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# CREECA NEWS

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Winter 2014

## A Letter from the Director

Yoshiko M. Herrera



Yoshiko M. Herrera  
Director, CREECA

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Dear CREECA friends and colleagues,

We are very excited to introduce our new printed newsletter, which will appear twice a year, supplemented with monthly electronic updates. We hope this will be a good way to keep in touch. We look forward to sharing CREECA news as well as hearing from you.

CREECA is a vibrant and growing intellectual community. We are proud to say that at UW-Madison our faculty and students are engaged with Russia, Eastern and Central Europe, and Eurasia across a broad representation of disciplines and schools.

In the pages that follow we share with you some of the highlights from 2013, including a truly innovative outreach endeavor at the Oakhill Correctional Institution. We also would like to introduce one of our newest faculty members, Kathryn Ciancia, who has joined the Department of History; Roberto Carmack is the focus of our Student Spotlight.

We recap the Central Eurasian Studies Society conference which was held at UW-Madison and coordinated by CREECA last fall. You will see selected photos from CREECA events through 2013.

Be sure to also check out our upcoming spring events on our Web site:

[www.creeca.wisc.edu/events](http://www.creeca.wisc.edu/events)

Thanks for your support, and keep in touch!

**Yoshiko M. Herrera**

Director, CREECA

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science

## “The Student”

*Inside the Oakhill Prison Humanities Project*

The words of Anton Chekhov come alive, resounding within the walls of a bright, white classroom. On this wintry night Ivan Velikopolsky is not alone. Two students follow his dreary walk home, deciphering the intricate threads that tie his story together.

The students are inmates of the Oakhill Correctional Institution, a minimum-security facility in Oregon, Wisconsin. Throughout the year, the prison holds a series of eight-week-long humanities classes that have been taught by graduate students from various departments at the University of Wisconsin-Madison since 2005. There, on Thursday nights, students from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature discuss the works of great Russian writers. These volunteers have been teaching at Oakhill since 2009, starting with Naomi Olson who taught Russian literature, followed by Colleen Lucey who was the first to secure a Humanities Exposed Grant (HEX) to fund the program for the year 2010.

It is a unique class setting: a meeting-place of individuals with vastly different backgrounds and perspectives. As they explore these literary texts, teachers and students sometimes know

no more than each others' first names. Literature is their shared experience. The inmates lead even as they learn; asking questions and driving the course of the classroom conversations.

Since 2011 the theme for class has been “Life in Literature,” a title developed by Jose Vergara, the lead instructor at the time. He thought the title to be apt, as he planned to present biographies, memoirs and fictional narratives. In the years since, Vergara has found that the theme has taken on deeper meaning, as the men in the program often navigate the literature with a degree of self-reflection, relating back to experiences in their own lives.

*“Literature is a good window into our lives.”*



The course has expanded beyond the study of biographies. The focus of this particular evening is a discussion of Chekhov's short story “The Student,” led by Zachary Rewinski and Sergey Karpukhin. The participants read and analyze the story together. They dissect Chekhov's style and his choice of words; they ask questions about Russian home life in the countryside; they identify elements of allegory in Velikopolsky's story of Jesus and Peter. As the group converses, separating the various narrative threads in the story, they touch upon topics of philosophy, religion, and society.

Karpukhin later recalls that evening's conversations as “the most intellectually stimulating discussion” of a Chekhov story he has experienced to date. “It's the attention to detail that they [the students] bring to class. It's the integrity of reading. They try to make sense of what they read, honestly. They don't like it [the literature] if they don't understand it; and they try to understand it as much as they can,” he says.

Viewing the texts through the lens of varied individual histories allows for a depth of understanding that is different from academic discourse. For Rewinski, these insights are immensely valuable. “Literature is a good window into our lives,” he says. But more than that, according to Rewinski, this close reading and study of literature presents the participants with an affirmation of human worth. “There's very little there that will [...] say that they are valuable people. If there is any one thing that I hope having these classes combats, it's that opinion,” he says.

Rewinski and Vergara have had the chance to observe many students over the past few years. They note that the experience of the inmates as they participate in the course has been positive. Rewinski has seen students who sign up for multiple classes in the humanities program or continue the study of Russian literature from course to course. He has witnessed students who begin reading at a fourth-grade level improve over time to the point where they are able to confidently navigate Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* or Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*.

*“This is where literature makes sense. You talk about human experience described in literature and it makes sense on a human level.”*



Zachary Rewinski (L) and Sergey Karpukhin (R).

“This is where what I do meets the real world,” notes Karpukhin, “This is where literature makes sense. You talk about human experience described in literature and it makes sense on a human level. Not as literary construct, not as an intellectual idea, but as experience.”

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*On Thursday, January 30, 2014 CREECA hosted a panel discussion with current and past instructors of the Oakhill Prison Humanities Project. The panelists shared their observations, teaching experiences, and spoke of how the program has fostered their own development as teachers.*

Full audio of the discussion can be found on our Web site:

[www.creeca.wisc.edu/lecturearchive.html](http://www.creeca.wisc.edu/lecturearchive.html)

# The Central Eurasian Studies Society Conference Returns Home

*After nearly a decade, the University of Wisconsin-Madison once again hosts the annual Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS) conference.*

It is a cool October evening in Madison, Wisconsin. As the sun sets on Lake Mendota, students, professors, and visiting scholars make their way into Alumni Lounge, a long, glass-paned reception hall at the Pyle Center. The room begins to fill and the steady hum of conversation grows, accented by the sounds of laughter. For Uli Schamiloglu the atmosphere is a warm reminder of earlier days of camaraderie and discussion.

The Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS), and its annual conference, developed from a series of workshops on Central Asian Studies that were hosted from 1996 to 2000 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and organized by Uli Schamiloglu, Professor of Turkic and Central Eurasian Studies. During the final session of the 1999 workshop, the participants met to discuss the future of the field of Central Asian Studies. Interest in the region was increasing following the fall of the Soviet Union, and there was a growing desire to establish an individual identity for the Central Eurasian regions. Thus, CESS formalized as a scholarly society in 2000.

Until 2003, the annual CESS conferences were held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As the organization grew, the society then rotated through secretariats in various academic institutions in the United States and the conference was hosted at a different venue each year. In 2013, after nearly a decade, the CESS conference was held again in Madison, with CREECA taking on the role of host. Organizing was spearheaded by CREECA associate director Jennifer Tishler, CREECA affiliate Virginia Martin, and Uli Schamiloglu. "It is really special to us to bring it [the conference] back here," said Martin.

The conference, which ran from October 3-6, 2013, boasted a strong and diverse attendance of 250 participants from Central Eurasia, South Asia, Europe, Canada, and the United States. A delegation from Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan was led by its Vice-President for Student Affairs and International Cooperation, Kadisha Dairova. Many alumni from the University of Wisconsin-Madison also came together at the conference.

There were unique opportunities for students and scholars affiliated with CREECA to showcase their talents and achievements. Honorary fellow Heather Sonntag curated a photo exhibit featuring the work of the photographer Orden from the Anahita Gallery collection (Santa Fe, New Mexico). During the late 1800s, Orden traveled extensively from Merv to Samarkand and captured unique images of colonial Central Asia. Roberto J. Carmack, won the CESS Graduate Student Best Paper Award for his paper "History and Hero Making: The Sovietization of Kazakh Frontline Propaganda, 1941-1945."



L-R. CREECA Director, Yoshiko Herrera, alumna Malavika Jagannathan, and associate director, Jennifer Tishler at the welcome reception.

*"It is really special to us to bring the conference back here."*



L-R. CESS members Marianne Kamp, Scott Levi, and Virginia Martin.

One significant goal for events such as the CESS conference is to generate conversation and present studies on Central Eurasia in an expansive, global context. This was an important factor in choosing the keynote speaker. "We wanted a keynote speaker who could talk broadly about the region and its place in the world. It is a chance for us who are immersed in the region to hear what other people think," said Virginia Martin on inviting writer and journalist Steve LeVine to deliver the keynote address.

LeVine has vast experience in the regions surrounding the Caspian Sea, having served as a foreign correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. He is also the

author of two books on the region, *The Oil and the Glory* (2007) and *Putin's Labyrinth* (2008).

For Jennifer Tishler, associate director of CREECA, hosting the CESS conference was a way to foster stronger linkages among scholars on campus and to connect with national and international scholars, several of whom are UW-Madison alumni. "I am very grateful for the participation of UW-Madison students, faculty, and staff. History graduate student Kathleen Conti mobilized a great group of student volunteers who helped with conference logistics and who opened their homes to visiting graduate students. Of course many UW professors, staff, and graduate students with long ties to CESS organized panels and presented papers, but it's great that so many CREECA professors and academic staff who were not previously connected with CESS served willingly as panel chairs and discussants. In my view, these connections were mutually beneficial to both UW-Madison and Central Eurasian Studies Society."

## CREECA STAFF

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To learn more about CESS activities, publications, and the 2014 conference please visit: [www.centraleurasia.org](http://www.centraleurasia.org)

## Student Spotlight Roberto J. Carmack

*In each issue of our newsletter we will introduce one of our exceptional students. It is a wonderful opportunity for us to share their perspectives and accomplishments. We are excited to make connections within the CREECA family and beyond!*



Roberto J. Carmack after receiving the award for 'Best Graduate Student Paper' at the 2013 CESS conference.

*"I wish to push beyond the bounds of the field of history while still applying a rigorous methodological approach."*

Our spotlight is on Roberto J. Carmack, a doctoral student in the Department of History. Roberto studies the history of the former Soviet Union, in particular the mobilization of the populations of Kazakhstan during World War II.

Roberto was born in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Mexico but spent most of his life in Albany, New York. He has lived and studied in Almaty, Moscow, and several cities in Central Eurasia.

He attributes his understanding of how ethnic diversity operates outside of an American context to his many travels. During his time in Kazakhstan, he was struck by the similarities that exist between the Kazakh rhetoric of multi-ethnic cooperation and the discourse of ethnic diversity in the United States. He finds this fascinating, given the vastly different political and social conditions that prevailed in the former USSR and the United States.

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### What draws you to study the CREECA regions?

I was drawn to the study of the former Soviet Union because I wanted to explore how decades of Soviet rule contributed to the making of modern Central Asian identities. Many historians who study Central Asia portray the Soviet period as some sort of interruption that disrupted the "natural" course of development of Central Asian societies. While I do not reject this approach entirely, I believe that contemporary political developments in the Central Asian republics can be best understood through reference to the Soviet period.

**Can you describe your experience at the 2013 CESS conference? What were some highlights?**

The CESS conference was a marvelous opportunity to become acquainted with brand new research pertaining to Central Eurasia that is being produced by scholars working in multiple disciplines. It was also interesting to meet scholars whose work I'm familiar with - it's always nice to match a face with a book!

**What does winning the Best Graduate Student Paper Award mean for you?**

It was truly an honor to be acknowledged by CESS in this manner. The award means a great deal to me because it demonstrates that my research has a wide appeal to scholars who study Central Eurasia. In my opinion, compartmentalization by field is a problem in Central Eurasian studies, and in the future I wish to push beyond the bounds of the field of history while still applying a rigorous methodological approach to the study of Kazakhstan and the Soviet Union. This award inspires me to pursue this goal!

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## Faculty Spotlight Kathryn Ciancia

*CREECA is pleased to welcome Kathryn Ciancia, an assistant professor in the Department of History who teaches courses on Central and Eastern Europe.*



(Picture courtesy Kathryn Ciancia)

**Tell us a little bit about yourself.**

I was born and grew up near Liverpool in England. My grandfather came to the UK from Poland during the Second World War, and when I was a teenager, he asked me to write down his life story from his birth until the end of the war. While I didn't study any Polish history as an undergraduate, my granddad's

tales of life in Poland prior to the war must have piqued my interest in the 1920s and 1930s! After completing my undergraduate and master's degrees in England, I moved to the US in 2005 to start my PhD at Stanford and then continued there as a postdoctoral fellow in 2011. After eight years in sunny California, I am now enjoying the snowy Wisconsin winter for the first time!

*"I try to foster skills of empathy, asking students to imagine the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of ordinary people across time and space."*

**What are your research interests?**

My research focuses on Poland between the two world wars, with an emphasis on how Poles conceived of themselves within the wider world. In my current book project I explore the ways in which Polish national identity was shaped by perceptions of—and encounters with—Poland's multiethnic eastern borderlands, areas that are now part of Ukraine. I'm particularly interested in how different sets of people, including border guards, boy and girl scouts, and military settlers, carried ideas of Western "civilization" eastwards, and—in particular—how they perceived Ukrainians, Jews, Poles, and others who lived in the east. I'm also beginning work on a second project that deals with the movement of Poles (including Polish citizens who did not primarily define themselves as "Polish") around the world—to places as far afield as Palestine, South America, Africa, and the United States.

**What are you teaching this year? What is your teaching philosophy?**

This fall, I taught a lecture class on Eastern Europe from 1900 until the present day, as well as a seminar on mass violence. In Spring 2014, I'm excited to be teaching a class on the history of Poland and a graduate seminar on modern Eastern Europe. In all my classes, I encourage students to think about the connections between Eastern Europe and the wider world—through themes like migration and the international circulation of ideas—as well as the ways in which studying people's experiences in this part of the world can help us to understand current events, such as the Arab Spring and the anti-government protests in Ukraine. Overall, I try to foster skills of empathy, asking students to imagine the experiences, emotions, and perspectives of ordinary people across time and space. To this end, I also use fictional characters in my lectures and classroom activities, a technique I began to develop as a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford. For more, see my co-authored article in *Perspectives on History*.

**A fun fact about yourself that you'd like to share.**

I'm a big Liverpool soccer club fan—and have been since the age of 6. Although I don't think anything will replace my love for soccer, I have recently started to enjoy watching American football too—I think it's the Green Bay Packers effect. I've also had the chance to go to a Badgers basketball and a football game—and look forward to going to many more in the future.

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# Updates from the CREECA Community

*Faculty, Staff, Students, and Alumni*

**Faculty and Academic Staff**

CREECA affiliate **Virginia Martin** published "Using Turkic-Language Qazaq Letters to Reconstruct Local Political History in the 1820s-30s" in the volume *Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th-Early 20th Century)*, edited by Paolo Sartori as part of the Brill Inner Asian Library Series.

**Scott Gehlbach** (professor of Political Science) was awarded the Abram Bergson Prize by the Association for Comparative Economic Studies for his article, co-authored with John S. Earle, "Did Post-Communist Privatization Increase Mortality?" The prize acknowledges the best article published in the journal *Comparative Economic Studies* in the previous two years. In 2013 Gehlbach also published the book *Formal Models of Domestic Politics* with Cambridge University Press and co-authored an article on "Privatization" with Earle and J. David Brown in the *Oxford Handbook of the Russian Economy*, edited by Michael Alexeev and Shlomo Weber.

**Manon van de Water** (professor of Theatre and Drama) was awarded a Vilas-Phipps Distinguished Achievement

Professorship. Her book *Theatre, Culture and Youth: A Critical and Historical Exploration* (Palgrave, 2012) received the 2013 American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) Distinguished Book Award. In September 2013, van de Water led a five-day workshop for the Theatre Leadership Institute at the Meyerhold Center in Moscow and in November 2013 was the Honorary President of the Jury at the Tandarica Puppet Festival, in Bucharest, Romania. In fall 2014 Professor van de Water will begin a half-time appointment with the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature.

**Graduate Students and Alumni**

**Kathleen Conti** (History) contributed a chapter, titled "'My Country is Russian Literature': History and Literary Development in the Golden Age," for the forthcoming volume *Russia's Golden Age*, edited by Rachel Stauffer.

**Kyle Marquardt** (Political Science) received a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) award for 10 months of research in Moldova and Russia in 2013.

**Nicole Butkovich Kraus** (Sociology) was recognized with a College of

Letters & Science Teaching Fellowship in spring 2013. The award is the highest recognition the College awards to graduate student teaching assistants. In addition to receiving a cash reward, Kraus also led three training sessions for new and returning TAs in fall 2013. In September 2013 she published an op-ed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* titled "Focus on children to defeat Russia's antigay law."

Alumnus **Evgeny Finkel** (Ph.D. in Political Science, 2012), an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at George Washington University, received the American Political Science Association's 2013 Gabriel A. Almond Award, which recognizes the best doctoral dissertation in the field of comparative politics, for his work "Victims' Politics: Jewish Behavior during the Holocaust."

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*This is just a small sample of the excellent work being done by CREECA faculty, staff, students, and alumni. We will feature more updates in our upcoming electronic and print newsletters.*

*Please send your submissions to [communications@creeca.wisc.edu](mailto:communications@creeca.wisc.edu)*

## Make a Contribution to CREECA!

Every gift enables CREECA to do something we could not otherwise have accomplished; whether it is support for undergraduate and graduate students, an additional lecture, or a course development grant.

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**Top Row:** (Left to Right) Malika Taalbi, Elementary Uzbek student, summer 2013; Lt. Col. Robert Schaefer at the CREECA lecture series, October 2013; Milan Simic and Cecelia Leugers volunteer at the CESS registration table, October 2013.

**Bottom Row:** (Left to Right) Zolotoi Plyos, Midvale Elementary School, April 2013; Uli Schamiloglu and Scott Levi at the CESS welcome reception, October 2013; Educators at CREECA's annual Teacher Workshop, August 2013.