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Muskie Fellows Promote International Exchange

at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

The Edmund S. Muskie FREEDOM Support Act/Graduate Fellowship Program provides early to mid-career professionals from the New Independent States (NIS) an opportunity to pursue a graduate degree in the United States. Created to build democracy in these former Soviet Union states, it exposes rising NIS leaders to American teaching and ideals. Fellows are selected on their academic and leadership potential, and face stiff competition for a limited number of fellowships. Approximately 340 Muskie fellowships were awarded in the 2002-03 academic year from a field of more than 6,000 applicants according to the U.S. Department of State. Seven now study at the Andrew Young School.



*Current Muskie Fellows are (L to R) **Hasmik Melikyan, Viktor Stetskevych, Elena Tsykalo, Asif Mahmudov, Victoria Alexeeva, Serhiy Kostyuk and Aziza Abdurazakova.***

Selection for the Muskie Fellowship, a merit-based scholarship, is based on GMAT or GRE scores, previous experience, country of origin and TOEFL, or Test of English as a Foreign Language. Applicants are interviewed in their country by American university professors and USAID or U.S. Embassy employees. Once they are chosen, fellows are assigned to a U.S. university that matches their degree preference.

Seven Muskie Fellows have joined the Andrew Young School in the last two years. Five arrived in the 2001 Fall semester: Elena Tsykalo (M.P.A.) from Russia, Aziza Abdurazakova (M.P.A.) from Tajikistan, Victoria Alexeeva (M.S. in U.P.S.) from Belarus, Hasmik Melikyan (M.P.A.) from Armenia and Serhiy Kostyuk (M.S. in U.P.S.) from Ukraine. Two arrived this year, Viktor Stetskevych (M.P.A.) from the Ukraine and Asif Mahmudov (M.A.Econ.) from Azerbaijan. They came together on a fall afternoon to share their impressions of the Andrew Young School.

“We knew where Atlanta is because of the Olympics,” said Hasmik, who worked 2.5 years at the U.S. Embassy in Armenia. “When I first heard about this school, I talked to my friends at the embassy and they did not know anything about Georgia State University. We looked up the Andrew Young School and saw its rankings. We were surprised that so little was known about such a well-regarded school.”

“I would not say I’m surprised at the level of knowledge of students and professors here,” said Serhiy. He has taught history and political science at a Ukrainian college, interned in the Ukrainian Parliament and was a policy analyst at the Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies. “Although I think NIS students have a higher level of knowledge and skills – we have a broader outlook of the world,” he said. “There are three things I appreciate about the teaching here.

“First, I appreciate the way of thinking, critical thinking, and the technique; how professors teach us to build research and analysis. Second, I like how they use information technology, not only cutting-edge computers, but also the databases. You have access to amazing databases here. In a room you can access information from the IMF, World Bank, and others. And the library resources, including the people, are very good,” said Serhiy. “Also, the international approach here is good. They teach and treat us like American students. It is a normal, natural environment – they do not baby sit. I like the diverse community here; in one place I can meet people from 100 countries.”

Elena agrees that some subjects they study “may seem a little easier to us because of our backgrounds, than to American or other international students. Some things are totally new and we have to make our way through that.” Elena worked on a USAID technical assistance program for four years before her Muskie fellowship. “Right now it is very interesting to be here because the last USAID project I worked on was on fiscal federalism and decentralization, and that’s what this school does. It is interesting to read the research papers here,” she said.

Although the comments on their experiences with all AYSPS professors

were very favorable, Elena credited three for giving her some new experiences and new outlooks. “Dr. Ted Poister has a wonderful theoretical background and gives interesting, very pleasant lectures,” she said. “Dr. Greg Streib changed my perspectives on technology. He is on the edge of technology, and I’m now always watching for the new things coming this way.” She and others mentioned PAUS Chair Lloyd Nigro for his openness and support.

Victoria worked two years in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. She compared the program at AYSPS to her graduate program in Minsk. “About the Urban Policy Studies program, we don’t have this specific field in any university at home. It’s a new field and new development. It’s even hard for me to translate what it is.”

She pointed to other differences. “In our country, when we take programs in a particular field, the knowledge is from many different fields. But here if you get a master’s degree, it is in a very specialized field. In general, I find it interesting that professors give a lot of materials to read, many times on controversial points of view – controversial opinions – and you have to think and discuss it critically. What I witness in my country is different. Normally we have certain materials or a book on the subject. The discussion is based on the one book. Here it’s not one opinion or one theory, but many, and very often the controversial opinions are available. This approach I’m taking back.”

Aziza is on a two-year study leave from her work for the United Nations High Commission of Refugees in Tajikistan. “I had seven years of experience dealing with administration and protection issues, so for me it was an interesting time to expand my views, my career and my perspectives in public administration. So I applied for the Muskie program to expand my education.”

She noted her first exposure to a particular training method. “Dr. Poister’s case studies for me were something new. He shows what is going on in real life – not in the theoretical, ‘how it should be done.’ He gives the true-to-life story of some agency that is in complete disaster. We give our strategies on how to improve this agency. Thinking back on working in a big agency, I remember we used to have some of the same problems. Now I know how to build a strategy and how to manage the conflict in the workplace. For me the case study is very valuable.”

Several common threads run through the Muskie fellows: most have degrees in or related to linguistics, several earned graduate degrees prior to attending AYSPS and all have work experience, most in the public realm. More importantly, all fellows expressed their desire to use the knowledge they have gained at the Andrew Young school to help foster

improvements in their home country upon their return in jobs in teaching, government, public administration, economics or in private business and consulting.

In fact, Serhiy has been invited to create a new course in policy studies at the International University of Kiev. "It's a completely new field in Ukraine. I'll be in charge, and I hope Georgia State and AYSPS will help me. Our professors already do, sharing outlines and articles that help me grasp some ideas I can share."

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