On November 7 and 8, 2019, our department held a multidisciplinary research conference titled Social Impacts of Post-Socialist Transition and Policies for the Future. Researchers from various fields of study presented their papers and contributed to others’ research. Our own Dr. Mitchell Orenstein and Dr. Kristen Ghodsee organized the event, Nicholas Emery, a REES Department alumnus and a PhD student at UCLA, assisted with the research and preparation for the conference.

Dr. Mitchell Orenstein and Dr. Kristen Ghodsee of REES Department’s Dr. Kevin M.F. Platt was among prominent conference participants. Penn’s Dr. Julia Gray, Dr. Michelle Guillot, Dr. Julia Lynch, and Dr. Rudra Sil were among the conference presenters. Other participants included Mr. Simon Commandre, a former senior official at World Bank in Washington, DC, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in London, Maurizio Russo, a lead economist in the World Bank’s Chief Economist Office for Europe and Central Asia, Michael Lokshin, a Lead Economist with the World Bank’s Office of the Chief Economist for Europe and Central Asia, John Feffer, Director of Foreign Policy In Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC, Johannes Linn is a Nonresident Senior Fellow in the Global Economy and Development Program at the Brookings Institution, Dr. Molly Peaney, Lecturer. Her interests are in language pedagogy, early 20th-century Modernism, and creative writing. This fall semester, Dr. Peaney will teach: REES200: Intermediate Russian I REES197: Madness and Madmen in Russian Literature and Culture

Kevin M. F. Platt, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Term Professor in the Humanities, Dr. PlattworksonrepresentationsofRussianhistory, Russian historiography, history and memory in Russia, Russian lyric poetry, and global post-SovietRussianculture. Thisfallsemester, Dr. Plattwill teach REES191: Putin’s Russia REES605: Modern Literary Theory and Criticism

Peter Steiner, Professor Emeritus. Dr. Stein- er’s major areas of research are literary theo- ry and modern Slavic literature and culture.

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 ac- claim. Dr. Toller’s research interests focus on the use of film, literature, and political and business materials. Her current research interest lies in techniques for training business profes- sionals to develop and assess cross-cultural competency.

Kristen Ghodsee, Professor. Dr. Ghodsee’s research interests include the lived experi- ence 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 is on sabbatical this academic year.

Brian Kim, Assistant Professor. Dr. Kim received his PhD from Stanford University. He is a specialist in Russian literature of the long nineteenth century, translation stud- ies, and literary and cultural relationships between Russia, Western Europe, and East Asia. This fall semester, Dr. Kim will teach: REES145: Masterpieces of 19th-century Russian Literature REES201: Dostoevsky

Mila Nazyrova, Lecturer. 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. Nazy- rova will teach: RUSS360: Russian for Heritage Speakers I RUSS473: Everyday Life in the Soviet Union

Molly Peeney, Lecturer. Her interests are in language pedagogy, early 20th-century Modernism, and creative writing. This fall semester, Dr. Peeney will teach: REES200: Intermediate Russian I REES197: Madness and Madmen in Russian Literature and Culture

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Russian celebrity director Kirill Serebrennikov. The Humorist, which Idow also wrote, is his directorial debut. Both films were recognized with prestigious awards. Idow's screenings and class discussion attracted a large audience of students and faculty, who grilled the writer-director about his depiction of the late Soviet era. As someone who was born in Soviet Latvia, grew up in the American Midwest, and has worked for years in the Russian and European film and television industry, he offered students valuable insight into what might be called “global Russian culture.”

This fall, Professor Plat’s “Putini’s Russia” course will feature a (virtual) guest appearance by Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, the lead singer of Pussy Riot. Plat, who has many contacts in contemporary Russian cultural life, considers contact with the makers of Russian culture to be an important and exciting aspect of teaching about Russia today.

Finally, on November 11 and 12, the director and screenwriter Mikhail Idov came to Penn to screen two films: Leto, a biopic about the legendary late-Soviet rock star Viktor Tsoi, and The Humorist, a bitter-sweet comedy about a late-Soviet stand-up comic and his run-ins with the Soviet authorities. In partnership with his wife, Lili, Idow was the screenwriter for Leto, which was directed by the politically embattled Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov. The Humorist, which Idow also wrote, is his directorial debut. Both films were recognized with prestigious awards. Idow’s screenings and class discussion attracted a large audience of students and faculty, who grilled the writer-director about his depiction of the late Soviet era. As someone who was born in Soviet Latvia, grew up in the American Midwest, and has worked for years in the Russian and European film and television industry, he offered students valuable insight into what might be called “global Russian culture.”

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**Message from the Chair:**

Dear Students,


No one is more disappointed that Penn is going back to school this fall online than your REES faculty. Throughout the spring, whilst we sat indoors trying to contain the virus, I was hopeful that we would defeat it and be able to experience a somewhat normal fall term. However, our US government underperformed. And this fall, University of North Carolina’s experience showed what would happen if we opened up normally. Within a few days or weeks, the virus would spread dramatically and we would be forced to go back online.

REES faculty spent the summer preparing for online teaching, hoping for the best, but planning for the worst. All courses have been adapted to the new environment with many changes both large and small. We were reasonably well equipped to meet the challenge last spring, but much better equipped this fall. However, one of the hardest things to recreate online is the community that exists in our classes and our department as a whole, which is why I am writing to you today.

REES faculty realizes the challenges inherent in creating a sense of community in an online environment. In particular, we want students to continue to feel close to their professors (as well as each other). For that reason, I want to make clear to all my students and to all REES majors and minors that I am happy to take your calls directly from 8am - 10pm any day of the fall term on any topic. You continue to be our top priority as a department. But it is not only me: All faculty members in the department are happy to engage with you directly. I suggest that you email your professors and set up a Zoom consultation or phone call.

We understand this fall will be a challenging and unusual time. But we look forward to meeting it together. Get in touch. Stay in touch.

Have a great semester.

Mitchell A Orenstein, Chair
Meet Our Faculty:

Mitchell Orenstein, Professor, Department 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 REES314: Communism

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:
- RUS8001: Elementary Russian I
- RUS8003: Intermediate Russian I

Maria Bourlatskaya, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Dr. Bourlatskaya specializes in teaching advanced Russian content-based courses for business professionals with the use of film, literature, and political and business materials. Her current research interest lies in techniques for training business professionals to develop and assess cross-cultural competency. This fall semester, Dr. Bourlatskaya will teach RUS311: Advanced Russian Conversation and Composition.

Kristen Ghodsee, Professor. Dr. Ghodsee’s research interests include the lived experience of socialism and post-socialism, the gendered effects of the economic transition from communism to capitalism, and the ethnographic study of post-communist nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe. Dr. Ghodsee is on sabbatical this academic year.

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- RUS636: Russian for Heritage Speakers I
- RUS473: Everyday Life in the Soviet Union

Molly Peoney, Lecturer. Her interests are in language pedagogy, early 20th-century Modernism, and creative writing. This fall semester, Dr. Peoney will teach:
- RUS8003: Intermediate Russian I
- REES197: Madness and Madmen in Russian Literature and Culture

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- REES111: The Art of Plotting
- REES164: Russian Film from 1900 to 1945
- REES555: Terrorism

Julia Verkholyatskaya, Associate Professor, Undergraduate Chair, Dr. Verkholyatskaya’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. Verkholyatskaya will teach REES412: 19th-Century Russian Literature and Culture: Romantics and Realists

Lada Vassilieva, Instructor. Lada’s research interests include foreign language teaching methodology and Russian phraseology. This fall semester, Ms. Vassilieva will teach RUS8001: Elementary Russian I

Margarita Lappa, Fullbright Language Teaching Assistant. Born in Orenburg, Margarita now teaches in Moscow. She will be our first ever online FLTA for this academic year.

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Conference Participants came from various corners of the USA and the UK
Feast your eyes on some the topics for the conference panels:

The field of Russian and East European studies is wide, and you can start your career with our department by means of taking our courses and becoming our major or minor. Please consult our website for contact information of our faculty.