

## ALUMNI PROFILE



## Ivan Velinov Became Intrigued with the United States After Hearing a Radio Broadcast from Bulgaria

By Joan Wilder

**I**t was the *Voice of America* – the government-sponsored American radio station that has been broadcasting throughout the world since 1942 – that ignited a fascination with the United States in Bulgarian native Ivan Velinov and which ultimately led him to Bridgewater State College.

“My interest in the United States, in the English language, and in both international relations and communication started in the early 1980s when I was growing up in communist Eastern Europe,” said Mr. Velinov, who graduated from BSC in 2006 with a bachelor’s degree in communications studies. “I was seven or eight when I first heard the *Voice of America* on an old Russian radio. I didn’t understand a word, but there was something intriguing and enchanting about it.”

Soon after that, Mr. Velinov began taking private English lessons, and his adolescence and teen years were filled with a yearning to learn about the United States. As a teenager, he decided that he would, one day, study in America.

“For me, the biggest attraction of America was this idea of idealism, freedom, independence. It always bothered me

that we had state-run media. I always liked communications. And media and journalism ... weren’t free,” said Mr. Velinov.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, his dream began to seem a little closer.

Despite the new freedom the end of the Cold War brought to Bulgaria, it didn’t eliminate all obstacles to the free movement of people and ideas.

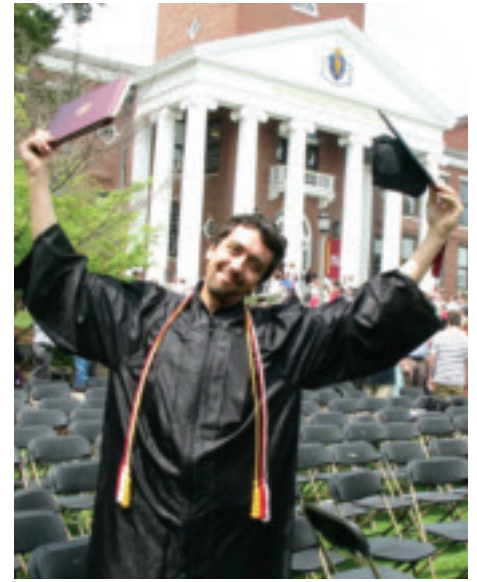
“It took me years before I was able to realize my dream,” said Mr. Velinov, who worked as much as he could throughout his young life to save money for his future studies in America. Working toward his goal, he also completed an undergraduate program in English philology and linguistics at Southwestern University in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. At that time, one of the first American Universities in Eastern Europe opened – American University – and Mr. Velinov would, “often sneak into the library and read books and newspapers.”

Finally, in 2001, at the age of 23, Mr. Velinov arrived in the United States. Knowing that his degree from Bulgaria wouldn’t be fully recognized by future employers, he chose to start all over again.

“I wanted to study here so much and felt that the educational systems were so different that I didn’t want to miss anything and wanted to absorb as much information as possible,” he said. “Even when I could have used some credits and shortened my undergraduate program here, I just didn’t want to sacrifice any subjects that I could take.”

After taking courses at Quincy College and Cape Cod Community College, the Bulgarian, who lives on the Cape with his wife, says he, “fell in love with the school’s [BSC’s] small-town, homey and easy-going atmosphere.” His list of favorite professors includes Dr. Jabbar Al-Obaidi, Dr. Nancy Street, Dr. Arthur Lizie Jr., and Professor Susan Miskelly.

Mr. Velinov found his lifelong desire for an American education to have been exactly the right path for him. At BSC, he was able to personalize his program by choosing classes, schedules and professors that he liked. His Bulgarian education had offered few choices of any sort. BSC also differed greatly from his Bulgarian college in the interaction it welcomed between professors and students. In Bulgaria, many



*Ivan Velinov, '06*

classes consisted of daily lectures and one enormous test at the end of the course, a format that stifled creativity. Among his most satisfying BSC academic activities were class presentations, and being able to disagree with professors and pursue creative responses to issues.

“I had open-minded professors who appreciated this, and it did not affect my grades negatively, but just the opposite,” said Mr. Velinov. “For me, this was very important – for my academic freedom, creativity and opportunity – to even argue with my professors in trying to learn and realize my potential.”

Mr. Velinov is pursuing his master’s degree in political science and international relations at Suffolk University and is thinking of going on for a PhD.

“I am considering a doctoral degree because I’ve always enjoyed the academic environment, and I would like to remain in it and one day teach,” he said. “My Bridgewater State College professors have encouraged me in this endeavor, and some have even said that they would like it if I came back and taught one day. It is by far my favorite school, and I would love to do so.” ■

*Joan Wilder is a Boston-based freelance journalist and writer.*