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Education Graduate Selected for Fulbright Teaching Program in Cyprus

Posted [July 7, 2011](#) at 4:27 pm by [Melanie Marquez](#)

In September, with her master's degree in elementary education from USFSP in hand, Ali Billias will take her newly developed skills to the Republic of Cyprus. The island country in the Mediterranean Sea will be her home for nine months while she teaches English and American studies as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant.

With guidance from George Roy, assistant professor of mathematics education, Billias learned about the Fulbright international teaching program and applied in October of 2010. She applied to the Cyprus program because of her Greek heritage.

"I thought this was going to be a long shot," Billias said. "It was such an intense application process that I felt so honored to be chosen. It's important to think about the culture of the country you're looking to work in and what your connection to it might be."

Billias' assignment in Cyprus includes teaching in two schools and leading a community service initiative of her choosing. She wants to combine her love of teaching with her passion for art and create an arts education program. The culminating project of her program will be the creation of a public mural touching on issues of peace, tolerance and unity.

"Ali displayed leadership, curiosity, and determination that made her stand out from her peers," Roy said. "These are essential qualities when experiencing a new educational endeavor and they will benefit her work in Cyprus."

Billias earned a bachelor's degree in art history and English from New York University in 2008. After several internships with art museums and galleries, she landed her first job at an arts public relations firm and supervised the firm's interns.

"The experience reminded me how much I love working with people in a capacity where I can help them and help them realize their potential," Billias said. "You could tell how much they appreciated my help and it made me think about my teachers and what kind of impact I could have with a career in education."

After five years in New York City, Billias returned to her hometown of St. Petersburg in August 2009 to pursue her master's degree in elementary education in the College of Education at USFSP. She said the program ideally suited her because she did not have a background or

undergraduate degree in teaching. The program covers the foundations of teaching and includes internship experiences in local elementary schools.

“One of the things that I loved about the program was the relationships I developed with my professors and how small the classes were,” Billias said. “It made me feel more prepared because I felt like I could really talk to them about my concerns.”

Before Billias leaves for Cyprus in September, she is honing her art teaching skills as an AmeriCorp volunteer with CityArts in Providence, Rhode Island. CityArts provides free arts education to elementary school students from low-income families.