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How far can language and area studies take you?
A CREECA M.A., a Russian major, and a mechanical engineer tell their stories

Jacob Mays entered the graduate program in mechanical engineering at UW-Madison in fall 2009. He earned a B.S. in chemistry and physics from Harvard in 2007, but also studied Russian. After graduating, he worked for a year at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. He’s now continuing his study of Russian and hopes a career in developing power projects will take him abroad again. See his story on page 5.

Damian Wampler earned an M.A. in Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies from CREECA in 2005. Since then, he’s done Fulbright research and worked in New York as a Peace Corps recruiter. He was recently accepted into the U.S. Foreign Service and is leaving for Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on February 15. See his story on page 6.

Laura Weigel graduated from UW-Madison in 2009 with majors in International Studies and Russian Language and Civilization. In fall 2009, she worked in Russia as a recruiter for the American Councils’ Future Leaders Exchange Program. Weigel is currently looking at new job opportunities in Russia, preparing for the GRE, and planning to apply to graduate school in the fall. See her story on page 7.
Dear friends of CREECA,

I trust that most of you are staying warm and upbeat this winter. Lest you despair at the sight of the seemingly eternal ice cover on Lake Mendota, take heart that February is International Opportunities Month (IOM) on the UW-Madison campus. CREECA has a long tradition of active participation in this program of lectures, presentations, and other events that teach students about global issues and opportunities for travel, work, study, and volunteer service abroad.

In the spirit of IOM, this issue of the CREECA newsletter features several stories about our students and recent alumni who have used their language and area studies expertise in diverse and interesting ways at UW-Madison and beyond. Laura Weigel, 2009 B.A. in Russian and International Studies, recently returned from a 4-month stint in Russia as a participant recruiter for the American Councils for Internation- al Education FLUX program. Damian Wampler, 2005 M.A. in Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies, has served as a Peace Corps volunteer and Fulbright scholar, and is departing this month for a new position in Dushanbe as a Foreign Service Officer with the US State Department. Jacob Mays, currently working on an M.S. in Mechanical Engineering, received a FLSA fellowship for advanced study in Russian in 2009-2010. Zachary Kelly, 2008 B.A. in Russian and a student in the Baltic Studies Summer Institute (BALSSI) here last summer, has an internship at the US Embassy in Tallinn lined up for next summer. I know you will enjoy reading about the successes of this sample of our many impressive students.

CREECA has also recently learned that we will be hosting BALSSI again not only during the coming summer, but also for a third summer in 2011. Please help spread the word to anyone potentially interested in studying Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian.

By Ted Gerber
CREECA DIRECTOR

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CREECA is a Department of Education Title VI National Resource Center. It was established in 1993 to unite the efforts of two long-standing University programs—Russian and East European Studies and Central Asian Studies. CREECA consists of roughly 100 members including many nationally and internationally known experts in their fields.

Gina Gau (St. Mary’s University of Min- nesota), together with her husband, Marsha Nef, published an article in the Winter 2009/10 issue of the Minnesota Historical Society’s quarterly Minnesota History. In his story about Mikhail Mikhas and Raisa Gorbachev to Minnesota on June 3, 1990, Titled “Red Stars over Min- nesota,” the article discusses the preparation for and participation in Mikhail Gorbachev’s visit day itself, and recalls the prevailing mood of optimism in 1990 about the possibilities for international cooperation between the US and USSR.

Alumnus

The American Research Institute of the South Caucasus (ARISC) has a new repre- sentative in Yerevan, Richard Antaramian (75), Richard, who earned a B.A. in Polit- ical Science as well as the undergraduate certi- ficate in REECA, is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in history at the University of Minne- sota. Richard will be providing guidance to U.S. scholars on how to conduct research in Armenia, including information on Armenian archives, local scholars and permits. Richard will also be coordinating several lectures and talks in the Yerevan sponsored by ARISC.

Greg Gaut (St. Mary’s University of Min- nesota), together with his wife, Marsha Nef, published an article in the Winter 2009/10 issue of the Minnesota Historical Society’s quarterly Minnesota History. In his story about Mikhail Mikhas and Raisa Gorbachev to Minnesota on June 3, 1990, Titled “Red Stars over Min- nesota,” the article discusses the preparation for and participation in Mikhail Gorbachev’s visit day itself, and recalls the prevailing mood of optimism in 1990 about the possibilities for international cooperation between the US and USSR.

Mays is currently teaching intensive elementary Estonian. He returned to Madison for BALSSI 2009, Zachary Kelly’s post-doctoral events in Yerevan sponsored by ARISC. He will also be coordinating several lectures and talks in the Yerevan sponsored by ARISC. Mays will also be providing guidance to U.S. scholars on how to conduct research in Armenia, including information on Armenian archives, local scholars and permits. Richard Antaramian (75), Richard, who earned a B.A. in Political Science as well as the undergraduate certificate in REECA, is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in history at the University of Minnesota. Richard will be providing guidance to U.S. scholars on how to conduct research in Armenia, including information on Armenian archives, local scholars and permits. Richard will also be coordinating several lectures and talks in the Yerevan sponsored by ARISC.

Mays’s advisor Michael Corradini said that he was initially most impressed with Mays’s interest in energy analysis and policy. He describes his time in Latvia as "realizing how important Central Asia is going to be in the next couple years.”

For this reason, he predicts broad opportun- ities for those studying Central Asia and Rus- sia. Wampler called Russia’s future “unclear” in light of its deteriorating democratic situation.

“It’s really exciting time to be studying Rus- sia, maybe even more so than in the Cold War era,” Wampler said.

After his two-year post in Tajikistan ends, he plans to return to the region periodically. As always, he’s pursuing a variety of endeavors, such as getting his photo exhibit “Darfur in Brooklyn” into a permanent collection and finishing his second play but Wampler’s Cen- tral Asia focus will remain in the forefront.

“I continue to promote understanding bet- ween the U.S. and Central Asia for the rest of my life,” he said.

Wampler is currently teaching intensive elementary Estonian. He returned to Madison for BALSSI 2009, Zachary Kelly’s post-doctoral events in Yerevan sponsored by ARISC.

“Among the things that make it an attractive city, but it’s a fascinating place,” Mays said. There’s lots of stuff going on all the time, in Russia in gen- eral.”

Without background knowledge from RE- ECAS, “My Fulbright would have been a lot weaker and a lot less informed,” Wampler added. “It would have been a weak theoretical base and I wouldn’t have had the skills to do research without CREECA.” He plans to draw on his REECAS skills once again for his Foreign Service posting in Tajik- istan. According to Wampler, his knowledge base has grown to encompass all of the topics involved in serving as an information officer. Wampler said that most people don’t “realize how important Central Asia is going to be in the next couple years.”

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“I continue to promote understanding bet- ween the U.S. and Central Asia for the rest of my life,” he said.

The UW Press has used its share of the initiative’s publishing funds mostly to keep its catalog growing. According to Corradini, not enough engineering students study a for- eign language.

Extensive prospect exist for Russian speakers in any field, Mays noted. “What I’ve discovered is that there are a lot of opportunities for people who want to study Russian and not a lot of whole people who take advantage of them,” he said.

Mays noted that his language skills are not enough for him to read Russian literature.

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Children’s lit fest crosses borders

T he eighth annual Children’s and Young Adult Literature Celebration, sponsored by the Wisconsin International Outreach Consortium, was held in the Memorial Union on the UW-Madison campus on Saturday, November 21, 2009.

This program, which aims to present unbiased and informed literature about cultures from around the world, attracts teachers, school and public libraries, and students and faculty of education and library science. Megan Schliesman, librarian at Lodi High School, gave a brief interview with Janel Anderson and a few highlights of the day can be found below.

“I really think of this day as a seed that we can plant for kids,” said Anderson.

By Nancy Heingartner
CREECA OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Lodi holds int’l day

By Nancy Heingartner
CREECA OUTREACH COORDINATOR

News & Updates

Undergraduate students

CREECA would like to extend its congratulations to four students who received the Undergraduate Certificate in Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies (REECAS) in December 2009.

Samuel Balistreri-Daurn completed a double major in French and History, with a strong interest in Eastern European and Russian Studies. After graduation, Samuel will be working and preparing to take the LSAT; he plans to attend law school in the new year.

Samantha Reigninger studied Arabic and Russian at UW-Madison. Her senior thesis, written under the direction of Professor David McDonald in History, examined the_Armenian genocide of 1915, looking at the Dashnak's (a nationalistic group formed in Russia) and their influence in the Ottoman Armenians.

Samantha plans to pursue graduate-level work in museum studies, with an eye towards an eventual career as a museum curator. She is currently applying for museum-related positions in Washington, D.C.

Lauren Thorpe majored in History, but took Russian and Central Asian and Cultural literature. Lauren notes that “the courses and professors in these fields, specifically for Russian and Central Asian topics, are the most interesting and well taught classes I’ve had while in school.” Lauren plans to pursue a career in marketing and public relations.

Proving the old adage “It never hurts to ask,” Alexis Schrube (’09) received her certificate in December 2009, three years after graduating from UW-Madison with a major in Political Science. Upon receiving her degree, Alexis lived and worked overseas, developing interest in the languages of Asia, or Eastern Europe in anthropology, political science, sociology, or geography. Professor Gehlbach was recognized in November 2009 in Boston at the 41st National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

Graduate students

Stephanie Richards, Ph.D candidate in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, received the J. Thomas Shaw Prize for the best graduate student paper presented at the 41st National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. She gave a paper in October 2009 in Barrow, Alaska, on the Inupiaq language and culture. The conference was organized by the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Jambul Askievzev, a graduate student in the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia, has been awarded a Graduate Student International Field Research Award from the Division of International Studies. The award provides funding for students who have not yet reached dissertation status to conduct preliminary field research as they develop their dissertation topics. Jambul will spend part of summer 2009 conducting research in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

CREECA faculty, academic staff, and honorary fellows

CREECA would like to offer its congratulations to Scott Gehlbach, associate professor of political science, whose book Representative Through Transnational Networks and Developments in Postcommunist States was award- ed an honorable mention by the committee of the AAASS Davis Center Book Prize in Political and Social Studies (for an achiev- ing monograph published on Russia, Eur- asia, or Eastern Europe in anthropology, political science, sociology, or geography). Professor Gehlbach was recognized in No- vember 2009 in Boston at the 41st National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

Halia Filipovic, professor of Slavic languages and literature, gave an invited lecture for “Beyond Lions: Re-presenting Russia” at the International Conference in November 2009 in Boston at the 41st National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

Kathryn Hendley, the William Voss-Bascomb Professor of Law and Political Science, has been honored by her prolific and signif- icant scholarship with a Kellett Mid-Career Award from UW-Madison. Professor Hendley, who also serves as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the University of Wisconsin School of Law, has published extensively on law in post-Soviet Russia.

From November 16-18, 2009, Milan Haun- der, an honorary fellow in the Department of History, gave a series of presentations on his research to audiences in Philadelphia, includ- ing a lecture titled “Million: New World War I ‘propaganda’ and ‘clamor’ from Czech Archives” at the For- eign Policy Research Institute. In attendance was the former US ambassador to the Czech Republic, Adrian巴斯.

On October 22, 2009, the NGO Friends of Chernobyl Centers, UX FOCCUS held its annual fundraiser at the Inn on the Park in downtown Madison. FOCCUS paid tribute to Norma Berlowitz, the founder of FOCCUS during a clinical assistant professor and staff event in the School of Social Work. Also recognized by FOCCUS was CREECA associate director Jennifer Tishler. In the past two years, CREECA has assisted FOCCUS with planning and implementing two national conferences, a study tour of Ukraine, and workshops for Open World delegations on community and health issues in Ukraine.

At the end of the fall 2009 semester, three FOCCUS instructors in the Department of Slavic languages and literature were named Honored Instructors by students living in University Housing: Ewa Mierzrowska (senior lec- turer), Oksana Merets (senior lecturer), and Jennifer Tishler (CREECA associate director). The three were recognized for having a positive impact on UW-Madison undergraduates, and for being an important element in the MSWs and their connectedness in their classes.

A three-year effort to develop online modules targeting advanced-level listening proficiency in Kazak and Uzbek has come to close with the completion of the Central Asian Interna- tional Literature Series Project. Supported by a grant from the Department of Education, housed in the Language Institute, and direct- ed by Professor Uli Schamiloglu (Languag- es & Cultures of Asia), the CAILPS consists of ten online lessons each in Kazak and Uzbek. Lessons target advanced-level learning and are based on videos with experts in history, music, biotechnology, and other areas of scholarship. Designed to...
City, students at UW impress Kazak teacher

Marzhan Arenova with students of Kazak.

By Jennifer Tishler

Associate Director

Marzhan Arenova is a lecturer in Kazakh language in the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia. She arrived in Madison in August 2009, having taught for several years at the Kazakh University of Humanities and Law in Astana, Kazakhstan. From 2003-2009 she was the head of the English department of that university, where she taught courses in cross-cultural communication, sociolinguistics, and English.

Marzhan brings to Madison a wealth of varied professional experiences. Not only does she hold a doctorate in linguistics from the N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Astana, but she has also received advanced-level training in translation and interpreting. To top it off, she is a professionally trained singer.

In the 2009-2010 academic year Marzhan is teaching three levels of Kazakh language. When asked about her Kazakh classes, Marzhan expresses enthusiastic pride for her Madison students, who hail from departments such as Geography, Languages and Cultures of Asia, and CRECEAS. “As I teach my native language to American students, I am happy to see how passionate they are in studying Kazakh and [their] desire to be aware of my culture and country,” Arenova reported. “They are eager to know more and more about the Kazakh language. For me, one of the surprising and unusual aspects of teaching Kazakh was that some of the American students have a rather profound background and [in it] I was really surprised by it. I could not have ever imagined that America I would be able to meet such students.”

Mechanical engineer builds on Russian study, Moscow job experience

Jacob Mays visits a honey market in Moscow.

By Alec Luhn

Web and Publications Assistant

UW engineering graduate student Jacob Mays is, by his own admission, a grammar freak, a trait that’s greatly aided his study of the declension-heavy Russian language.

“I actually like grammar a lot, which I realize disgusts most people,” he added. “I actually like grammar a lot, which I realize disgusts most people,” he added. “I think it was interesting how quickly I picked it up.”

Mays has found that his twin interests in languages and science not only complement one another, but also aid his ongoing study of Russian. Mays started learning Russian at Harvard University, where he first chose the language for its uniqueness even [as an undergraduate].”

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In his free time, Mays befriended other foreigners and got to know the city.

“I thought it was interesting how quickly you’re able to form bonds with foreigners in Russia,” he said. “It’s very easy to meet people from Central Asia, Mongolia, etc. You kind of think of Russia as homogeneous, but Moscow has an incredible amount of diversity.”
How far can language and area studies take you?

Renaissance man/CREECA grad joins Foreign Service

By Alec Luhn
WEB AND PUBLICATIONS ASSISTANT

If Damien Wampler were to teach a seminar on what you can do with an area studies degree, it would be tough to decide which department should host his course.

Since receiving his master of arts degree from CREECA’s interdisciplinatory Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies (REECAS) program in 2005, Wampler has become a published playwright with a work that draws on his experience volunteering and conducting research in Central Asia. He’s professionally exhibited his photographs from the Kyrgyz Republic and elsewhere. He’s worked as a recruiter for the Peace Corps in New York City. Most recently, he’s been accepted to the U.S. Foreign Service and is departing for the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on February 15.

Wampler says the skills he learned from the master’s program in REECAS helped him earn admittance to the Foreign Service. More broadly, Wampler used his time at CREECA to develop a bigger picture—his area specialization helps in passing to decide which department should host his course.

The cool thing about CREECA is that you can create the degree that you want,” Wampler said in a recent phone interview from Washington, D.C. “I liked the ability to tailor it to my own needs, which I couldn’t do at other schools.”

Even before he enrolled in the REECAS program, Wampler had accrued extensive experience living and working in Central Asia. After graduating from Boston University in 1999 with degrees in English and anthropology, he taught English as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic until 2001.

From there, he went on to teach English in Slovakia and then to work as a recruiter for an exchange program in Uzbekistan.

Wampler’s Peace Corps experience piqued his curiosity in Central Asia. He applied for the REECAS master’s program to place his personal experience within a more comprehensive understanding of the region.

“I had very local experiences and I wanted to get a bigger picture,” he said. “I wanted to see if what I was seeing in my Peace Corps village was part of a larger trend.”

At CREECA, Wampler chose geography as his department of concentration, working mainly with Professor Robert Kaler, but also took courses in anthropology and history. His additional exposure to political science coursework—an entirely new field for him—gave Wampler a different approach to employ when thinking about culture, one that he is confident will prove useful in his new Foreign Service position.

In fact, Wampler credited the area studies skills he developed in the REECAS program with helping him earn acceptance into the Foreign Service. Although he is an accomplished playwright—last year saw the debut of his Peace Corps village was part of a larger trend.”

Selections from one of Wampler’s series of photographs taken in Kyrgyzstan.

During his time as a graduate student, Wampler took a class on how to write a research proposal and collect data for social science research, which he said aided him in his work as a project manager for a Web site on Central Asian history and in his Fulbright research project. He went from a master’s thesis on religion in Kyrgyzstan to a Fulbright project on the topic.

Ten questions for Laura Weigel

Laura Weigel graduated from UW-Madison in 2009 with majors in International Studies and Russian Language and Civilization. From August to December 2009, she worked as a Participant Recruiter for the Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX) as part of American Councils for International Education.

1. What drew you to study Russian language and culture? Did you ever think you would someday work in Russia?

In my high school [Stratford (Wisconsin) Jr.-Sr. High School] there was a student from Russia on the exact same exchange program. I was just employed by—I thought, “Russia, that’s neat.” Then I worked on the program last year, so it’s like I’ve come full circle … But no, not at all, [the possibility of someday working in Russia] never crossed my mind.

2. How do you use your Slavic degree in your work and life?

Studying Russian at UW prepared me for the job I just did in Russia. Knowing the language was critical, but knowing about culture, too. I studied abroad through UW-Madison in Russia (Moscow), and that … helped me more than anything. It gave me the confidence to really speak Russian, not just kind of speak it.

3. How did you get your job in Russia? What was your favorite part about it?

I did it on the American Councils Web site. After I came back from study abroad, I started to always watch that. I really liked the chance to work with Russian youth. Part of it was interviewing students for a scholarship, and it was interesting to hear their opinions about what they would like to show American students and what they thought about America, just general cultural exchange stuff, their view of the world … It was nice talking to teenagers because they’re very honest, especially Russian teenagers. They’re not shy at all. And I got to travel all over. I saw tiny little Russian cities I never would have gone to otherwise.

4. How did you like living in Russia? How would you characterize the culture and the people?

I absolutely loved living there, but at the same time, it’s a different world … All the [Russian] people I worked with were friendly, hospitable and open. Also at times they were very honest; sometimes they say exactly what they’re thinking without taking your feelings into consideration. What I like about Russia is its extremes. Life is always up and down, but it’s always interesting. It’s an adrenaline rush just being there.

5. In your opinion, what distinguishes Slavic studies at UW-Madison?

The cool thing about studying Russian is that not everybody studies it. It’s a small world … but those are people I’ve crossed paths with again and again, even those from other universities. I’m always able to stay friends with them and run into them in Russia. For my last job, at first I was nervous because a lot of the other recruiters had a master’s but compared to my four American co-workers, I was surprised at how well I did. I was totally prepared; a degree from UW-Madison in Russian really laid the foundation well. I had a lot of experience just as an undergraduate that people from other universities hadn’t had.

6. What have been unexpected benefits of a Russian degree?

I feel like … having a specialization in Russian makes [another degree] stand out even more, as opposed to just international studies … Proving

Continued on page 10

Weigel administers a test to high schoolers in Penza.

Continued on next page

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