

REESNews



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Letter from the Chair of REES

by [Stephen Crowley](#), Associate Professor of Politics, Chair of REES



Greetings to alumni and friends of Russian and Russian and East European studies (REES) at Oberlin, and welcome to what we hope will be our annual newsletter. Oberlin's REES program was very active this past year, bringing speakers from Serbia and Hungary, among other places, and welcoming some key additions to our committee. Last fall,

the [Center for Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies \(OCREECAS\)](#) sponsored a week-long minicourse taught by Serbian filmmaker Goran Radovanović, whose documentaries have followed Serbia's transition from dictatorship to democracy. Radovanović screened and spoke with students about a number of his films, which focus on a range of compelling topics such as the plight of war refugees, prostitution, and political resistance in contemporary Serbia. We also hosted Miklos Haraszi, a former Hungarian dissident, journalist, and human rights advocate who was then serving as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's representative on freedom of the media. Haraszi gave a lecture on the current state of media freedom in post-Communist Europe, and spoke to classes about his experience in Communist-era Hungary.

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This year, we are fortunate to add new members to our ranks. Maia Solovieva, hailing from Krasnodar, Russia, took over leadership of Russian House, as well as the coordination of the OCREECAS internship program. We have just sent three new OCREECAS interns to Russia this summer and will send another in the fall. We include here a report from a past intern, San Maday-Travis, on her experience working on the Great Baikal Trail Project in Irkutsk.

We are also delighted that Liliana Milkova has joined Oberlin as the curator of academic programs at the [Allen Memorial Art Museum](#). Milkova, originally from Bulgaria, comes to Oberlin from a stint as postdoctoral fellow at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., where she worked on several exhibitions at the Department of Photographs. She earned a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, where she specialized in 20th-century Russian and East European visual culture. Milkova enjoys cooking traditional dishes from her native Bulgaria, taking part in Balkan line dancing, and reading mystery novels. With her guidance, we look forward to further integrating the visual arts into the REES curriculum.

During the 2009-10 academic year, Oberlin sent three of our recent graduates on Fulbright fellowships to Russia to teach English: Nicolle Ouellet '09, Helen Stuhr-Rommereim '09, and Kevin Brondum '08. The Fulbright program has brought benefits in the other direction as well. Thanks to two successful grant applications, the Department of Russian has begun hosting Russian Foreign Language Teaching Assistants (FLTA). The first two Fulbright FLTAs were Kseniia Troshina (2008-09) and Violetta Kravtsova (2009-10), and Oberlin has received a new FLTA for the coming year.

One of the thankless tasks for faculty and staff serving on departments and committees is undergoing program review, a process that takes place every 10 years or so and involves a visit from reviewers from other academic institutions. Our reviewers found Oberlin's Russian and REES programs to be “a gem,” and among the very best undergraduate programs anywhere in the country. We of course agree, but it is nice to have that assessment confirmed by outsiders. •

The Films of Goran Radovanović: the Troubled Legacy of Serbia in the 1990s

By Veljko Vujačić

BETWEEN OCTOBER 2 AND 7, 2009, Serbian documentary filmmaker and director Goran Radovanović taught a short course based on six of his films—five documentaries and his first feature film, *The Ambulance*, which premiered at the Montreal film festival in September 2009.

The documentary films address different social and political themes and featured some rare footage, both by the film director and from Serbia's film and television archives. Each screening was followed by a brief exposition and discussion with the director. It is worth pointing out that none of Radovanović's films could be shown on Serbian television prior to the downfall of the Milošević regime in October 2000.



The first film screened was *My Country-For Internal Use Only*. Its overarching theme is the Milošević regime's manipulation of

statewide visual and newspaper media. The glaring contradiction between officials advertising Serbia's "leap" into the 21st-century world of mobile phone and computer technology is glaringly juxtaposed to scenes of Serbian refugees streaming on tractors from Croatia and Bosnia; a "love affair" between two well-dressed pensioners from erstwhile solidly middle-class backgrounds, now regular visitors to a soup kitchen in Belgrade; and some spectacular original shots of NATO's bombing campaign over Serbia and Kosovo in spring 1999.

In *Model House*, Radovanović documents the sad fate of Serbian refugees from Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Widely considered as the villains of the wars of Yugoslav succession, the Serbs are usually portrayed as aggressors rather than victims. As a result, the 800,000 Serbian refugees have been largely out of sight in the Western press and media, though their plight was hardly any different from that of their Croatian, Bosnian Moslem, and Albanian counterparts. Worse still, because the Serbian regime boasted its "war victories," the refugees represented a living reminder of its subsequent military defeats. In 1995, when some 200,000 refugees fled to Serbia in the wake of the successful Croatian-Bosnian Moslem military offensive in a mere four days, the Milošević regime scattered them throughout Serbia in an effort to hide them from public view. Radovanović's *Model House* tells their moving stories: a refugee woman cleaning a well-furnished apartment without possessing one of her own; a boy practicing karate moves, cigarette in mouth, clumsily boasting his early manhood amid the clutter of a refugee "model house."

In *Otpor: The Fight to Save Serbia*, Radovanović tells the story of the student movement whose imaginative street performances

did much to galvanize Serbian public opinion against the Milošević regime in 1999-2000. The special value of the documentary derives from the fact that the filming occurred in vivo, i.e. well before the political outcome was known. We see the designer of the movement's symbol, the clenched fist symbolizing "resistance" (the translation of *otpor*), telling us how he designed it because he wanted to impress his girlfriend; a mother joining a daughter in street demonstrations; police beatings and student solidarity; and a mock cake consisting of territories that Milošević lost submitted as a birthday present to "our beloved president."

In *Chicken Elections*, Radovanović tells the story of an old Serbian peasant woman living alone in a decaying rural area, but now learning how to communicate with the outside world with the help of a cell phone. Her son (a policeman) and the country priest are her only visitors and caretakers. The death of the woman stands for the death of an old way of life, with documentary footage from the interwar period (1930s) serving as a reminder of a once vital world that is irretrievably lost. The policeman and the priest have more clients in the local taverna (called a *kafana* in Serbian), where idle jobless men hang out all day, than in their respective places of work.

In *The Casting: Pantyhose, Prostitution, and Sex Trafficking*, Radovanović produces a staged documentary, attracting both female and male clients for a "Euro-pantyhose" commercial. Young women volunteers include a girl who needs money for insulin and an attractive high school student preferring a quick buck to long study. Both come from "normal families" short of cash in a transitional society. The men are more comical: a cop willingly takes off his uniform to expose his "hairy vitality;" a former body-building athletic champion wins the "pantyhose race." But the most disturbing parts of the film involve interviews with a real sex trafficker (a "good father" who buys toys for his son from the proceeds) and a Romanian woman "sold" in Kosovo and "saved" by a Bosnian Serb cop.

In *Second Circle*, Radovanović concentrates on the Roma population in Serbia. A Roma man lives in a "cave" under Belgrade's main park (a former Ottoman and Austrian fortress) hunting pigeons and scavenging for food and living supplies in garbage dumps; others show knife scars and talk about their life "plans," including a wedding. A

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Roma girl gets job offers rescinded when she reveals her ethnic identity. But the picture of the lack of integration into mainstream society and majority prejudice is partially alleviated by institutional tolerance (or negligence) for the Roma's nomadic way of life.

Radovanović ended the course with his first feature film, *The Ambulance*. It is a bleak portrait of Serbia in the immediate post-Milošević period, when political identity was in rapid flux and the economic devastation caused by regime mismanagement and criminal mafia undertakings, sanctions, and NATO bombing put society on the brink of collapse. However, as the film reveals, the collapse is as much moral as it is political-economic: a Partisan veteran and Milošević believer desperately tries to commit suicide by taking an overdose of medication and finally succeeds; his daughter—for many years a TV announcer of regime propaganda on the evening news—is treated as a “collaborator,” her son returning from school with a shaved head. But there is hope as well: a relationship between a wheelchair bound, computer-literate young woman and her neighbor who

is trying to master elementary software leads to a potentially redemptive friendship amidst the socio-political rubble. The movie is a highly allegorical successful “first,” whose moral and aesthetic complexity cannot be revealed in a few sentences.

A word is in order about the reception of the course, which attracted 20 students from various departments. The films were well attended and the discussions were lively. Radovanović provided the context for each film and explained his technique and personal and creative motivation. I occasionally filled in the blanks with brief sketches of the broader social and political context. Student comments were overwhelmingly positive, and the final papers reflected the learning experience: by the end of the class, students knew not only much more about a talented filmmaker, but also about a face of Serbia that they had never encountered in Western media accounts. •

Veljko Vujačić is associate professor and chair of sociology and a member of the REES Committee.

Introducing Maia Solovieva

[Maia Solovieva](#) was born in the city of Krasnodar in the Caucasus area of Southern Russia. She has recently joined the teaching staff of the [Department of Russian Language, Literature, and Culture](#), teaching aspects of cross-cultural communication and chairing the [Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies \(OCREECAS\)](#). In the following introduction, she describes her professional career as it was shaped by experiences in the Russian cities of Krasnodar and Taganrog, the birthplace of Chekhov, and in America.

By Maia Solovieva

My professional experience has been influenced by so many of the events related to socioeconomic changes in Russia after the fall of the former Soviet Union that my professional path couldn't be described as a traditional one. It feels like a dramatic challenge sometimes, but it's also an unbelievable journey that couldn't have happened if I hadn't taken the road less traveled.

I earned a PhD equivalent (*kandidatskaia*) in language education at Rostov Pedagogical University, and I have extensive experience teaching American undergraduate and graduate students. While working in Russia at Taganrog State University, my involvement in the integration of humanities courses into the traditional Russian technical university curriculum led me to research potential methods of such incorporation. In 1999, I published a handbook for a course titled *Russkaia Slovesnost*, which featured suggested classroom exercises and assignments for the humanities-focused classroom at engineering institutions. Further, my dissertation, “Pedagogical Strategies for Improving Russian Language Skills Among Students at a Technical University,” drew on my teaching practice at that time. I argued for the implementation of a new, innovative curriculum, including courses in Russian language, literature, and communication as well as engineering, and summarized the pedagogical approaches and techniques that are proven methods of teaching such humanities courses to native speakers of Russian. I reviewed the postulates of Vygotsky's theory and suggested that they have not been fully implemented into pedagogical



practice in Russia.

My research interests in America are also strongly influenced by my teaching experience. My current position as a faculty-in-residence and previous position of instructor at University of South Carolina sparked

my interest in areas of second-language acquisition, with its emphasis on learners' self-presentation and self-construction. My personal experiences teaching and observing American students in Russia made me look at particular issues of the intercultural communication, for example the role of “openness” toward the target culture and its influence on the level of learner's performance in language classes both in the United States and abroad. I would like to continue to explore the culturally marked communicative situations that are especially challenging for American students of Russian in Oberlin.

Beginning in 2002, I taught traditional Russian language courses from the beginning to the advanced level at the University of South Carolina. I also taught a variety of literature and culture courses (Chekhov, Russian Women Writers, with an emphasis on contemporary authors and national identity, and Russian Media). One particular class became very personal to me: a semester-long course, *Russian World: Russians in Everyday Life*, which I taught in different versions but always with the emphasis on practical aspects of cross-cultural communication.

In summer 2006, I initiated and launched Russian Language in Context, a five-week immersion program that I designed in close collaboration with Russian educators from Southern Federal University in Taganrog, Russia, where the program takes place. I have coordinated and taught the program from 2007 through 2010. The program has given me the opportunity to employ effective language- and culture-learning strategies in the context of study abroad. Having the experience of establishing a well-sequenced program made me more interested in how to foster positive cross-cultural attitudes toward the target culture among the American students and facilitate cross-cultural transition to prepare students for subsequent study in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Oberlin has provided me, for the first time in my life, with the supportive environment to work on and present my research at major conferences. In addition to a talk on a culturally diverse immersion-type program at the Forum on Teaching Russian in the North

American Context, [ACTR/ACCELS](#) (Washington, D.C., 2007) and delivering a paper, “Reading Chekhov in Russia,” at the [American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages \(AATSEEL\)](#) conference (San Francisco, 2008), I recently gave a talk, “The Chekhovian Sense of Life: a Cultural Adaptation of *The Sisters*,” at the [American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies \(AAASS\)](#) conference (Boston, 2010) and became interested how the literary text can be transferred to the screen. I also couldn’t resist participating in the [150th Anniversary of Chekhov](#) in Moscow, and I presented a paper at Moscow State University this past January. Chekhov has been always in my teaching and I hope that dialogue between the Russian author and my current students will continue in my classes at Oberlin. •

Maia Solovieva is faculty in residence and lecturer in Russian who joined the faculty in the fall of 2009.

THE OCREECAS INTERNSHIPS

AS THE CHAIR OF OCREECAS, Maia Solovieva facilitates internship opportunities for students. She recommends that all students applying for an internship have prior experience in that country, either through study abroad or some other intimate means. The internships are meant to give students an opportunity to experience professional or pre-professional life in Russia and Eastern Europe. Many students this year, both graduating seniors and undergraduates, made use of OCREECAS’s connections. Some opportunities are listed here.

[The Hermitage Museum](#) in St. Petersburg accepts a small number of students each year as volunteers to act as docents and helpers with patrons of the museum. Students are expected to speak Russian well and have a strong knowledge of the Hermitage’s collection.

[The Great Baikal Trail \(GBT\)](#) is an ongoing project in eastern Russia to construct a path that winds around the world’s largest freshwater lake, Lake Baikal. Volunteers live in the wilderness and spend their days digging, building, and interacting with Baikal’s beautiful surroundings. The work lasts one entire summer, but volun-

teers are often welcomed back. The GBT is one of the most important environmental projects in the world and will help support Russia’s ever-relevant environmental movement. Volunteers should have a working knowledge of Russian, but many other languages are spoken as well. For a firsthand account, read about San Maday-Travis’s summer on the Kamchatka peninsula in this issue..

[Friends House Russia](#) is an organization that supports the rights of underprivileged minorities and provides guidance for those interested in the Quaker faith. The organization works toward greater social justice in Moscow and other parts of Russia and facilitates social and volunteer work. The Friends House intern essentially joins their working staff for three months to help with the vast amounts of work they do.

[The American Home in Vladimir](#) is an organization founded in 1992 to help teach English to native Russians. American Home is also involved with numerous outside projects, including those involving economic development, humanitarian aid, and the arts. The organization’s goal is to strengthen U.S.-Russian relations. An American Home intern typically teaches English and helps with other aspects of administration.

SAN’S BAIKAL TRIP

By San Maday Travis ’11

I spent six weeks working with the Great Baikal Trail Project (GBT) in Irkutsk, Russia, on three separate projects on the southern side of Lake Baikal, the deepest, cleanest, most beautiful freshwater lake in the world. GBT (or ББТ, Большая Байкальская Тропа по русский) is a locally run organization dedicated to bringing sustainable and safe tourism to the shores of the lake. Initially their goal was to create a chain of trails that completely circumscribed the lake’s waters, but it soon became clear that this was too large a goal for such a small organization. Instead, the group works on building new trails and maintaining older ones for both recreational and scientific



purposes. Volunteers come from all around the world, with about half coming from Russia and the other half from Great Britain, the United States, Germany, and other countries. I have been told in confidence that Oberlin sent GBT its first foreign volunteer in the early 2000s, and an Oberlin student or graduate has worked with the program almost every year since. In 2009, I took the chance, and with only one year of Russian study, I packed a backpack full of maple syrup and anarchist zines as gifts and prepared for the unexpected joy that was my Russian journey.

On my way to the trailhead, I visited several places of interest. First, Stockholm, to see the place my parents met and got married. Then, Moscow—the captivating capital city of Russia—to couch surf with locals and begin my orientation in true Russian spirit, or *душа*. From Moscow, I took the train through Yekaterinburg, capital of the Urals, where the Russian teacher from my sophomore year lives. These preliminary travels were all paid for out-of-pocket, but made possible by travel support from OCREECAS.

By the time my train rolled in to Irkutsk, I had already been in Russia a week. My Russian language had gone from timid to strong to terrified and quavering, depending on how comfortable and self-confident I felt at the time. After meeting up with another GBT volunteer at the train station, however, my Russian soon made a permanent turn for the better. We took the *трамвай* to the hostel where I stayed between projects, and we talked about all of the things I came to take for granted over the next six weeks. I fast became familiar with the local transit, especially the *marshrutkas*, long-distance taxis that made frequent stops at the lake.

I made fast friends with several longtime volunteers, including Fred, a professor at Yale who was returning for his fourth or fifth year as a GBT volunteer, and Natasha, a local biologist who spends her summers working with GBT and supporting their programs. Natasha even invited me to visit her *dacha* (summer house) near Angarsk for a weekend, which was a transformative experience and the closest I really got to Russian life during my stay there. During my orientation time of a few days, we went swimming in the (frigid) lake, had excursions to several local museums (I highly recommend the Museum of the Decemberists), and watched the breathtaking sunset off the nine-story building the hostel is located in.

Then, it was off to the lake.

My first project was located in *Байкальский Заповедник* (Baikalskii Zapovednik). A *zapovednik* is the Russian equivalent of wilderness area. Use of the areas is extremely restricted, and visitors are charged an entrance fee to use the space. But, more importantly, a *zapovednik* is designed to be educational, and visitors should be prepared to be guided, instructed, and closely watched during their stay.

We had a special permit to be on our own in Baikalskii Zapovednik because we were volunteering, creating new trails for researchers to use in the winter season. Our group was mostly Russian, with a little more than half of the volunteers fluent in English and half fluent in Russian. This made for a huge linguistic challenge, especially for our translator, whose English was intermediate, but not perfect. Nevertheless, we all became fast friends—most of us were younger students or young working people out for two weeks of valuable work, and everyone had an incredible personality and self-driven nature.

Many of the Russian volunteers had been saving up money for several years in order to have the opportunity to work with GBT. The



standard of living in Russia is far lower for young people than it is in the United States—many of the friends I made who were in their late 20s had jobs in which they earned the equivalent of U.S. \$200 per month or less. This made the experience seem much more powerful for the international visitors on the trip, especially the three Americans.

In two weeks we broke 300 meters of fresh trail in a veritable rainforest. The work was sweaty and rewarding, and the evenings were full of stories and laughter. Every night, someone presented something about the place they were from, either their own country or their region of Russia. For American night, I taught a couple of folk songs and in very broken Russian attempted to teach everyone to contra dance.

My good friend Reetta, who came to the project from Finland, held a wife-carrying race and a rubber-boot throwing competition in honor of long-standing traditions in her country.

There was always delicious food cooked over a campfire, which we ate on a picnic table handmade by our handyman from a lakeside village, Lyosha. Two people were on duty every day, in charge of cooking, cleaning up, and lounging around on the beach of our very own mountain river, the *Ocanovka*, or *Aspen River*—clean enough to drink! On the last day we visited the lake to swim, sing songs, eat fresh-smoked *omul* (the most delicious fish ever—found only in Baikal), and laugh our sorrows away as we prepared to say goodbye for perhaps the last time. I am still in touch with most of the people I met on that trip, and I even got to visit the other American student at the University of Virginia in her room in Russian House last fall. The bonds we built over those two weeks of hard work were powerful, and I hope to see many of my friends again the next time I visit Russia.

My second project was on the western side of the lake, near the village of *Bolshie Koty*, or “Big Clogs.” The town was named after the wooden shoes worn by Siberian prisoners working in a gold mine there. This project was an *Eco-English Camp*, a program designed for Russians who wanted to learn English and participate in GBT projects at the same time.

When I signed up for this program, I understood that there would be multiple native English speakers on the project—turned out I was the only one! It was hard at first to deal with the frustrations of being forced to speak English all the time with those who clearly

wanted to be more clear and more comfortable, while struggling to connect with a group that was totally Russian. I spent most of the day in English classes, in which I helped, and at night I presented my own cultural classes in English to continue the lesson from that day.

We had a lot of fun learning from each other, despite the discomfort that everyone was dealing with. Overall it was an extremely powerful experience, if one that I wouldn't care to repeat. I learned a lot about how to teach English effectively and how to overcome my own cultural blocks in communicating with others that don't share my background. I made many connections which I maintain to this day. All of the people on the trip made me smile, especially the leaders and teachers I was working with on a daily basis.

My third and final project was about nine kilometers north of the Eco-English site, on the opposite side of Bolshie Kory. A group of international volunteers built a set of stairs on a dangerous section of trail along the lake north of the village. Stair building was rewarding, but became increasingly difficult as we ascended the slope carrying logs, stakes, gravel, and large stones to build the foundation for each of 33 steps up a 30-foot incline on the shore.

There were two German, two British, five American, and one Russian volunteer, along with two Russian leaders. Several of the Americans were traveling together as a family group. This dynamic changed my experience a lot, from eating a lot of American food, to learning to deal with being a member of the dominant group when you didn't always agree with what was going on, to remembering the things I love—and hate—about Americans abroad. Only two of the

foreign volunteers spoke any Russian, myself included, and our one Russian volunteer had only a very basic level of English. This meant speaking a lot of Russian, which made me quite happy, and it also meant speaking lots and lots of English, which was also a fun activity, especially with the dialogue between American, British, and German speakers of English.

We all became close and enjoyed each other's company. Work was fun, but play was better—it was now August, and the once frigid lake was warm enough to swim in regularly, which we did as much as possible. We spent a lot of time cleaning up trash that had been left by tourists. There is a strong culture in Russia to leave trash behind wherever you travel, and fighting that urge is a difficult task. On our boat out of the campsite, we had about more trash than we had provisions, including tents, camping equipment, and our own belongings.

By my last day in Russia, I had made dozens of close friends, experienced the best and worst of Russian landscapes, seen villages and cities and nature alike, and improved my Russian dramatically at the same time. I would highly encourage any student of beginner or intermediate Russian to take the leap, find a project you want to pursue, and make your dream a reality through the incredible support of the OCREECAS program. My summer was incredible, full of learning and laughter and hard work.

To read more and see some great pictures, I encourage you to visit my travel [blog](#). Feel free to [e-mail](#) me with any further questions you might have about GBT and the work it does. Best of luck and safe travels to all who embark on this incredible adventure. ●



Oberlin Student Fulbrighters go to Russia

By Helen Stuhr-Rommereim '09

Nicolle Ouellet '09, Kevin Brondum '08, and Helen Stuhr-Rommereim '09 undertook English teaching assistantships (ETA) in Russia during the 2009-10 academic year.

Ouellet, a double major in English and Russian, was a 10-season varsity athlete in cross country, indoor track, and outdoor track. Besides teaching English during her Fulbright year, she planned to research the relationship between sports teams and secondary school social groups. "My experiences as a student and as an athlete spurred my interest in how things are the same and different for student athletes in Russia," she said before beginning her ETA.

Brondum majored in politics and minored in Russian and East European studies. He credits the Linguistics for Language Students course he took during his first year and his experience coteaching Russian during winter term with inspiring his desire for an ETA. Brondum planned to research civics education during his ETA year, a plan that was partly influenced, he said, "by courses I took at Oberlin in political and sociological theory, comparative politics, and Russian language and culture."

Stuhr-Rommereim said that a semester abroad studying in Moscow inspired her to apply for the Fulbright. "I wanted to spend more time in Russia, and the Fulbright ETA is an excellent way to facilitate meaningful cultural exchange." Because her two majors, Russian

and studio art, led her to consider the various ways images can be an integral part of teaching in all subjects, she planned to collect images while in Russia. See her first-hand account of her year in Siberia below.

Tomorrow I'll be getting on a train and saying goodbye to Krasnoyarsk, the Siberian city that's been my home since last September. Krasnoyarsk is a beautiful, lively, and surprising place. It's big and prosperous, with a population of about 1 million. It's on the opposite side of the planet from Oberlin and my hometown, Grinnell, Iowa, on a mighty river, the Yenisei, which flows from Mongolia all the way to the Arctic Ocean. The river cuts through the center of the city and is lined with wide walkways, perfect for evening promenades when it's not minus-40 degrees outside. Over the past few weeks the weather has finally gotten beautiful. On May 9, Victory Day, summer cafes opened up all over the city, on every open square and all along the river. It's impossible to walk for five minutes and not run into a tent selling beer and shashlyk. The sun doesn't set until 11 p.m. or midnight, and no matter where you are in the city the streets are uniformly crowded with people strolling and enjoying the warm weather. It's easy to forget that starting in mid-October and ending only recently, not five days passed in Krasnoyarsk without snowfall. The winter was long and severe, but after seven or more months of relentless cold and darkness, summer in Siberia feels like something very special.

I came to Krasnoyarsk to work as an English Teaching Assistant at Siberian State Aerospace University on the Fulbright Program. But

even after all this time, I still sometimes find myself looking around me and thinking, “I’m in Siberia! How did that happen?”

I started studying Russian at Oberlin after reading Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in high school. I was so blown away by those books that I decided I needed to read them in Russian. But since then my interests have moved from 19th-century literature toward more recent culture and politics. The more I learn, the more I want to know. It feels like I started a relationship that I never expected would get too serious and somehow ended up taking over my life. The endless train rides, the incredible expanses of unoccupied land, the expansive array of fermented milk products and salty snacks to eat with beer—Russia is huge and strange, saddled with contradictory histories, straddling almost an entire hemisphere. It’s not like any other place.

And this year I’ve been able to get deep into some of the most distant corners of Russia. I’ve got a thick stack of train tickets documenting the many cities I’ve visited. Not long ago I went south of Krasnoyarsk to the Republic of Tuva, a world unto itself, where I saw an entirely new and unexpected side of this country. I’ve been all over Siberia, through the steppe and the taiga. I imagine I could spend the

rest of my life examining the contents of Russia’s many pockets.

But it’s easy to stare out a train car window at the open spaces rolling by and think about great Russian souls and things like that. I’m always trying to understand something about people and life here, but I guess I’ve learned enough now to be unable to draw any conclusions.

And this year hasn’t been all scenery and introspection. I’ve done a lot of work, and built a real life for myself here. I taught English to hundreds of students, and I got quite a close look at the Russian university system. For the first time in my life I maintained friendships entirely in a foreign language. Every day here is a little bit of an adventure, every bus ride is a little bit of a surprise. Every time I leave my apartment my eccentric neighbor has something funny to say to me. She recently gave my mother, who was visiting, and me a big hug in the elevator. She seemed like she was going to cry, she was so happy that my mom came to visit me. Every time I leave with a backpack on she thinks I’m moving out.

Pretty soon I really will be moving out, but I don’t think this will be my last time in Siberia. ●

FACULTY NEWS AND NOTES

Stephen Crowley

[Stephen Crowley](#) is chair of REES and associate professor of politics. He recently helped create Oberlin’s new concentration in [peace and conflict studies](#), and he has developed a new introductory course (cotaught with Steve Mayer) on the topic. Crowley is at work with two colleagues on a new volume tentatively titled “Working Through the Past: Labor and Authoritarian Legacies in Comparative Perspective,” about the impact of past regimes on labor unions in Russia and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia. During the academic year 2007-08, he was a research fellow at the Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study.

Marko Dumančić

Marko Dumančić will join the Oberlin faculty in fall 2010 on a three-year visiting professorship. Dumančić is a native of Croatia. After his undergraduate work at Connecticut College, he earned an MA and a PhD at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His dissertation examines the changing portrayals of masculinity in Soviet film during [the Thaw](#) (1953-68) and demonstrates how controversial post-Stalinist movie heroes came to represent the country’s shifting postwar values and ideals. His research interests include media representations of gender and sexuality in Russian and European history, Cold War popular culture, and film history. Dumančić’s most recent project delves into the depictions of queerness in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian literature and cinema.

Arlene Forman

During fall 2009, [Arlene Forman](#), associate professor and REES committee member, served as a consultant for the Strategic Planning Initiative of the Five Colleges Incorporated (Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith colleges, and the University

of Massachusetts at Amherst). On December 5, 2009, she served as a speaker and facilitator of the group’s Strategic Planning Faculty Retreat at Smith College. Her article “Повествовательная нить “Вольчего льна” appeared in V. Novoselev and B. Roginskii, eds., *Белла Улановская Одинокое письмо* (Moscow: Новое литературное обозрение, 2010). This is a memorial volume that contains the Petersburg writer’s unpublished prose, as well as articles and essays about her prose.

Heather Hogan

History professor and REES committee member [Heather Hogan](#) has been teaching Russian history at Oberlin since 1981. In addition to the survey of Russian history from the 10th century to the present, she variously offers course work on early modern Russia, the 19th-century intelligentsia, Russia’s interactions with Central Asia, and Stalinism. Her research interests include late imperial labor history and 19th- to 20th-century Central Asia. She is author of *Forging Revolution: Metalworkers, Managers, and the State in St. Petersburg, 1890-1914* (Indiana, 1993). On July 1, 2010, she will begin a three year appointment as associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for faculty development.

Ari Sammartino

[Ari Sammartino](#) was promoted in 2009-10 to associate professor of history. Her book, *The Impossible Border: Germany, Migration and the East, 1914-1922*, which addresses the political and ideological ramifications of migration during and after World War I, will be published by Cornell University Press this fall. Her current project, “Freedomland: Mass Housing and Urban Crisis in New York City and East Berlin, 1965-2000,” is a transnational study of the large-scale housing projects [Co-op City](#) and [Marzahn](#).