

A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR

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 Verkholantsev, 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,



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Break Out the Shampanskoe!

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 increased 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 discos!), to political theory, to international relations.

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Department of Russian and East European Studies



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 REES134: Communism as well as REES502 Intro To Russian & East European Studies I: Social Science Approaches.

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OUR FACULTY



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 REES213 Saints and Devils in Russian Literature and Tradition



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 postcommunist nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe. Dr. Ghodsee is on sabbatical in the fall and back in the spring of 2022.

The Launch of the Penn-EUSP Dual M.A. in Russian and East European Studies - cont'd from p.1

At the end of the first year of the program, students will formulate the topic of their M.A. thesis and will travel to St. Petersburg, Russia. During the ensuing summer, they will engage in intensive language study, as needed, and will conduct independent research in archives, libraries or in field work in the region. Finally, in the second year of the program, they will continue their coursework at EUSP, becoming members of our first class of graduates in June, 2023.

It is no secret that the past several years have been a period of troubled relations between Russia and the USA. The launch of this program is an act of optimism and an investment in a future of better relations, opening borders, increasing understanding and exchange. We are grateful to the administrations of the University of Pennsylvania, EUSP, the Carnegie Corporation, Polymetal International, and all of the other people whose labor and creativity over the past five years has brought this project to realization. And we are looking forward to new cohorts of students who will take advantage of our unique program to study the region's history, political life, culture, art, and much more!



Given the ongoing challenges and upheaval of the pandemic year, Professor Kristen Ghodsee penned this letter to the students at the end of the spring semester of the course: REES159 - Population and Public Health in Eastern Europe (cross-listed with anthropology and sociology). [The letter has been edited for length.]

Dear Class,

... I want to address the times we are living in. This has been a very difficult 15 months for all of us, and the upheavals are very real. ...

I think we should all be mindful of the possible long-term effects--on ourselves and on our societies--of a global event of this magnitude. You learned what happened in Eastern Europe after an event of a similar historic magnitude for the people living in that system--the sudden and unexpected end of socialism and in many cases of the countries they were born in. Some people handled it well; they were able to reinvent themselves and thrive in a changing world, but many people did not thrive. Suicides rose. Birth rates fell. People turned to alcohol and drugs to numb the pain or they abandoned their countries and permanently emigrated abroad.

Those left behind are getting older and sicker and there's no one left to look after them; not doctors, not nurses, and not their own grown children. Young children miss mothers who must work abroad to support their families back home, and abandoned husbands sink deeper into alcoholism and despair. Remember, these conditions did not result from a war (save for Yugoslavia), but from a change in the political system that was unexpected. This pandemic was similarly unexpected, and in the months, years, and perhaps decades to come, we will all be marked in some way by this experience. Let's hope the leaders of our contemporary societies are better than the ones they had in Eastern Europe in the 1990s.

If you think back to the readings about which populations handled the transition the best, it was generally those people who had strong social networks and support systems. They played on soccer teams or attended religious services, or they had robust relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. ... Our individual immune systems can fight off physiological illnesses, but it is our social immune systems that must fend off the psychological ailments that inevitably follow upheavals like this one. Nourish and strengthen your social immune system as best you can. ... Dr. Ghodsee

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 endowment 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.

LETTERS FROM STUDENTS

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

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 a Turkic 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.

OUR FACULTY



Kevin M. F. Platt, Edmund J. and Louise W. Kahn Term Professor in the Humanities. Dr. Platt is also the Graduate Chair of the new joint Master's program. 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 fall semester, Dr. Platt will teach REES191 Putin's Russia, REES649 Socialist and Post-Socialist Worlds



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 studies, and literary and cultural relationships between Russia, Western Europe, and East Asia. This academic year, Dr. Kim is on sabbatical.

A Modern Take on Medieval Music



In March, we had a rare pleasure of hosting an online concert and a Q&A with Puulup, a self-described zombie folk Estonian duo that uses talharpas, medieval string harps to create a thoroughly modern and eclectic musical experience.

You can watch the event on our youtube channel: <https://youtu.be/kwMJQjqwlf8>



Love and Sex Behind the Iron Curtain

Later in March, we hosted a zoom conversation with three researchers from Poland, Czechia, and Russia, moderated by Dr. Ghodsee, on the issues of women's rights, sex, and love in Eastern Europe. You can watch that event here: <https://youtu.be/Okv2RyWKfHY>

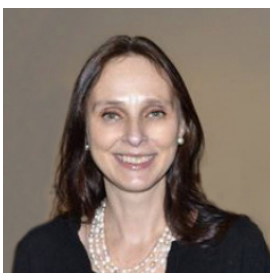
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Maria Alley, Senior Lecturer in Foreign Languages, Language Program Coordinator. Dr. Alley's interests include second language acquisition and language pedagogy, proficiency testing, and materials development. This fall semester, Dr. Alley will teach RUSS311 Advanced Russian Conversation and Composition I.



Aleksey Berg, Lecturer. Dr. Berg's interests include 19th and 20th century Russian poetry and economic approaches to literature. This fall semester, Dr. Berg will teach REES145 Masterpieces of 19th-Century Russian Literature, REES201 Dostoevsky, and RUSS001



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. This fall semester, Dr. Bourlatskaya will teach

REES413 20th Century Russian Literature, Film, and Culture.

Original idea and design by Alina Yakubova, Administrative Coordinator

OUR FACULTY



Margarita Lappa, Fulbright 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 Mikulska, Lecturer, Graduate Coordinator. Dr. Mikulska's research focuses on the geopolitics of natural gas within the EU, former Soviet Bloc and Russia. In the fall, Dr. Mikulska will teach REES504 Geopolitics of Energy in Russia and Eurasia.



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 RUSS360 Russian for Heritage Students I and REES456 Fear and Loathing of Capitalism in Russian Literature of the 19th Century.



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 RUSS003 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, REES430 Ethnic Conflict in Film, and REES555 Terrorism.



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