Fearless: Aleksandra Petkova

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Abstract
Consistently serving the campus community, conducting new research in psychology, and leading younger students to realizations about their own roles in fighting for social justice, Aleksandra Petkova ’14 has fearlessly pursued opportunities to promote social change all four of her years here at Gettysburg.

Keywords
Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, social change, Muslim teenager, American Muslims, Bulgaria

Disciplines
Civic and Community Engagement | Place and Environment | Politics and Social Change | Race and Ethnicity

Comments
Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

This blog post is available at The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College: http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/82
Consistently serving the campus community, conducting new research in psychology, and leading younger students to realizations about their own roles in fighting for social Justice, Aleksandra Petkova ’14 has fearlessly pursued opportunities to promote social change all four of her years here at Gettysburg.

Aleks began taking opportunities to serve the Gettysburg community in remarkable ways her first year here. Instead of flying back to her home country of Bulgaria for the summer, Aleks devoted her time to being an intern with the Heston Summer Experience. The Heston internship, on the surface, provided her with opportunities to tutor English language learners in the migrant communities here in Gettysburg. But if you ask Aleks, the experience was much more than that.

“It opened my eyes to the issues in our community here,” she said, “and I began to ask a lot more questions.”

These questions about the migrant experience inspired her to pursue research as part of the Mellon Summer Scholars Program after her sophomore year. That summer, Aleks researched the experiences of second and third generation American Muslim teenagers, especially as to how they integrated their faith with American culture. Not shying away from the difficult questions, Aleks studied the bullying and negativism these teenagers experienced in schools, especially after 9/11.
Again, after her junior year, Aleks found a new way to serve in leading an Immersion trip to New Orleans this past May. As the leader of the trip, Aleks needed to study the issues and histories of the communities she and her group of Gettysburg College students would be visiting beforehand, causing her to ask more questions.

“What was really the most amazing thing for me about that experience,” said Aleks, “is that, you know, after being here for three years and doing things with different service programs and learning about different issues, you just start to assume that everyone else knows about these social injustice issues, too. So it was incredible for me to take this group of underclassmen to New Orleans and show them that, while service projects and doing hours of community service are nice, they really need to know the situations—to study the issues, educate themselves and the communities about the root causes, and then work on serving those communities’ needs—because that will get better, more meaningful results.”

Each of these opportunities and achievements has created in her new passion and drive to show others how to unlearn the untruths about how we view migrant communities in the US, the experiences of American Muslim teenagers in school, and the situations of people in New Orleans post-Katrina.

Aleks’ continual pursuit of excellence, not only academically, but in terms of promoting social justice and understanding, has led to an incredible Gettysburg experience in which she has grown personally, all the while inspiring her peers to fearlessly ask questions, pursue knowledge, and serve with informed understanding.

http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/fearless-aleksandra-petkova/