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CREECA NEWS

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CENTER FOR
Russia, East Europe,
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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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A Letter from the Director

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*Cover photo taken by Milan Simic
at Lake Teletskoye*

Greetings to our alumni, friends, faculty, staff, and students! This issue of the CREECA newsletter highlights the greatest asset of our center: its people. You will read about innovative new research by Professors Rachel Brenner and Manon van de Water, whose projects explore the cultural and literary dimensions of the human experience in Poland and Russia, respectively. On the more quantitative side of things, we check in with 2015 political science Ph.D. Kyle Marquardt, whose postdoctoral fellowship allows him to explore the links between language, ethnicity, and mobility in Eurasia. Our feature article on the summer 2015 study program of students from Nazarbayev University highlights the synergies that develop when professors and students work together on shared research. We also look back at the spring 2015 visit by documentary filmmaker Robin Hessman, whose award-winning film *My Perestroika* brought CREECA students, faculty, and community members together for discussions about the complex experiences of five childhood friends in Moscow during perestroika and today.

Check out the vivid photographs submitted by graduate students who received awards to conduct exploratory field research in the regions. You will also see students who took Kazakh at our annual Central Eurasian Studies Summer Institute and two young participants on our inaugural Pushkin Summer Institute Abroad, a pre-college Russian language program in Latvia funded by a grant from the National Security Language Initiative for Youth.

This annual review gives a snapshot of the amazing accomplishments of our affiliates, but does not tell the whole story. For more timely updates on their many impressive activities, please contact us to receive the “CREECA Monthly” E-Newsletter. Those of you in the Madison, Wisconsin area can also catch up with the many talented people in the CREECA community by joining us for our Thursday afternoon lecture series during the academic year. For the schedule, see the CREECA homepage, creeca.wisc.edu. Please keep in touch!

Ted Gerber
Director, CREECA

UW Hosts Nazarbayev University Students

UW-Madison welcomed 60 students from Kazakhstan during summer 2015 as a part of its strategic partnership with Nazarbayev University. CREECA coordinated the effort, working with campus partners on a comprehensive program for the NU students.

“Be sure to expand your horizons while you’re here,” writes one student from Madison to peers at home in Kazakhstan. “Also, don’t forget to study hard.”

In summer 2015, UW-Madison hosted 60 students from Nazarbayev University (NU) in Kazakhstan for an eight-week academic and cultural program that blended rigorous coursework with opportunities to expand horizons. The students, 30 from NU’s School of Science and Technology (SST) and 30 from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS), came to Madison through the Visiting International Student Program, or VISP.

The students’ visit was one part of a larger University of Wisconsin-Madison Partnership with Nazarbayev University. Founded in 2009, NU is a young, dynamic institution. In order to bolster its academic services in its formative years, NU has forged strategic partnerships with several international universities, among them UW-Madison.



NU students gather at Union South
Photo credit: Laura Weigel

UW-Madison staff and faculty worked together with NU faculty to design a student-centered program with a central research focus. The 30 SST students were enrolled in Geoscience 376: Physical and Historical Geology with Dr. William (Bill) Barker, Director of UW-Madison's Offices of Research Policy and Industrial Partnerships. The NU students came with a range of majors, including computer science, biology, chemistry, mathematics, and robotics.

This was Barker's second summer teaching a specialized geology course for NU students, one that provides intensive hands-on research experience. "By the first week, they've had a field experience, they've had their geographic information system training, and they've had their advanced library training. We do a lot that first week," Barker outlines. Students also participated in ongoing research being conducted at the Lakeshore Nature Preserve and UW Arboretum, gathering data on pollination.



Geoscience 376 fieldtrip to open-pit mine
Photo credit: Bill Barker

"We recorded which plants were blooming and counted the number of pollinators present in the area," NU student Yana Kim explains. "They are taking this data in order to see whether there are any correlations between the amount of pollinators, weather conditions, and the use of pesticides." Students also took pictures and GPS coordinates to document their recordings. At the end of the course, students made a formal research presentation to the class.

In addition to their fieldwork for the pollinator project, Barker incorporated other geology fieldtrips to Devil's Lake, Cave of the Mounds, and an open-pit mine south of Madison. Kim, a computer science major, liked the course even though it was not directly related to her major. "I really enjoyed our fieldtrips because we went to natural areas, where there are a lot of flowers, bees and other small animals. It was so wonderful to just be there and observe the world around you," she says.

Thirty NU SHSS students with majors including economics, political science, and international relations took Agricultural and Applied Economics 375: Social Science Research Practicum with Professor Kyle Stiegert. The course was designed around the production of individual or small-group research papers.

Students' final projects covered a variety of topics, including the impact of Westernization on divorce rates in Kazakhstan; the effects of Islamic banking in Kazakhstan;

fiscal management of oil revenue in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan; the economic benefits to firms that practice empathy; immigration into Europe from North Africa; and the effects of the Eurasian Trade Union on various industries.

"The final product was totally my creation. I really enjoyed this positive attitude towards students."

Stiegert was impressed with the quality of the NU students' projects. "Some of them, if they continue with this work, could end up being publishable products for peer-reviewed journals," Stiegert says enthusiastically.

For some, the UW-Madison experience led them to consider new academic and professional pathways. In addition to taking either Geoscience 376 or AAE 375 as a required course, NU students enrolled in another UW-Madison summer course of their own choosing. Several students, including Yana Kim and Pavel Kosmynin, took Management and Human Resources 322: Introduction to Entrepreneurial Management. Kosmynin, an economics major, explains his choice: "I wanted to take a course that we don't have at NU. I chose Entrepreneurial Management because in recent times in Kazakhstan we have developed these business contests in companies."

Kosmynin asserts that his experience at UW opened a range of possibilities for his future. Although he had previously only considered private sector careers, his work in AAE 375 presented academia as a possible trajectory. His research project for the course focused on the factors of inflation in Russia. "I care about that because our countries are very closely connected. What happens to them [Russia] will happen to us [Kazakhstan] soon," he explains. All together, Kosmynin observes, his summer at UW "broadened the horizons of my opportunities."

For his part, Stiegert hoped to instill "an appreciation for the difference between being a person that collects information and truly evaluates information." He continues, "Most undergraduates have learned how to collect information. Getting them from doing that to actually interpreting information is sometimes a very difficult thing." Grasping these critical thinking skills can significantly boost students' confidence.

Shane Auerbach, a teaching assistant for AAE 375, also observed how the NU students' confidence grew at UW, explaining, "They know NU is an ambitious university, but they don't really know the degree to which being successful there is going to translate to outside institutions. So when they come to UW and see they can be successful in classes here, I'm hoping they get the impression that they're not just good. They're not just Kazakhstan's best students; they're top international candidates."

Take the case of student Nazerke Moldakyn. After receiving low grades for the first time in spring 2015, Moldakyn entered the VISP program feeling that she should

give up on pursuing a career. But her experiences here restored her self-confidence. She elaborates, “I had felt so disappointed in myself. But here, when I went to office hours with Shane [Auerbach], the first words he said were, ‘You did a great job.’”

This was an important realization for Moldakyn.

Because “everything was so flexible and even more student-oriented than at NU,” Moldakyn took ownership of her research project, which compared the nationalized oil industries of Russia, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia. She summarizes, “I got the feeling that this is *my* research. I’m not fitting the expectations of Shane [Auerbach] or Professor Stiegert. The final product was totally my creation. I really enjoyed this positive attitude towards students.”

And the feeling is mutual. Barker, Stiegert and Auerbach were all impressed with the NU students and found working with them extremely rewarding. They are eager to point out that the UW benefits from the relationship with NU as well. Barker notes, “We’re doing it because people are genuinely interested in scholarship. Lots of people have been able to advance their own scholarly agendas within the framework of this relationship, in a uniquely UW way. We’ve applied a much more collaborative perspective to the partnership with NU.”

As an extension of the Wisconsin Idea, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Partnership with Nazarbayev University is an opportunity for UW-Madison to extend the benefits of its knowledge, in this case throughout the world. With this partnership, Stiegert said, UW-Madison is establishing global connections that will benefit the state of Wisconsin and the



NU and UW students visit the International Crane Foundation
Photo credit: Laura Weigel

region by laying the foundation for economic and intellectual exchanges. Stiegert concludes, “Just having this dialogue always generates outcomes that tend to be positive and tend to surprise you. It’s hard to know when these advantages will come up, but they ultimately do.”

Visit <http://international.wisc.edu/nuproject/> to learn more about the project.

Robin Hessman Visits UW-Madison

The film director talked to students and screened My Perestroika.

Although Robin Hessman is best known for her award-winning documentaries, many students of Russian first encounter her work while learning the basics of the language. Hessman helped create an original Russian alphabet song during her time as producer of the country’s version of *Sesame Street*, called *Ulitsa Sezam*.

“It was one of the first things I watched in first-year Russian,” says Ainsley McNerney, a UW-Madison senior who is currently on the UW Russian Overseas Flagship Capstone program. “It was interesting to learn that she was one of the people behind that.”

Hessman visited UW-Madison in April 2015, uniting the efforts of several programs across campus. Over two days, Hessman met with students in the Russian Flagship Program, screened her film *My Perestroika*, delivered a guest lecture in the course “Russia: An Interdisciplinary Survey,” and spoke at CREECA’s Thursday lecture series.

Hessman’s success spans both television and film. In addition to producing *Ulitsa Sezam*, Hessman co-produced a PBS biography of Julia Child (*Julia! America’s Favorite Chef*) and co-directed the Academy Award-winning student film *Portrait of Boy with Dog* in 1994. Her documentary *My*

Perestroika has won several awards including Best U.S. Documentary at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and Best Documentary Film at the 2010 Milwaukee Film Festival.

My Perestroika follows five individuals as they grow up in Soviet-era Moscow, experience the collapse of the Soviet Union as teenagers, and then live in a new political landscape. Hessman shot the majority of the film herself and also used home movies of her subjects and others their age. According to Snezhana Zheltoukhova, former social hour facilitator for the Russian Flagship Program, the film is important for students because it helps them understand Russia’s past.

“The film is intimate, but at the same time very global.”

“As a student who has lived in Russia and has studied Russian for five years now, it was a very rare opportunity to get an intimate look at a Russian’s life,” adds McNerney. She notes that cameras were not always welcome during her travels in Russia, adding, “It’s really important in a volatile time like

now, to show Americans what a true Russian is. It's not what we see on TV, it's not the stereotypes we see in the United States."

During her visit to Madison, Hessman was careful to protect the subjects of her documentary. She chose not to provide updates on their lives until the final event, her CREECA lecture. Even then, she asked that the talk not be recorded. While visiting the Flagship Program, Hessman led an informal discussion focused on her work as a producer of *Ulitsa Sezam*, including clips from several episodes. For the Q&A session following the public screening, Hessman answered questions related to making the documentary and her

experiences.

For McNerney, Hessman's success is inspirational and shows "success in that sphere is possible."

Hessman's My Perestroika is available on DVD in CREECA's lending library. For information on this and other films in the collection, please contact CREECA Outreach Coordinator Nancy Heingartner: outreach@creeca.wisc.edu.

Alumni Spotlight

Kyle Marquardt

In this issue of our newsletter we check in with one of our recent alumni, Kyle Marquardt, who completed his Ph.D. in political science in 2015.



Kyle Marquardt received his Ph.D. in political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2015. His dissertation research examined support for separatism in Eurasian regions, positing that linguistic demographics are better predictors than ethnic identification of both individual- and region-level support for separatism. His findings indicate that scholars and policymakers interested in separatism should not conflate language and ethnicity, but should instead treat language as having its own impact on political behavior.

Where are you now and what kind of appointment do you have?

I am currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. My appointment involves working about half of the time on V-Dem-related projects, and half of the time independently on my own research. V-Dem compiled a cross-national time-series data set of indicators of democracy (released in January 2016), many of which rely on expert coding.

My V-Dem research focuses on developing strategies to aggregate the data provided by expert coders, and determining the characteristics that make coders reliable. Since an increasing number of social-scientific enterprises depend on expert coding, such work will provide a framework for the rigorous use of these data in the future.

What is the focus of your own research?

In addition to my work at V-Dem, I am continuing research related to my dissertation. More specifically, I am working on a book project stemming from the dissertation, as well as articles that use my original survey data to 1) conduct detailed analyses of the link between language, ethnicity and social mobility and 2) investigate new methods for quantitatively analyzing ethnic identity.

How have your experiences at UW-Madison informed your current work?

At the UW I developed many of the skills that have enabled me to both gather and analyze the data – both quantitative and qualitative – that I use at V-Dem and in my own research.

How does your own language study contribute to your research?

My language study has influenced every aspect of my research. First, it sends a clear signal of respect to regional interlocutors, especially those who speak less common languages. As a result, these individuals are more likely to speak openly with me than they would if I only spoke Russian and English. Second, many important materials – especially related to nationalist and separatist movements – are not available in Russian or English. Third, a large portion of my dissertation research involved designing and implementing a survey in four languages. Given that I intended the survey to measure very specific things, the fact that I was able to work directly with the translators meant that I was drastically more confident that the instrument captured my intended meaning than I would have otherwise been.

What are your future research plans?

I am currently working on extending the scope of my book project: I hope to conduct further survey work on the topic of language and separatism in regions outside of Eurasia, and to compile a cross-national time-series data set of relevant national linguistic demographics and separatism.

What do you like most about living in Sweden?

Living in Sweden is amazing on many different levels. Since I've spent most of my career either in the United States or Eastern Europe, living here has given me a very new perspective on how a government can organize a society so as to encourage equality in many different regards, as well as what that means in practice. This has also probably been the warmest winter of my life, which was not necessarily what I expected moving to Sweden, but it's a nice change of pace!

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New Faculty Research

Rachel Brenner

**What was your original inspiration for *The Ethics of Witnessing*?**

My research on the book began during my fellowship at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where I discovered one of the diaries. It was an amazingly complex and sophisticated record of a Polish woman-writer who devoted herself to rescuing Jews.

What was your research process and how did your concept for the book develop throughout?

This discovery [of the diary] started my search for more diaries by Polish intellectuals at the time of the Occupation, where I hoped to discover in-real-time recordings of the Jewish destruction which they were witnessing in their city, Warsaw. I became interested in the impact of the ongoing Jewish genocide on witnesses' ethical and emotional mindset. To what extent do the universal values of humanistic Enlightenment inform the witnesses' reactions? How did the pre-war exclusionary national particularism affect the responses to the Jewish tragedy? These questions which guided my research led to unexpected and fascinating findings about the ethical complexities of witnessing.

My research took me to Warsaw where I spent a few summers in libraries and archives. I found five extensive diaries which included the Holocaust period. The study of the diaries allowed me to gain insight into the formative years of the writers-diarists, their ideologies and worldviews – a context which illuminated their responses to the Holocaust.

What does winning the ASEEES USC Book Prize mean to you?

Winning the prize gives me enormous satisfaction; I am very grateful for the recognition of my work. But even more gratifying is the fact that the prize signals the importance of the question of the humanistic ethical fortitude of the witness of terror and genocide. In that sense the prize draws attention to the ethical responsibilities of all of us as witnesses of present-day atrocities.

What is your next research project?

At the moment I am engaged in writing the sequel to the book. The project focuses on early Polish fictional responses to the Holocaust.

Rachel Brenner is the Max and Frieda Weinstein-Bascom Professor of Jewish Studies and a member of the CREECA faculty. In 2015, the Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies awarded her the University of Southern California Book Prize in Literary and Cultural Studies for her book *The Ethics of Witnessing: The Holocaust in Polish Writers' Diaries from Warsaw, 1939-1945*.

New Faculty Research

Manon van de Water



Manon van de Water, the Vilas-Phipps Distinguished Achievement Professor, is a CREECA faculty member with appointments in the UW-Madison Department of Slavic Languages & Literature and the Department of Theatre & Drama. Manon is currently writing a biography of theatrical producer and director Natalia Sats.

Who is Natalia Sats and what attracted you to her as a subject?

Natalia Sats is the daughter of Ilya Sats, a composer who worked for the Moscow Art Theatre. She became head of the Children's Theatre section at the Theatre and Music Section of the Department of Education of Moscow Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies in 1917 when she was 15 years old. Sats is widely seen as the mother of "theatre for young audiences" as we have seen it unfold globally in the 20th century – that is, professional theatre by adults for children.

Despite all this, there is no biography of Sats' life and work in Russian or English. My aim for this book is to place Sats, her work and her life, in a cultural and historical context, highlighting the determination and accomplishments of a woman in a time that was dominated by men and constructing

a narrative of Soviet culture that is neither tainted by Soviet rhetoric, nor by Cold War biases.

Describe the research process for your book.

Much of the extant work is by Sats. She wrote several autobiographies, of which one compilation is published in English. She also wrote numerous articles on the right of children to quality performing arts experiences, a cultural education that should be the prerogative of all children. My research started with these writings, augmented by archival research in Moscow and interviews with people who knew her well, both professionally and personally. In all, my data will consist of published works by or about Sats in English and Russian, on-site archival research in the theatres she founded and worked at, interviews with people who knew her, and archival research in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, the Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum, the Russian Theatre Federation, and the International Association of Theatre for Children and Youth (ASSITEJ) archives.

What are the next steps in working on your Sats biography?

I will travel to the Child Drama archives at Arizona State University to see what is there. Sats was active internationally through ASSITEJ, founded in Paris in 1965, and the archives will have documents from Americans active in that organization. I also plan to go to Almaty, Kazakhstan in May to research the archives of the Theatre for Young Audiences she founded there during her period of exile, and hopefully interview one of the actors who is still there. Further, I will need to research the ASSITEJ archives that are housed in Berlin and Frankfurt, and interview some people in Berlin who knew her. In July I will go to Buenos Aires and see what is there on the period she directed two operas with Otto Klemperer in the Teatro Colon in the early 1930s.

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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) Elementary Kazakh students rehearse an interactive skit for CESSI's closing ceremony; Pushkin Summer Institute Abroad students fencing in Latvia; Miri Arab madrassa, Poi Kalyan, Bukhara, Uzbekistan, photo taken by Ph.D. student Madina Djuraeva while conducting summer research. **Bottom Row:** (Left to Right) Ph.D. student Milan Simic at Korbu Waterfall, Lake Teletskoye, South Siberia; Nazarbayev University and UW-Madison students share a meal; Filmmaker Robin Hessman speaks at CREECA during her trip to UW-Madison.