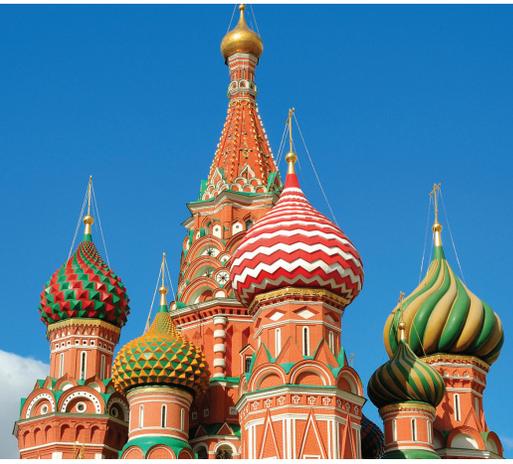


# REESNews



FALL 2020-SPRING 2021 • VOLUME 8

## Greetings from the Chair of Russian/REES

by Tom Newlin

This delayed newsletter comes to you after an extraordinarily challenging year, one marked by a strange combination of non-stop eventfulness and interim eventlessness.

We held our last in-person gathering on March 9, 2020, when David Brandenberger (history, University of Richmond) regaled us with a provocatively ghoulish lecture on “Zombie Politics: Stalin and Soviet History in Putin’s Russia.” The next day, Oberlin announced that it was sending students home. We had to cancel a slew of upcoming lectures and other events, including several presentations by returning OCREECAS interns, and classes moved online for the second half of the spring. The 2020-21 academic year saw a shift to a three-term calendar (with a goal of “de-densification”—an appalling neologism!) and a mix of in-person and remote classes.

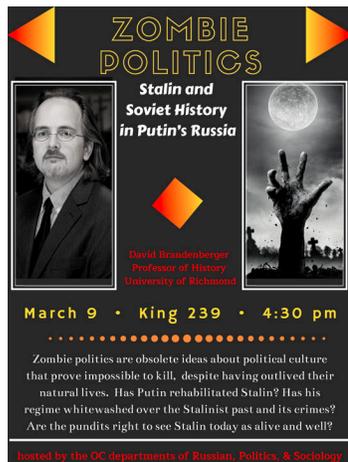
We all adapted quickly enough, learning both about the limitations of Zoom and the unexpected opportunities it afforded. We were able to bring a number of fabulous guest speakers into our classes, sometimes from very far away. This past fall, for instance, Joanna Stingray, who played a key role in bringing Soviet and Russian rock to the West, discussed her experiences in Leningrad in the 1980s with Vladimir Ivantsov’s first-year seminar *Rebellion, Revolution, Rock-and-Roll*; Ani Kokobobo of the University of Kansas spoke with my first-year seminar

on *War and Peace* about gender ambiguity in Tolstoy’s works; Ivan Kurilla, professor of history and international relations at the European University at St. Petersburg, talked with Steve Crowley’s Post-Soviet Politics class on the history of U.S.-Russian relations. This spring Veljko Vujačić brought a series of speakers, including Max Bergholz (Concordia University), Eric Gordy (University of London, School of Slavonic Studies), and Robert Hayden (University of Pittsburgh), into the course on nationalism in 20th-century Yugoslavia and Spain that he co-teaches with Sebastiaan Faber of Hispanic studies. We also held a well-attended Poetry Evening, organized by Vladimir Ivantsov in connection with *Den’ Litseia* (October 19, celebrated in Russia as “poetry day”), and over the winter, Faculty-in-Residence Maia Solovieva kicked off a highly popular advanced Russian conversation hour on Sunday afternoons that brought together students and recent graduates via Zoom. This is an initiative that is definitely worth continuing, and that might never have happened if not for the pandemic.

We said a regretful goodbye last spring to Tim Scholl, who retired after teaching for more than a quarter of a century at Oberlin. Having gone back to school and completing several years of seminary training in his spare time, Tim has now moved on to other pastures as a Lutheran minister (see his interview with Eleanor Cannon ’20 in this issue). We will miss him, for sure, and we wish him the very best in his new career. We also look forward to having him back here at some point before long so we can belatedly fete him, in proper style, and give him the send-off that never happened last spring.

We were also sad to see our extraordinary Fulbright language assistant, Katerina Zhukova, head home to Kaliningrad in June after being stranded here, in relative isolation, for more than two months. We deeply appreciate the professionalism and grace she displayed in dealing with the sudden onset of the pandemic. It goes without saying that we were unable to bring a new FLTA to campus from Russia this year.

We welcomed two new faces this past fall: Vladimir Ivantsov, who has joined us as visiting assistant professor of Russian, and Nicholas Bujalski, who comes to us as Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow and visiting professor of history and Russian and East European studies. They bring a wealth of energy and new ideas to the Russian program at Oberlin. We



are thrilled to have them here.

This past year we were also delighted to welcome back Dale Alexander, who rejoined us—this time on a permanent basis—as AA for Russian, German, and East Asian studies. We are also buoyed by the return of Professor of Sociology Veljko Vujačić, who came back to Oberlin in fall 2019 after serving for four years as an academic apparatchik (we never believed that would happen!) at the European University in St. Petersburg. For more on his experiences see his interview with Eleanor Cannon on these pages.

With most of the campus already vaccinated, we are optimistic that things will be more or less back to normal by the fall—i.e., we hope

that we will be teaching in person, and that we will be able to offer Winter Term Russian, bring a slate of speakers to campus, welcome a new Fulbright teaching assistant from Russia, and send a new round of OCREECAS interns off to various interesting destinations abroad.

Finally, I am happy to bring your attention to our [revamped website](#). While it is still a work in progress (especially the back pages), we think the front page is pretty sharp. We are planning to set up a new section highlighting what current students and graduates are up to. So please send your news and updates to me ([thomas.newlin@oberlin.edu](mailto:thomas.newlin@oberlin.edu)), Maia ([msolovie@oberlin.edu](mailto:msolovie@oberlin.edu)) or Dale ([dalexan3@oberlin.edu](mailto:dalexan3@oberlin.edu)). We are always delighted to hear from you!

## Department Events

### PANEL ON THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 precipitated unimaginable change for Germans. To mark the anniversary of this historic event, the Russian, German, and history departments at Oberlin hosted an interdisciplinary panel titled “The Fall of the Berlin Wall: Repercussions and Implications Thirty Years Out.” The panelists discussed, among other things, what it meant to grow up alongside the wall, the origins and implications of growing nostalgia for the former East Germany, and the continuing repercussions of the wall in today’s Germany.

Moderated by Ari Sammartino (history), the panel featured poet and Max Kade writer-in-residence Nora Gomringer, *taz.de* online newspaper journalist Malte Göbel, former *New York Times* reporter and Oberlin chief of staff Ferdinand Protzman ’75, who covered the fall of the wall in 1989, and professors Stephen Crowley (politics) and Veljko Vujačić (sociology).

Both Gomringer and Göbel grew up in West Germany, and both were in their teens in 1989. Gomringer remembered West Germans mailing candies and jeans to friends in East Germany. Göbel observed that after the fall, it was apparent that one could walk 10 meters and basically be in a different country—and where people spoke with an entirely different accent. In 1989, residents of the same city greeted each other as foreigners who had lived radically different lives.

Protzman, who majored in German and politics at Oberlin, was hired in 1989 by the *New York Times* as a business and economic reporter covering Germany and quickly found himself at the center of the action as a reporter. A firsthand witness to the destruction of the wall and the shock and euphoria felt by Germans from both sides, he was present at the disastrous press conference in which an East German spokesman mistakenly announced that East Germans could travel without restriction to the West. As a result, a wave of GDR residents flooded border checkpoints, and soon the collapse of the wall, as professor of Politics Stephen put it, “went from unimaginable to inevitable.”

The panelists also discussed the phenomenon of nostalgia for communism in the former GDR. Although former GDR citizens soon came to understand the extent of their economic deprivation, they had nonetheless been raised under a communist system and were

**Dye Lecture Hall**  
November 4 4:30 p.m.

One of the most transformative events in the 20th century, the fall of the Berlin Wall, at midnight November 9, 1989, came as a complete surprise.

There was no previous official announcement and no diplomatic coordination between the two Germanys or the Soviet Union and the United States. Experts on the reigning East/West geopolitical tensions generally expected it to happen, though not in their lifetime.

Our panelists - some of whom witnessed the momentous event in close proximity - will examine the historical background, the causes and the repercussions.

**The Fall of the Berlin Wall**  
**Repercussions and Implications 30 Years Out**

**Panel Discussion**

Ari Sammartino (Moderator) Professor of History, OC  
Steve Crowley, Professor and Chair of Politics, OC  
Ferdinand Protzman, Chief of Staff in the Office of the President at OC, former journalist who covered the fall of the wall for the New York Times  
Veljko Vujačić, Professor of Sociology, OC

Nora Gomringer, German and Swiss poet and writer, recipient of the prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann Prize (2015), Director of the International House of Artists Villa Concordia, Bamberg, currently Oberlin's Max Kade German Writer-in-Residence  
Malte Göbel, Journalist and Editor-in-Chief of the *taz.de* on-line daily newspaper, Berlin

Made possible by support from the OC Dept. of German, Max Kade Foundation, Clowes Fund, Russian and Eastern European Studies, and the OC Dept. of History

thus attached to it emotionally. Vujačić noted that when people have been raised in a particular manner, nostalgia can generate fondness, especially for childhood experiences—even if those experiences were actually harmful. Vujačić, who grew up under communism but never developed any sense of nostalgia for the system of his youth, underscored both the moral and material failings of the communist system and the missteps of liberal Western democracies in the wake of communism’s fall. He also identified nostalgia for the communist past as one of the root causes of the prevalence of far-right politics in the former GDR.

Crowley observed that the way the totalitarian government of the

GDR limited economic opportunity and political choice led to the current political divisions in Germany, wherein those who formerly lived in the Soviet bloc—and once hungered for democracy and capitalism—ended up feeling alienated and dispossessed, and gravitated more and more toward right-wing politics and populism.

—*Eleanor Cannon '21*

### ARTSLINK FELLOW KATERYNA RUSETSKA

For five weeks in October and November 2019, the Russian department and OCREECAS, in conjunction with the Bonner Center for Community-Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Research, hosted ArtsLink Fellow Kateryna Rusetska, an arts manager and curator who cofounded and directs Kultura Medialna, an arts center in Dnipro, a large industrial city in the eastern part of Ukraine. Kultura Medialna supports various civic initiatives through culture and creates and manages art and cultural projects that contribute to urban community development.

CEC ArtsLink is a U.S.-based international organization with a storied history of facilitating exchanges of visual and performing artists, curator, arts administrators, and cultural managers between the United States and some 37 countries overseas. It was founded in 1962 as the Citizen Exchange Council to promote artistic dialog and exchanges between the U.S. and USSR, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia and more recently has expanded its efforts to other countries such as Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, and Afghanistan. This is the second time Oberlin has brought in an ArtsLink Fellow; in 2017 we hosted Nikita Makarenko, a music producer and journalist from Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Fellows come here to learn about how we do things in the U.S.; we in turn learn from them about the state of the arts in their own countries.

Immediately after her arrival, Rusetska participated in a two-day “Studio in the Street” workshop in Cleveland sponsored by the Land Studio; the workshop was focused on “making the leap from a studio



Luci Williams '22, Tara Bobinac '22, and Brian Shoop '22 at the Russian department's February 2020 Maslenitsa Festival on Tappan Square. Photo: Maia Solovieva.

Legacies of the Soviet and Industrial Past in Contemporary Ukrainian Art

New Realities and Directions

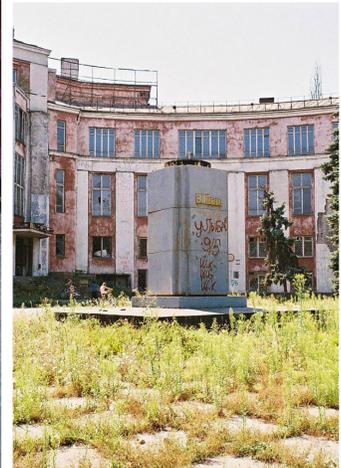
Kateryna Rustetska, Arts Manager and Curator, Kultura Medialna, Dnipro Ukraine

OCTOBER 30  
4:30 - 6:00 PM  
ROOM 103, WARD ART BUILDING

Details at FB: ObieRusHouse



Photo credits: Yulia Krivich "Palace of Culture", 2015



artist/creative person to a public artist.” She also visited several outdoor community art installations in Detroit, including the Heidelberg Project and the Dabls Mbad African Bead Museum. In Oberlin she observed and participated in Community Day at Oberlin’s Allen Memorial Art Museum.

Kateryna met and talked with a range of people both at the college (the art museum, the art Library, the Bonner Center) and in the local community (the Oberlin Community Art Center). She interacted regularly with Russian language students at all levels, and was a guest speaker in Maia Solovieva’s class “Women’s Voices in Contemporary Russia.” She also sat in on a number of other classes at Oberlin in order to gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum and the diverse approaches to teaching at an American liberal arts institution.

A highlight of Rusetska’s visit was her lively public talk, “Legacies of the Soviet and Industrial Past in Contemporary Ukrainian Art.” Rusetska discussed her own work as a curator, which focuses on collective identity, memory, and history in post-Soviet and post-industrial public spaces, as well her interest in the interplay between social and political realities and individual and collective stories and histories.

We are excited by the possibility of sending OCREECAS interns with an interest in art and art management to work alongside Kateryna in Dnipro and Kyiv at some point in the future.

# Students and Alumni

## ADVENTURES IN RUSSIAN ARCHIVES

*Double-degree cellist and REES and history major Annika Krafcik '20 recounts her foray into the daunting realm of Russian libraries and archives.*

In January 2020 I flew to Moscow on a solo research trip. It was my third time in Russia. I first traveled there in January 2017 for a group Winter Term tour of some of St. Petersburg and Moscow's most interesting theaters. Then in the fall of 2018 I returned as a student on the Bard-Smolny program in St. Petersburg. My third trip to Russia lacked the structure of a tour or a semester-abroad program. I was traveling to Russia on my own, and with one mission: to gather information about Nadezhda Briusova, a mass music educator from revolutionary Russia.

Briusova, the subject of my History Honors thesis, was a graduate of Moscow Conservatory, a pianist, music theorist and educator who dedicated her life to bringing music to the masses. In 1906, she co-founded the Moscow People's Conservatory, an institution which offered concerts, lecture series, and music classes to the general public. After the October Revolution, the Moscow People's Conservatory—and Briusova's "listening to music" classes in particular—became a model for mass music education in the Soviet age.

My research trip was characterized by the usual comedy of errors that I had already become accustomed to as a student abroad in Russia. I arrived in Moscow's Sheremet'ev Airport at 6 a.m. on January 8. After trying (and failing) to procure an International SIM card, I traveled, tragically phoneless, to my hotel, relying on the Beeline storekeeper's directions for guidance. Two very squished bus and metro rides later, I found the hotel and collapsed on the bed. After taking a life-giving shower, I opened my computer and read an email that made my stomach drop. It turned out that the main archive I would be visiting, the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), would not be able to fill my materials request for another six days. Little had I known, the staff of RGALI had taken the whole week off to celebrate New Year's. They hadn't seen the request I had sent on January 2 until that morning, and would need another week to fill the request. Just like that, my two-week trip was cut in half. Because the archive only allowed visitors to access 500 pages from a personal *fond* (collection) every three days, this six-day delay meant that I would only end up seeing 24 of the 70 dela I had ordered. It also meant I had six days with a wide open schedule.

With no reason to visit the archive until January 14, I spent my first six days in Russia at the Russian State Library, known colloquially as the Leninka. Unsurprisingly, accessing this monstrous library, the second largest library in the world, required interfacing with Russia's beloved bureaucracy. Before I embarked on this trip, history professor Chris Stolarski had graciously walked me through the Lenin Library's somewhat byzantine system, but despite his coaching I still managed to make a fool of myself.

After exiting the metro, I stumbled around the exterior of the library for a while, searching for the registration entrance. At first, I walked into the main entrance and stood like a deer in headlights



*Fyodor Dostoevsky mulling over life in front of the Lenin Library, with snow in his lap and a bird on his head. Photo: Annika Krafcik*

next to a conveyor belt and an ID checkpoint. The security guard stared back at me and offered me no counsel. Certain I was in the wrong place, I turned back around and headed outside, continuing my search for the registration room. Eventually I found it, tucked behind some unassuming columns. I walked inside and spotted the window of a cloak room.

I must confess at this point that I truly love cloak rooms. They promise comfort and civility, and I wish that we had them more in the U.S. Excited by the chance to avail myself of the cloak room's services, I quickly disrobed and handed over my jacket and backpack to the attendant. But she refused to take my wares. She said something inaudibly quiet that I swear I wouldn't have understood even if it was in English. Unsure what had just happened, I put my jacket and my backpack back on and scanned the room. I walked up to a woman who appeared to be in charge. She was standing in front of a row of closed-door clerks' offices. The woman handed me a registration form and asked if I had my passport. Indeed, I did (I hadn't screwed that up!), so she handed me a registration form and ushered me over to the worktables. I hurriedly scribbled in my name and passport information, hoping I wasn't missing any crucial informa-

tion lost in translation.

I returned my form to the woman in charge, who then presented me with a number. Upon receiving my number, I felt a resurgence of that familiar feeling, one I had cultivated while studying abroad in St. Petersburg, that feeling of satisfaction when you fill out your paper work and get a number in reciprocity. Russians love their bureaucracy, and they rather sneakily teach you to love it too.

When my number was called, I was ushered into one of the clerk's offices. This was probably the most nerve-wracking part of the whole process. The clerk took my passport, inspected my visa (which was the required Humanitarian Scientific Technical Visa). She asked me my name, asked me if I was a student. And then, perhaps because my nervous Russian had given away my discomfort with the language, she asked whether I knew that there were no English-language books here. *Da, konechno*, I replied, Yes, of course.

Having answered yes to that crucial question, I was in. The clerk printed out my Leninka ID, my very own ticket to paradise. Very proud of myself for having passed what felt like a test, I rode on a cloud over to the cloak room window and presented my now Leninka-approved coat and backpack to the clerk. But once again, the clerk refused to take my things. She said, again almost inaudibly, *chto ty khochesh'*? What do you want? And that's when I realized... this was the staff cloak room. Swallowing my pride, I put my jacket back on for a second time and headed out the door.

Heading back to the main entrance, I figured the security guard would be excited to see me again, proud of me for making it through the registration process in such record time. No such luck. He waved me through the ID checkpoint without so much as a nod of acknowledgement. But no matter. I had finally reached the proper cloak room. I took off my jacket and backpack (for the third time in about 20 minutes) and made my way up the grand staircase.

My whole first day at the Leninka I spent figuring out the WiFi and trying to find the bathroom. Exhausted after a day of hard work, I headed home a couple hours later. The next day, I arrived, ready to decipher the library's material ordering process. This was a big moment for me. This was the moment when I would present my *otnoshenie*, my letter from Oberlin stating my research intentions, to a librarian and ask for their guidance in navigating the library. And to my great delight, the librarian was extremely helpful! Once I told her what I was looking for—Soviet-era music journals in which Briusova was published (I had a complete list)—she directed me to a room of cabinets filled with drawers of cataloged index cards, and I got to work. I ordered probably 20 music journals and took hundreds of pages of scans, using the Notes app on my phone.

Taking scans and reading Soviet music journals filled my first few days in Moscow, until, eventually, January 14 arrived, the day my materials were ready at RGALI. Excited to finally review the materials I had traveled across the ocean to read, I got to the archive first thing in the morning. As it turns out though, first thing in the morning in Russia is much closer to 10 a.m. than 9 a.m. The security guard (who was much nicer than the Leninka one) directed me to the nearest coffee shop, where I waited for the archive to officially open.

After a brief registration process, I made it into the RGALI reading room, which was about as uninspiring as a room can be. It was a beige, rectangular room with a dozen empty tables. However, what the room lacked in excitement, the documents made up for. The very first file I read was fascinating: correspondence between Nadezhda Briusova and Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, in which Briusova asks Krupskaya to support her nomination to the Party.

Forbidden from taking photos in the reading room, I spent my days in RGALI hurriedly transcribing and translating anything and everything that seemed relevant to my thesis's argument (which was, at that point, murky at best). I skimmed probably around 1,500 pages of Briusova's handwritten lecture notes, correspondence, syllabi, as well as advertisements and establishing documents for the major institutions at which she worked. Without international cell service or Wi-Fi, without so much as a Russian-English dictionary (which I will definitely bring with me next time) in the reading room, translation work was challenging. Afraid of mistranslating Briusova's words, I wrote down words I didn't know in my notebook and translated them when I returned to my apartment every evening.

It was absolutely exhausting work, but thrilling too. Each file had a check-out sheet, on which former readers had signed their names. In some cases, I could see that I was one of only a handful of people to have read the document before me. To my knowledge, the only other person to write extensively on Nadezhda Briusova is Natalia Minor, a Russian scholar of pedagogy who advocated for the reincorporation of Briusova's mass music education program into the modern Russian education system. My thesis was the first work written in English to delve into Briusova's contributions to the Russian and Soviet music culture.

Of course, reading 100-year-old documents was not all I did in Moscow. In my free time, I braved the cold, strolling around Red Square, Zariadke Park, and the cosmonaut-themed VDNKh Park. As someone who has only ever been in Russia in the winter-time, I must say I really enjoy the festivity of Russian winter. The New Year's decorations and the ice skating rinks at Red Square and VDNKh really put you in the holiday spirit, even despite this January's unseasonably warm weather. I visited the New Tretyakov Gallery, took in a show at the Bolshoi's New Stage (*Flames of Paris* by Boris Asafiev), and toured the Moscow Metro. I also ate well, filling up on khachapuri, pelmeni, and pirogi.

I am very grateful for the funding from the Russian department (the Richard Lankford Memorial Student Research Award), the sociology department (the Jerome Davis Student Research Grant), and the history department (the Frederick Artz Student Research Grant) that made this trip possible. If you have any questions about conducting research at the Lenin Library or RGALI, or if you are interested in reading my thesis, feel free to contact me at [akrafcik@oberlin.edu](mailto:akrafcik@oberlin.edu).

**Editor's addendum:** We note with pride that Annika received Highest Honors at graduation for her thesis on Briusova.

# Faculty News and Notes

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Professor of Politics **Steve Crowley** was a Visiting Fellow at the Aleksanteri Institute/ Finnish Center for Russian & East European Studies at the University of Helsinki for June 2019. He gave a talk on his research at the Department of Russian & East European Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in December 2019. His article “Global Cities versus Rustbelt Realities: The Dilemmas of Urban Development in Russia” appeared in the Summer 2020 issue of *Slavic Review*.

During spring and fall 2020, Professor of East Asian Studies **Sheila Miyoshi Jager** was on research leave, with support from the Smith Richardson Foundation, completing a new book about the great power struggles between Tsarist Russia, Qing China and Meiji Japan over the Korean Peninsula at the end of the 19th and early 20th century. Titled *The ‘Other’ Great Game: The Opening of Korea and the Birth of Modern East Asia*, the book will provide a deep historical context for understanding Northeast Asia’s present and future situations. She is also working on a coauthored book (with Jiyul Kim in the History Department) titled *The Korean War: A New History*.

Associate Professor of Comparative Literature **Stiliana Milkova** published her book [Elena Ferrante as World Literature](#) (Bloomsbury Academic) in February 2021. Her translation of Alessandro Baricco’s “The Boodman Syndrome” in *The Arkansas International* (Fall 2019) was nominated for a Pushcart Prize (Stiliana’s second such

nomination). Among her other publications and public writing are a review of Elena Ferrante’s *Incidental Inventions*, a translation from Italian of an interview with feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero in the journal *Narrative*, and an essay in the *Michigan Quarterly Review* on the cultural myths of the pandemic. In December 2019 Stiliana was an invited speaker at the international one-day symposium Global Ferrante in Siena, Italy. Her article, coauthored with Liliana Milkova (Yale University Art Gallery) “The Visual Politics of R. Crumb’s Bulgaria: A Sketchbook Report” is forthcoming in *The Comics of R. Crumb: Underground in the Art Museum* (University of Mississippi Press, 2021). She continues to edit the online journal *Reading in Translation*, and recently put out a [special issue](#) for *Reading in Translation* on the Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg. She is on sabbatical in Bulgaria for the 2020-21 academic year.

Professor of Russian **Tom Newlin** published an article on Tolstoy’s lifelong habit of dressing as a peasant in the October 2019 issue of *Russian Review*; a related short essay on [Tolstoy the Peasant: A ‘Myth’ Revisited](#) appeared on NYU’s All the Russias blog. He also contributed a piece on deep time in 19th-century Russia to *Russian Literature of the Anthropocene* (Fall 2020). He has given talks recently at conferences and workshops in Munich, Princeton, Berlin, and elsewhere.

**Kristina Paabus**, associate professor of studio art in reproducible media, was awarded

an [Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award](#) for 2019, as well as Oberlin College Grant-in-Aid and an H.H. Powers Travel Grant. These awards supported her solo exhibition [Vahepeal/ Meanwhile](#) at [Hobusepea Gallerii](#) in Tallinn, Estonia, during summer 2019. While in Estonia, Paabus also participated in [Muhu Print](#), an international printmaking workshop to learn more about Mokulito (wood lithography) techniques. In October 2019, Paabus was a visiting artist at [The University of Arkansas - Fayetteville](#), where she met with students, presented a public lecture on her work and research, and created a print with [Red Ridge Editions](#). In early 2020 Kristina’s solo exhibition [Something to Believe In](#) was on display at the [McDonough Museum](#) in Youngstown, Ohio, and she presented a public lecture on her work at the museum. Paabus also took part in the group exhibitions, Artists to Watch, at [Bonfoey Gallery](#) (Cleveland) as well as [PrintAustin: The Contemporary Print 2020](#) at [Big Medium](#) (Austin, Texas).

Professor of History **Ari Sammartino** is enjoying her first year as chair of the Oberlin history department. This spring she completed the final edits on her next book manuscript, *Freedomland: Co-op City and the Story of New York*, which is now in copy-editing and due out spring 2022 from Cornell University/Three Hills Press. She is also beginning a new research project that looks at the concept of risk in modern Europe, ranging from early modern gamblers to Cold War nuclear strategists.

Russian House Director and Faculty-in-Residence **Maia Solovieva** taught three new courses in 2019-20: Women’s Voices in Contemporary Russia (a fourth-year class in Russian), Russian Phonetics, and Navigating Russia, which is designed to prepare students to study and live abroad. Her students’ enthusiasm made the phonetics course especially fun to teach, and the songs they learned made the department’s traditional Maslentsa celebration more colorful than ever. She had to move entirely online to teach Navigating Russia, which was a challenging but rewarding experience. In February 2020 she presented a paper on the challenges of teaching advanced level courses at the annual AATSEEL conference in San Diego. She coauthored an article with Alla Epstein (Wellesley College) titled “Extracurricular Activities in Russian Language and Culture Programs: Challenges and Perspectives” that was published in *The Art of Teaching Russian* (Georgetown University Press) in fall 2020.

Professor of Sociology **Veljko Vujačić**’s book *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) [appeared in Russian](#) (St. Petersburg, The European University Press, 2019) and Serbian translations (Belgrade: CLIO press, 2019). Public presentations were organized in St. Petersburg (European University) on October, 22, 2019, and at the International Belgrade Book Fair on October 27, 2019.

# Reports from our OCREECAS Interns

## Hannah Tyburski '19, Russian Major (Irkutsk and Lake Baikal, Russia)

Just one week after my graduation in May 2019, I traveled to Irkutsk, Russia, for an internship with the nonprofit environmental organization Great Baikal Trail. A grant from the Oberlin Center for Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies made this unique opportunity possible. OCREECAS provides students with funding for a three-month-long internship abroad based on their personal interests and goals.

Irkutsk is a lively city containing charming wooden houses, trendy cafes, and modern art galleries. The city is located on the Angara River and is only an hour's drive from the oldest, deepest freshwater lake in the world. I discovered the Great Baikal Trail (GBT) from a former OCREECAS recipient who had a very positive experience with the organization. GBT was founded 17 years ago and is dedicated to creating Russia's first ecologically conscious trail system. They also educate the public on environmental issues and on how to be responsible while hiking or camping through nature. I chose to go to Irkutsk because I wanted to see how Siberia differs from western Russia and to learn more about the environmental efforts taking place in the Baikal region.

During the first part of my internship I lived in the GBT hostel in the heart of Irkutsk for three weeks while translating materials from Russian into English. I then participated in three back-to-back trail building projects, each two weeks long. Each project involved 10-15 volunteers, the majority of whom were from various places in Russia, as well as Great Britain, France, Zimbabwe, and the U.S. We spent our

days digging new trails or rebuilding old trails around Baikal. We also built structures on some of the trails, such as stairs and water drainage systems, using materials around us such as wood from fallen trees and rocks from the creek.

I learned practical skills such as how to build a fire, chop wood, and prepare food over a campfire. While I was learning these useful skills, I was also finding out much more about Russian culture while bonding with my fellow volunteers. The work we did was physically challenging, but it was immensely rewarding to see all that we accomplished in two weeks. My Russian improved greatly, and I also grew as a person in many ways. Without any prior camping experience, I had a difficult time at the beginning of the first trail-building stint, but by the end of my third project, I felt completely comfortable and at peace with myself in nature. Now I really miss the times when I swam with my team in the freezing lake, when my clothes smelled like campfire, and I fell asleep at night to the sounds of nature.

I recommend OCREECAS to anyone who wants to improve their Russian skills while acquiring a deeper understanding of a place's culture by living there. The summer was the best, most soul-enriching one of my life and I am incredibly grateful to OCREECAS for making that possible.

*Hannah returned to St. Petersburg for the 2019-2020 academic year to teach English to Russian students at Bard-Smolny. She is now putting the outdoor skills she acquired on the GBT to good use as an intern at the John Heinz Wildlife Refuge in Philadelphia and was recently certified to operate chainsaws, backhoes, and other heavy equipment.*



Hannah Tyburski (second from top, left) with her fellow trail-blazers. Photo courtesy of Hannah

## Gillian Smith '19, Russian and Psychology Major (Tver, Russia)

I spent the fall of 2019 in the provincial city of Tver, Russia, working as an English instructor. I wasn't sure what to expect before I arrived. My only point of comparison was St. Petersburg, which is a tough act to follow in terms of culture and history. But it turned out



Gillian Smith (cup in hand) preparing shashlik at the dacha with her host brother and two teachers from her school. Photo courtesy of Gillian

that Tver offered Piter stiff competition!

The city is located right between St. Petersburg and Moscow. Prince Mikhail Tverskoi once fought the prince of Moscow to establish Tver as the capital of Russia (he lost). The city boasts a palace that Catherine the Great used when she commuted between the larger cities, now converted into an art gallery. When a fire took most of the city center, Catherine donated money to rebuild it in the style of St. Petersburg. It is also the proud hometown of the Russian chanson singer Mikhail Krug. Later, back in the United States, I went to a language club in Chicago and met a man who had lived in Ukraine for 10 years. I mentioned that I had just returned from Tver, and he said “Of course I know Tver, it’s the hometown of Mikhail Krug!”

In Tver I interned as an English instructor at Delta Intercontact Language School. Looking back on my decision, I’m a little shocked at how much I stepped outside my comfort zone. In St. Petersburg I felt too shy to connect with the Russian students in my classes. In Tver, I began working the day after I arrived, meeting with 15 to 20 students per week. Every class was an hour and a half long, and they were conversation classes. What do you talk about for an hour and a half with someone you’ve just met? Everything. I had conversations with a professor about education in America and Russia. Another student told me everything I could want to know about boar hunting. My friend Olga told me about the struggles of being a working woman in Russia. I was drawn into several conversations about Al Capone. It turns out

that Russians’ notion of Chicago mostly revolves around our gangsters and Aleksei Balabanov’s movie *Brother 2* (2000).

My favorite relationship was the one I had with my host family. My host brother, Zhenya, and I talked for hours after dinner. My host mom didn’t speak a word of English, and was so encouraging when I spoke to her in Russian. We visited the dacha on the weekend, had barbecues on chilly days, and went to a Renaissance fair in the park.

I’m grateful to OCREECAS for allowing me to pursue this internship and to experience Russia through the eyes of the people who live there. I will cherish the memories and the relationships I built in Tver for the rest of my life, and I look forward to the day when I can return.

### **Julia Ingoglia ’19, ENVS Major and REES Minor (Republic of Georgia)**

When people asked me what I was doing after graduation, many expressed surprise that I was headed to Georgia, but assured me that Atlanta was an interesting city. A lot of Americans have never heard of Tbilisi, let alone the Republic of Georgia. But off I went in August 2019, encouraged and intrigued by the strong recommendation of previous OCREECAS grantee Jean-Paul Gilbert, who had done the same internship in 2017. Travel and cultural exchange were a big part of my Oberlin experience, and I really wanted to continue that post-grad, which is why OCREECAS appealed to me so much. However, I was totally uncertain of what my time in Georgia would be like.

My internship was focused around Pheasant’s Tears Winery, which produces wine in the traditional or “natural” Georgian way that has been used for thousands of years. One of the owners is an American transplant, who also runs several restaurants in Tbilisi which feature local, seasonal Georgian food. I worked both at a restaurant in Tbilisi and at the winery itself in the countryside, bringing tourists and travelling chefs on tours through the vineyards and cellars. Every day was different, from helping with guests to visiting surrounding winemakers to assisting with more administrative tasks. It was a lot less like my experience working in restaurants in the States and more like continually opening a family’s kitchen to visitors.

When I first arrived in Tbilisi, I had expected Soviet-bloc architecture to still dominate. While those buildings certainly exist, the city is actually an eclectic mix of modern (and sometimes highly experimental) buildings, traditional brightly colored Georgian houses, and more ancient remnants of Ottoman sulphur baths and medieval churches. Open air markets full of Soviet kitsch stand across the street from recently opened boutique hotels, and everyone I met in the capital under the age of 40 spoke English. My overwhelming impression of Tbilisi and the young people of Georgia is that they are westward facing, eager to speak with Americans, and consider themselves an up-and-coming European country. Once, while looking lost wandering down a street, an older gentleman politely gave me directions, and after finding out I was American, shook my hand and told me he loved America (something I haven’t often heard abroad since 2016). However, that conversation was entirely



*Julia Ingoglia enjoying a glass of Georgian white wine. Photo courtesy of Julia*

in Russian. There is a clear generational divide between those who speak English and those who speak Russian, and I would switch depending on the age of the person I was talking with. Learning Russian was a requirement for school children prior to 1991, and while the language is still very useful in Georgia (the Georgian language is entirely unique and incredibly hard to learn), and many people still have family ties in Russia, there is a good deal of antipathy towards Russia today on the part of many Georgians. A phrase I heard a lot was “Russia is occupying 20% of my country,” referring to the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This sense of still being under Russia’s thumb exists alongside a growing tourist industry, international recognition of Georgia’s rich food and wine traditions, and social modernization.

I was in Georgia for only three months, and I realize I was only able to scratch the surface of its many layers of history, tradition, and community. I’m so glad I was able to be there at this pivotal time when the country is on the cusp of becoming a major tourist destination. More and more, the rest of the world is becoming aware of the culture, art, gourmet cuisine and winemaking, and natural beauty of multifaceted Georgia.

**Roman Broszkowski ’19, Politics Major, REES Minor  
(Warsaw, Poland)**

In September 2019, I was able to travel on an OCREECAS grant to Warsaw, Poland to cover the October 13 parliamentary elections for *Political Critique*, a leftist cultural and politics magazine.

I had been to Poland many times before and had even worked at *Political Critique* when I studied abroad two years earlier, but this time I arrived in Poland with a singular focus. Since 2015, Poland has experienced a dramatic political shift and, with each subsequent election, seems to be becoming less democratic. Drawing on my studies at Oberlin, I wanted to investigate how the changing electoral climate was affecting marginalized groups across Polish society. What I found was that for many communities, the sharp rightward turn in the government has become an existential threat. I wrote three major articles during my time in Poland, while also editing and publishing many pieces by other writers. Each article focused on a different group and their opinions around contemporary Polish politics.

One of my articles focused on the Polish LGBT community, which has been particularly singled out for attack by the ruling Law and Justice party. I spoke with many different sources—elected officials, activists, candidates, and regular people—and found not only a common fear but also a shared passion for organizing that I have not seen anywhere else. This mirrored my conversations with Polish feminists and women’s rights activists around the country. Both groups have been brutally repressed by the Polish government and their conservative allies, yet many stories about the election simply omitted their feelings or experiences. I am deeply proud of writing about these communities and I know that without OCREECAS’s support these groups would have continued to be overlooked in the English-language media.

My OCREECAS grant provided me the means to support myself and put my Oberlin studies to practical use. Not only do I feel infinitely more prepared as a journalist, but I wholeheartedly believe that OCREECAS represents the very best of the Oberlin experience.

**Обрусевшая! Update from Jenny Bird ’16**

*Shortly after graduating, Russian major Jenny Bird headed to St. Petersburg on a three-month OCREECAS internship—and ended up staying for more than four years! Here we get an update (pre-COVID, late 2019) from Jenny about her life in Russia.*

As my plane touched down at 4 a.m. in the middle of a Siberian airfield, I wondered why I was there.

I did not imagine I would ever take a business trip to a city as obscure as Surgut, Russia. Surgut is located in western Siberia, a three-and-a-half-hour plane ride from Saint Petersburg. This 425-year-old town has a population of roughly 370,000. Although temperatures there often reach a low of -40 degrees, I would have the fortune to visit during its three-month winter reprieve.

In spite of its remote location, Surgut is far from barren or boring. Among its many peculiarities is an approximate replica of Big Ben, which functions as an English language school. A Mil Mi-26, the largest helicopter in the world, sits unattended in an airfield. But the city’s most interesting attraction is Old Surgut, the city’s historical and cultural center. It was in these small wooden houses, or *domiki*, that my education on Surgut began.

In the minds of many, mentions of Russia will undoubtedly conjure up images of vodka-drinking people in fur hats. In fact, the Siberian fur trade, which began in the 16th century, was of great economic and cultural importance to the Surgut region. The main victim of this trade, the black fox, even appears on the town’s coat of arms, though real specimens can no longer be found in either forest or zoo. Only the *domiki* in Old Surgut remind the visitor of the once-important status of the animal, which was hunted to extinction centuries ago.

Despite having lived in Saint Petersburg for four years, I have never felt more connected to local Russians than I did in my one week in Surgut. Everywhere I went, the locals went out of their way to show me the kind spirit of their city. The guide at the black fox museum offered me a private tour, free of charge; my taxi driver gushed about his love for American cinema as he maneuvered his taxi exactly in front of the hotel entrance; and person after person showed me the best places in town in the hopes that I would have a great time. The warmth of the people was a striking contrast to Surgut’s chilly summer nights.

The circumstances leading to my visiting Surgut are unique amongst most American undergraduates. After majoring in Russian, I received an OCREECAS grant to work at the European University in Saint Petersburg, assisting current Oberlin Professor Veljko Vujačić in his role as vice-provost. When my internship ended, I began teaching English at the largest English language school in the city. After a year and a half, I was promoted to assistant director of studies, a position which has opened the door to many of my unusual experiences.

# News from Students and Alums

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A number of our recent graduates caught the Russian bug so badly that they ignored their professors' sober cautionary advice and went off to PhD programs in Russian literature anyway, which of course makes us proud. These include **Paul Kleiman '19** (Princeton), **Isak Saaf '18** (Middlebury), **Walker Griggs '17** (University of Southern California), **Oliver Okun '17** (University of Chicago, Comp. Lit.), and **Hank Miller '17** (University of California at Berkeley).

**Jenny Bird '16** is back from Russia after four years there and is currently running her own business working with Russian entrepreneurs and business professionals. She trains her clients (who work in industries ranging from cosmetics and engineering, to education and medical research) in skills such as discussing/analyzing data, negotiating, and pitching. She generously invites students interested in her experience to contact her via email ([jennifer.bird2718@gmail.com](mailto:jennifer.bird2718@gmail.com)).

In 2020 **Sarah Chatta '17** moved from Alaska, where she was a reporter for the *Chilkat News*, to New York City, where she worked for *Inside Edition*. She is currently a Fulbright Fellow in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. She reports that she has already visited the Savitsky Museum and the ancient Zoroastrian Necropolis in Nukus, walked around the ruins of ancient castles in Khorezm, been bitten by a enormous dog, and had rabies shots.

**Jean-Paul Gilbert '17** is back in his hometown of Chicago, where he is working for Diversey Wines and plotting to open a natural wine bar.

Russian and comparative literature major **Xiwei Guo '22** spent three weeks at the famed Ilkhom Theater in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in January 2020 on a Winter Term Grant from OCREECAS. She sat in on classes at the Ilkhom School of Drama and talked with managers, directors, teachers, and actors there. She also visited a number of exhibitions at the theater's Center of Contemporary Art and attended several of the theater's original plays.

**Annika Krafcik '20** is working at the Museum of Russian Art in St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Charlotte Kropf '20** interned at the European Reading Room of the Library of Congress, where she is now employed as a library technician. She is currently working on a project to catalog an enormous collection of Russian legal material. She reports that she recently found a letter written in 1916 that fell out of a book from the 19th century. See her fascinating [blog post](#) on a late 19th-century Russian postcard series depicting the tea trade route of the Trans Siberian Railroad.

**Heeseob Lee '20** is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science and International Studies at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea, where he is focusing on environmental politics, including renewable energy and energy transition.

History and REES major **Emma Moore '21** is completing an honors thesis in history titled "Challengers: The Yugoslav Communist Party, National Identity and Foreign Policy (1941-48)."

Congratulations to **Gaby Parlapiano '20**, who was awarded the ACTR Post-Secondary Russian Scholar Laureate Award as outstanding graduating senior in Oberlin's Russian program for 2020.

**Nick Parlato '12** received an MA in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Northern British Columbia in 2019; as part of his studies he conducted extensive fieldwork in Siberia investigating Indigenous territorial rights. He is now pursuing a doctoral degree in Arctic and Northern studies at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

**Louis Porter '10** received his PhD in Russian history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2018. His dissertation was awarded the Cohen/Tucker Prize for "an outstanding English-language doctoral dissertation in Soviet or post-Soviet politics and history" from the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. As of fall 2020 he is an assistant professor of history at Texas State University.

**Lillian Posner '17** completed a master's degree in Eurasian, Russian & Eastern European Studies at Georgetown University in 2020 and is now a program assistant for Russia, the Middle East, and Asia Pacific at the Center for the National Interest.

REES major **Patrick Powers '21** is completing an honors thesis under the direction of Visiting Assistant Professor Vladimir Ivantsov that interprets the spiritual and existential underpinnings of the *chinari* group (Kharms, Vvedensky) through the writings of Yakov Druskin. He is presenting some of his findings at the European and Eurasian Undergraduate Research Symposium in May 2021 at the University of Pittsburgh.

**Zach Rewinski '10** is scheduled to defend his dissertation this May in the Slavic department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He has been teaching Russian for the past two years at Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

Congratulations to **Danny Rothberg '20**, who received a Critical Language Scholarship for summer 2020 to continue his study of Russian at an advanced level. Because of COVID, the fellowship was online rather than in-country, but Danny reports that it was intensive and highly rewarding nonetheless.

**Drew Wise '15** taught high school in the Akron, Ohio, area and Washington, DC, for several years and is now pursuing a graduate degree in statistics at the University of Washington in Seattle.

*Send us your news, we'd love to hear from you!*

# Interview with Professor Veljko Vujačić

In the fall of 2019, Professor of Sociology Veljko Vujačić returned to Oberlin after a four-year stint as vice-rector and professor at the European University in St. Petersburg, Russia. The European University is a private graduate school founded in 1995 with the support of the first democratically elected mayor of St. Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak. The mission of the university was to create a western-style institution of higher learning, attract Russia's leading social science and humanities professors, and train and retain a younger generation of Russian scholars. Twenty-five years on, the university has largely succeeded in its mission. In this interview, Eleonor Cannon '21 asks Vujačić about his experiences as an administrator and professor in Russia and his thoughts on Russia's recent past.



## How did you end up at the European University, and what was your role there?

In 2014, I took an unpaid leave from Oberlin to work at the university. The university's trustees wanted someone who had experience in western university practices but was also familiar with Russian culture. They interviewed me, and, somewhat to my surprise, I got the job. I am not Russian, but I have studied Russia for a long time, and the fact that I was of a proximate but quite different Slavic background and had lived under communism spoke in favor of my candidacy as an "insider-outsider." In addition to serving as provost, I also taught a sociological theory class each year. I wanted to get to know the students, and didn't want the faculty to perceive me only as an administrator (read: "boss," or potential "jerk" in the Russian context). When I arrived I quickly discovered that despite a significant level of institutional development, many things that we take for granted in a western university were missing: for example, there was nothing resembling an internally protected website system like Blackboard, and because of convoluted state rules for different departments and programs, there wasn't even a coherent academic calendar. As time went on, I began to understand how the complexities of Russian government rules stand in the way of creating a fully western-

style institution. Such rules exist in some form in the U.S., of course, but they seem more meaningful and less onerous: for example, we had to develop an assessment protocol for our department/majors in order for Oberlin to get accreditation, but we did learn something about our program in the process.

## What are some up-close examples of challenges you experienced?

The problem in Russia is that the state imposes so many detailed rules that it becomes difficult to streamline programs. A syllabus in Oberlin is sometimes quite elaborate and can be 8-10 pages. But if you submitted such a document to the Russian Ministry of Education, it would have to be transformed into something that was acceptable to the state and would be 30 pages long. In practice, this means that Russian universities hire special administrators and "helpers" whose only job is to make sure that all the forms are filled out properly. You end up with an absurd waste of time and labor and the creation of what Russians call a "Potemkin Village," a fictional reality to please the authorities. So, you can have your own internal rules, but the official documentation has to abide by state standards. Excessive regulation is an instrument of political pressure by the state: state bureaucrats inevitably find "mistakes" in your documents and take away your accreditation

or license to teach: this happened to the European University in 2017—two years into my term.

Another problem I encountered was that it's very difficult to organize quality control or fire badly performing administrators. Neither the rector nor the provost could affect much-needed personnel changes because Russian labor laws make that exceedingly difficult. As far as academic quality control is concerned, although there was no tenure, contract extension for professors was almost automatic, so I created a quality control committee similar to those that exist in American universities and colleges. Even so, we had to make sure that it functioned in a way that was compatible with state rules and regulations.

## How is the university faring now?

The university lost the license to teach in 2017 for purely political reasons. It was obviously a warning or punishment for its liberalism. State repression is not like in Soviet times when the state could just do whatever it wanted, now it is more of a war of attrition. Wars of attrition are a litmus test for how far the government can go in pressuring or crushing independent institutions. One liberal Russian radio commentator stated that there would be one Russia if the European University survived, and another Russia if it didn't: meaning that if the university was

closed for good, this would be a clear sign that authoritarianism was triumphant. The bizarre thing is that the university had powerful backers, since its trustees included Russia's former Minister of Finance Alexei Kudrin and the director of The Hermitage—the largest museum in the world—Mikhail Piotrovsky. Even so, the cronies of then Prime Minister Medvedev, who had a personal grudge against Kudrin, temporarily prevailed. As the Russian saying goes: “when the bosses fight, the people suffer.” Fortunately, the tables turned and in 2018 the university regained its license. However, because of all the political trouble Russian donors got scared, hurting the university financially: this is one mechanism of the war of attrition.

**You've been studying nationalism since the late 1980s. Were there indications then that liberalism in Russia and other former Soviet States would wane and nationalism would gain momentum once again?**

I first went to Russia in December 1991, just on the verge of the resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev and the country's dissolution by agreement. The greatest mystery for me was how the Soviet Union collapsed relatively peacefully. The USSR was an incredibly powerful state. Your generation can't imagine this even with the help of books, movies, and documentaries: liberal Americans think this is some kind of Cold War hangover. However, ask anyone of my generation in Eastern Europe, including in Yugoslavia which was outside the Soviet bloc, and they will tell you: the Soviet Union was terrifying, the impression was that they could run over your country and install a “friendly leadership” in a matter of weeks. I grew up in Yugoslavia, which had the mildest communist regime: the country was open to western tourists and culture, we also had millions of people with passports who lived and worked abroad. This was a true anomaly in the communist world and since this was a “negative example” in the eyes of the Soviet leadership, we always awaited the day when the Soviets would come to “save true socialism” in Yugoslavia: in other words, invade. You can't imagine how scary that prospect was.

So, when the Soviet Union dissolved by

agreement in December 1991, I asked myself: where were these legions of communists, and army and KGB officers when the state was falling apart? My comparative study of Russian and Serbian nationalism (*Nationalism, Myth and the State in Russia and Serbia. Antecedents of the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*: Cambridge University Press, 2015) as well as the sequel book I am writing now on politics in the two countries in the 1980s, are devoted to answering the question of why this happened and also why Yugoslavia—despite its cultural openness and relative economic prosperity—collapsed in a bloody civil war.

When I first started studying Russian nationalism, most of my colleagues thought it was a misplaced effort, given how hegemonic the liberal discourse of democracy and markets was at the time. In good measure, although not exclusively, the revival of nationalism in Russia is a consequence of disappointment with liberalism and the West. Initially, there was an incredible love affair with everything Western, and Russians expected much more support from the West. A promise was made to Gorbachev that NATO wouldn't expand, but the United States broke it. In 1999, 19 countries of NATO bombed Serbia, because of the ethnic conflict there (the Serbian authorities were responsible for ethnically cleansing the Albanian population). From the Russian point of view, NATO acted unilaterally, in violation of international law, and without consulting the UN Security Council, so that when the West now calls into question Russia's annexation (or “liberation”—depending on your point of view) of Crimea it looks hypocritical. Such events were a signal to Russian elites that their country was not taken seriously on the world stage.

Another reason for the revival of nationalism is the need for a minimally positive narrative about the past. There has to be some narrative that unifies everyone under a national idea. You can remove statues, but you cannot remove these figures from the national imagination. These stories tell us who we are with all the bad and good that goes with it: if they change, our idea of ourselves changes along with them.

The Soviet Union collapsed in a wave of anti-Stalinism, when previously banned novels, histories, films, and numerous testimonies told the true story of the Soviet tragedy: millions had perished during the forced collectivization of agriculture and artificial famines, and communist party purges on the mid-1930s. Millions more lost their lives thanks to Stalins' mistakes in World War II and the wartime crimes of the Soviet secret services whose members shot retreating soldiers in the back and sent many others to camps in Siberia. But once the truth came out, people were left with the question: was everything wrong about the past, are there no redeeming moments? Were the lives and struggles of Grandma and Grandpa in vain? Vladimir Putin said as much when he began reviving some Soviet symbols and rehabilitated the collective memory of victory in World War II—something millions of people can feel justifiably proud of: after all, Nazi Germany lost the bulk of its military force to the Red Army on the Eastern front, something “westerners” tend to “conveniently forget.”

Nationalism arose out of this quest for meaning, for the revival of meaningful heritage, not just as “imperial nostalgia.” Of course, politicians like Putin also use nationalism in order to consolidate support and appeal to the electorate on an emotional level. In this respect, at least, Trump's MAGA and his self-identification as “an American nationalist” serves a similar purpose. In any country, about 15-20 percent of the electorate will vote “patriotic” no matter what: in most political systems you need to add only another 15 percent to form a government. In the Russian case, but obviously not only there, nationalist appeals can redirect focus from internal issues to external enemies, or turn social and economic issues into problems of “identity:” it's usually not a pretty picture. In the special case of Russia, national security was always important because the country was invaded so many times, most devastatingly from its western borders. Because of that, we should show some understanding for their “security dilemma” even when we disagree with their leaders or policies.

# Excerpts from an Interview between Eleanor Cannon '21 and Professor Tim Scholl



Photo by Jennifer Manna

## So what stands out for you, after 26 years, about teaching at Oberlin?

I got a teaching position right out of grad school, which isn't really supposed to happen. You're supposed to want to teach those high-power literature courses, but the thing that has really sustained me has been teaching second-year Russian. There's more self-censorship in literature classes, and I'm not very good at that. In second-year Russian, people are working toward a common goal and a group identity forms. It is the hardest year, and if I can get the students through it, they will find the following courses easier.

## You have other interests besides Russian literature that worked their way into all of your classes. How did those interests form?

The book that you need from the library is not the one you went for, but the one next to it. The interest in dance started when I was a kid, watching PBS in South Dakota. There was a show called *Dance in America*, and on the show there were fantastic things. Many different forms of concert dance, and this was at a time when dance in NYC was at its peak. It had a level of skill then that has not been seen for the last 30 years.

When I was in grad school at Yale, I was going down to New York to watch dance all the time. When the dance people realized I spoke Russian, I got a lot of gigs. I rewrote the New York City Ballet's *Nutcracker* program, there was no one doing this before I did it.

I love archival research. The biggest project I did was with the Mariinsky in Russia. I looked at notations of all the ballets—I was the conduit between the Mariinsky administration and these notation

papers, which the staff at Mariinsky had never seen. They needed a show, and I said that they had the notations of the original show at Harvard. They didn't know about them, they had been in Harvard for the last 60 years.

## What are some notable memories you have of Oberlin? Or significant differences between Oberlin when you started and Oberlin right now?

A friend called and told me about a job at Oberlin. I needed a job, so I applied. It was a really weird place. Everything was really dirty. Students were dirty, places were dirty. There was a smoking-room at the Feve, which I'm sure was fumigated. This, of course, used to be next to Lupita's in the old Feve. I went to a party hosted by Gary Shteyngart while he was a student, and there was broken glass all over the floor. Students wanted to be as bohemian as possible.

The current student body is much more prepared to leave Oberlin. There's increasing professionalization. Writing is much better than it used to be. There is more pressure on students, and their parents.

I can tell you when I was certain I was going to be fired. This was my first year, and I was doing a seminar on Russian Modernism. Five of the students decided that they were going to reenact a Dionysian ritual for their final presentation. I saw them start to pass a bottle of wine around in class. I said "I cannot take responsibility for this. I need to leave." I was certain I was going to get fired.

I told the Oberlin job interviewers that I wanted to teach about decadence, and they said "Great." The course gives you such a different perspective on literature. We normally study literature by nation, time period, genre. And here, you have a movement that transcends all these things. Decadence is always about Western Civilization falling apart, which prompts the question: "What is Western Civilization?"

## What made you to become a Lutheran pastor?

I knew I needed a change. I guess the great thing about entering a religious vocation is that you never actually have to say why you're doing it—just describe it generally as "a calling." What made me decide to actually follow through with my religious education? Well, the Oberlin motto, "one person can change the world." I hate it. I really hate it. After hearing that slogan for so long, I went back to religion and saw what a group of people can do.

I'm a person of faith, and I believe you have to put your faith into action. My husband is an ex-Catholic. Catholics are very similar. A guy walked into our restaurant the other day in a hospital gown, with a hospital wristband. We gave him some food even though he didn't have any money, apparently he got picked up for drugs, and was on his way to meet with a lawyer. My husband does that all the time, and I love that.

I spent last summer doing a chaplaincy at the Cleveland Clinic.

This is a good time to go put in some work for other people. I've loved you people, but now I want to go work for some people who can't pay for it.

# Oberlin Library Acquires Runs of a Rare Soviet-Era Newspaper

Russian and creative writing major **Katie Frevert '22** spent Winter Term 2020 scouring old issues of the important local newspaper *Vecherniaia Moskva* (*Evening Moscow*). In 2018 Mudd Library acquired a set of the newspaper from 1943-1944, 1946, 1948-1953, 1955, and 1961. The 1953 run includes coverage of Stalin's death in March of that year.

The newspapers were in fragile condition when they arrived (the acidic paper from that period was of especially poor quality) and were stabilized and catalogued in the summer of 2019 by Gaby Parlapiano '20 as part of her work for Special Collections.

The newspaper provides a fascinating window into life in the Soviet capital during a tremendously eventful period. Each issue is typically only four pages. What is especially striking about *Vecherniaia Moskva*—and what sets it apart from more official, national news organs such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*—is the way it juxtaposes “great events” (featured on the front page) with mundane yet fascinating material on the inner and back pages that reflects the ordinary, day-to-day preoccupations of the average Muscovite.

Katie chose to zero in on the first half of the year 1961—the height of Khrushchev's Thaw. She paid particular attention to the back pages, which featured consumer ads for clothing and household items (primarily targeted toward women), listings for radio and TV programs (including occasional English lessons!), and announcements for cinema, ballet, and theater. Films, if not Russian in origin, were almost always from other Soviet republics or other communist nations (Cuba, China, North Korea) and very rarely from Western Europe (France, Italy). She came across one ad for an American film—an adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. In a short article on the film, Hemingway was quoted as being against American intervention in the Cuban revolution.

She was surprised to find that every day at the bottom of the back page there was a public listing of divorces (an average of about 20 per day), announced according to who had filed for the divorce (it appears to be a fairly equal mix of men and women). There were no

announcements of births or marriages, and only very occasional death notices.

She found many articles focused on how to properly raise Soviet citizens and instill socialist morality from a young age, usually starting off with a tragic story of negligent parents whose morality and behavior (drinking, fighting, etc.) went against that of the collective, then describing how these people were reformed due to support from those around them. She also came across occasional articles reporting on minor crimes.

Some were unusual or humorous in nature, such as attempted thefts gone wrong due to the foolishness of the criminals; others were more serious—there were several reports on drunken violence, for instance. Much like articles discussing failures in raising children, these articles on crime would emphasize the focus of the legal system on reform rather than punishment: the working assumption was that those who had gone astray would be integrated back into the collective by their families, neighbors, classmates, and fellow workers.



A back page of *Evening Moscow* in 1961. Photo courtesy of Katie Frevert

## New Faces



Visiting Assistant Professor **Vladimir Ivantsov** joined the Russian department in fall 2020. A native of Ulyanovsk, the hometown of Vladimir Lenin, he comes to us by way of Williams College, where he taught for three years, and McGill University in Montreal, where he received the second of his two PhDs in Russian literature (the first is from St. Petersburg State University).

Vladimir is equally at home in the 19th and 20th centuries, and his research and teaching interests range over literature, theory, philosophy, and music. He is the author of a book in Russian on the contemporary writer Vladimir Makanin and is working on another book project that traces the shifting concepts of the underground in Russian literary and cultural discourse from Dostoevsky to Siberian Punk Rock. His teaching in 2020-21 included the first-year seminar *Revolution, Rebellion, Rock'n'Roll: 20th-21st-Century Russian Culture* and a 200 level course (cross-listed with comparative literature), *The Existentialist Imagination in Russia and Europe*. Next year he will teach *From Pushkin to Pussy Riot: Literature Meets Music in Russia and Beyond*, as well as a senior seminar, *The Myth of Lenin*.



Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor in History and Russian and East European Studies **Nicholas Bujalski** holds a BA from Middlebury College and a PhD from Cornell University. He is a historian of modern Russia, with particular interests in cultural, intellectual, and spatial history. His article “Narrating Political Imprisonment in Tsarist Russia:

Bakunin, Goethe, Hegel” came out this past year in *Modern Intellectual History*, and he is working on a book titled *Russia’s Peter and Paul Fortress: From Heart of Empire to Museum of the Revolution, 1825-1930*. Based on research in more than a dozen archives in both Russia and Western Europe, this project explores how generations of radical writers and activists transformed the tsarist empire’s most notorious political prison into a revolutionary “holy site.” He is also pursuing new research on the cultural history of death in revolutionary Russia. Alongside broad surveys in pre-modern, imperial, and 20th-century Russian history, his teaching interests include upper-level seminars on political and aesthetic avant-gardes, critical geography, Russian orientalism, and trans-European intellectual histories.



Russian House Director Professor Maia Solovieva leads students in singing Russian songs, February, 2020. Photo courtesy of Maia Solovieva



*Tom Newlin leads a class in Tappan Square in fall 2020. Photo by Yvonne Gay*