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Mila Nazynova, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Dr. Nazynova’s research interests focus on Russian art and culture at the turn of the 20th century and early Soviet era. This fall semester, Dr. Nazynova will teach REES504 Geopolitics of Energy in Russia and Eurasia.

The Launch of the Penn-EUSP Dual M.A. in Russian and East European Studies

By Dr. Kevin M.F. Platt

We are proud and excited to announce the launch this fall semester of the University of Pennsylvania — European University at St. Petersburg (EUSP) Dual M.A. Degree in Russian and East European Studies. This two-year program is a true collaboration between Penn and EUSP, each of which numbers among the leading private universities of the two countries. It will build much needed bridges of mutual understanding between American and Russian academic institutions, societies, and people. It was made possible with a seed grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The majority of students over the next ten years will be supported by full fellowships, funded by a generous gift from Polymetal International PLC.

At the end of August, our first cohort of eight students, including three recent graduates from Russian universities and five from North American institutions, will arrive in Philadelphia. The Penn-EUSP Dual M.A. in REES is designed to allow each student to focus on a specific discipline of study, in addition to mastering the languages and more generalized knowledge of the region. During the first year of study at Penn, the members of this first cohort will engage in course work in a diverse range of disciplines, ranging from Soviet history (for one student—the history of Soviet dissidents), to political theory, to international relations. By Dr. Mitchell Orenstein

Here at REES, we are anticipating the return to normality in Fall 2021 with glee and trepidation. The COVID pandemic has been hard on students and faculty alike, confining us to small boxes on Zoom screens, and prohibiting us from normal interactions in our daily lives. While on the one hand, people are thrilled to get outside and rejoin normal life, on the other hand, we have all gotten used to aspects of our confinement and wonder how we will experience the changes that lie ahead. In some ways, the REES Department managed the pandemic really well. Our language faculty faced enormous challenges in delivering high quality instruction through electronic media, but did an outstanding job. Luckily, in hindsight, Language Program Coordinator Maria Alley and other faculty had led the way in organizing aspects of course delivery through Canvas well before the pandemic, so we were in great shape when disaster struck. The Department quickly adjusted to new frameworks that had seemed experimental in the past. And largely through the online advising efforts of Undergraduate Chair Julia Verkholantsyev, our numbers of new REES majors and minors exploded. Add to this the launch of a new MA REES masters program in conjunction with European University of St. Petersburg, and you will see that the REES Department exits this crisis with all sails to the wind. We have all navigated difficult times, continued on p.2
I started learning Russian because I knew that process could introduce me to lifelong friends and meaningful works of art that I otherwise wouldn't even have been able to seek out. What I didn't anticipate is the way learning Russian makes you an active participant, not just a fly on the wall, in a language community-- one that's connected by a shared set of big post-Soviet questions. Russian language skills enabled me to take part in those conversations as a literary translator and as the news editor for the international edition of Meduza, an independent outlet based in Riga and Moscow. Russian is also a gateway language: without it, there is no way I would have been able to study Juhuri. Juhuri is the language of the Jewish communities rooted in the Eastern Caucasus Mountains, and there's amazing work being done in Juhuri poetry, drama, and history today. However, it's difficult to learn Juhuri even if you have friends or family members who speak it because formal learning opportunities are scarce. The REES department supported me in taking my studies to a new level through online private lessons. Thanks to that support, I've been able to use my existing language skills to connect with organizers across the Juhuri diaspora, working with them to increase access to Juhuri culture through translation and online meetups. REES enabled me to raise my language skills to the level necessary to have those conversations with colleagues and friends while centering my research on literature in multiple languages.

Vito Acosta, BA student, Class of 2022

I studied in Russian and Kyrgyz in Bishkek this summer thanks to support from the Penn REES department. With an academic base in Chinese studies, I have become interested in the cultures and histories of Central Asia. In Bishkek I have been able to practice both the lingua franca of the region, Russian, and the local language, Kyrgyz, a unique experience that encapsulates the beautiful plurality of cultures in this fascinating area. Upon my return, I will continue studying Russian at Penn and Kyrgyz online with tutors in Bishkek.

**Letters from Students**

Hilah Kohen, PhD student
Program in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

**Announcing the Bruce and Irene Marks Penn Russia Fund**
By Dr. Mitchell Orenstein

The REES Department wishes to thank alumni Bruce Marks (SAS ’79, Law ’84) and his wife Irene Marks, who have made a large endowed donation to support student travel to Russia, as well as other activities in support of the department. Bruce Marks is Managing Director of Marks & Sokolov, LLC in Philadelphia. He uses his REES training every day, since his law firm specializes in handling disputes and transactions between Russia, Ukraine, and the United States, and has an office in Moscow. Bruce and Irene Marks believe strongly in person-to-person interactions and share our view in REES that bringing people together creates enormous opportunities for learning. As a result of this important gift, REES plans to double support for student travel to the REES region, normally with a language learning component. The REES Department would like to extend its thanks to Bruce and Irene Marks for their generosity towards the next generations of REES students and looks forward to expanding student travel opportunities this coming year.

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Our Faculty

Margarita Lappa, Fullbright Language-Teaching Assistant from Moscow, Russia, coming in for her second year at Penn. In addition to assisting in teaching advanced Russian courses, Margarita will host Russian Tea and other events.

Anna Mikulak, Lecturer, Graduate Coordinator. Dr. Mikulak’s research focuses on the geopolitics of natural gas within the EU, former Soviet Bloc and Russia. In the fall, Dr. Mikulak will teach REES594 Geopolitics of Energy in Russia and Eurasia.

Milka Nazynova, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Dr. Nazynova’s research interests focus on Russian art and culture at the turn of the 20th-century and early Soviet era. This fall semester, Dr. Nazynova will teach RUSS360 Russian for Heritage Students I and RUSS397 Peer and Loathing of Capitalism in Russian Literature of the 19th Century.

Molly Penney, Lecturer in Foreign Languages. Her interests are in language pedagogy, early 20th-century Modernism, and creative writing. This fall semester, Dr. Penney will teach RUSS505 Intermediate Russian I and REES197 Madness and Madmen in Russian Literature and Culture.

Vladislav Todorov, Senior Lecturer. Dr. Todorov is the author of several scholarly books as well as an accomplished fiction and screenwriter. Several of his novels were made into films that garnered critical acclaim. This fall semester, Dr. Todorov will teach REES164 Russian Film 1900 - 1945, REES390 Ethnic Conflict in Film, and REES595 Terrorism.

Lada Vassileva, Instructor. Lada’s research interests include foreign language teaching methodology and Russian phraseology. This fall semester, Ms. Vassileva will teach RUSS501: Elementary Russian I.

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