

University of Massachusetts Boston

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Global Governance Expert Maria Ivanova



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The Japanese government describes human security as the human ability to lead healthy and productive lives in harmony with nature. There are many different opinions on how to achieve this goal, and it is within this “how” Maria Ivanova finds her passion.

A native of Bulgaria, Ivanova started down her path when she arrived in Massachusetts in 1992 to pursue a BA at Mount Holyoke College. She became familiar with the UMass system at this time, as she took many courses at UMass Amherst. In 1999, she received a joint MA in Environmental Studies and International Relations from Yale University. After a stint at the Environment Directorate of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris, she returned to Yale to earn her PhD in International Environmental Policy, which she received, with distinction, in 2006. She was a faculty member at the College of William and Mary until 2010, and has taught summer courses in Japan and Switzerland.

Her research into the effectiveness of global environmental governance, with an emphasis on the role that international organizations play, has been published across a broad spectrum of media: she is co-editor of a book, author of a myriad of articles, and even produced several documentary films used by numerous universities around the world. At the same time, Ivanova is an active participant and leader in the global environmental governance community, where she connects the academic and policy worlds. A frequent speaker at conferences, she has represented the North American Civil Society at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and serves as a commentator in print media and radio programs. Recently, she attended Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she co-organized—with Yale and the Brazilian university Fundação Getulio Vargas—a global climate change workshop for 13 universities

from 9 countries.

When she arrived at UMass Boston in 2010, Ivanova brought with her an impressive background, as well as the Global Environmental Governance Project (GEG Project), which she founded in 1997. The GEG Project seeks to create a dialogue between policymakers and academics in order to better understand and address the pressing issues facing the global environment, and the challenges inherent in attempting to address them.

And now Ivanova will further strengthen UMass Boston's vital role in developing solutions, thanks to a five-year, \$3.1 million Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) grant from the National Science Foundation. Ivanova and her colleague Robyn Hannigan, founding dean of the UMass Boston School for the Environment, are the grant's co-principal investigators. This funding will enable UMass Boston to implement an interdisciplinary, transnational approach to studying global environmental issues enabling our graduate students to become global environmental problem solvers.

The grant will fund the new IGERT Fellows program entitled “Coasts and Communities: Natural and Human Systems in Urbanizing Environments.” Fellows will study urban coastal management across disciplines—and across nations—with a special focus on the Horn of Africa.

“We cannot manage the environment,” says Ivanova. “We can manage our behavior, the way we live our lives, and the economy, but we are part of the environment, and we have to learn how to live in harmony with nature. The GEG Project brings together multiple actors working towards this collective goal.”

In 2009, Ivanova convened a forum in Switzerland that brought together experts from academia, policymakers, and all of the UNEP executive directors since its inception in 1972. This was the first time that all five directors met in one location and took part in a guided discussion; it also provided an opportunity for young “emerging leaders” from around the world to meet with the founders of the global environmental system and begin forming a global network. “It is absolutely critical that such interactions take place because we are confronting more and more pressing problems each day, which can only be solved collectively,” she says.

The GEG Project now operates out of the Center for Governance and Sustainability here at UMass Boston. Maria Ivanova and Craig Murphy co-direct the center, which now has 12 research assistants and 12 fellows, representing nine different countries.

When Ivanova and Murphy came to UMass Boston, they were also tasked with the responsibility of establishing a new PhD program in Global Governance and Human Security within the McCormack Graduate School for Policy and Global Studies. Having welcomed its inaugural class in the fall of 2012, the program is already receiving a great deal of interest and excitement. Initially

expecting only to be able to offer positions with funding to eight students, the incoming students actually numbers 12—8 are full-time, 2 part-time; and 2 full-time and 1 part-time are self-funded.

“I think students are drawn to the program because of its interdisciplinary nature,” says Ivanova. “The new generation of students has a genuine desire to be able to solve global problems, and you cannot solve a problem with one discipline alone.”

With the world continuously expanding from the local to the global, and environmental problems are only seeming to worsen, it is certain that the research and efforts of Ivanova and her incoming students are integral to finding and achieving the elusive harmonious balance between society and nature.

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