

Welcome to Penn and welcome to our interdisciplinary and multicultural Russian and East European Studies (REES) Department. As the chair of and a professor in the department, I am delighted that our program is precisely suited to

educate students with the knowledge and languages necessary to help understand the current events shaping the world we live in today. Given the complexities of current geopolitical events, and the ongoing importance of this part of the world to American foreign policy interests, we believe that there has never been a better time to study Eastern Europe.

The REES department 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 team 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 traditions of the region: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Gogol, Akhmatova, Kafka, Kundera, 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. We offer courses on the theories and practices of socialism, communism, anarchism as well as broad surveys of “Putin’s Russia” and courses relating to international relations.

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. Many of our students are double majors with other departments, and have gone on to work in banking, journalism, politics, the military, and various positions within the federal government. 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



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

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 Hungarian, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian language courses. If you haven’t studied Russian 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 Foreign Language Requirement by taking a placement test. Even if you don’t fulfill 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 Sunday, August 27, from 5 to 7 pm. Contact Dr. Maria Alley ([malley@sas.upenn.edu](mailto: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:

REES 2670 (Shaping Russian Society: Soviet Heritage and Transformation) for non-heritage students who completed 3 years of Russian at Penn or have equivalent proficiency.

REES 3170 (Tears and Laughter in the World of Anton Chekhov) for heritage students and advanced non-heritage students.\*This course fulfills the College Cross-Cultural Analysis requirement.

If you are interested in these topics and are new to Penn, 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. Join our team and help us make a difference!



### Latvian: A Love Story

It's already August, which means I am returning from a year of sabbatical to take up teaching at Penn once again. Among other things, I can report from my year of research and writing, with some satisfaction, that I am finally getting somewhere in my study of Latvian language (although I still have a long way to go...).

Why study Latvian, you ask?

First, the professional narrative: some years ago, I became interested in poetry written in Russian in contemporary Latvia—where about 25% of the population speaks Russian as a first language. Latvia is a place where poetry in Russian becomes something other than “Russian literature”—Latvian literature, European literature, world literature. After studying and translating this work into English, I eventually began to write a book about the culture of Russian-speaking Latvia more generally. For this, of course, I needed to gain some minimal knowledge of Latvian—the majority language and culture that defines this society. That book is coming out this winter: *Border Conditions: Russian-Speaking Latvians Between World Orders*.

But now, the personal story: along the way, I fell in love. The Latvian cultural tradition is constrained in scale, yet extraordinarily rich. It extends from intense avant-garde artists like Gustavs Klucis to innovative experimental poets like Amanda Aizpuriete and Uldis Bērziņš. (My first translations of the latter, by the way, have recently been published in *World Literature Today*: <https://www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2023/july/two-poems-latvia-uldis-berzins>) Latvia is a land of ancient northern-European cities, wind-swept Baltic beaches, incredible strawberries in the spring, and transparent forests filled with wild berries and mushrooms. Latvian is a fascinating Indo-European language, one of two (or three, depending how you count them) remaining languages of the Baltic languages branch.

If that's not enough reason to commit to serious study, consider this. Global culture can be compared to an ecological system. It thrives on diversity, variety, and complex interrelationships that enrich all.

Fewer than 1.4 million people in the world speak Latvian today. As with all small languages, Latvian has faced assimilatory pressures throughout its history. The imperial social structures of the Soviet Union crowned Russian as a privileged language and the key to social advancement and enabled an influx of Russian-speakers to Latvia. If this situation had persisted for two more generations, Latvian might have become a dying language. Today, Latvian faces new threats from global English and economic pressures leading to the out-migration of young people in search of opportunity.

This is, of course, not to mention the threat to Latvian independence, and therefore cultural life and language, of Russia's neo-imperialism, that has unleashed cruel and unjust war on Ukraine and threatens all neighboring states. Learning a language might seem like a small thing to do in the face of these huge geopolitical threats. But it may be the most important thing one can do, as well. Learning a small language helps preserve both it, and the ecological richness of world culture as a whole.

Penn does not offer Latvian (although I want to begin conversations about this in the coming year). But it does teach many small languages through the Penn Language Center. So here's an idea: if you care about culture, don't just learn large, pragmatically obvious languages while you are at Penn. Learn a small language, too!

Dr. Kevin M.F. Platt

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

In the past year, the Russian Language Program Students attended various extracurricular events, such as ballets, lectures, and restaurants, featuring Eastern European cuisines. The REES program hosted a variety of events to promote language learning and offer informal speaking practice with other Penn speakers of Russian, and to allow students to



*New book acquisitions to fill out Prof. Platt's growing library of Latvian poetry.*

register for the Language Direct Tutoring program. These events serve students' participation in the REES language courses, and promote the study of the Slavic languages.



For example, the RUSS language students attended such events as ballet performances at the Philadelphia Ballet Company (“the Nutcracker”, “The Cinderella”, “The Sleeping Beauty”), as well as visited the Georgian restaurant “Sakartvelo” to sample the authentic cuisines of the former Soviet Union. These activities add cultural content to the standard academic instruction to support in the study of the Russian language.



The teaching of the Russian language is illuminated and enriched through the theater visit to ballets, and operas, as well as through informal speaking practice with native and non-native speakers over food at restaurants, as well as

community building activities during weekly tea meetings and games nurture the language skills.

For the upcoming year, the program will plan more activities to complement in the teaching of the Russian language curriculum.

Lada Vassilieva  
Russian Instructor

Last year, we were fortunate to host and co-sponsor three events of interest to our department's students and faculty..

In October, Dr. Łukasz Stanek presented a book talk titled “Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War”. Dr. Stanek spoke about how architects, planners, and building companies from socialist countries collaborated with their counterparts in the Global South, and how their collaboration shaped five cities during the Cold War period: Accra, Lagos, Baghdad, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait City.

The book is now available for purchase through Princeton University Press.

In early April, REES hosted a conversation with Yevhen Fedchenko and Tomasz Grzywaczewski on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with emphasis on the lessons after a year of war. Yevhen Fedchenko, Ph.D is co-founder and Chief Editor of fact-checking website StopFake.org, leading hub of expertise on Russian disinformation. Tomasz Grzywaczewski (<https://www.facebook.com/tomasz.grzywaczewski.9/>) is a war journalist, documentary filmmaker, and author of non-fiction books focusing on Central and Eastern Europe. He has spent the last 12 months reporting from the front-lines in Ukraine as a correspondent for the Chief Evening News Service on the first channel of Polish Public TV.

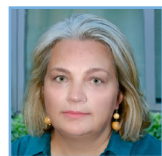
The talk was live on youtube and is available on our channel (the links to our social media are at the end of the faculty profiles page).

And the biggest undergraduate research event of the year was our 20th annual Slavic Bazaar which in April 2023 was a multi-university event held in collaboration with REES NE (Russian, East European, & Eurasian Studies North-east). Some of the presentation titles included topics like “The 21st Century Augmented Reality Battlefield”, “Central Asia: A Road or a Roadblock to Russia's “Pivot Eastward?””, “Mini Russia: Serbia's Backslide from Democracy and the Implications on the Balkans”, and “The Demise of Soviet Ballet in the Late 20th Century”. For the full lineup of presentations that took place during this event, please visit <https://rees.sas.upenn.edu/events/slavic-bazaar-2023>. The next event will take place in 2024.

## 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 1631: Anarchism: Theories and Ethnographies.



**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 0100: Russian I.



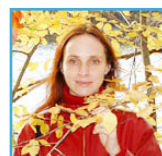
**Aleksey Berg**, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Dr. Berg's research interests include 19th and 20th century Russian poetry, and economic approaches to literature. This fall semester, Dr.

Berg will teach RUSS 0100: Russian I, and RUSS 1100: Russian Society Today



**Sjarhei 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 0190: Russia and the West, and REES 1172: Marx, Marxism, and the Culture of Revolution, and RES 1230: Russian and East European Film from the October Revolution to World War II.



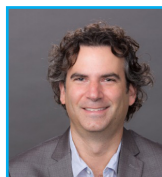
**Maria Boulatskaya**, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Her current research interest lies in techniques for training business professionals to develop and assess cross-cultural competency. This fall semester, Dr. Boulatskaya will teach REES 2670: Shaping Russian Society: Soviet Heritage and Transformation.



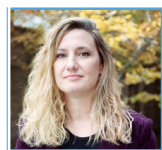
**Brian Kim**, Assistant Professor, Undergraduate Chair. He is a specialist in Russian literature of the long nineteenth century, translation studies, and literary and cultural relationships between Russia, Western Europe, and East Asia. This fall semester, Dr. Kim will teach REES 0410: Masterpieces of 19th-Century Russian Literature and REES 0480: Dostoevsky.



**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 3170: Tears and Laughter in the World of Anton Chekhov and REES 0201: Russian for Heritage Speakers I.



**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 be on academic leave but returning to teaching in Spring 2024.



**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



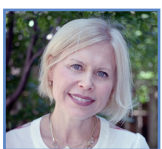
**Kevin M. F. Platt**, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Term Professor in the Humanities. Dr. Platt works on representations of Russian history, Russian historiography, history and memory in Russia, Russian lyric poetry, and global post-Soviet Russian culture. This academic year, Dr. Platt is on a sabbatical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



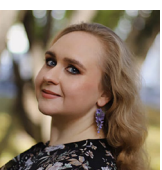
**Vladislav Todorov**, Senior Lecturer. Dr. Todorov is the author of several scholarly books as well as an accomplished fiction- and screen- writer. Three of his novels were made into films that garnered critical acclaim. Dr. Todorov is a voting member of the European Film Academy. This fall semester,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



**Julia Verkholtantsev**, Associate Professor. 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.



**Anna Semkina**, FLTA. Anna is an English teacher from Ryazan, Russia. She worked at School 14 (In-Depth Study of English) and at the department of foreign languages of the Ryazan State University named after S. Yesenin. Her professional interests include literary translation and consecutive interpretation as well as creating video-based lessons for students of various language levels.

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