

PORTUGAL USG-ALUMNI News

A newsletter for alumni of U.S. government (USG)-sponsored Portugal-USA exchange programs

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U.S. Embassy Lisbon, Portugal



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FEATURE STORIES

Making Impact through Social Entrepreneurship

Inspired by the SIESL program experience, alum shares insight into social entrepreneurship and her project

Last summer, Mara Sousa participated in the program Global Social Entrepreneurship Institute of the Summer Institutes for European Student Leaders (SIESL) at the Kelley School of Business of Indiana University. The program's goal is to have participants return to their home countries in Europe prepared to employ entrepreneurial knowledge and skills to address social issues. According to Mara, participating in the program gave her "a completely new perspective about life and the world in general. "

"Learning about social entrepreneurship, experiencing it through practical projects and hearing about many other successful ones, I

have started to look at things in a different way, which made a real difference when I started working on my ideas. [The program] allowed me to share experiences, values and backgrounds, which, most of the times resulted in great ideas. Engaging in a multi-cultural exchange of ideas is one of the best ways of broadening horizons. There was some competition, obviously, but it was overall very positive because it gave us motivation to develop the best projects we could. Personally, this thought still drives me to always do the best I can, because it reminds me that there are many young entrepreneurs out there, with great ideas, doing great things."

Although many definitions of social entrepreneurship exist, there is no exact single definition for this topic. As Mara sees it, "social entrepreneurship is the opportunity to develop a business idea driven by the intention to tackle a social issue, in order to promote a significant social impact, change or improvement in a local or global community, being socially, financially and environmentally sustainable."

Social entrepreneurship is a process of pursuing innovative solutions to solve a social problem, which is not always easy. As Mara points out "coming up with a concrete, feasible and sustainable solution can be quite challenging ... I have always fought with a blurred line between implementing a charity project and setting up an actual business, [but] at the end of the day you do have to have a strong, feasible and sustainable business model to present to your possible investors and to make it get into the market. Measuring social impact is an example of one of the most essential social entrepreneurship concepts that has been crucial to me because it helps me in keeping track

of my main goals ... and assuring that my project accomplishes a triple bottom line: social, financial and environmental sustainability.”

As a social entrepreneur, Mara has developed a social venture project to help solve youth unemployment in Portugal, which is one of the main consequences of the national economic crisis. She explains, “[the crisis] has been responsible for threatening social phenomena, such as brain drain ... especially because of the austerity measures that have been applied to the Portuguese economy during the last years, Portugal has become an unattractive country for young motivated people. Portuguese young adults are highly qualified and driven by a strong will to start working and to implement the knowledge they spent years of their lives studying for. They are also very attached to their country, which makes the decision of emigrating not an easy one.”

Specifically, to help address youth unemployment, Mara plans to establish a business incubator for social ventures. As she describes, “a business incubator basically helps start-ups to get established in the market and to implement their business models. It offers logistic, financial and management support.

There are already some very successful business incubators in Portugal but their target is not social enterprises. With my project I would help social entrepreneurs, young motivated people, who just graduated from university and are willing to set up their own social businesses, people who are looking for opportunities to develop their ideas, opportunities that their country does not offer them.”

After finishing her undergraduate degree this summer, Mara plans to take a year off to focus on her project. “Developing a project such as this one demands a lot of dedication in terms of time and logistics,” she says. In the meantime, she has started defining her business model, making contacts, and planning to form a team to help her. In the future, Mara also hopes to help address other issues such as empowering women through access to education and conflict resolution.

Lastly, Mara shares her thoughts about innovation— a key element in social entrepreneurship. “After getting to know many social entrepreneurship projects, I have figured out one thing, a trend that is common to the majority of them. I have realized that frequently, big problems have very simple solutions and these may have always been in front of our noses. Innovating is not inventing something completely new. Innovating is re-inventing what already exists. It is taking something that is already there and giving it a different meaning, a new use.”

“As long as we are passionate about our cause, we keep focused on our goals and organized on its development, great things can happen and have a powerful impact on the lives of many,” she says.



MARA SOUSA

Exchange Program:

Global Social Entrepreneurship Institute - Summer Institutes for European Student Leaders (SIESL), 2014

Hometown:

Vila Pouca de Aguiar

Occupation:

Student at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto (major in Languages and International Relations)

BFTF Alum Leads Project to Help High School Students with College and Program Selection

Project would provide high school students access to good information about their prospective area of study and university so that they make the right choices toward finding suitable careers/jobs after graduation

Choosing the right college and program to study is a big life decision. It can be a confusing and complicated process since there are many options to choose from.

Mariana Coelho (Benjamin Franklin Transatlantic Fellow, 2014) is leading a project to help senior high school students in her hometown make informed decision on which program to study and university to attend. By providing these students with access to good information about their prospective program of study, they can make the right choices toward finding suitable career after graduation.

Mariana was inspired by her BFTF experience to help make a change in her community. She represents the growing number of youth leaders who are dedicated to share their knowledge and skills with their peers through positive action.

Below is an excerpt of an interview by the Alumni office with Mariana.

Can you describe your project?

My project is called "Seguir Em Frente," and it started out right after I got back from the U.S. last summer. With all the background I got, I created a project that is going to help senior year students in my hometown's high school, giving them more information about universities and possible degrees they can take on. Right now I am very anxious about it because the first study trip (to the University of Aveiro) will hopefully take place next Tuesday (13th January), and I hope it all goes as planned!

Furthermore, the students will be encouraged to search for the history of the courses they're planning to apply to, and to get to know current students and alumni from those courses, with the help of some lectures that I am planning to organize in my hometown's high school.

With all this, hopefully we will have more students being more aware of their future choices, and fewer students leaving behind their education because of the lack of knowledge.

Can you tell us about your exchange experience?

My exchange experience [BFTF] had an incredible impact on me, in every way possible. Not only did it change my way of seeing the world, in terms of helping others, working in communities, and making our actions be worth it to the rest of the society we live in, but also, more importantly, it called my attention to the fact that I can do something for the others.

It helped me realize that even though it might seem hard to start a project to improve our community's quality of life, it is always possible that we can make a change. That is why it was so good to spend a whole month [during



MARIANA COELHO

Exchange Program:
Benjamin Franklin
Transatlantic Fellow (BFTF),
2014

Hometown:
Oliveira de Azeméis

Occupation:
Student at the Faculty of
Engineering of the
University of Porto (major
in Bioengineering)

BFTF] with lots of different people, with very different views, but all with a common idea in their minds, the idea that we are powerful enough to change our world. That definitely changed my way of looking at everything.

The U.S. Embassy in Lisbon is accepting nominations for the 2015 Benjamin Franklin Transatlantic Fellow. If you know a youth leader between 16-18 years old, please share this link to them

<http://portugal.usembassy.gov/pa/cultural-affairs/bf-summer-institutes.html>.

The application deadline is February 27, 2015. Complete application should be sent to the U.S. Embassy Lisbon, lisbonbfscholars@state.gov, no later than February 27, 2015.

2015 Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) Competition Begins on February 3



Now in its fifth year, the AEIF competition provides grants of up to \$25,000 to teams of past and current participants of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs to carry out public service projects that utilize skills and knowledge they have gained through their exchange experiences. The AEIF competition increases the leadership capacity of alumni to develop and implement projects that benefit their communities. Alumni teams from Portugal were selected as finalists in 2014 and one of the winners in 2013.

To participate, alumni must be members of the International Exchange Alumni global online community and form teams of at least five IEA community members.

Proposed projects must embody one of the AEIF themes: Empowering Women and Girls; Social Inclusion/Alternatives for Vulnerable Populations; Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment; Access to Education; Climate Change and Environmental Protection; Global Health Awareness; Civic Participation; and Conflict Resolution.

Alumni are invited to submit project ideas through the International Exchange Alumni website (<https://alumni.state.gov>) from February 3 to February 24, 2015. Finalists will be announced by March 10, and the list of winning proposals for funding on May 11.

Learn more about the 2015 AEIF here <http://goo.gl/NhfRie>. Additionally, check out <https://prezi.com/s9wzknlpop6o/aeif-2015/> and [Commonly Asked Questions](#).

We highly recommend interested alumni to contact us at U.S. Embassy Lisbon (email: alumniportugal@state.gov), so we can assist you in creating strong project proposals.

ALUMNI NEWS

Alumni Learn How to Develop Sustainable Social Impact Projects at a Workshop in Porto

On November 29, 2014, the U.S. Embassy in Lisbon, in partnership with IES Social Entrepreneurship Institute, Fulbright Commission Portugal, and American Corner at the University of Porto, Faculty of Letters, organized an alumni professional development workshop on social entrepreneurship development, held at the American Corner at Faculty of Letters, University of Porto. The full-day workshop provided alumni with tools to develop a social project with a sustainable business model and to effectively pitch a project to potential stakeholders and investors.



Delivered in a fun and engaging training approach, including team building exercise, real world case study, business model development, and team presentation, the alumni participants came away with not only learning more about social entrepreneurship, but also the importance of teamwork, networking, and communication. All these skills will be valuable as exchange alumni apply for funding sources such as the upcoming 2015 Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF), a worldwide grants competition to fund alumni-led projects with social impact.



The workshop was led by two social entrepreneurship trainers from IES Social Entrepreneurship Institute, including Miguel Alves Martins, a 2012 alum of the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP). It was attended by a diverse group of alumni from around Porto, Lisbon, and Madeira.

Annual Fulbright Thanksgiving Dinner Held in Porto

In coordination with the U.S. Embassy Lisbon, the Fulbright Commission hosted the 16th annual Thanksgiving dinner for its current and future Fulbrighters, Fulbright board members and partners, as well as the entire alumni community. The event was held for the first time in Porto on November 28 at Escola de Hotelaria e Turismo do Porto.

The Thanksgiving Dinner was held on the eve of the alumni professional development workshop on social entrepreneurship, which was held the next day at American Corner at the University of Porto, Faculty of Letters. Several of the workshop's participants attended both events.



Alumni in the news

João Barros (Fulbright, 2014) was featured in the December 26, 2014 issue of *Technology Review*. Barros' company, Veniam, has installed Wi-Fi routers on 600 buses and taxis in Porto, which allow free Internet access and data collection for city planners. According to Barros, there are plans to expand service to other cities. The article can be viewed here <http://www.technologyreview.com/news/533176/hundreds-of-portuguese-buses-and-taxis-are-also-wi-fi-routers/>

José Mendes Bota (IVLP, 1987) received the 2014 Scandinavian Human Dignity Award at a seminar on human trafficking held on November 18, 2014 in the European Parliament in Brussels. He received the award for his efforts to combat human trafficking in Europe. The Scandinavian Human Dignity Award is presented to an individual or organization that has made a special contribution to strengthen human dignity and human rights. More info: <http://www.shrl.eu/scandinavian-human-dignity-award/scandinavian-human-dignity-award-2014/>

Patrícia Portela (International Writing Program, 2013) was selected as one of the five finalists of the Sonae Media Art Award. The national award is given to Portuguese artists in the media art field. The works of the five finalist will exhibited at Chiado Contemporary Museum on November 20, 2015-January 31, 2016. The winner will be announced on December 12, 2015. More info: <http://sonae-mediart.com/en/premio/>

Filipe Rocha (IVLP, 2014) mentioned the need to increase international opportunities in professional development for Azorean youth on television news RTP Azores on September 2, 2014. Rocha, the executive director of Escola de Formação Turística e Hoteleira dos Açores, said that the school continues to invest in overseas training of its students. This year four more students will intern in different countries.

DID YOU KNOW?

As USG-exchange programs alumni ...

You can access for **free** high quality information from research databases such as EBSCOHost, Gale, and ProQuest on [International Exchange Alumni](#).

The databases provide full-text articles from **20,000** academic journals and popular magazines/newspapers like the Economist, New York Times, The New Yorker, Science News, USA Today, and Wall Street Journal!

Register at <https://alumni.state.gov/user/register> to gain access to site resources.



The
Economist

The New York Times

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
WSJ

Have your say, alumni!

How have you used your exchange experience to help others?

Let us, and your fellow alumni, know!

E-mail: alumniportugal@state.gov

We will feature your answers in the next issues of *PORTUGAL* USG-Alumni News.

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International Exchange Alumni

Connect with exchange alumni around the world!



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