

OCREECAS Newsletter

2025–2026 Academic Year

About OCREECAS

The Oberlin Center for Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies ([OCREECAS](#)) is designed to strengthen the study and teaching of Russian, East European, and Central Asian studies at Oberlin. Created in 1998 with support from the Clowes Fund, Inc. and other private contributions, its mission is twofold: to foster the development of curricular programming and cultural activities on campus that focus on the region, and to support student opportunities through OCREECAS grants.

Director [Kristina Paabus](#) and Internship Coordinator [Maia Solovieva](#) provide the administrative support and resources essential to developing innovative programming for Oberlin students and recent graduates. They also assess participant safety and program quality within the rapidly changing conditions of the region.

OCREECAS is committed to providing Oberlin students with opportunities for the study of the Russian language, and for studies in, about, and with the cultures and countries of the OCREECAS region. The OCREECAS region is defined as the following: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. *Please note that OCREECAS does not support travel to locations with a U.S. Department of State travel advisory level of 3 or 4.*

Statement on the Russian War in Ukraine

OCREECAS and REEES (Russian, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies) continue to condemn Russia's unprovoked attack and ongoing war of aggression against the sovereign nation of Ukraine. We grieve for the victims of this war, and we stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, along with all those who have protested the Russian government's actions.

OCREECAS Supported Events

OCREECAS supported a wide array of programming, events, and experiences by working with REEES and the larger campus community during the 2025–2026 academic year. The following initiatives highlight the breadth of this support:

Academic Year 2025–2026

- Building on the success of *The Russian Revolution and the Global South Reading Group* that began in 2021, students continued their studies under the guidance of Nicholas Bujalski, Assistant Professor of History, during the 2025–2026 academic year by examining the following two texts: L.D. Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism* (1920) and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Fall 2025

- OCREECAS, REEES, and Oberlin College celebrated the development of the Edith Clowes Professorship with a series of events in October that culminated in the panel discussion “*Art, Literature, History, and Dissent in Russia*,” featuring visiting and tenure-track faculty alongside distinguished scholar, Oberlin alumna, and generous donor, Edith Clowes. The presenters included:
 - Liana Battsaligova, Assistant Professor of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies
 - Nicholas Bujalski, Assistant Professor of History
 - Vladimir Ivantsov, Assistant Professor of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies
 - Olesya Ivanstova, Lecturer in German and Russian
 - Edith Clowes (’73), Brown-Forman Chair Emerita, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Virginia
- Liana Battsaligova, Assistant Professor of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, secured OCREECAS support to enable thirty students in REEES courses to attend Oberlin Conservatory’s production of Dave Malloy’s *Natasha, Pierre, and The Great Comet of 1812* at the Wurtzel Theater in December 2025.
- Vladimir Ivantsov, Assistant Professor of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, invited three virtual speakers to his first-year seminar course FYSP 085 “Rebellion, Revolution, Rock’n’Roll: Art and Dissent in Russia”:
 - Joanna Stingray (musician and author of *Red Wave*) led a conversation about her experience in the Soviet rock and artistic underground.
 - Victoria Lomasko (contemporary dissident artist) discussed her art and her books *Other Russias* and *The Last Soviet Artist*.
 - Katie Frevert (’22; major: Russian; current PhD student in Slavic Studies at UC-Berkeley) presented on the Siberian musical underground.
- Professor Ivantsov, Battsaligova, and Solovieva organized the purchase of the sixth edition of the *Golosa* Russian-language textbook for departmental use. This provides significant savings for Introductory Russian Language learners, as well as Russian Intensive Winter Term students and student teachers for many years to come.
- Maia Solovieva, Director of Russian House, OCREECAS Internship Coordinator, and Senior Lecturer in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, invited film director and screenwriter Toma Selivanova to her advanced Russian language course REEES 411 “Special Topics – Russophone Women’s Voices” to lead a class discussion with students about Andrey Zvyagintsev’s film *Elena*.
- Professor of Sociology Veljko Vujačić and Robert S. Danforth Professor of Politics Steve Crowley co-hosted Ivan Kurilla, Visiting Professor in the Department of History at The Ohio State University, for a public lecture titled “The Uses and Abuse of History in Russia.” During his visit, Professor Kurilla also met with students in Professor Solovieva’s advanced Russian course and Professor Crowley’s course on post-Soviet politics.

Spring 2026

- Liana Battsaligova, Assistant Professor of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, organized a seven-hour screening of Sergei Bondarchuk’s acclaimed film adaptation of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* for students enrolled in REEES 310 “War and Peace,” as well as members of Oberlin’s broader community.

REEES/Comparative Literature 334 “The Art of Storytelling,” where she presented on the Italian writer Italo Calvino in comparison to Russian storytelling traditions.

- Maia Solovieva, Director of Russian House, OCREECAS Internship Coordinator, and Senior Lecturer in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, hosted a virtual lecture by Dr. Curtis Ford, creator of the Russian Grammar YouTube channel and Tips4Russian.com, for students enrolled in beginning, intermediate, and advanced Russian language courses. Solovieva also hosted an OCREECAS Internship informational session in February 2026.
- Professor Solovieva secured funding from OCREECAS to support Russian-language Student Teaching Assistants during the spring semester. These assistants facilitated necessary Russian language practice for students both inside and outside the classroom.
- Students Nat Becker-Stevens ('26; major: Politics) and Katia Chapin ('26; majors: Politics and International Affairs) organized a campus visit by Darya Tsymbalyuk, Ukrainian scholar, author of *Ecocide in Ukraine*, and Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages & Literatures at the University of Chicago, in April 2026. Professor Tsymbalyuk met with numerous students and participated in two public events: an art-making workshop in the Oberlin Arb that was co-hosted with the Studio Art Tuesday Travelling Tea series and a lecture in Hallock Auditorium followed by a question and answer session. This visit was co-sponsored by OCREECAS, Studio Art, and Environmental Studies. Student organizers led the initiative and worked with Professor Kristina Paabus, OCREECAS Director and Chair of Studio Art, who provided technical guidance and support.



Darya Tsymbalyuk Art Workshop in the Oberlin Arboretum



Darya Tsybalyuk Art Workshop in the Oberlin Arboretum

OCREECAS Student Grants

During the 2025–2026 academic year, OCREECAS continued its grant programming to support students with three distinct award opportunities: the OCREECAS Russian Language Study Award, the OCREECAS Winter Term Grant, and the long-standing OCREECAS Internship Award.

OCREECAS Russian Language Study Award

In 2025–2026, OCREECAS provided six monetary awards to students who wished to supplement their Russian language learning with additional educational opportunities. Students typically use these funds during winter or summer to enhance their Russian language proficiency in the U.S. or abroad. This award is designed to promote language learning and is open to first-, second-, and third-year currently enrolled students who have taken at least two consecutive terms (fall, winter, or spring) of Russian language and intend to continue studying Russian at Oberlin. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis and require a statement of purpose, confirmation of participation in a program, a detailed budget, and brief letter of support from an Oberlin Russian language faculty member. Due to popular demand, in 2025–2026, the overall annual budget for this program was increased to cover six rather than four grants. Awards were allocated on a rolling basis, with a maximum amount of \$2,000 per student.

2025–2026 OCREECAS Russian Language Study Award Recipients:

- Spring 2026 – Madeline Flack ('27; majors: Politics and Russian) was awarded funding to continue her Russian-language learning while on study away at Daugavpils University in Latvia during spring semester 2026.

- Summer 2026 – Scarlet Craig ('27; majors: Law & Society and Russian) was recognized with funding to participate in Middlebury College's Russian Immersion Program in Middlebury, Vermont.
- Summer 2026 – Nila Grkinich-Myers ('27; majors: Comparative Literature and REEES) was granted support to attend the Yerevan: Russian Language Intensive in Yerevan, Armenia through The School of Russian and Asian Studies (SRAS).
- Summer 2026 – Julian Gorn ('29; majors: History and Russian) secured funding to study at the American Councils' Advanced Russian Language and Area Studies Program (RSLAP) in Yerevan, Armenia.
- Summer 2026 – Mea Johnson ('27; major: REEES) postponed her grant from the previous year to attend the Beloit College Center for Language Studies Summer Russian Immersion seven-week online program.
- Summer 2026 – Ezra Rudensky ('28; major: Politics; minor: Russian) received support to attend the four-week Russian Language Summer School at University of Tartu at Narva College in Narva, Estonia.

OCREECAS Winter Term Grant

In January 2026, OCREECAS awarded two grants (up to \$1,000 each) to assist students with Winter Term projects that were thematically related to the OCREECAS region. Projects could be individual or collaborative in nature and focus on creative, scholarly, or other pursuits. The OCREECAS Winter Term Grant was open to all currently enrolled students, with priority given to REEES students and majors, and additional consideration towards demonstrated financial need. The project location could be almost anywhere, but proposals require a thematic relationship to Russia, Eastern Europe, or Central Asia.

2026 OCREECAS Winter Term Grants:

- Arev Lima Boudakian ('27; majors: Computer Science and Anthropology; minor: REEES) was awarded funding for her Winter Term internship at American University of Armenia Papazian Library in Yerevan, Armenia.
- Clem Schonfeld ('29; undeclared) received the grant for "Extracurricular Support for Winter Term Intensive Elementary Russian" to organize and fund cultural events for the on-campus, student-taught course.

OCREECAS Internship Award

As part of its long-running grant programming, OCREECAS awarded four grants (up to \$5,000 each), rather than the planned three grants, to support student internships in the OCREECAS region during 2026. While a few affiliate placements are available, students are strongly encouraged to create their own internship opportunities with recognized institutions. Internships typically last one to three months and require at least one affiliate institution in the host country. The program is open to current students and recent graduates (within the past two years), with priority for REEES majors and students who have not previously received this award.

2026 OCREECAS Internship Recipients:

- Frances McDowell ('26; majors: Studio Art and Sociology), will spend three months in Budapest, Hungary, continuing her work with grassroots arts initiatives by interning at the OFF-Biennial Budapest and assisting with preparations for their 2027 programming of exhibitions and events.
- Nuala Sharon ('26; major: History; minor: REEES), is traveling to Georgia for a hands-on culinary internship with Pheasant's Tears Restaurant in Sighnagh and Vino Underground in Tbilisi in order to enhance her understanding of Soviet and post-Soviet food culture and politics.
- Patrick McManus ('26; major: Religion; minors: Russian and Hispanic Studies), will be interning with the KnowledgeCafe in Tsnori, Georgia, to assist with English-language learning while also working with the local library to catalog English books for easier access.

- Sophie Haward ('27; majors: History and French; minor: REEES), is going to Riga, Latvia for an internship that will support her interest in public history education at the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust in Latvia Museum organized through the Baltic Center for Educational and Academic Development.



Frances McDowell, OCREECAS 2026 Internship Grant Recipient, in her senior art studio at Oberlin College

OCREECAS Student Experiences

2025–2026 OCREECAS Russian Language Study Awardee Testimonials:

Scarlet Craig



Scarlet Craig, OCREECAS 2026 Russian Language Study Awardee, at Middlebury College's Russian Immersion Program in Middlebury, Vermont

“Здравствуйте from Middlebury, VT! This summer I got to spend 8 weeks fully immersed in Russian (no English allowed!) at the Kathryn Wasserman Davis School of Russian, where I completed 12 credit hours of coursework, covering all kinds of topics from religion to climate change to corruption entirely in Russian. I also was able to take part in extracurricular activities, like theatre, choir, and painting, and made so many friends that I already miss! The program was incredibly challenging at times, but greatly strengthened me as a student and brought me to a level of language proficiency that I never thought I'd reach. Without the support of OCREECAS, this experience would not have been possible, and I am so grateful for this opportunity that has profoundly contributed to my studies with Oberlin REEES.”

- Scarlet Craig ('27; majors: Law & Society and Russian)

Madeline Flack



Madeline Flack, OCREECAS 2026 Russian Language Study Awardee, at Daugavpils University in Daugavpils, Latvia (Left: Madeline [center] with friends in Riga; Right: Madeline at a pottery workshop)

“Last semester I had the privilege of studying abroad in Latvia. Through the OCREECAS grant I was able to study abroad in Daugavpils, Latvia with Learn Russian in the European Union. Daugavpils is a small Russian speaking city near the borders of Belarus and Lithuania. I was in a unique position to learn about the intersection of the Russian language and Baltic politics. Since the war in Ukraine Russian in the Baltics has become increasingly more political. Being in Daugavpils gave me a front row seat to how this politicization affects the lives of Russian speakers in the Baltics.

Being in Daugavpils also gave me the opportunity to explore the Baltics. I really enjoyed my time in Latvia as well as the excursions that we took to the other Baltic states. I visited Tallinn and Parnu in Estonia as well as Kaunas, Vilnius and Trakai Lithuania. I really enjoyed this particular program because I was given the opportunity to go to multiple countries and I was truly exposed to all aspects of Baltic culture.

I am so grateful that I was able to study away in Latvia. Not only did I improve my Russian, but I also met many interesting people and built lasting friendships. I truly believe that studying away is a life changing formative experience and I am so grateful that through OCREECAS I was able to experience that.”

- Madeline Flack ('27; majors: Politics and Russian)

Mea Johnson



Mea Johnson, OCREECAS 2026 Russian Language Study Awardee, at Beloit College Center for Language Studies' Summer Russian Immersion Program

"Hello from the eighth and final week of Beloit College's summer language program! Over the past seven weeks I've been studying fourth-level Russian online with students from around and outside the country. Throughout the program we read and discussed a novella alongside its historical context. We practiced new vocabulary, reviewed grammar topics in depth, and took part in a talent show. We had weekly meetings with the professor for one-on-one conversation or extra practice. Thank you to OCREECAS for supporting my learning through the Russian Language Study Award grant!"

- Mea Johnson ('27; major: REEES)

Nila Grkinish-Myer



Nila Grkinich-Myer, OCREECAS 2026 Russian Language Study Awardee, at SRAS Yerevan: Russian Language Intensive in Yerevan, Armenia (Left: Nila at the top of the Yerevan Cascade; Right: SRAS students and coordinator celebrating Vardavar, an Armenian water festival, in July)

“This summer, I spent 6 weeks studying Russian in Yerevan, Armenia, which was a truly life-changing experience. I studied in Yerevan through SRAS and took Russian language classes with their Armenian partner school, Aspirantum, for 4 hours a day. The classes were conducted entirely in Russian by an absolutely amazing instructor with such lovely, engaged classmates who all helped me improve my Russian greatly. Through the school, my host family, and other experiences, I met some really remarkable people from all over the world that I hope to know for a long time. Armenia has a very long, complex history, and the knowledge I’ve gained from spending time exploring its museums, cities, nature, and religious sites has made me truly appreciate my time there. I learned so much about Armenian and Caucasian culture and history while in Yerevan, and I would absolutely recommend studying there to anyone. The support I received from OCREECAS made this experience possible for me, and for that I could not be more grateful.”

- Nila Grkinich-Myer ('27; majors: Comparative Literature and REEES)

Julian Gorn



Julian Gorn, OCREECAS 2026 Russian Language Study Awardee, at American Councils' Advanced Russian Language and Area Studies Program in Yerevan, Armenia

"Hello! My name is Julian and I am a rising second year in the Oberlin REES department. Thanks to OCREECAS I have spent the last 2 months in Yerevan, Armenia studying Russian with American councils. In Armenia I spend 4-5 hours a day studying intensive Russian, lived with a local host family, and went on various trips and excursions to explore Armenian culture. Being immersed in this kind of Russian speaking environment has helped me greatly further my Russian abilities, especially in regard to colloquial and everyday speech. Armenia was also one of the most fascinating places I have ever been to - it is an ancient country with an incomprehensibly deep history baked into every street corner. During my time here I saw some of the most beautiful nature I have ever seen, explored millennia old monasteries, churches, and ruins, learned about and ate food from a very rich culinary tradition, and immersed myself in the traditions, culture, and hospitality of the Armenian people. I am overjoyed to be able to take these experiences back to Oberlin with me this Fall!"

- Julian Gorn ('29; majors: History and Russian)



Ezra Rudensky, CREECAS 2026 Russian Language Study Awardee, at the University of Tartu's Narva College in Narva, Estonia (View east toward Ivangorod, Russia, from Narva, Estonia)

"Thanks to the OCREECAS scholarship, I am approaching my final week in a month-long Russian language immersion program at University of Tartu, Narva Campus! This program has been very rigorous, and attracts students as young as 16 and as old as 62, from everywhere from California to Japan. Narva itself is a very special city and offers a unique opportunity at Russian language immersion; Russian is the language you hear on the street, the language you use in daily encounters with locals at the bar or at the shop, the language parents teach their children. Narva is across a (small) river from the Russian city Ivangorod, and has had a long and complicated relationship with Russia. The border is quite active, with many people going back and forth to visit family; there is emotional as well as geographical proximity to the country. And yet the impacts of the Soviet bombing, invasion, and occupation of Narva are impossible to ignore, and not forgotten among those who identify as Estonian. The University of Tartu itself attracts many students who have left Ukraine. All in all, this program has offered an intensive, multi-faceted, and complicated perspective on the post-Soviet world. I feel very lucky to have experienced such thorough language immersion with the immense warmth and kindness offered by all those I have come across here."

- Ezra Rudensky ('28; major: Politics; minor: Russian)

2026 OCREECAS Winter Term Awardee Testimonials:

Arev Lima Boudakian



Arev Lima Boudakian, OCREECAS Winter Term Grant Recipient, for an internship at American University of Armenia's AGBU Papazian Library in Yerevan, Armenia

"As a result of my OCREECAS Winter Term Grant, I was able to have an easier time travelling to Yerevan, Armenia where I interned at the American University of Armenia's AGBU Papazian Library. During my internship, I had the opportunity to work with every librarian there, observing and learning about all the processes that go into keeping a university library running smoothly. I learned about cataloguing, archival work, circulation, ensuring access to resources, resource creation, outreach, and more.

One of the most fascinating parts of my internship was the archives. The Senior Librarian and archivist at the AUA Library, Bella Avagyan, has been involved with AUA since its founding in 1991 and has been working at the library since 1992. She now works part time in the archives, digitally uploading the last three and a half decades worth of photos in the publicly accessible DSpace (a digital repository for AUA containing theses, photos, and more). The coolest part however, is that she does this entirely from memory. Because she has been involved with AUA since the beginning, she knows everyone in the photos and is able to easily identify the who, what, where, and when of the photos.

Beyond learning about the processes of the library, I was also given some very intern jobs that I really did enjoy. I spent one day going through the entire fiction section with instructions to separate the poetry so it could be reshelfed elsewhere to make it easier to find and so that the AUA library's shelving would be more consistent with the norm. In going through the entire fiction section, I found some really amazing volumes, including a 1944 print of A Bell for Adano by John Hersey that has the following note on its copyright page: "THIS BOOK HAS NOT BEEN CONDENSED. ITS BULK IS LESS BECAUSE GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS PROHIBIT USE OF HEAVIER PAPER". It was wild to see an 82 year old book that was honestly falling apart a little, just sitting on the shelf to be checked out instead of in an archival or special collections box.

Many of my duties, such as researching where other libraries shelve poetry or the Institutional Repository and Open Access guidelines and policies of other institutions, were meant to make the jobs of the librarians I was working with easier, but they also allowed me to learn a lot. The poetry shelving question allowed me to learn that most, if not all, American academic libraries use the Library of Congress classification systems as opposed to the Dewey Decimal Classification System (DDC). I got very familiar with the 650s of the DDC during my time as I was also tasked with going through the books and taking out any volumes that had not been checked out in at least a decade or were quite damaged. It hurt when I ended up weeding two full shelves of books because the 650s are “Management and Public Relations”, and since most of AUA’s collection is from donations, most of the books were from the 1980s and 1990s, rendering most of them obsolete and not checked out since the 1990s or the early 2000s. I’ve included a photo of one book about portable computing not checked out since 1998.

Another really cool project I got to work on was creating Library Guides (LibGuides). The first one I made was my choice and I created a LibGuide about the digital divide ([linked here](#)). After I finished that one, the academic support librarian asked me to create a second one for resources for writing ([linked here](#)). It was a really exciting experience to be able to be able to create resources that students might actually use!

I am truly grateful for the OCREECAS Winter Term Grant because it made my travel and accommodations to Armenia easier to handle, giving me the ability to truly enjoy all the amazing experiences at my internship.”

- Arev Lima Boudakian ('27; majors: Computer Science and Anthropology; minor: REEES)

Clem Schonfeld



Clem Schonfeld, OCREECAS Winter Term Grant Recipient, "Extracurricular Support for Winter Term Intensive Elementary Russian," Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH

"Last winter, I was awarded the OCREECAS Winter Term grant to facilitate extracurricular support and enrichment for the Russian intensive Winter Term. This allowed me to cook delicious meals for the Russian intensive Winter Term's students and instructors, and organize fun group craft projects. Over the three and a half weeks, I was able to prepare and serve plov, blini, ajapsandali, adjaruli khachapuri, pelmeni, and other fun dishes from Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. Few parts of culture are as central and universal as food, and cooking these dishes for Winter Term participants introduced me and others to diverse culinary traditions, granting me, at least, a deeper understanding of the area of study. Additionally, I was able to screen movies like Assa and Ivan Vasilyevich Changes Profession (still unsure what exactly happened in the former), host weekly craft nights (some more well-attended than others), and hang out with cool people all day (no parenthetical aside here).

More valuable than the activities themselves, though, was the way that my Winter Term project built and reinforced my relationship to other Russian students. In spending time cooking for and speaking to people with similar interests, my passion for exploration of the Russian language and the culture of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia only grew, as did my sense of community with the inhabitants of Russian House, and the students and instructors of the Winter Term. I hope, in building an open and friendly space focused on exploration of REEES culture and collaborative learning, my project also strengthened the Oberlin REEES community's relationships to one another. All in all, over Winter Term I grew closer to the rest of the REEES department, formed lasting bonds with new and old Russian students alike, and had a great deal of fun. None of that would have been possible without OCREECAS."

- Clem Schonfeld ('29; undeclared)

2026 OCREECAS Internship Awardee Testimonials:

Sophie Haward



Sophie Haward, OCREECAS 2026 Internship Award Recipient, at the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust Museum in Riga, Latvia

"During my time in Latvia working at the Riga Ghetto and Holocaust Museum and taking Russian classes at the Baltic Center, I got to know a beautiful country and its history while developing my language and professional skills. Being able to contribute to the preservation of Baltic Jewish history was incredibly fulfilling! Thank you so much to the OCREECAS Committee for your support and guidance through this amazing opportunity!"

- Sophie Haward ('27; majors: History and French; minor: REEES)



Patrick McManus, OCREECAS 2026 Internship Award Recipient, at KnowledgeCafe, Tsnori, Georgia

“My OCREECAS internship has allowed me to partner with the KnowledgeCafe in Tsnori, Georgia. The KnowledgeCafe is much more than just a cafe and bookstore, it’s a community resource. In addition to the bookstore, which provides mostly Georgian literature, there is a small but fruitful library of works in both Georgian and English at all levels that children are encouraged to check out and work on their language skills with. There are also near-constant events being hosted every week that span from a celebration for the 4th of July (some wonderful pictures attached) to storytime for kids to lectures on quantum mechanics.

My OCREECAS grant has allowed me to work with this wonderful program in a number of ways. I run two group meetings, an English conversation club for young teens and a storytime for younger readers who are still largely proficient in English. In addition to this, I have been working with a group of Tsnori locals on a project to catalog the English language section of the library to make it easier for those looking to work on their English reading skills. In my free time, my grant has helped me to enjoy the wonderful scenery and culinary experiences of the town of Signaghi, where I’ve been staying.”

- Patrick McManus ('26; major: Religion; minors: Russian and Hispanic Studies)



Nuala Sharon, OCREECAS 2026 Internship Award Recipient, at Pheasant's Tears Restaurant in Signaghi and Vino Underground in Tbilisi, Georgia

"I used OCREECAS internship funding to travel to Georgia where I am studying culinary and natural winemaking traditions at Pheasant's Tears Restaurant in Signaghi and Vino Underground natural wine bar in Tbilisi. Working at Pheasant's Tears allowed me to learn about traditional and fusion culinary techniques from chef Gia Rokashvili. At Vino Underground, I've been building on my culinary experience, helping to design a new food menu while also growing my knowledge of viticulture and helping with Georgian natural wine tastings. Neither of these incredible experiences would have been possible without OCREECAS funding and the support of Internship Coordinator Maia Solovieva, who was an invaluable guide through the application process and a knowledgeable and connected resource while scouting potential internship locations."

- Nuala Sharon ('26; major: History; minor: REEES)

2025 OCREECAS Internship Awardee Testimonials:



Eliza Balmuth, OCREECAS 2025 Internship Awardee, at the International Guitar Festival and Courses in Brno, Czechia and Waldorf Music School in Ljubljana, Slovenia (Clockwise from top left: Eliza visiting the Slovenian parliament, with her host family, at the Savica waterfall, and with the jury of the guitar competition)

“My OCREECAS internship project began with the vision of working in the organizational teams of two classical guitar festivals in summer 2025: the Summer Guitar Program in Celje, Slovenia, and the International Guitar Festival and Courses in Brno, Czechia. I chose these two institutions as they offered a breadth of pre-professional experience in festival organization. One of the major festivals in Central Europe, the Brno festival was in its 34th year and had among its guest artists some of the biggest names in classical guitar, such as Zoran Dukić. In contrast, this was the inaugural edition of the Celje festival, a collaboration between two young female guitarists, Patricija del Negro and Maya Lončar.

However, a scheduling conflict arose with the Celje festival, so I pivoted to the Waldorf Music School in Ljubljana for the Slovenian part of my project, where I served as an intern assisting one of the guitar teachers. I grew up homeschooled with Waldorf education, and now substitute teach kindergarten through fourth grade in the Waldorf school in Milwaukee. Music is integral to Waldorf education. However, the Waldorf Music School in Ljubljana is unique as the only Waldorf music school I am aware of in the world. Unlike the US, Slovenia has a state music school curriculum for children. The Waldorf Music School, operating in the same building as the regular Waldorf elementary school, seamlessly integrates the music curriculum into the regular schoolday of their students.

I spent most of June assisting the main guitar teacher, Uroš Rakovec, in his lessons. I also played in the guitar concerts and ensemble and sat in on the panel for their end-of-year exams. The school has around 40 guitar students. I learned about the more structured and formal (compared to in the United States) children’s music education in Slovenia and received a lot of teaching materials and skills. I have no photos from this part of my internship itself as the Waldorf philosophy does not permit technology in schools. I had a lovely host family from the school. Having a host family was key to my integration into the culture and school, and they were enthusiastic about having English in the home for the

children and me working with the children on English and math practice. They showed me around their gorgeous country during my off time. What a beautiful place with mountains, sea, caves, lakes, and amazing food!

Between the parts of my project, I separately participated in a touring youth ensemble exploring intersections of Klezmer, Turkish, and Greek traditional music with musicians from at least 14 different countries. One concert was supposed to be in the OCCREECAS region, in Belgrade, Serbia, but it was cancelled because of intense protests at the time. But through this I learned flexibility and resilience that is an important part of OCCREECAS. We ended up having to go to Serbia anyway just to catch a flight, which meant an eventful 15-hour bus trip (the second in 10 days) across the Balkans (six passport stamps in a night!), which made me reflect a lot about relative privilege related to passports when some of my colleagues faced intense questioning and denial of entry in one case. But overall this tour was an incredibly rich experience of cultural exchange working with musicians from different backgrounds playing music of different cultures together.

I subsequently resumed my OCCREECAS project in Czechia, working in the organization of the International Guitar Festival and Courses Brno '25. These were intense, but wonderful days, typically working from 7:30 am to 11 pm. As part of the team, I staffed the check-in and info desk (I was the point-person for English speakers—there happened to be a large student group from NYC), made the first breakfast, and made coffee and printed for the guest artists (we ran up and down so many stairs!). I served as secretary of the jury for the senior division of the competition and had the opportunity to take one lesson and perform in the final student concert as well. Through this I made fantastic connections with the guitar students in Brno who were also working in the organization of the festival and with the international guest artists.

There were definite challenges over the summer—a badly sprained ankle in Ljubljana, the cancelled concert in Serbia, the stressful bus ride through the Balkans, having to diplomatically enforce the competition rules to the Brno jury of important figures (all older men) in the guitar world, and having all my friend's bike attachments stolen while I was borrowing it. But I feel I grew the most in these moments. My one regret is that I did not have more Slovene or Croatian competency as I believe that would have helped some of the children in the music school feel more at ease to open up. However, I really feel it was the most rewarding summer of my life and I met so many people, made lasting friendships and connections, learned about myself, was exposed to new music, and developed skills in teaching, festival organization, and performance. I am grateful from the bottom of my heart to OCCREECAS for this amazing, life-changing opportunity!"

- Eliza Balmuth ('24; majors: Musicology and Comparative Literature; minors: English and French)

Sasha Paris-Carter



Sasha Paris-Carter, OCREECAS 2025 Internship Awardee, conducted an internship with Tier Music and developed additional professional connections through Heldeke! Theatre-Bar in Tallinn, Estonia

“ My primary objective was to learn music business skills from an internship at Tier Music Publishing. My mentors were Thea Zatizev, Hanna-Greth Peetson, Sandra Perens. I mainly worked with Hanna-Greth on sync and licensing, while sometimes researching labels and festivals for artists on the roster. Through Tier, I was introduced to composers Tuulikki Bartosik and Jonas Tarm, who educated me on the contemporary composition scene in Tallinn, specifically the influences and consequences of the Estonian Diaspora. I considered my own Estonian heritage in these conversations, and composed music which reflected my family’s history.

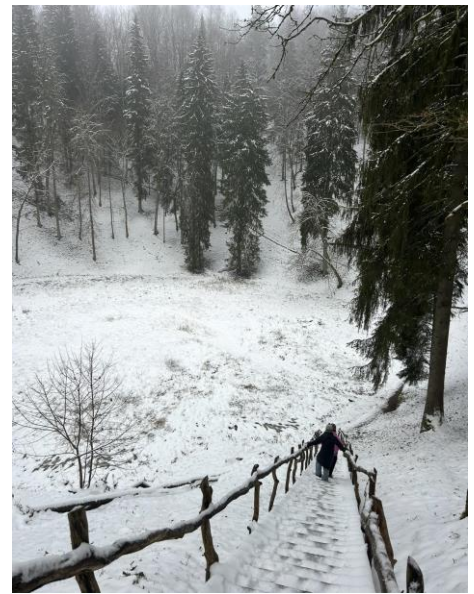
I found an unexpected second home at Heldeke! theatre-bar. I had secured two fringe gigs there, but I never expected to see so many varieties of concerts, let alone perform quite so much. I worked with Katherina Von Schatz at Burlesque Estonia and became connected to performers from all over the country and from neighboring Finland. I did similar work for a visiting Swedish collective, the Haus of Freakshow, who also invited me to perform with them onstage. Now, they are remotely producing my music video.

When I met Nikita Talvet at Heldeke!, it was an instant click. We began writing a show together mere days after our meeting at his concert. Post Punk Cabaret was our night of slapstick and songs, and we got a huge audience by canvassing all over Tallinn. We even got positive reviews in the local blogs. The whole experience was like a writing workshop, exchanging music in English, Estonian, and Russian. I also received mentorship from local musicians Kaisa Ling Thing and Rene Paul, both nationally recognized blues artists who compose music in Estonian. I was mentored in event organization by Kaisa along with local comedian and founder of Pussy Jam Comedy Sille-Kadri Simer.

My time in Estonia culminated in two nights of performing at Heldeke! Myself, Nikita, and Alec presented music from my album A Devil in my Shoe. These were the first sold out shows of my career as a soloist. My opener was a local comedian, Jana Levitina, who I met at the bar and was looking to get her start. Turned out to be a perfect fit! The show was mentioned in Estonian World News and Sour Cream and Dill, and visual materials were captured by local videographer Anton Serdjukov as well as an international visitor, Samuel Caverly. I keep in touch with everybody I met during this process.”

- Sasha Paris-Carter ('25; major: Composition; minor: Improvisation)

Eliza Youngman



Eliza Youngman, OCREECAS 2025 Internship Awardee, at Forest and Meadows Studio and Užupis Arts Incubator, Vilnius, Lithuania

“In the Fall of 2025, with the support of the OCREECAS foundation at Oberlin College, I spent three months in Vilnius, Lithuania. I went to Vilnius to complete a weaving internship at Forests and Meadows Studios, a natural dyes and textile studio. I was originally interested in travelling to Lithuania because my grandparents are from there, and I grew up tangentially around the culture but did not practice it or speak the language myself.

With the gracious guidance of Raminta Berzanskyte, the head of Forests and Meadows, my internship exceeded my expectations. Not only did I strengthen my pre-existing knowledge of weaving on a floor loom, but I also learned a wholly new weaving skill: Lithuanian tablet weaving! Raminta walked me through tablet weaving from the very beginning, and by the end of my internship, I was making tablet weavings with up to 8 cards in complicated patterns. It was very meaningful to be able to learn this technique, as I grew up with Lithuanian tablet weavings around my grandparents’ house, so this art form holds a lot of sentimental value to me. At the end of my internship, Raminta gifted me a set of tablets, so I have been able to continue tablet weaving in the US.

I also got the chance to assist the studio with natural dyeing, something I had always been interested in but had never gotten the chance to try. I assisted the studio with the maintenance of their indigo dye vat and tried my hand at some Shibori dyeing techniques. I applied my new dyeing knowledge to my weavings and even made tablet weavings with my own hand-dyed yarn.

In addition to my weaving internship, I ended up interning part time with the Užupis Art Incubator, an artist residency and gallery in the arts district of Vilnius. I assisted the gallery manager with the curation and hanging of resident’s shows, and also got to participate in the Vilnius art biennial. While this internship was not as fine skills-based as my weaving one, it bolstered my professional art skills by teaching me about the management of arts nonprofits, and about how to present work professionally in a gallery and art-fair setting. Through activities I attended with the Užupis Art Incubator I also got to connect with many Lithuanian artists! It was through this that I made a lot of friends, got to visit artist studios, go to live music venues, toured the Vilnius arts university buildings, and saw a lot of interesting and inspiring work.

Outside of my internships I was able to travel around Lithuania. In Vilnius, I took historical tours of Soviet-era Lithuania, went to the many art museums, and learned a ton about the history of Russian occupation and Lithuanian resistance. I also visited Kaunas, where I visited an amazing risograph studio, learned about Lithuanian art deco architecture, and fell in love with M.K. Čiurlionus’ paintings. I also was able to visit the Curonian spit, which has magnificent protected beaches, dunes, pine forests, and... smoked fish!! And lastly, I visited the municipality where my grandparents emigrated from.

This opportunity supported both my personal and professional growth, providing me with an invaluable personal connection to my family, and giving me the concrete skills and experiences needed to succeed as a professional in the art

world. I am very grateful to OCREECAS for providing me with this opportunity to focus on myself and my work; I feel like it was the most amazing transition possible for me between college and post-grad. Because of this opportunity I entered my post-graduate life with stronger life skills, a broader worldview, and an ability to be independent. I left Lithuania having eaten a ton of smoked fish and dark bread, having had a ton of fun, and feeling way more prepared to continue making art and pursuing my passions outside of college. Thank you OCREECAS!!!! I am so grateful!"

- Eliza Youngman ('25; major: Studio Art; minors: East Asian Studies and Food Studies Integrative Concentration)



Eliza Youngman, OCREECAS 2025 Internship Awardee, at Forest and Meadows Studio and Užupis Arts Incubator, Vilnius, Lithuania

OCREECAS encourages student applications for the upcoming 2026–2027 academic year! Please visit our [website](#) for more information, and reach out to Kristina Paabus or Maia Solovieva with any questions.

OCREECAS Acknowledgements

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- Liana Battsaligova, Assistant Professor of Russian and East European Studies
- Nicholas Bujalski, Assistant Professor of History
- Vladimir Ivantsov, Assistant Professor of Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies
- Kristina Paabus, OCREECAS Director, Chair of Studio Art, Associate Professor of Reproducible Media
- Maia Solovieva, OCREECAS Internship Coordinator, Director of Russian House, and Senior Lecturer in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies
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