizen.

Participation in the Civic Education Program helped me to understand what it takes to provide a good year in the USA for an exchange student. A partnership between the government and volunteers starts when people decide to keep and take care of an exchange student for the whole school year. Volunteer work is an important part of our economic, social, and political life. I believe that Russia needs powerful volunteer organizations now, more than ever. People now are too concerned about their own problems and needs. In an effort to get more and more material possessions, people often forget about the moral values that contribute to our freedom and independence. People forget about homeless children, hospitalized relatives, and poverty. I would like to develop a Russian civic service program that will inspire people to dedicate part of their life to find ways out of the difficult living situation that engulfs Russia. I still have a lot of questions about this issue, but participating in the Close Up Program decreased the number of questions. It is essential to keep the spirit of Close Up alive by staying informed, becoming involved, lobbying for what you believe in, voting, thinking of the needs and the interests of all citizens and responding to those needs with action, being fair, and remembering that we have the power to shape the future. This is our task and challenge.

Learning about the U.S. Disability Rights Movement

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As a student with disabilities, an integral part of my FLEX experience was the Disability Re-entry Workshop. The few days that I spent there added so much to my FLEX experience. FLEX students with different disabilities gathered there not only to get to know each other, but also to discuss differences about their countries' policies and how their countries address the problems that disabled citizens face. A key aspect of our agenda was to examine the disability rights movement in the U.S.A.. We learned about the battle for equality and rights of disabled citizens in the United States and the rewards that they received. There is no doubt that prejudices and rejection would not have been eliminated without these efforts. I think this may be useful for our country, but considering my own experiences, I think that disabled people in Russia are too self-conscious to do the same.

I found it useful to listen to the history of the independent living movement. It started in the late 1960s as a social movement in Berkley, California. Historically, people with disabilities have faced barriers, such as lack of access to public accommodations, sub-standard housing, inadequate personal assistance, and unemployment. This movement sought to put an end to such inequalities. Individuals with disabilities joined together to declare equality, dispute their exclusion from mainstream society, and realize the value of a full-fledged life.

Everything we did at the workshop added so much to my perception of this problem. Our visit to the ENDependence Center of Northern Virginia was especially rewarding. This community-based resource and advocacy center is managed by and for people with disabilities. ECVN promotes the independent living philosophy and equal access for people with disabilities. The name of the center speaks for itself. It's amazing how many organizations and firms are interested in making the lives of people with disabilities easier, so that they will never feel excluded from the rest of the world and will be able to perform as full members of society. Everything from legal and advocacy services to accessible transportation is provided. Disabled people run most of the organizations, and I consider it one of the main reasons why the disabled in the United States have reached goals they had never even expected to reach 50 or 60

years ago. We had a lot of discussions and worked in groups, which let us dig deeper into the problems disabled people face in the Eurasian states. We each told stories and shared experiences to demonstrate to each other and our American hosts things that we were going through back home. During our discussions, we agreed how humiliating it is for us to be stared at. Judging from my own experience, people assume things without knowing the real facts. I think it especially the case for people with cerebral palsy who are born with this disease and break society's stereotypes throughout their lives. As for me, I had to learn to live a new life when I was twelve after being cured from cancer. So, everything I had to experience was something new and different.

Too often people equate a person's intellectual capabilities with their physical ones. The disabled are judged by their ability to walk or not walk, hear or not hear, see or not see, etc. So, the saying, 'don't judge a book by its cover,' is appropriate in helping overcome these stereotypes. It doesn't strike a lot of people that a rich, inner world lies behind a disabled person's appearance. It's vitally important for everybody, no matter what capabilities they have, to show all their talents. I'd also like to note that sometimes people with disabilities don't socialize much in public for these reasons: they are afraid of being the source of whispering and curious glances.

Those four days together were extremely enjoyable for all of the participants. In my opinion, information is a vitally important means to problem solving and the FLEX Disability Re-entry Workshop opened my eyes to a variety of options ahead of me. I think that the way Russian people with disabilities will choose to fight for their rights is not going to be the same as in America. While there are a lot of predominantly non-profit organizations for the disabled, unfortunately the scope of their work is not very wide. These organizations usually help by providing physical rehabilitation through sports and other activities.

We had a lot of interesting meetings, which included discussions with fascinating people at the workshop. We met the former assistant secretary of special education and rehabilitation services, president and founder of the Inter-American Institute on Disability, and many other people. Thanks to my experience at the workshop, I have become firmly devoted to the belief that I should be confident in order to be more self-reliant and not let my life



FLEX Disability Re-entry Workshop Participants

plans and dreams be hindered by my disability.

I think that FLEX and this part of the program have changed a lot in my mind. I learned how to be open about my disability. I no longer set barriers for myself. I want to reveal the potential I have. Though I had some hesitations on my return to Russia, I chose to take classes at the university, rather than study at home and take exams twice a year - which is the common practice for most disabled students. I finished my first year in the Department of History (regional studies) at Omsk State University. I am glad I made this decision, because despite the difficulties I face every day, it is compensated by the valuable experience of studying in this setting. As I walk on a prosthesis, my challenges start with transportation, specifically stairs, which are a real obstacle for me. Though I have learned not to pay attention to things like this, of course it would be nice if buildings and public transportation offered easier access. Not many disabled people in Russia choose to study in universities and institutes, because they think they will not be able to handle it and that they somehow don't deserve it. I am sure that as more options become available to disabled people who want to pursue higher education, more and more people with disabilities will find themselves in a sphere of knowledge which is appealing to them.

Overcoming is not always easy, but these strong, determined, and motivated people whom I had the chance to meet during my staying in Washington, D.C., helped me. The results of their work showed me the importance of being active. They showed me that the first step involves breaking stereotypes about disabled people. Their own experience inspired me because they started changing the world around them by taking the initiative and making efforts to have a better future. It was an exceptionally meaningful event and I surely not only for me. It has become a real stimulus for my further actions at home. ■

A Close Up Look At Future Leaders

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Civic Education Workshop Participants Visit Capitol Hill

After ten years, the U.S. State Department's Civic Education Workshop in Washington, D.C. continues to be a life-changing experience for hundreds of FLEX students. We at the Close Up Foundation witness the transformation of students from intelligent, motivated individuals to confident future leaders over the course of their week in Washington. On the first evening of the program, an excited murmur fills the room as FLEX students eagerly await the beginning of their program. By the end of the week the same room is filled with dancing, cheering students, snapping photos and embracing for tearful goodbyes. A recent FLEX alumnus wrote "At the Workshop we began to see ourselves as people, who can change the fate of nations. We began to see ourselves as the very future leaders that the FLEX program proclaimed us to be."

FLEX students express an almost overwhelming thirst for knowledge and enthusiastically

seek out answers to their questions. Every seminar with a Washington insider is filled with many more questions than time for answers. Often, over half the students attempt to ask speakers from the U.S. State Department, media, or universities their opinions on a wide variety of issues.

When students meet with U.S. Senators and Representatives, they voice their opinion on issues affecting their U.S. communities, ranging from terrorism and the war with Iraq to drug abuse and education reform. One FLEX student asked Representative Tom Osborne how his experience as a three-time national champion football coach helped him be a better leader for his district. Members of Congress are often surprised at the depth of the FLEX students' understanding and analysis of U.S. public policy. Students, in turn, are often surprised at the open access they have to government officials and institutions. Some Members of Congress have even taken time from their busy schedules to personally give FLEX students a guided tour of the U.S. Capitol.

Sometimes the most powerful experience for students is visiting Washington's awe-inspiring monuments and memorials. Sitting on the Lincoln Memorial steps, admiring the Capitol building and the Washington Monument, FLEX students and their instructors often discuss Abraham Lincoln's leadership during the U.S. Civil War and his views on slavery. Other FLEX students stand on the spot where Martin Luther King, Jr. stood to make his famous "I have a dream..." speech, debate the progress

that the U.S. has made towards greater equality, and discuss the obstacles and steps toward change in their own countries.

Each year has been a life transforming experience for the Close Up staff, just as it is for the students. The intensity of the schedule from breakfast around 7 a.m. to curfew at 11 p.m. helps form an important bond among all of the participants and staff. Each year, following the program, students exchange email addresses and attempt to keep in touch. Some correspond only as long as they remain in the U.S., while others still correspond today. Several groups of FLEX students created their own website where they posted pictures and continued conversations. They established ties that hopefully will last them as they develop as career professionals. For the past ten years the Close Up Foundation has been honored to be a part of the FLEX program and the life changing experience for over three thousand FLEX students. One former FLEX student, describing the power of the program, wrote "You made me believe that even one person can change the future of the whole country even by simply changing himself and people around him."

Editor's note: If you are interested in more information about the FLEX Civic Education Workshop conducted by the Close Up Foundation, contact Tim Hair by email (hairt@closeup.org). ■

Tyranny of the Distance

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Originally, the metaphor "tyranny of the distance" was used to describe the vast expanse of the inner-Australian territory of bush land. Later, it meant the huge contrasts in people's cultural outlooks on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

The unique concept of the FLEX program is that it gives students a chance to experience living overseas and to compare the United States to our own homes, and serves as a bridge to close the inter-cultural communication gap. FLEX alumni participate in an experience, which can be extremely beneficial to the relationship between the United States and the countries of the former Soviet

Union. The exchange students, at this young age, are still open to changes and ready to accept new values that could have a strong impact on the future of their lives and the future of their countries. The Washington Enhancement Program (now called the Civic Education Workshop), in which I participated in 1995, provided plenty of opportunities to understand the system of the U.S. government, the NGO sector, international organizations, and religious societies. By talking to common people during these field trips, I was able to get a better picture of American society, compare the U.S. form of democracy to Russian democracy, and understand how it was possible for the American forefathers to have had the foresight to build this democracy and see how it has developed and evolved throughout the numerous obstacles it has faced.

Personally, I lost this feeling of awareness that the program gave to me shortly after I completed the program. I managed to experience it again in Russia and make practical use of it. This past winter, I learned about an opening for an assistant journalist, thanks to an email announcement from the Moscow FLEX alumni office. I decided to take advantage of this opportunity. Thus, for several months I worked as an interpreter for an American freelance journalist, Adam Ellick, who was writing a series of story entitled "Life in Russian Provinces" for various English-language newspapers in Europe and the U.S. His biggest project was a news report for the Jewish Telegraph Agency (available at http://www.jta.org/page_siberia.asp). The tyranny of the distance almost overtook me twice. One of the main hardships was that the

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Tyranny of the Distance from p. 6

trip was long. We traveled from Moscow to Vladivostok on the Trans-Siberian railway. As we came into the railway station in Khabarovsk, I realized that I had overcome this tyranny. The biggest challenge of all for me was to be a facilitator for the journalist who had never been to Russia before. I had to introduce him to a lot of purely Russian aspects of life so as to close the culture gap. In time, the triumph over the tyranny was complete. The Washington experience helped me. I was able to put myself in Adam's place and give examples of what I had seen in U.S. society to paraphrase experiences and foreign events that he was experiencing on the trip so that overseas readers could easily picture the situations he described in article. Adam was amazed to find that harsh weather conditions only make people more open and helpful in Siberia. It was really hard to

explain to him the causes for people's obsession with identification papers in a country which still bears the traces of its closed past. Very frequently the interviewees referred to some event or notion from Russian life such as the BAM. I had to explain to Adam that the BAM is a portion of the Trans-Siberian railway that was built during the 1970s by a Soviet labor force, which had been inspired by Communist propaganda. Such explanations helped Adam, and later the readers, have a better understanding of what common Russian people had to say.

During the trip I had to deal with so many aspects of life. The themes that we covered in the articles were very broad. Interviews were held with government officials (in preparation for the 1000th anniversary of Kazan), human rights activists and historians (while writing about the former GULAG

prison camp, which was turned into a museum), athletes and coaches (describing the life of the former Czech National Hockey League players who played on the Omsk "Avangard" team), environment activists (while examining the environmental hazards endangering Lake Baikal), religious leaders and monks (living a typical day in the life of a Buddhist monk in a datsan monastery near Ulan-Ude), teachers and students (sitting in on Yiddish classes in Birobidzhan), and many more fascinating people. Throughout the trip, I felt this division between people. I tried as hard as I could to make the life in Russia's provinces more comprehensible for the journalist and consequently for the readers in the West. I was more capable of revealing and describing many aspects of Russian life, especially the work of the government and of the NGOs, thanks to the Washington Enhancement program. ■

A Wonderful Experience

Bob Dickerman

Civic Education Program Evaluator
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I have to admit it; I was a huge fan of FLEX kids long before I first volunteered to evaluate their applications for the Civic Education Program. They had already taught me so very much. I was a just-retired American diplomat when, in 1994, I was first invited to evaluate applicants for the Freedom Support Act/FLEX program. A newly-retired cold warrior, if you will. During my 30-year career in press and cultural affairs work, I served in Africa, Asia, Western Europe and the Caribbean. However, I never went behind the Iron Curtain. That was too complicated for an American diplomat in those years. And why bother? The joy of having an international career was getting to know, and communicating with, real folks, not officials. In those years, behind the Iron Curtain, I certainly would not have been able to meet plain, ordinary citizens, speaking openly and honestly.

Then, in 1994, I started reading these marvelous FSA applications, from these impressive kids in the Newly Independent States: teenagers telling me about their lives in Moldova, Kamchatka, Central Asia, the Arctic, the Black Sea, the Caucasus. They were wonderfully bright, thoughtful, involved, energetic, highly motivated kids. They would tell me, in their second, third, or even fourth (!) language, of their lives, families, hometowns and dreams.

What had seemed a vague grayness behind the Iron Curtain became a wondrous sparkle. These towns, schools, and families could be

seen through the eyes of kids 14 and 15 years old. I was hooked. I became even more so when I was invited to fly to Kyiv twice, and Almaty once, as a FLEX flight leader. I stayed with local families each time, and spent wonderful hours with FLEX alumni (thanks, guys!), sharing their memories, perspectives and insights. I was finally having the kind of communication and friendship, which the Cold War had made almost impossible.

Then, in 1999, my admiration for FLEX kids grew even more. I became an evaluator for the Civic Education Program, the very special one-week experience in Washington D.C. to which, unfortunately, for budgetary reasons, only about ten percent of each year's FLEX students can now be invited.

The applications that I had read before were of potential FLEX participants. Now I was able to learn what individual students were actually doing here, what they were enthusiastic about, what they were learning, and what others were learning from them.

How impressive many of them were! These were kids that had arrived as complete strangers only three months previously. They were living in Alaska, Mississippi, Texas, Minnesota, in rural towns and large cities, even on an Indian reservation. They had made themselves members of new families, started in new schools, made new friends, and absorbed, shared and taught (!) new ideas. Teachers often found FLEX exchange students to be exemplary. They wrote, frequently, about how much both they and their American students had learned from this or that FLEX stu-

dent from Russia, Georgia, Uzbekistan, or Ukraine; and how impressed they were by them. "If a teacher could have just one student like that in one class each year, what a joy it would be," wrote one. These kids had faced challenges (succeeding as an exchange student is not easy!); had drawn on remarkable inner resources; and really were beginning to seem like future leaders.

Then there was the joy, when the lucky ten percent or so arrived in Washington, of actually meeting individuals who until then have existed only on paper. Seeing them interact; seeing them sharing their experiences with one another; quizzing State Department and Congressional personalities; and performing musical, dance and other talents at the final banquet.

It all makes one very, very proud to be a part of this FLEX program, of this family of such fine and remarkable young men and women. As an evaluator, I was often very humbled. While one does one's best to choose the very most deserving, one knows very well that many other applicants, applicants who weren't finally chosen, were just as deserving, and would have been just as impressive.

Thanks, future leaders, for having taught me so very much.

Bob Dickerman

Editor's note: Bob Dickerman now raises cattle on a rocky farm in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. ■

A Voice in Ukraine's Constitutional Reform Debate

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It has been a year since I returned to my home country, Ukraine. The year spent in the United States was the greatest of my entire life. Besides improving my English and meeting a great number of new people, I discovered a considerable amount of information about American government and the history of the country. The bulk of this information came from the Civic Education Workshop in Washington, D.C. This week was the apex of my whole year spent in the United States. I have always dreamed of going to the United States of America and visiting its capital. Thanks to the American taxpayers, the U.S. Department of State, and the Close Up Foundation, both of these aspirations came true.

Since the age of five, I have had an interest in politics. Many people think that politics is boring, but even at this young age I loved watching the TV news and talk shows about current issues of perestroika and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now I am completely engrossed in politics. The trip to Washington, D.C. was a great opportunity to visit the world's major political center. Of all my memories of the U.S. capital, the most fascinating was the Capitol Hill Day. On that day I had an exciting chance to move among the "big wheels" of the American political establishment. In addition to all the meetings, seminars, and workshops, I enjoyed the glamorous city, particularly its magnificent memorials. I could dwell on this city's beauty for the entire article, but Washington, D.C. speaks for itself.

The benefits of the Civic Education Workshop are greater than sightseeing. That week in February had a major impact on my life. After the meeting with Assistant Secretary A. Elizabeth Jones of the U.S. Department of State, I was inspired to pursue a career in international relations. The day after I disembarked from the airplane, I started working hard to enroll in the Kyiv International University, and eventually



I was accepted. I chose this academic path to help me pursue my larger goals, inasmuch as the Civic Education Workshop fostered my leadership potential and self-confidence to make a difference in this country.

Unfortunately because of my young age I cannot claim any significant accomplishments, but I am confident that this is just the beginning of a very long process. Nevertheless, I have one occasion of which to be proud. This year, I participated in an all-Ukrainian discussion on constitutional reform in Ukraine. On Ukrainian Independence Day in 2002, President Leonid Kuchma announced his desire to amend the Ukrainian constitution. He wanted to shift Ukraine from a presidential-parliamentary republic to a parliamentary-presidential one. This will be a formidable alteration for both the government and the nation. There was, and still is, an impressive amount of work lying ahead. In the fall 2003, President Kuchma, in his address to the nation, appealed to the public to express their opinions on the proposed constitutional reforms. I decided to participate in this discussion, because I wanted to apply my perception of democracy. The United States and Ukraine differ drastically, but the common factor of both countries is democracy. The American form of democracy could be applied to the Ukrainian system in many ways. Our president's draft law is not too bad, but it has many contradictions and incongruities.

I consider that that the main cause of our misfortunes is the lack of checks and balances. Unlike the Senate of the

United States, the Supreme Rada (Council), the Parliament of Ukraine, cannot influence presidential nominations. The President does not need the consent of the highest legislative body to appoint government officials. Another issue that I do not agree with is that the President of Ukraine appoints all the governors and district administrators. This is an absolutely undemocratic procedure. People are deprived of their most important constitutional right, to be the full authority of the state. But still, despite impressive support nationwide, the President has not expressed his will to abdicate his right.

I also disapproved of the President's desire to create a bicameral parliament instead of the current unicameral one. I think it is absolutely irrelevant in Ukraine as a unitary state. Ukraine is not a federation and there is no need to compromise between state and national interests, as was the case in the United States at its dawn. This issue did not receive a lot of public support, and he did not include it in his final draft law. There are some other parts of his proposal that people did not support, and our President was forced to amend his bill to correspond to public opinion. That is a big victory for my fellow citizens and me. Moreover, President Kuchma is now experiencing serious clashes with the Rada over this constitutional reform. The Rada is the only body in the country that can amend the constitution, and it disagrees with him on a number of matters. As a result there are now two draft laws, one presidential and the other parliamentarian.

I dedicate this small victory to the Civic Education Workshop and the Close Up Foundation staff. You provided me with essential information on democracy. I am trying to apply the things that you taught me now in my fight for a better Ukraine. That is the first and most important step in becoming a truly active citizen of Ukraine. I am grateful to the people who worked at the Civic Education Workshop February 24-March 2, 2002, and may God bless you all for the great job you did!!! ■

Understanding the Impact of the Civic Education Workshop

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When I took part in the Civic Education Program in February, 1997, about 120 FLEX students were chosen to participate in the Washington, D.C. program. We had to write essays and send recommendations from our American Studies teachers to demonstrate our qualifications, motivation and interest in the program. I don't think that when I was writing the essay and even when I got the invitation letter and travel instructions that I realized what was waiting for me. I simply wanted to meet other exchange students, share my impressions and ideas about living in the States, visit new places and participate in something unknown, but definitely interesting and exciting.

During those five great days in Washington we had different discussions and role plays, visited Congress, talked to senators and representatives from our host states, went to a lot of museums and simply enjoyed ourselves. The true understanding of my experience came much later, after I returned to Russia and became a university student. The most important thing that

I learned during those five days was to believe that things can be changed and improved, and that it's difficult, but possible, to find people who share the same ideas, and are ready to build a team and work together for a better future. At Lipetsk State Pedagogical University, I became involved with the Youth Discussion Club, where we discussed lots of problems of modern Russian society: roots of nationalism and how to cope with it, military service, the future of higher education in Russia, relationships of this country with the European Union and NATO, and many other topics. In groups, we discussed different aspects of the problem and invited foreign guest speakers, local officials and even schoolchildren to participate. We didn't solve global problems of course, but I am sure that those discussions in Lipetsk, as well as the ones in which I took part in Washington D.C., helped each participant to determine his attitude and perspective towards certain issues, and helped to become an active participant of society instead of an observer.

This year, I had the chance to be one of the English teachers who worked with the

finalists of the Open Russia Ambassadors program. It's a new project that is organized by the Open Russia Foundation in collaboration with American Councils for high school students who are to become future leaders of Russia. Some of them were selected to go to the States for one year, but all together they were part of the project called "Newlandiya", where they learned how to build and govern an independent country, be a citizen and active participant of the state, and be tolerant towards others and responsible for one's own life and actions. During the lessons and simply through every day communication with students, I noticed how their attitude changed towards the issues concerning civic society, democracy, human rights and others. I think that this project, as well as the Civic Education Program, has great influence on students at this age, though the participants might not realize it right away. These projects help to raise a generation of talented, broad-minded, independent and responsible individuals who can really lead their country and help it become a valuable member of the world community. ■

Thanks for the Recruiting Help!

A special thanks to the more than 600 FLEX alumni throughout Eurasia who assisted FLEX recruiters this fall. Recruiters noted that many alumni went beyond the call of duty to help recruit outstanding FLEX students. They gave up many a weekend and put in long hours to make this year's competition a success. Alumni advertised the program in local schools, contacted the media, assisted with crowd control during testing, and made the recruiters feel welcome in their cities. We don't have room to print all your names, but we thank you and couldn't have done it without you! ■

Getting Personal

**The Bradley Herald
 invites alumni to share
 personal news
 in this new
 column.**

Armen Burnusuzyan '97 (Razdan, Armenia) and Karine Petrosyan would like their friends to know that they gave birth to Anna Burnusuzyan on May 23, 2003. You may send congratulations to the family at armen999@mail.ru.

Elena Verbitskaya Wisely '01 (Volgograd, Russia) announced her September 6, 2003 marriage to Chris Wisely. Elena met her husband in Texas during her FLEX year.

You may send congratulations care of Elena at termojader@yahoo.com.



Winners of the 2003 "Faces of FLEX" Photo Contest Announced

Anna Kirey '97 (Nikolayev, Ukraine) won first prize in the Faces of FLEX photo contest for her photograph "Taking Care of Our Future," in which Asiya Bobrova '98 and Elnura Adylova '02 are holding one-month old babies in Bishkek Hospital #3. Alumni visit the hospital to nurture these newborns, who have been abandoned by their parents. Contest judges from the Youth Programs Division of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs selected this winning photo from among 180 submissions from alumni in all twelve of the countries in which the FLEX program is administered. According to the judges' evaluations, this year's photos bring to life the wide range of FLEX alumni activities, as well as the creativity and energy that goes into their efforts. Alumni presented their alumni grant projects, as well as charity initiatives and numerous projects in which they work and play with children.

Second place in the contest was awarded to Serhiy Paliychuk '97 (Lutsk, Ukraine) for the photo of U.S. Senator Bill Bradley surrounded by Ukrainian alumni at the Tenth Anniversary FLEX Alumni Summit, which took place in Kyiv, October 31- November 2, 2003.

The third place prize is shared by three alumni. Pavel Khizhnyak '96 (Blagoveschensk, Russia) submitted a photo of himself "The Underground Interpreter," taken on June 5, 2003 while he was serving as an interpreter during a USAID-funded mine inspection. "Brownie Night" by Damira Musurmankulova '01 (Mailuu-Suu, Kyrgyzstan) depicts yet another creative FLEX approach to fundraising. Alumni of different years gather regularly to bake brownies. The group in this photo baked all night long on October 19, 2003, and in the morning sold them to loyal customers at Bishkek international organizations, who were already familiar with their "American" product. Brownie sales allowed alumni to raise enough money to buy glasses for children at the Blind Children's Center in Bishkek. Third place is also shared by winner Lela Elizbarashvili '99 (Gurdzhaani, Georgia) for "Democracy in Action - Flowers for Mtskheta Children," taken on April 12, 2003, in conjunction with Youth Volunteer Day in Georgia. More than 20 alumni participated in the joint activity with the Urban Institute, during which they cleaned up the park and planted many colorful flowers and played games with the local children and orphans.

Six more photographs were selected for honorable mention. They are "American Day" submitted by Vladimir Gordeev '98 (Kirov, Russia); "Great Chiefs' Hospitality" submitted by Gaukhar Kenzhagaliyeva '99 (Almaty, Kazakhstan); "Vote for Me" submitted by Nino Gordeladze '98 (Tbilisi, Georgia); "Dressed to Kill" submitted by Aleksandra Vasil'eva '01 (Mogilev, Belarus); "Let's Help the Children" taken by Laura Muslimova '01 (Lenkoran', Azerbaijan); and "Answers We Know" taken by Ani Hakobyan '00 (Yerevan, Armenia).

Many thanks to all alumni who submitted photos for this year's contest. Winning photographs and descriptions of activities may be viewed on the State Alumni website: <https://alumni.state.gov>. Winners will be contacted shortly to receive their prizes.

Start thinking now about participating in the 2004 Faces of FLEX photo contest, which will be announced this summer. Be sure to take your camera to alumni events so that you will be ready to catch fellow alumni doing all the ordinary and extraordinary things they do!



Alumni Beat

Pre-departure orientations, summer camps and re-entry seminars kept alumni busy throughout the summer. FLEX alumni in many countries organized and participated in reunions with alumni of other ECA programs. In conjunction with these reunions, several new alumni associations have been created. FLEX alumni are helping to set the directions for the work of these new organizations. The activities highlighted below show how alumni are working with others in their cities to share their knowledge and skills through community service and professional development projects.

Armenia

During the summer, FLEX alumni from Armenia diligently worked to make the "Youth for Achievements" televised debates successful. This project, which was funded by European Commission Delegation Branch Office in Armenia, aimed to provide a wide range of information to the public and increase public awareness on issues and problems associated with the European Union.



Armenian Alumni Receive Certificates for their Contributions to the Tele-debate Series "Europe- Problems and Tendencies"

In the first debate, FLEX and Ugrad alumni made their cases about the advantages and disadvantages of the E.U. During the second debate, enti-



Yerevan Alumni Debate the Enlargement of the European Union

tled "European Union Enlargement," participants examined both the positive and negative outcomes of a possible enlargement. In the final debates, participants disputed the idea of "Freedom of Religion in the EU" and the question "EU is in Europe, but is Europe in the EU?" FLEX alumni were very active in this event and without their help it would not have been such a success.

Azerbaijan

FLEX alumni and Red Cross representatives participated in the Red Crescent and Red Cross Summer Camp in the month of June. The close relationship that some FLEX alumni have with the Red Cross in Baku gave them a great opportunity to spend time with mentally challenged children who really appreciated their help. Participants of the camp traveled from Ganjlik to Surakhani and spent four days at an orphanage for mentally challenged children. They had the opportunity to play, talk, and read to the children and most importantly to bond with them. FLEX alumni also had the opportunity to interpret for the Red Cross representatives.

Belarus

Hilary Brandt, webmaster of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, met with FLEX and Muskie program alumni in July. The aim of the meeting was to inform alumni about the opportunities the website offers and how to use it effectively. She highlighted the site's sections which are of particular interest to alumni, including news, discussion forums, career opportunities, grant and training announcements,

and "Find Fellow Alumni." After the event, Ms. Brandt demonstrated how to use the website as a tool for the American Center for Education and Research staff working with alumni to coordinate projects and keep the alumni database updated. All FLEX alumni are encouraged to register on this site at <https://alumni.state.gov>.

Georgia

FLEX alumni showed the newly-returned '03 alumni how to celebrate the U.S. 4th of July holiday "Georgian style." During the largest FLEX event of the year, senior alumni celebrated the arrival of the new alumni by treating them to a picnic in the mountains of Saguramo. More than sixty alumni had the opportunity to talk about their experiences in the U.S. and senior alumni gave advice about how to manage issues such as culture shock. At the end of the celebration alumni played a few games of American football and threw around frisbees.

Kazakhstan

On May 23-24, approximately 250 alumni of U.S. Government-sponsored programs attended the Tenth Anniversary Reunion for Kazakhstan Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) alumni. Zhandos Shaikhy '00 wrote a grant proposal on behalf of the FLEX Alumni Association and was awarded \$20,000 from the U.S.



The Kazakhstan FLEX Alumni Quilt, Created at their Reunion, Symbolizes their Unity

Embassy, Public Affairs Section for the alumni reunion. Representatives from American Councils, International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), and the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy opened the two-day

Alumni Beat

reunion with a bash! Participants attended workshops, watched slideshows, discussed the development of alumni activities, and brainstormed for alumni activities that support the main goals of the FLEX program: professional development, and the promotion of the English language, American culture, community service, and democracy. Alumni from different programs were able to come together and celebrate their experiences in America. Active FLEX alumni in Almaty tracked down more than 80 "lost" FLEX alumni for whom they had outdated information and reconnected them to the alumni association.

Kyrgyzstan

FLEX alumni and students from the American University - Central Asia (AUCA) launched a project to promote political participation among college students in southern Kyrgyzstan in May. This project, which was supported by the Public Affairs Section of the U.S.



Youth Empowerment Summer Campers Received Gifts of English-language Books and U.S. Flags

Embassy, aimed to promote democracy in the Kyrgyz Republic and academic integrity. Two seminars, each two-and-a-half days long, took place in the city of Osh. The alumni and AUCA students taught forty college students about democracy, open and civic society, monitoring of elections, and voting during the two seminars which were held in Osh. After the teaching sessions they involved the participants in debates on related issues. Later in the summer, two more seminars were carried out in Talas and Naryn. There, the project trainers taught classes on free elections, different government systems, human rights, democracy, voting processes, and the current political sit-

uation in the Kyrgyz Republic. For more information on this project visit the "Political Participation" seminar at <http://politicalpart.host.net.kg>.



Political Participation Seminar Students Speak Out Against Torture

FLEX alumni in Kyrgyzstan, together with UGrad, Teaching Excellence Awards, Partners in Education, and Soros program alumni, organized and conducted their fourth annual Leadership Camp for High School students in June at the Sputnik Resort in the Issyk-Kul region. This year 123 teenagers and 40 FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan, as well as six FLEX alumni from Tajikistan participated in the camp. One of the primary goals of the camp was to bring together high school students from rural and remote areas of Kyrgyzstan for an interactive learning experience. Their curriculum included classes which taught students how to effectively make presentations and debate and taught them about issues such as human rights, democracy, drug abuse, and HIV prevention, ECA exchange programs, the concept of volunteerism, and the Internet. To learn more about Leadership Camp '03, see their web page at <http://leadershipcamp.host>.

Moldova

Ludmila Bilevschi '97, American Councils' Higher Education alumni coordinator, and the faculty of Moldova State University's International Relations Department organized an international conference entitled "Concept of Civic Engagement in the Context of University Training: Theoretical Bases and Practical Implementation" on May 20 - 22. This program aimed to encourage local faculty members, students, and non-gov-

ernmental organization (NGO) representatives to discuss different aspects of civic engagement and the possibility of implementing a new educational system with a civic engagement component at Moldova State University (MSU). Ludmila Bilevschi wanted to show the audiences that an educational system with a civic engagement component has many benefits over a more traditional approach. At the end students, including FLEX alumni, had the opportunity to voice their opinions about the issue and many gave suggestions about how to improve the learning process and help local communities and civic groups.

Russia

In July, FLEX alumni from Nizhny Novgorod and Samara joined together to participate in their first ever tele-debate. Alumni debate teams and their support groups gathered in Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) centers in Nizhny Novgorod and Samara to debate the topic "The Internet Will Replace Books." Due to the strong arguments from both sides, the judges were not able to make a final decision. Therefore prizes were awarded to the alumni/ alumna with the best presentation, the most emotional speech, and the best argument. Alumni were thrilled to communicate with alumni from another city with the help of the Internet and hope to become involved in more activities where they can cooperate again.

Six FLEX alumni and three Ugrad alum-



Novosibirsk Alumni Team Up with Operation Smile

ni from Novosibirsk and Tomsk participated in the medical charity mission called "Operation Smile." The mission provided free-of-charge reconstructive

surgery to 160 children with facial deformities. Alumni translated for the operating teams, helped to screen prospective patients, helped with administrative tasks, made presentations about dental hygiene, and had the opportunity to observe some of the operations.

On August 15, Senator Richard Lugar



Alexander Nozdryn '01 Shares News with Mothers of Children who were Helped by Operation Smile during the Medical Mission to Novosibirsk

found time to meet with six outstanding FLEX alumni during a business trip to Moscow. Each of the alumni shared their academic and professional achievements and engaged in conversation with Senator Lugar. They also stressed to him the importance of the alumni association and its role in uniting and supporting ambitious young people on their return from the U.S. Senator Lugar, a strong supporter of the FLEX program, spoke about what a wonderful experience the program offers to young people from the former Soviet Union and told the group that he makes an effort to meet FLEX alumni wherever possible in the course of his Eurasia travels.

Tajikistan

International communication was the talk of the town on May 23 - 26 in Boulder, Colorado and Dushanbe, Tajikistan when over 1,550 residents of the sister cities participated in the Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities Virtual Event. FLEX alumni organized a virtual event between the sister cities with the help and support of American Councils for International Education, the International Foundation of Election Systems (IFES), and the International Research & Exchange Board (IREX). Residents of both cities

were able to transmit messages to each other and FLEX alumni and members of the English Conversation Club helped to translate messages for the residents. To see the background of the sister-city relationship and discussions during on-line forum, go to: www.boulder-dushanbe.org or www.boulder-dushanbe.irex-tj.org.

Turkmenistan

FLEX alumni in the cities of Dashoguz, Turkmenabat, Turkmenbashi, and Ashgabat have united to reach out and show that the FLEX alumni and program can do great things for their communities. Alumni in these cities have opened the doors of their American centers and have made almost all of their activities available and appealing for interested members of their communities. Classes such as the "Life Skills" class in Dashoguz, which aimed to prepare high school students for adulthood by teaching them life skills and focusing on self-esteem, really help to bring FLEX alumni closer to their communities. Poetry clubs, movie nights, English grammar, slang, business English, and conversational English classes are also provided, organized, and taught by FLEX alumni. These alumni are really reaching out and sustaining and support the main goals of the FLEX program

Ukraine

The All-Ukrainian United Nations Youth Summit was held on July 17-20 in a Kyiv suburb. During this amazing summit, FLEX alumni along with many other Ukrainian youth planned events



Ukrainian Alumni Promote the "Race for Life" at the All-Ukrainian United Nations Youth Summit

and discussed projects to improve the situation in Ukraine. The goals of this annual meeting are to encourage youth to become more active in local and central government politics and to develop action plans to ensure the fulfillment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Ukraine. The participants were taught the skills needed to work with the government, feel confident enough to become active in political life, and to strengthen the "Voice of the Ukrainian Youth." For more information about this summit visit <http://www.un.kiev.ua/en/youth-summit/index.php>.

Uzbekistan

On July 12-13, the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy organized the first Uzbekistan Alumni Reunion in the mountains of Chervak Lake resort. Eighty alumni representing all U.S. Government exchange programs participated in the reunion, 20 of whom were from regions other than Tashkent. Alumni coordinators from different programs made presenta-



FLEX Alumni in Uzbekistan Gather for First Ever Alumni Reunion

tions on the existing alumni programs and grants available and then alumni made presentations about their own successes with FLEX Alumni Grant Program projects. All alumni then participated in leadership and team-building training where they had to work in groups to solve problems. At the end of the two-day event, participants had the opportunity to play games and be involved in different fun activities. The event increased camaraderie among Uzbekistan alumni from different programs.

Send us updates about your place of work and title. If you've moved, send your new contact information to flexalum_bd@actr.ru

Class of '94

Armenia

Ara Vardanyan is the head of the European Union Affairs Division in the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development of the Republic of Armenia.

Russia

Grigory Ivankov works as a recruiting assistant for American Councils for International Education in Yekaterinburg.

Class of '95

Ukraine

Serhiy Koltakov is working on a Ph.D. in computer science at Stanford University with a focus on computer graphics. Recently, Serhiy was involved in the production of *Star Wars Episode II* and *Terminator III* and upon graduation, he hopes to find a full-time position working with special effects for Hollywood feature films.

Turkmenistan

Dinara Matkarimova is working as an alumni coordinator at the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat.

Moldova

Alexandru Culiuc was one of the winners of the Photo Contest "Best Places I Have Seen this Summer," which was organized by the Chisinau Alumni Resource Center. Alumni submitted more than 140 photos, which have been posted on the web site at: <http://www.ac.iatp.md/photocontest.html>.

Class of '96

Russia

Evgeniya Malaya (Cheboksary) received an Honorable Mention at the 2002 International Essay Contest organized by the Goi Peace Foundation.

Ekaterina Savrasova (Nizhny Novgorod), upon receiving her diploma, also received a "Best Student Research Work" award from the Russian Ministry of Education.

Alexander Sladkov (Nizhny Novgorod) received a scholarship from the Deutscher

Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service) to perform scientific research at the Technische Universität in Chemnitz, Germany.

Anastasia Ekkert (Samara) worked this summer as a translator and interpreter to the president of the International Foundation to Support Humanitarian Programs.

Azerbaijan

Yusif Akhundov was hired by the U.S. Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation as a translator and project liaison for the Joint Contact Team Program.

Class of '97

Kyrgyzstan

Medina Aitieva received a Master's degree in sociology from Ball State University, Indiana at the Muncie campus and was accepted as a Civic Education Project Local Fellow (Open Society Institute, Soros Foundation). Medina is going to teach sociology at the American University - Central Asia.

Russia

Natalya Kurenkova is currently doing an internship in the sales department of the Nestle Graduate program.

Ksenia Yafasova (Kazan) works as an interpreter for Teleset, Ltd., a telecommunications operator in Kazan.

Tajikistan

Shabnam Mullo-Abdulova (Khorugh) is currently employed by the Aga Khan Foundation in the Mountain Societies Development Support Program (MSDSP). He has also been involved in a health services project, through which the organization provides English language and computer classes to doctors and nurses in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan.

Class of '98

Russia

Dmitriy Polynkov (Volgograd) successfully defended his undergraduate thesis on internal combustion engines and was accepted into the Graduate School of Internal Combustion Engines Department at Volgograd State Technical University.

Dmitry Mironenko (Moscow) graduated from the Korean Language Institute at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea, where he successfully completed all requirements involved with the fellowship

he received from the Korea Foundation. He also won an essay contest organized for graduating students by the British American Tobacco Company.

Olga Babicheva (Krasnoyarsk) graduated with honors from Krasnoyarsk State University. She continues working as a translator and interpreter in a small company which produces Geographic Information Systems (GIS) products. This autumn, she traveled to Japan to study for three months at Toyama International Academy.

Tajikistan

Nazokat Yakubova (Chkalovsk) has been working for the United Nations Development Program since 1999. Her work involves supporting the process of Tajikistan post-war revival by encouraging development within the 14 districts of the Sogd region.

Class of '99

Moldova

Andrei Kaigorodov worked as the "Get Out the Vote" campaign coordinator, organized by the U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Section from April 24-May 31. He communicated with grantees, gave logistical and informational support, and coordinated many activities in efforts to increase public awareness of the importance of voting and civic responsibility in conjunction with local elections on May 25.

Ukraine

Anna Opanasyuk (Kyiv), a recent graduate of International Christian University in Kyiv, was promoted from logistics manager to project director for the Donetsk Region at Counterpart International's Community and Human Advancement Program. Some of her new duties will include building NGO capacity in the Donetsk region and promoting the sister-city relationship between Donetsk and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Russia

Ekaterina Litvyak (Irkutsk) is working as a facilitator for the Open World Program.

Kyrgyzstan

Medina Aidarova is working as an assistant to the press service department head at the Kyrgyz White House. She is currently helping to develop an English-language version of the presidential website.

Yulia Hwang won a grant from the Embassy of Italy in Uzbekistan to attend summer language courses in Italy in 2003.

Class of '00

Azerbaijan

Akpar Dashdamirov will participate in the Human Rights Messenger Project sponsored by the European Union. Fourteen European participants will participate and conduct workshops about Human Rights as a part of their volunteer service to the host country. After spending six months in the host country, these Human Rights Messengers will continue their efforts in their home countries by promoting human rights in there.

Georgia

Teona Maisuradze won first place at the International Silk Road Student Conference for the presentation of her paper "Silk Road Benefits." Teona is a student at the International Black Sea University, which organized the conference. She also presented a paper at the International Silk Road Symposium at the Metechi Palace Hotel in Tbilisi, Georgia in June.

Ukraine

Yuliya Klymenko (Kharkiv), an active member of the Kharkiv State Medical University aerobics team, traveled to Belgium to participate in the Open Belgian Sports and Fitness-Aerobics Cup. Her team won first place in two categories. They also competed and won first place in two categories in the Ukrainian Championship.

Uzbekistan

Diora Ziyaeva participated in the summer school 2003 at the European College of Liberal Arts in Berlin, Germany.

Rustam Abdurahmanov was awarded a FSA Undergraduate Scholarship to study for one year at Williams College in Massachusetts.

Class of '01

Russia

Svetlana Botkina (Saratov) published her research paper on lexicology in the Saratov State Socio-Economics University student journal. She will also participate in a summer leadership English camp, "Speak out."

Georgia

Lasha Chkartishvili, while participating in a student meeting with NATO Secretary General Rt. Hon. Lord Robertson, was noticed by the director of "Imedia" TV channel and was offered a job as a newscaster.

Sandro Rtvelade is working at the International Fund for Election Systems (IFES) Voter Lists project as the manager of operations.

Kyrgyzstan

Ulan Duishebaev is currently doing an internship program at the Academy of Educational Development, USAID Bishkek office.

Sevara Ismailova received a grant from the U.S. Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic to organize a summer camp on academic integrity for 30 students in Osh, Kyrgyzstan in July 2003. The idea of implementing the 'Academic Integrity' summer camp grew out of a series of seminars on academic integrity in the Republic, initiated by the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic. Sevara Ismailova organized seminars in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

Class of '02

Azerbaijan

Tohida Kazimova will participate at the Connecting Futures Summer Camp, sponsored by the British Council in Baku. She is currently working as a project assistant at Mercy Corps/Cluster Access to Business Services. This project aims to train farming communities to work together to solve their problems.

Ayla Samadova has been accepted to the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) on a full scholarship, and will major in business administration. She has also been giving private English lessons to a local orphan who is planning to take her university exams this summer.

Ukraine

Ismail Hayredinov (Odesa) was hired as a manager and interpreter at the Riddem Ltd. Company. He has also finished the web page design about the life of indigenous peoples of the world, which can be viewed at www.indigenousprogress.org. Due to his talents in web-design, he decided to volunteer at the Crimean Republican Boarding Gymnasium School for gifted children. His team of students, after receiving training on web design, completed a website on leadership, which can be viewed at www.club.cris.net/leadership.

Kateryna Komarova (Odesa) became the editor and one of the anchors of the new TV show *Bez Kolebaniy* (No Hesitation), which covers teenage problems, interests and opportunities. The first episode aired on one of the Odesa regional TV channels in July 2003.

Olena Rybak (Kyiv) was selected to participate at the Global Young Leaders Conference in Washington, D.C., which is coordinated through the Congressional Youth Leadership Council. This conference offers outstanding

students the opportunity to explore global issues with today's world leaders and analyze concepts surrounding communications, diplomacy, peace and security, economics, law, human rights, and the role of the United Nations in the global international community. The GYLC program includes creative decision-making simulations, where hands-on skill sessions challenge students to solve problems and lead their peers.

Turkmenistan

Eduard Dzhunelov is attending Kent State University in Kent, Ohio for the next four years on a full scholarship. He will double major in business administration and international relations.

All Classes

Russia

Svetlana Alekseyeva '97 (Yelets), Irina Buldakova '96 (Izhevsk), Ekaterina Sycheva '96 (Kaluga), and Irina Yegorova '95 (Kaliningrad) were selected by American Councils to teach English to high school students who were chosen to participate in the Open Russia Ambassadors Program, sponsored by the Yukos Company and administered by American Councils. The language classes were offered in conjunction with the Yukos-sponsored New Civilization camp in Istra, a suburb of Moscow, June 26-July 7.

Tajikistan

Miskola Abdullaeva '02, Aziza Baimatova '98, Farrukh Khamzaev '01, and Nikolai Khvan '01 volunteered as trainers at the Kyrgyzstan Leadership Camp for High School Students 2003 at the Issyk-Kul resort. Ninth and tenth grade students from rural areas learned about computers, effective presentations, intercultural learning, drama, basics of proposal writing, debates, AIDS, drugs, volunteerism, and human rights. In August, they conducted a similar camp near Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Ukraine

Lviv
Nataliya Bak '01, Antonina Popova '98, and Oleh Sybira '02 interpreted for a joint military exercise, which tested the American, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Moldovan, Ukrainian, and Uzbekistani militaries on their reaction to emergencies. This exercise, "Rough & Ready - 2003" was held at the Yavoriv military base from June 20 - 6. Each of the interpreters received a letter of appreciation from Major General Serhiy Zozulya from the Ministry of Emergency Management, and Brigadier General Douglas R. Moore of the California Air National Guard.

National Scholarship Test in the Kyrgyz Republic

Nargiza Khakimova '94
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My name is Nargiza Khakimova. I am a '94 FLEX alumna of the first generation of FLEX in the Kyrgyz Republic. I work at American Councils for the National Testing Initiative project, sponsored by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as a chief national test administrator. There are five permanent staff members in our project, of whom two are FLEX alumni: Altynai Moldoeva '96 and me. She is a logistics specialist and interpreter.

I would like to share the achievements of our project with other alumni. This project has been functioning in the Kyrgyz Republic since 2002. Its purpose is to develop a test that would serve as a uniform instrument in assessing high school graduates' critical thinking skills and learning abilities. According to President Askar Akaev's decree, this test score is the only criterion in competing for 5,085 state educational scholarships to study at a state university.

This test consists of one main test and several subject tests. The main test has four sections: Mathematics, Analogies and Sentence Completion, Reading and Comprehension, and Practical Grammar. Graduates may choose from among four subject tests: chemistry, biology, English and German. Students could choose only one subject test, except for chemistry and biology. Those who planned to study medical, veterinary and some technical majors had to choose both chemistry and biology. Tests were developed in three languages that are widely used in the Kyrgyz Republic: Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek. Over 120 school and university



teachers were involved in developing test questions.

I was responsible for the registration process and test administration. For the registration process we hired 133 temporary staff members, who worked in local education departments all over the country. They registered students, collected forms and passed the forms to us for processing. I had to design training for them which would explain the project in general, the purpose of test scores, and their duties. Together with Altynai Moldoeva, we compiled a handbook that would guide

test centers to troubleshoot problems which could arise during testing and held eight trainings.

Testing was conducted from May 17-31, 2003, at 85 test sites. Together with my assistants, I managed logistics for the testing teams. We had to arrange lodging, test



registrars in their work. During registration, I coordinated the work of the registrars.

In order to test over 35,000 students who registered for the test, we had to hire over 800 administrators. Together with the project team, we developed a guidebook for administrators that would trou-

ble center schools, transportation, and packing and delivery of main and subject test copies to each test center.

Forty-three FLEX alumni participated in testing as administrators. Maksat Tynayev '99, Azamat Baltabaev '00 and Manas Mambetsadykov '00 served as team leaders. Among their many responsibilities, the team leaders had to ensure the professional work of their administrators, provide security of test materials, and communicate with local school directors, officials and parents. Besides FLEX alumni, about 20

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National Scholarship Test from p. 16

alumni of other Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs programs such as FSA Undergraduate, Teaching Excellence Awards, and Partners in Education were also involved in testing. It is great that in implementing such a project we have people whom we can trust. These are the people who understand and share our ultimate goals: integrity and transparency in assessing students. We distributed alumni on each team so that every team would have a person committed to our principles and would ensure that others on the team would follow them.

We also had 15 American Councils staff from Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan who came to the Kyrgyz Republic to help with testing. They served as team leaders and were part of our front that ensured integrity in testing.

The National Testing Initiative project is a giant step in reforming education in the Kyrgyz Republic. So far, it is an instrument for distributing educational scholarships. Further on, analysis of the test could serve as a means for advancing teaching methodology. Kyrgyz National University students who were enrolled under the scholarship

last year showed academic performance 15 percent better than the students of previous years who are enrolled under the old system of distributing "budget places." The National Scholarship test is popular among people because now any bright student can compete for free education, despite financial abilities.

On behalf of the project, I would like to thank all American Councils staff from Eurasia who helped out with testing and all ECA program alumni who participated in test administration this year. You were a great help and support for us! ■

Below are FLEX Alumni who worked as test administrators:

Abduvakkos Abdurahmanov '98, Uzbekistan
Kamila Kadyrova '96
Aigerim Jolomanova '01
Kishimjan Osmonova '00
Aijan Karabukaeva '02
Maksat Tynaev '99
Anna Grigorova '00
Manas Mambetsadykov '00
Artem Zozulinskii '00
Merdan Halilov '98, Turkmenistan
Asel Samakova '02
Nodira Inoyatova '01, Uzbekistan
Asiya Bobrova '98
Nurgiza Kulmanbetova '01
Asylgul Alymbaeva '00

Nurzada Joldoshebekova '01
Asylgul Musaeva '02
Oleg Valiev '01
Azamat Baltabaev '99
Pavel Pimenov '01
Bakyt Azimkanov '01
Rashid Ivaev '01, Uzbekistan
Bermet Uraimova '01
Sevara Ismailova '01
Cholpon Abasova '98
Shuhrat Kamalov '01, Uzbekistan
Dmitriy Polyakov '98
Shukurjan Rozmetova '02, Turkmenistan
Eldar Supataev '02
Stepan Filshin '02

Elena Klintsova '98
Tamara Tashbaeva '02
Elnura Djenish '01
Timur Muhamedov '01
Farida Abdulhafizova '01
Tuichy Meliboev '97, Uzbekistan
Felix Tsoi '01
Ulan Dushebaev '01
Halil Halilov '01, Turkmenistan
Veta Shapkina '99, Uzbekistan
Irina Wolf '00
Yulia Vasilieva '99
Janara Tajek-tegee '01
Zamira Yusupjonova '00, Tajikistan
Jyldyz Sultanmuratova '00

FIFTH ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF GLOBAL YOUTH SERVICE MOVEMENT

Global Youth Service Day 2004 Mobilizes Youth around the World to Rebuild Communities, Break Down Ethnic Barriers and Increase the Peace through Community Service
www.gysd.net

New York and Washington, DC - January 26, 2004 - From Pakistan to the Philippines to Uganda, from Bolivia to India to Spain, millions of youth around the world are organizing community service projects and special events to celebrate the 5th Annual Global Youth Service Day, April 16-18, 2004.

Global Youth Service Day is a public education campaign that highlights the amazing contributions made by youth year-round to their communities through volunteering. Led by Youth Service America, with the Global Youth Action Network as its key partner, together with a consortium of international organizations and national coordinating committees, this initiative engages young people around the world in responding to terrorism, war, and ethnic violence through service. Young volunteers are mobilizing en masse to eradicate hunger and HIV/AIDS, address education problems in their communities, and resolve conflicts. Global Youth Service Day is sponsored by the GM Foundation, the Babel-Aiken Foundation, DisneyLand, CitiGroup, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

"Countries around the world are beginning to recognize young people as assets, tapping into their amazing energy, commitment, and skills to solve problems," said Steven A. Culbertson, president and CEO of Youth Service America. "Young volunteers from different geographic, socio-economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds are organizing service projects, public awareness campaigns, and forums that tackle some of society's most intractable problems," Mr. Culbertson added. ■

Editor's note: Contact the FLEX alumni assistant for your region to learn about how you can participate.

Project Management Seminar on Volga River

Yegor Mikhalev '95
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FLEX and FSA Undergraduate alumni from across southern Russia participated in a "Project Management" conference, August 4-8, 2003. The unique thing about the conference was that it took place on board the wonderful river-cruiser Alexander Nevsky. Thirty of us, including staff and participants, departed from the Volgograd river port and sailed up the Volga river, making stops in Saratov and Samara.



The conference was organized by Project Harmony Inc. In order to be selected to participate, an alumnus/a had to create a community service project, which was evaluated by the staff of the Project Harmony Inc. regional office for southern Russia, headed by Artyom Popov '96. He and his team selected the alumni who submitted the 25 most interesting projects.

The conference began with introductions and project presentations. I was personally pleased to meet so many nice people there.

Among our guests was Paul Hinshaw, director of the Project Harmony Russian office. Professor Nikita Kultin of St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University served as conference trainer. Right after introductions, participants picked out the four most interesting projects and split into four groups. They chose "Journalism Without Borders", through which journalism students would hold a video conference, with the goal of



developing international collaboration and exchanging professional experience among journalists around the world. The "Spiritual Revival" chat/video conference on the

topic "Youth and Freedom" was designed for senior high school students and university students. Project designers wanted to draw youth's attention to modern problems of Russian society and to acquaint them with some alternative approaches to moral and spiritual problems solving. This group conducted its first conference on September 9, 2003. Another creative project proposal was for an "On-line Law Tournament" to be held among senior secondary school pupils. Their aim is to increase level of law culture and to present a new form of law education with

help of the Internet. The fourth project "Information Technologies as Help to Children" envisioned conducting Internet skills development training courses for orphans and creating a web site with an orphans and families database. They hope to help orphans find families through the Internet.

During the four-day conference, alumni worked in groups to develop these projects, using Project Expert, Microsoft Project, and Microsoft Powerpoint software. The software is tremendously useful in helping conduct a general analysis of the business idea and then determine the project's financial needs. More sophisticated options include a description of the tax environment and its possible change during the course of project management. We found the software's ability to create a calendar of the project, as well as a detailed description of expenses very instructive. Conference organizers also planned our conference, so that at its conclusion, participants would be encouraged to bring these projects into life in their cities.

Our daily schedule included listening to lectures and doing practical work on notebooks. During the days, we also had the chance to do some wonderful sightseeing in Saratov and Samara, swam in the Volga and at night we had so much fun dancing, singing and just talking to each other. I really think that "COOL!" is the only word I can use to describe our river conference. I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to Project Harmony staff for its organization and my hopes that one day Southern Russia alumni will get together again for such an outstanding event. ■

FLEX alumni who participated in the seminar were

Irina Karpova (Astrakhan) '02
 Ivan Nikulshin (Astrakhan) '02
 Victoria Davaeva (Elista) '03
 Ekaterina Isinova (Elista) '03
 Araltan Manjhiev (Elista) '97
 Egor Mikhalev (Elista) '95
 Karina Khadzhimova (Krasnodar) '02
 Roman Zaporetskii (Krasnodar) '98
 Pavel Zaporotskii (Krasnodar) '03
 Vlad Shlyapnikov (Krasnodar) '02
 Olga Starchecenko (Pyatigorsk) '03
 Margarita Minullina (Rostov-on-Don) '03

Timur Kurmaev (Samara) '02
 Irina Malakhovskaya (Samara) '98
 Oksana Kholod (Saratov) '01
 Aleksandr Klimov (Stavropol) '03
 Antonina Chernishova (Volgograd) '99
 Darya Karpenko (Volgograd) '01
 Olga Kornienko (Volgograd) '03
 Artem Popov (Volgograd) '96 (organizer)
 Irina Shigidina (Volgograd) '98
 Irina Vasilenko (Volgograd) '03
 Elena Verbitskaya Wisely (Volgograd) '01
 Maria Chizhmakova (Voronezh) '99

Profiles



Jafar Muzaffarovich Asimov

Home town: Dushanbe, Tajikistan

U.S. City and State: McClure, Ohio

Year returned home: 1994

Email address: jafar@tojikiston.com

Education: I graduated in 2000 from the Department of Computer Systems and Networks at Belarussian State University of Informatics and Radioelectronics.

Current place of work and title: Babilon-Mobile Company, Billing Center Administrator, Caftar.Com Web Design Studio - Team Leader.

Highlights of your work: I've been working in IT for over nine years. I have worked as system administrator, software developer, technical expert, web master, and IT consultant. My current work is administration of the GSM oper-

ator customer billing & care software and hardware. At the same time I'm running my own Web Design studio (www.caftar.com).

A personal achievement I'm proud of: Trained 25 school age students, by teaching them a one and a half year course on "Advanced Web Mastering." Five of my students are now professional webmasters and some already found well-paid jobs with local Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

How I feel about the future of my country: I see the future of my country in intelligent and well-educated young people. I believe that we can change this world.

The FLEX Program is important because: It gives high school students the opportunity to explore a different world with many interesting people.



Svitlana Belushkina

Home town: Born in Yaroslavl, Russia; live in Kyiv, Ukraine

U.S. City and State: San Diego, CA

Year returned home: 1997

Email address: belushkina@yahoo.com

Education: I completed a bachelor's degree in business administration from International Christian University, Kyiv. I believe that education is a never-ending process.

Current place of work and title: Non-profit organization Counterpart Creative Center, Deputy Director

Educational, Professional, and Personal Goals: I would like to be myself and find my own balance between ambitious personal, educational, and professional goals (order in them matters :).

A personal achievement I'm proud of: I am proud of many small achievements in my life. To be interviewed for *The Bradley Herald* is one more achievement. As they say, the mountains may be moved one pebble at a time.

How I feel about the future of my country: Every morning I wake up with the thought that "everything is gonna be alright." It reflects my attitude towards the future of Ukraine and my own future. I strongly believe that in order to change something in your work, in your city, in your country, you have to start with yourself, and that is rather hard.

The local issue of greatest concern to you and why: First of all, passiveness and loss of hope for a better future among the people in the remote regions of Ukraine. It hurts to think about it. One of the projects that I am working on

right now "Democratizing Ukraine Small Project Scheme" targets this issue in the context of social and economic development of communities. And of course, the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004 - for obvious reasons.

An interesting FLEX alumni activity in which I took part: With the best team of the FLEX alumni, and creative, talented Ukrainian television producers I initiated the creation of a youth TV program. The program reflects the return of investment of the FLEX alumni in Ukraine. It shows the real lives of real people, our friends, who returned from the States with the passionate desire to stay in their country and achieve their dreams. How they achieved it, what they think, dream - this all is reflected in the FLEX alumni TV program "PRISM." The program was financed by the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy, Ukraine, and I still consider it to be one of the most interesting and useful activities in which I have been involved.

Your Volunteer/Community Service Activity: I work in the sector of non-governmental organizations for four years already. Volunteer/community service activity I consider to be my professional field.

Right now I'm reading: *Great Contradictions*, Patrick J. Buchanan. The book is an analytical piece about the tendencies of today's society, meaning and place of the family institution in modern society, etc.

The FLEX Program is important because: of the human side. It gives globalization, cultural exchange, politics, etc., a human face.

What I'd like to say to fellow alumni: I like the phrase of Jeffrey Garten in his book *The Mind of the CEO* that says, "A vision without execution is a hallucination." My wish is that all FLEX alumni do what they dream about and follow the vision they have inside of themselves.



Yevgeniy Pogrebnyak

Home town: Moscow, Russia

U.S. City and State: Akron, Ohio

Year returned home: 1994

Email address: epo@icss.ac.ru

Education: Graduated from the Economics Department of Moscow State University.

Current place of work and title: Deputy Head of Research at Institute for Complex Strategic Studies, Moscow

Highlights of your work: carrying out policy-relevant economic research and providing policy recommendations to government, academia and business

Educational, Professional, and Personal Goals: A visiting PhD study at the London Business School on price modeling at competitive electricity market in Russia; finalizing PhD studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences by completing my thesis on electricity restructuring

A personal achievement I'm proud of: Compilation and publication of the

Russian business slang vocabulary

How I feel about the future of my country: positive. True love for your country doesn't need reasons, but events like Safin's taking over Agassi in Australian Open quarterfinals definitely encourage more patriotism.

The global issue of greatest concern to you and why: US occupation of Iraq and trade embargo on Cuba.

An interesting FSA FLEX alumni activity in which I took part: Long ago - in 1995 - I started the first FLEX debate competitions together with former alumni coordinator Kathy Lotspeich. Most recently I attended the meeting with Senator Lugar in Moscow.

Right now I'm reading: *Russia Rebounds* (IMF); *Rodichi* by D. Liskperov

The FLEX Program is important because: it offers an opportunity early in your career, when its effect is most profound.

What I'd like to say to fellow alumni: Be thoughtful of others and share.

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