

## Russian and East European Studies and Russian Imperialism

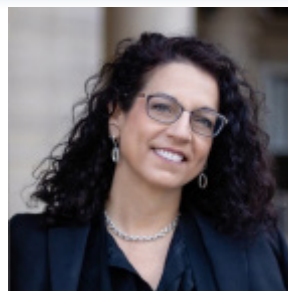
For all of us in the REES Department, February 24, 2022 changed our worlds. Russia's invasion of a peaceful Ukraine catapulted us back to the 18th and 19th centuries and before, a

period of imperial wars fought for aggrandizement of imperial states, to the detriment of nascent nations in Europe and Eurasia. While Italy and Germany unified as national states only in the 1860s, Ukraine and Belarus are among the late developing nationalisms in Europe. Ukraine's national movement was thwarted by Russian and German and Polish imperial programs and its modern national state was founded only in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the communist version of empire. Now Ukraine seeks its modern future as a member of the European Union, what some call a modern empire, but an empire of choice where nation states retain very significant ability to shape their common future, more of a federation.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent our minds back in history, creating new relevance for our courses on the medieval sources of modern nationalisms, Russian empire, and the like. It also catapulted Ukraine to the top of the global agenda, a resurgimento that reminds us that Russian and East European Studies is about more than Russia. Our courses promise a "world of possibilities" (the language of our website), focusing on the often frustrated national movements and languages of the many smaller (and medium-sized) nations that have fought throughout history for the independence from the Russian, German, French, Ottoman, Hapsburg, and other imperial projects, even Swedish.

The war also created new relevance for courses on contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe, the politics of Russia, the culture of Putin's Russia, the consequences of the collapse of communism, foreign policy, and the rise of new nationalisms.

But most of all, it focused our minds on the human costs of war, the terrible suffering of people in Ukraine caused by a level of barbarity that had been previewed in Russian accusations in Syria or Chechnya, but had never before been launched in Europe, the continent that had done so much to create peace since the Second World War by constructing institutions such as the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.



Welcome to Penn and welcome to Russian and East European Studies! As the incoming chair of the department, I am delighted that our program is uniquely suited to educate students with the knowledge and languages necessary to help understand the

current events shaping the world we live in today. Our program offers instruction in an area of the world that encompasses about 400 million people stretching from Budapest in the West to Vladivostok in the East and from Montenegro in south all the way up to the nether regions of the North Pole. We have an incredible array of dedicated lecturers that will help you master the grammars and vocabularies of a wide variety of Slavic Languages (as well as Hungarian). Our faculty also specialize in the rich literary tradition of the region: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Gogol, Akhmatova, and many other giants of the 19th and 20th century letters. Our professors in the social sciences also teach about the politics, economics, and cultures of the more than twenty-five sovereign nations that once fell behind the Iron Curtain.

The interdisciplinarity of the Russian and East European Studies department offers multiple pathways through our major and minor programs. Our students have graduated into a wide variety of career paths in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Perhaps now more than any time in the last several decades, a careful understanding of the diverse histories of this fascinating part of the world is essential for making sense of our collective global future. Whether you decide to just take one course with us or plunge fully into our major, we will share our passion and knowledge about this incredibly diverse and forever fascinating area of the globe!

Dr. Kristen Ghodsee, Chair

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As part of our department's support for Ukraine, we intend to participate in Penn's programs to make its online learning available for free for displaced Ukrainians and to welcome several Ukrainian graduate students to the department in the coming year. We plan to incorporate the study of Ukraine in our existing courses and to create new courses that focus specifically on Ukraine. We continue to be one of the few ivy league departments that offer Ukrainian language study, a long-standing commitment, which we hope to expand.





At the same time, we have not lost sight of the tragedy that has befallen our partners in Russia, liberals and intellectuals who oppose Russia's war of aggression and have faced their own increasing repression of speech and action and opportunity. Many of our colleagues have sought refuge outside of Russia. We remain dedicated to a Russia that, at last, begins to confront its legacy of terrorizing and colonizing its neighbors, and to support Russian cultures at home and in the diaspora that fight for a more modern Russia at peace with the other great nations of Europe. That day may seem far off right now, but this struggle has never been more relevant than today.

We welcome all those who come to our department in search of illumination of the events of today, their rootedness in the past, and the languages and cultures that express them.

Dr. Mitchell Orenstein

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Greetings on behalf of the Penn Russian Language and Culture program!

We look forward to the new academic year and are excited to meet each of you in our courses and at our events.

In our department, we encourage students to study more than one REES language and to explore languages you have not studied before. Our course offerings in partnership with Penn Language Center include Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian language courses.

If you haven't studied Russian, Ukrainian or another Slavic/East European language, we encourage you to try and to start as early in your academic career as possible.

If you have studied one of these languages in the past, either formally in a classroom or at home or your community, you may be able to fulfill Penn Language Requirement by taking a placement test.

Even if you don't fulfil the Language Requirement right away, this test will determine which language courses are best suited for your current proficiency level and will help you plan your academic career at Penn.

The Russian Placement test will be taking place during NSO, on Friday, August 26, from 10 to 12 pm. Contact Dr. Maria Alley (malley@sas.upenn.edu) to register or to find out times for placement tests for other languages.

In the Russian language program, in addition to our regular course offerings, this Fall we have two advanced seminars

taught in Russian in the "Cinema, Arts and Letters" category:

REES 2250 (Russian Culture Through Art and Architecture: From Fin de Siècle to Perestroika) for traditional students and REES 2270 (Post-Soviet Russia in Film) for heritage students

If you are interested in these topics, you will need to take the placement test to see if you are eligible to take these courses.

Outside of the classroom, this year we will continue our cooperation with Holocaust Survivor Program at JFCS Philadelphia. In the past, Penn students put their Russian language skills to use to help care for the Holocaust Survivors. Students participated in friendly calls with Survivors, organized and helped run health-focused workshops, and signed birthday cards for them. Additionally, we are currently planning initiatives to help Ukrainian refugees who are resettling in Philadelphia. Join our team and help us make a difference!

With best wishes for a productive academic year,

Dr. Maria Alley  
Russian Language Program Coordinator

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

After two years of remote instruction, both the faculty and students were happy to have in-person classes and events again.

The weekly **Russian Tea**, the department's Russian language conversation hours, took place throughout the year and was very well attended. Students enjoyed Eastern European pastries and candy to go with the tea served in an authentic Russian samovar. This is something you can enjoy this year as well.

Another new event series that took place in the last academic year were guest talks in Russian. One such talk, titled “**Слухи, байки и фейки о коронавирусе в России**”, was delivered by Dr. Alexandra Arkhipova (Research Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen, Center for Typological and Semiotic Folklore Studies Russian State University for the Humanities). The next talk in the series was “**Trust and Distrust in Russian Society Today**” by a Russian journalist Dina Yusupova. You can find this lecture on our youtube channel.

We also had an honor of hosting a talk by Dmitry Bykov, Russia's famous literary critic and a known critic of the regime. His take on the current (pre-war) Russian political situation fused humorous psychoanalysis with history and

literature. The talk was titled “**The Russian XXI Century: Feel the Difference**”, was followed by a lively Q&A session, and requests for an encore performance at a later date. We hope we can bring Mr. Bykov to campus again.

In November, Dr. Yuliya Brel-Fournier from the University of Delaware, Newark, spoke about Belarus's leader Alexander Lukashenka in her lecture aptly titled “**Belarus: The Predicament of Europe's 'Last Dictator'**”. This talk identified the social contract with the society that sustained Lukashenka for many years, and the consequences of how it has been breached.

Later in the academic year, we brought Dr. Jelena Subotic of Georgia State to speak to our students and faculty about her book titled “**Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance After Communism**”. As the Cornell University Press writes, “... Subotić concludes, Holocaust memory in Eastern Europe has never been about the Holocaust or about the desire to remember the past, whether during communism or in its aftermath. Rather, it has been about managing national identities in a precarious and uncertain world.” The lecture is available on the department's youtube channel under the “Live” tab.

Another talk from the past academic year that is available in the same place on youtube is “**Poland's Constitutional Breakdown**”, a talk by Professor Sadurski, the Challis Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Sydney. The event was co-organized by Penn's Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law. The lecture is available for viewing on our youtube channel.

The past year was studded with appearances from well-known personalities, and one such personality was Konstantin Borovoi who presented a talk titled “**Russia's Disinformation Campaign Against the U.S. and Its Citizens**”. Dr Orenstein and Dr. Michael Horowitz participated in the discussion. You can watch the event on our youtube channel.

Our annual Undergraduate Research Conference returned this year, with the keynote lecture titled “**The Soviet Program Era: Creative Writing Instruction under Socialism**” by Olga Nechaeva of Penn's Comparative Literature Program. Presentation topics were thought-provoking and ranged from “**Fragility of Lithuania's Nationalism and Obfuscation of its Holocaust Memory**” to “**The Purchase of Mazeikiai Oil Refinery – Poland's Involvement in a Geopolitical Game over Yukos Assets**” to “**The Tale of Two Regions: Nomads, Balts, and the Story of their Post-Soviet Existence**” to “**The Machinations of the Great Terror**”. Find the entire conference program with abstracts here: <https://rees.sas.upenn.edu/events/slavic-bazaar>

The entire archive of presentations from almost two decades of student research is available at this address to spark your interest and research inspiration.

On the last day of spring classes, we held our **Annual BBQ** at the BioPond. REES majors and minors were all invited as well as the core and affiliated faculty. It was a chilly day, but hot burgers, Eurasian delicacies, and European beer kept the spirits up throughout the event even as it ran past its designated end time.



Our academic year ends on an uplifting and celebratory note when we get together with the graduating REES majors and minors and their families for the **champagne reception** in their honor. The reception is held the day before the graduation ceremony. It is a bittersweet event, and we always look forward to it as it closes one chapter in the students' lives and opens a new one. We are happy to celebrate our students' achievements and wish them all the best for their future.



Our past majors and minors stay in touch with each other and our faculty through the LinkedIn group. It's a lively community we are very proud of.



## MEET OUR FACULTY:



**Kristen Ghodsee**, Professor, Department Chair. Dr. Ghodsee's research interests include the lived experience of socialism and postsocialism, the gendered effects of the economic transition from communism to capitalism, and the ethnographic study of postcommunist nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe. Dr. Ghodsee will teach REES 0010: Central and Eastern Europe: Cultures, Histories, Societies and REES 0630: Behind the Iron Curtain.



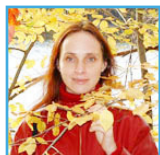
**Maria Alley**, Senior Lecturer in Foreign Languages, Language Program Coordinator. Dr. Alley's interests include second language acquisition and language pedagogy, proficiency testing, and materials development. This fall semester, Dr. Alley will teach RUSS 0300: Russian III.



**Aleksey Berg**, Lecturer. Dr. Berg's research interests include 19th and 20th century Russian poetry, and economic approaches to literature. This fall semester, Dr. Berg will teach REES 0410: Masterpieces of 19th-Century Russian Literature, RUSS 0100: Russian I, and RUSS 1100: Russian Society Today



**Siarhei Biareishyk**, Visiting Assistant Professor. His research interests include literary and critical theory, German Romanticism and Idealism, Russian Formalism, Soviet and Western Marxism, materialism and the Spinozist tradition. This fall semester, Dr. Biareishyk will teach REES 0130: Portraits of Soviet Society: Literature, Film, Drama and REES 0275: Montage and Revolution: Conceptual Cinema of Sergei Eisenstein



**Maria Boulatskaya**, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Her current research interest lies in techniques for training business professionals to develop and assess cross-cultural competency. This fall semester, Dr. Boulatskaya will teach REES 2271: Post-Soviet Russian in Film.



**Brian Kim**, Assistant Professor. He is a specialist in Russian literature of the long nineteenth century, translation studies, and literary and cultural relationships between Russia, Western Europe, and East Asia. This fall semester, Dr. Kim will teach REES 0481: Tolstoy and REES 6683: Cultures of Reading in Imperial Russia.



**Mila Nazyrova**, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Dr. Nazyrova's research interests focus on Russian art and culture at the turn of the 20th-century and early Soviet era. This fall semester, Dr. Nazyrova will teach REES 2250: Russian Culture Through Art and Architecture: From Fin de Siecle to Perestroika.



Affairs.

**Mitchell Orenstein**, Professor, Graduate Chair. Dr. Orenstein is a scholar of international politics focusing on the political economy of transition in Central and Eastern Europe. This fall semester, Dr. Orenstein will teach REES 0131: Putin's Russia: Culture, Society and History and REES 1570: Russia and Eastern Europe in International



**Molly Peeney**, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Her interests are in language pedagogy, early 20th-century Modernism, and creative writing. This fall semester, Dr. Peeney will teach REES 0172: Madness and Madmen in Russian Culture, RUSS 0100: RUSS I, and RUSS 0300: Russian III



**Kevin M. F. Platt**, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Term Professor in the Humanities. Dr. Platt works on representations of Russian history, Russian historiography, history and memory in Russia, Russian lyric poetry, and global post-Soviet Russian culture. This academic year, Dr. Platt is on a sabbatical leave.



**Vladislav Todorov**, Senior Lecturer. Dr. Todorov is the author of several scholarly books as well as an accomplished fiction- and screen- writer. Three of his novels were made into films that garnered critical acclaim. Dr. Todorov is a voting member of the European Film Academy. This fall semester, Dr. Todorov will teach REES 5550: Terrorism.



**Julia Verkholtantsev**, Associate Professor, Undergraduate Chair. Dr. Verkholtantsev's academic interests are in the field of cultural history, early modern and medieval literary and linguistic culture, and the history of ideas. This Fall, Dr. Verkholtantsev will teach REES 0100: Portraits of Old Rus: Myth, Icon, Chronicle



**Lada Vassilieva**, Lecturer. Lada's research interests include foreign language teaching methodology and Russian phraseology. This fall semester, Ms. Vassilieva will teach RUSS001: Elementary Russian I.



**Margarita Staruk**, FLTA. Margarita holds a BA degree in teaching English and Russian languages and a MA degree in Linguistic Expertise. She is a member of a 'Linguistic Experts Association of South Russia.' She has lived and taught in Lithuania, Russia, and Indonesia. Margarita is the recipient of Erasmus, Fulbright, and Oxford Russia Fund Scholarships, which allowed her to participate in various international forums, including the XIX World Festival of Youth and Students.

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