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# CREECA NEWS

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CENTER FOR  
Russia, East Europe,  
& Central Asia  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Fall 2016



# A Letter from the Director

## Ted Gerber



Ted Gerber  
Director, CREECA

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\* \* \*

Cover photo: Hillside Theater  
at Taliesin, Spring Green, WI

This fall marks an unusually active year for CREECA, even by its own high standards! Our activities have expanded, our staff is changing, and we are fortunate to have new resources to support our programs. I would like to mention several exciting projects. See, for example, developments in the Pushkin Summer Institute (PSI). Building on the domestic program and the study abroad component in Latvia, PSI embarks on another promising expansion in 2017 with the addition of Pushkin Scholars.

Our 2016 Central Eurasian Studies Summer Institute (CESSI) offered Tajik for the first time. We anticipate our largest enrollments yet in summer 2017, thanks to a Title VIII grant to provide fellowships for graduate students. Spread the word about this great opportunity to study Kazakh, Tajik, Uyghur, and Uzbek in Madison next summer!

I am also proud to announce that CREECA has been awarded \$1 million from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to support Russia-related research and training in the social sciences. The two-year project includes seed money for a new tenure-track faculty position in the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, post-doctoral research fellowships, a graduate student conference in summer 2018, and support for research, emphasizing collaborations between UW faculty and colleagues in Russia. Our success in obtaining this grant is a testimony to our strength in the social scientific study of Russia.

I want to conclude by thanking Nancy Heingartner, CREECA's outreach coordinator since 2007. Nancy expanded outreach activities in multiple directions and brought remarkable energy and enthusiasm to our enterprise. She took on new responsibilities ranging from student advising to managing CESSI. Congratulations to Nancy on her new position in UW-Madison's Institute for Regional and International Studies, which fortunately means she stays connected to CREECA! I am also delighted to introduce our new assistant director for operations, Kelly Iacobazzi, who takes over many of Nancy's duties. The opportunity to work with CREECA's dynamic and effective staff has been immensely rewarding, and Kelly has already shown that she will be another invaluable member of the CREECA team.

**Ted Gerber**  
Director, CREECA

## Pushkin Summer Institute Expanding Its Borders

*Since 2012, PSI has hosted summer programs at UW-Madison for high school students pursuing Russian studies. PSI partners with schools in Chicago, Illinois and Anchorage, Alaska. In summer 2015, PSI added an immersive study abroad component in Daugavpils, Latvia. In 2017, PSI will add a Pushkin Scholars program for PSI alumni enrolling at UW-Madison.*

“This is the program that budded my love of the Russian language! Russian was an ‘alright’ language until I went on the Pushkin Summer Institute to Latvia,” reflected one student after spending six weeks immersed in Russian language and culture in Daugavpils.

The Pushkin Summer Institute (PSI) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is a joint initiative of CREECA and the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic, with additional support from the Russian Flagship Program. Designed for students from underserved, low-income, and minority communities, PSI partners with American high schools with diverse populations and strong Russian language programs. Partner schools have included Noble Street College Prep and Pritzker College Prep in Chicago, Illinois and Anchorage West High School in Anchorage, Alaska. In 2017, The Noble Academy in Chicago will join the PSI community. The first Pushkin Summer Institute--a



PSI students volunteer at an orphanage in Daugavpils

six-week summer program on the UW-Madison campus for rising high school seniors--was held in 2012. The overseas program, called PSI Abroad, was added in 2015. Through the intensive study of Russian language, culture, and civilization, PSI aims to improve students' Russian language abilities and cultural competence; stimulate their interest in Russian studies; build lifelong critical thinking, reading, and writing skills; and prepare students, most of whom are first-generation college-bound students, for the demands of university life.

David Bethea, professor emeritus of Slavic languages and literature and the PSI faculty director, explains why he originally chose Alexander Pushkin, "Russia's national poet," as the organizing theme for the institute: "Russians refer to Pushkin as 'our everything.' His greatest poems and stories teach the reader how to think in new and different ways. He is considered Russia's most 'Russian' gift to the world, yet his African ancestry on his mother's side was instrumental in his sense of identity and in crucial aspects of his life and works."



PSI students at the Mark Rothko Art Center in Daugavpils

In its pilot year in 2012, PSI hosted 12 students for the summer session at UW-Madison. Interest has grown steadily, with 20-25 students attending each summer from 2013-2016. Enrollment in 2017 is projected to reach 30.

In 2015, PSI launched an international component to allow students to further their Russian studies overseas. Through funding from the National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, PSI sends high school seniors and recent graduates, many of them former participants in the Madison program, to Daugavpils, Latvia for six weeks of intensive Russian language study.

To offer the international component, PSI works with "Learn Russian in the EU," which provides customized training in Russian language and culture in Daugavpils, a city in southeastern Latvia where Russian is spoken by the majority of the population. "The goal is to give students from the domestic program an immersive Russian experience abroad," says graduate student Brian Kilgour, who served as a key coordinator for the first overseas program in 2015 and as assistant resident director in 2016. Students live with Russian-speaking host families in Latvia and are matched with Russian-speaking peer tutors. Learning happens through classes in Russian language, group activities such as singing and cooking (conducted in the target language), and more informal interactions with peer tutors. The students' academic coursework pushes them to improve their

Russian language skills, while living abroad provides many opportunities for cultural learning as well.

*"I loved the connections I made with many new friends! They will stay with me for a long time."*

While in Latvia, students visit museums, fortresses, and historical sites. They are also actively engaged, learning fencing from the Latvian National Team and volunteering at a local orphanage. Summarizing feedback from the students, Kilgour says, "The students enjoyed the cultural experiences with host families and Latvian peers the most. These people-to-people moments stood out as the highlights of their trip."

When asked about the most important accomplishment that can be linked to their exchange experience, one participant of the Latvia program enthuses, "I still talk to many of the volunteers [peer tutors] now. These people are so amazing! The culture is different but we are all human at heart and still strive for the same things, no matter where we are."

Another student adds, "I loved the personal connections I made with many new friends! They will stay with me for a long time. I hope to go back to Latvia to see them again."

The Pushkin Summer Institute is looking ahead to further growth in 2017. As the newest members of the PSI community, students from The Noble Academy in Chicago will be able to participate in the domestic program starting in 2017. PSI has also announced the inaugural "Pushkin Scholars" program for prospective UW-Madison first-year students who will be applying for admission in fall 2017. PSI will offer Pushkin Scholar awards to high-achieving participants of PSI who plan to continue their Russian studies at UW-Madison.

Although students will need to go through the standard UW admissions process, those who are accepted will receive priority consideration for financial support to continue learning Russian at UW-Madison. They will also be invited to apply for the Russian Flagship Program.

"We hope to continue encouraging these outstanding students to become proficient in Russian and start on interesting career paths," says Bethea. The Pushkin Scholar program will be administered through the Office of Admissions and Recruitment and the Office of Student Financial Aid at UW-Madison and will attempt to meet the financial need of the top graduates of PSI. Nineteen high-performing students who completed the 2016 domestic summer program at UW-Madison have been invited to apply to be Pushkin Scholars. The first cohort of Pushkin Scholars will join UW-Madison in the 2017-2018 academic year. Bethea explains, "By seeing to their financial situations as first-generation college students in a more concerted way, we can hopefully create a new stream of dedicated 'Russianists' from groups of kids who hitherto have been virtually unrepresented."

Visit [pushkin.wisc.edu](http://pushkin.wisc.edu) to learn more about PSI.

\* \* \*



# The Dragon Descends upon Wisconsin

*The UW-Madison Theatre for Youth staged a production of the Evgenii Shvarts fairy tale The Dragon.*

A team of UW-Madison faculty and students has revived Russian playwright Evgenii Shvarts's 1943 play *The Dragon*. This staging, an English translation and adaptation of the Russian original, is the culmination of a longstanding vision of UW-Madison Professor Manon van de Water.

*The Dragon* ran October 25-30, 2016 at the Fredric March Play Circle in the Memorial Union. In order to stimulate theatre for youth, the production team worked diligently to make *The Dragon* accessible, with affordable tickets and family-friendly matinee performances.



Lancelot (left) tries to save Elsa (middle) from the Dragon (right)

Van de Water is a Vilas-Phipps Distinguished Achievement Professor; the chair of the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic; and the director of Theatre for Youth within the Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies Program. This production of *The Dragon* emerged from the confluence of van de Water's appointments. She has wanted to stage *The Dragon* since arriving at UW-Madison in 1997. Her research focuses on Russian theatre for youth and *The Dragon* perfectly fits the mission, as she puts it, "to offer quality productions that respect young people's capacity to construct meaning, both on an emotional and intellectual level."

*The Dragon* was staged largely by students in the course "Literature in Translation/Theatre & Drama (LitTrans/T&D) 423: Slavic Drama in Context." Claire Mason, a graduate student in Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies, served as producer. She and van de Water had previously worked on a class reading of *The Dragon* with incarcerated people at the Oakhill Correctional Institution as part of the Oakhill Prison Humanities Project. The class reading was enormously well-received. "I fell in love with the play through their eyes," Mason says. The experience at Oakhill was revelatory and Mason realized, "Because it worked so well with the incarcerated people at Oakhill, we wanted to bring it to more of Wisconsin."

Mason was one of 13 students staging *The Dragon* for credit through LitTrans/T&D 423, which included undergraduate and graduate students. The course was designed as a truly interdisciplinary endeavor. Students handled myriad tasks in addition to performing. Some students did not perform at all, in

fact, but even the actors helped with integral production tasks like program design, lobby design, post-performance discussion, educational materials, promotion, and website management. "The interdisciplinary synergy is really amazing," van de Water emphasizes. "It's liberating to work in such a supportive environment where you can experiment."

Cultivating this environment was Director Jen Plants. Plants is a senior lecturer in the UW-Madison Department of English, where she teaches playwriting. She also wrote the adaptation of *The Dragon* for this production, cutting down the original play and updating some of the cultural references. To foster the supportive, interdisciplinary environment, Plants lets people work toward their strengths. "I'm not directing a play; I'm making a company," as she explains it. "If you treat people like artists, they make art. The impulse for art gets burned out of us as we grow up, but it's still there, for every single person. And you can rekindle it if you treat people like artists."

Van de Water and Plants agree that *The Dragon* is a particularly appropriate context for inspiring youthful creativity. The play was written during the era of Socialist Realism, a movement mandated by the first All Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. Soviet writers were forced to create works with linear storylines, clear distinctions between good and evil, and heroes conquering the evils of capitalism. This mandate resulted in a revival of fairy tales, with the genre's archetypes adapted to promote Soviet ideology to children. Shvarts became a master of the "Soviet fairy tale," penning a dozen plays between 1925 and 1958. Three of these plays, including *The Dragon* from 1943, became controversial for their more adult themes, particularly their confrontation of totalitarianism. Although Nazi Germany was the ostensible target of Shvarts's critique of totalitarianism, *The Dragon* and two other plays were banned in the Soviet Union for the implicit connection to Stalin's regime. These plays were not produced in Russia until Khrushchev's Thaw and are only performed sporadically to this day.

*"I want our production to be thought-provoking."*

As a fairy tale, *The Dragon* is an archetypal story about the hero Lancelot's battle to vanquish the dictatorial Dragon. Van de Water was particularly drawn to *The Dragon* during the 2011 protests of Governor Scott Walker and Wisconsin Act 10. "The theme of turning a blind eye to government corruption was very poignant," she says. But van de Water was unable to get the play picked up during the protests. When political conversation about totalitarianism emerged during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, van de Water acted to secure a production of *The Dragon* before the election. "One may contemplate what allegory *The Dragon* will stand for now, in Russia, under the Putin

regime,” van de Water says. “One may also contemplate what *The Dragon* means here and now, during this historic election in the United States.”

For van de Water and Plants, the strength of *The Dragon* lies in its appeal to both children and adults. “The play is hilarious, but very challenging. Children enjoy the dragons and knights, but there are a lot of elements that adults enjoy too,” van de Water explains. “There’s humor, juxtaposition between fantasy and reality, and anachronism between the fairy tale and modern technology.”

“*The Dragon* is funny and experimental. Adults and kids can enjoy it together, so it promotes conversation about what theatre for youth can be,” Plants concurs. Plants says that she is interested equally in the performance itself and what people talk about afterward. “I want our production to be thought-provoking. On one level, *The Dragon* is a simple fairy tale. On another level, it is a biting critique of how your will and sense of possibility change under authority.”

*The Dragon* was sponsored by UW-Madison’s Theatre and Drama Graduate Student Organization; Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies Program; Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic; and Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia.

After its run at the Fredric March Play Circle, *The Dragon* ran November 2-7, 2016 at Taliesin’s Hillside Theater. These performances were hosted as no-cost field trips for rural schools in Sauk County through funding from the Ira and Ineva Reilly Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment and the Taliesin Preservation. The long list of partner organizations is invigorating for van de Water and the production team. “So many constituencies were excited,” she says. “Giving back to and involving the community in the university is important and rewarding. It helps the students really see the impact of their work.”

Visit [uwmadisonfy.com](http://uwmadisonfy.com) for more about the UW-Madison Theatre for Youth.

\* \* \*

## Reaching Minds by Reaching Out

*We offer very special thanks to Nancy Heingartner for her years as CREECA outreach coordinator.*



CREECA has a mission to serve the larger community through outreach activities. From fall 2007 until spring 2016, those efforts were enthusiastically led by Nancy Heingartner, who designed numerous programs targeted to K-12 teachers and students, other institutions of higher education, business, media, and the general public. CREECA congratulates Nancy on her new position as assistant director for outreach with UW-Madison’s Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS). To mark her transition to her new position, Heingartner offered the following reflections on major activities that highlight her work with community members, children, and educators.

**The 2015 screening of the silent film *The Yellow Ticket*, the story of a Jewish woman in Poland who dreams of studying**

**medicine in Russia, was one of the biggest outreach events of the past year. How did that event come together?**

*The Yellow Ticket* was a lot of fun! The event was co-sponsored by the UW-Madison Cinematheque, which showcases rarely-seen films from around the world, and the Mosse-Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies. We also received a grant from the Anonymous Fund of the College of Letters & Science. There was a full house to see the silent film, accompanied by a live violin and piano performance of an original score. The score was composed by Grammy-winning violinist and vocalist Alicia Svigals. Marilyn Lerner, virtuoso pianist, was the other accompanist.

**What outreach have you organized for children?**

My favorite part of working as CREECA outreach coordinator has always been interacting with school children. I have met with kids as young as four and five all the way to kids who were about to graduate from high school.

The most common in-class presentation I have done for school children is an introduction to Russian language and culture. The topic is broad enough that I can tailor the content to meet the needs of the target audience. For smaller children, I would show a lot of photos of Russia, teach them to count to ten, and sometimes have them act out a traditional fairy tale. With older students, I would spend some time on Russian geography, politics, and current events. I taught all of the kids to sing a well-known Russian children’s song and also brought in a variety of traditional Russian foods for them to try.

Kids, especially the younger ones, tend to be very open-minded. I have found them universally eager to learn about Russia. They love saying words that sound funny to them. Many of them own nesting dolls--the traditional Russian *matryoshka*--and are excited to talk about the place they’re from. Most significantly, they cannot believe that Russian chocolate

is at least as delicious as American chocolate!

While working with older children, I use myself as an example to show how learning a foreign language enhances their futures and opens new doors.

#### **Tell us about CREECA's 'Day in...' series.**

During my tenure at CREECA, I organized "Day in Russia," "Day in East and Central Europe," "Day in Central Asia and the Caucasus," and "Day in the Baltics." These events were half-day mini-conferences open to high school juniors and seniors from around the state. The "day" always included a keynote address on a topic of interest by a member of the UW-Madison faculty, three breakout sessions, and a wrap-up cultural activity.

Breakout sessions--led by UW-Madison students, faculty, and even some community members--varied in topic, from languages, to history, human rights, sports, foods, travel, politics, and everything in between. I always tried to include interactive lessons on the folk dances of the featured region.

Over the years, I realized that these "days" were playing an important role in the academic careers of the students who attended. At the conclusion of each program, I would always be approached by several students (independently of one another) to tell me how exciting it was to learn about countries they'd never heard of until that morning.

#### **You taught Russian at Grandparents University, correct?**

Yes, in my eternal quest for new target audiences for outreach, I led a "Russian major" at Grandparents University (GPU) 2016, an initiative of the Wisconsin Alumni Association. I taught a class of grandchildren and their grandparents about Russian language and culture. They were an absolute delight! I am already looking forward to GPU 2017.

#### **What outreach activities have you organized for educators?**

I have worked with a lot of different teachers during the past eight years. They have taught in public schools, in private schools, in big universities, at small colleges, and at community and technical colleges. I always enjoy working with teachers since they are so curious and eager to learn.

Each summer CREECA offers a workshop in Madison for K-12 teachers. One of my favorites was "World War I and its Legacies" in 2014. It was held over five days in mid-June and was attended by around 25 teachers. The primary goal for these workshops is to send teachers home with class-ready lesson plans, on topics that they might not otherwise have time to teach, and that they can readily incorporate into their curricula.

Another fun program that I contributed to as part of the Wisconsin International Outreach Consortium was an annual celebration of international children's and young-adult literature. This was a one-day workshop that brought together Wisconsin teachers and librarians with the writers of globally-focused books for children to talk, listen, and share thoughts and ideas.

#### **How are you furthering your work on outreach related to Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern and Central Europe in your new position with IRIS?**

The CREECA-region program I am most looking forward to working on in my new position is a five-day teacher workshop in summer 2017 commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolutions. I will be working with Professor David McDonald, one of the leading experts in the field of Russian history, to put together a high-quality program that should appeal to a lot of Wisconsin teachers.

#### **Do you have any final thoughts you want to share?**

As CREECA outreach coordinator, I got to work with a wide variety of target audiences as well as partners across the UW-Madison campus and beyond. In addition to working with K-12 teachers and students, I collaborated with business people, community groups, members of the U.S. military, students and faculty at technical and community colleges and the UW System campuses, and the general public. Teaching different groups about Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia allowed me to share both my passion for this fascinating and critically important world region and my commitment to being a globally-engaged citizen. One of the best things about this is the fact that I have learned at least as much from them as they did from me.

\* \* \*



Central Eurasian Studies Summer Institute

# CESSI

[creeca.wisc.edu/cessi](http://creeca.wisc.edu/cessi)

**June 19 - August 11, 2017**

**Study Kazakh, Tajik, Uyghur, & Uzbek at the University of Wisconsin-Madison!**

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# CREECA Welcomes Kelly Iacobazzi

*Kelly Iacobazzi joined CREECA as assistant director for operations in October 2016.*



In October 2016, CREECA welcomed Kelly Iacobazzi as its new assistant director for operations. Iacobazzi will be CREECA's point person for outreach and has a varied portfolio of other projects, such as managing the Central Eurasian Studies Summer Institute (CESSI), coordinating recruitment and admissions for CREECA's certificates and graduate program, and heading up data gathering and records management for reporting.

Iacobazzi holds an M.A. in Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian regional studies from Harvard University and a B.A. in Russian with honors from Grinnell College. Her research at Harvard focused on nationalist political parties in Ukraine following the Euromaidan Revolution, and she has conducted field research in both Ukraine and Russia. Iacobazzi has also spent time in Prague, Czech Republic, where she worked as an English copy editor for a local law firm. She provided a preview of upcoming CREECA programming.

## What projects have you been working on since joining the CREECA team?

I have been focused mainly on organizing and promoting

CESSI, which will be held at UW-Madison, June 19 - August 11, 2017. CESSI 2017 will offer intensive courses in Kazakh, Tajik, Uyghur, and Uzbek to students and professionals from across the country. With the addition of Title VIII funding, we will be able to admit more students than ever before. So this is really an exciting time to be joining CREECA and CESSI!

## What are you looking forward to the most at CREECA?

I am eager to start planning CREECA's outreach events and developing our ties with the broader Madison community. I was very involved in community outreach as a student at Grinnell College. One of my favorite experiences was organizing the Russian Department's annual *Maslenitsa* celebration, where we made *bliny* and burned the traditional *chuchelo* (scarecrow) right on campus! I quickly learned that food was a great way to get people interested in Russian and Eurasian culture.

Speaking of community, I am also looking for new ways to engage and interact with CREECA alumni. We hosted the alumni reception at ASEES in Washington, D.C., and we have the CREECA Alumni Group on LinkedIn, but there is a lot more that we can do. So stay tuned!

*CESSI at UW-Madison offers comprehensive, intensive instruction in Central Eurasian languages together with a cultural program of lectures, films, and presentations introducing students to the rich world of Central Eurasian history and culture. In summer 2017, we will offer instruction in first- and second-year Kazakh, Tajik, Uyghur, and Uzbek.*

*New for 2017, CESSI will provide 10 Title VIII Fellowships to graduate students, researchers, and professionals who are U.S. citizens. Fellowships will cover tuition and fees, and provide a stipend of \$2,500 to cover living expenses for the summer.*

Visit [creeca.wisc.edu/cessi](http://creeca.wisc.edu/cessi) for further CESSI details.

## 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.

All gifts are tax-deductible.

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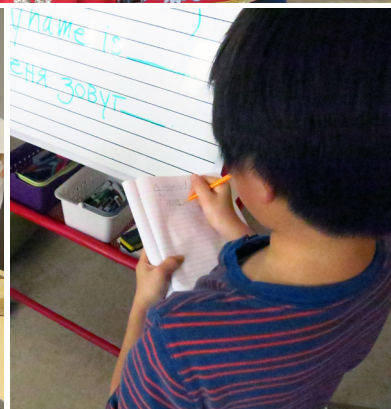


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**Top Row:** (Left to Right) Students from Kazakhstan and UW enjoy a summer evening on Lake Mendota. UW-Madison Theatre for Youth rehearsal of *The Dragon*. Russian folk ensemble Zolotoj Plyos plays during its April 2016 visit to Wisconsin.

**Bottom Row:** (Left to Right) *Pisanki*--traditional ornamental Easter eggs--decorated by UW students. Graduates of CESSI 2016 act out a wedding scene at the culmination of their summer language course. A student from Lincoln Elementary School in Madison copies a Russian phrase for a letter to his Siberian pen-pal.