Greetings from the Department Head

Valeria Sobol

Dear colleagues, students, alumni, and friends of the Slavic Department,

Happy New Year! 2020 was a year like no other, and I am sure that we are all hoping for the new year to mark the return to some form of a “normal,” pre-pandemic life. While our Department, and the University as a whole, has continued working hard in order to offer our students the best education possible under the circumstances, as well as opportunities for a vibrant intellectual and scholarly exchange, we all miss personal interactions, the irreplaceable classroom chemistry, and lively social gatherings. There was a silver lining to the challenging year 2020, however — and I am referring not only to the fact that we have all become Zoom experts and that our pets have enjoyed us being around more. More importantly, the challenges we have faced confirmed time and again what a wonderful and supportive community this department is and how fortunate I am to be working with such fantastic colleagues and students.

Despite the challenges, this was a very successful year for our Department. We welcomed four new graduate students in the fall: August Hagemann, Alex Karsavin, David Louden, and Brian Yang. This is a hard time to be starting a graduate program in a new place, but we hope they all thrive here. Dr. Peter Wright has joined us as the Visiting Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, bringing his much-needed expertise on the former Yugoslavia (you can read more about Professor Wright in the new faculty profile section below). I am also very happy to welcome several colleagues across campus who...
have recently joined us as affiliated faculty members of Slavic Languages & Literatures: Professors Gene Avrutin (History); Donna Buchanan (Musicology); Jessica Greenberg (Anthropology); and John Randolph (History and REEEC). In the fall of 2019, the Slavic department welcomed new Office Manager, Mary Moon, who has seamlessly transitioned into her new role.

In October 2019, shortly after the Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk was announced as the 2018 Nobel Prize winner in literature, our department held a roundtable, titled *A Celebration of Olga Tokarczuk’s Work*, organized by Prof. George Gasyna, Dr. Jack Hutchens and PhD candidate Diana Sacilowski. In the fall of 2019, together with the Slavic Reference Service at the Library, we celebrated Pushkin’s 220th birthday with poetry readings and fun Pushkin biography quizzes. In January 2020, before most of the world shut down, together with the Russian, East European and Eurasian Center, we hosted the Russian poet of Tartar origin Liliya Gazizova who gave a wonderful reading of her unique poems to a large audience of faculty and students. In September 2020, we participated in another REEEC initiative, a virtual roundtable on “Race and Racism in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies” (you can read more about the Department’s response to Black Lives Matter, below). And while the pandemic has made physical travel impossible, our faculty and graduate students have participated in a wide range of virtual events around the US and Russia, from the ASEEES national convention and an international conference at Pushkinsky Dom, to invited talks at Princeton, Columbia, NYU, and Vanderbilt, to name just a few.

Last year, moreover, witnessed an almost unprecedented record of awards and accomplishments in our department, most of which are featured in this newsletter. I would like to highlight one of them here, however — Professor Harriet Murav has earned a particularly high honor, being appointed a Professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois. To quote the CAS director Professor Tamer Başar, “this appointment ... constitutes one of the highest forms of academic recognition that our campus can bestow upon members of its faculty and is being made in light of [her] many significant contributions to and extremely high standing in [her] field.” Congratulations, again, to Professor Murav on this exceptional accomplishment!

2021 brings us hope for an eventual end to the pandemic, and yet our challenges will continue through the spring semester when face-to-face interactions are likely to be rare and when most of the instruction in our department continues to be remote. While I am taking my sabbatical research leave in the Spring 2021 semester, I know that the department is in good hands, with Prof. Lilya Kaganovsky taking over as the department’s Acting Head for this semester. I am grateful to Prof. Kaganovsky, who brings her wisdom and extensive administrative experience, for taking this role in such a challenging time.

Once again, let me wish you a healthy and happy New Year! I hope to see many of you in person this year, and we hope to hear more news from our alumni and emeriti faculty.

With best wishes,
Valeria Sobol
We all remember the week in March when we were told that we were going to be teaching and learning remotely (it feels like a lifetime ago, doesn’t it?). For so many Graduate Student Teaching Assistants, as well as faculty, the abrupt transition was difficult. I remember thinking, will it even be possible for a language class? Much of my language teaching hinges on floating around the room from group to group, facilitating several conversations at once. How would I ever be able to replicate this experience online?

There is much I can say about the efficacy of online language learning. Thanks to the capabilities of video conferencing platforms, plus all the great interactive technology I’ve learned about from my colleagues, there is much of the learning experience that perseveres online. However, I found myself spending less time thinking about the pedagogical realities of switching a class from in-person to online. Rather, what I found needed my focus was attending to the unique student needs that emerged during the Covid-19 crisis.

As so many of us already know, a passion for teaching does not solely stem from the enthusiasm for the content, but the impact that one can have on a student. In an uncertain and tense situation, how teachers treated their students was even more noticeable. While we all desire to replicate the rigorous academic environment that we are accustomed to fostering, the reality is that our students are struggling. We are struggling. We are all experiencing an unprecedented health crisis, tense and divided politics, and a painful reckoning with race in our country. The events of 2020 have deeply affected our students’ everyday lives in tangible ways, and it extends to their ability to perform in the classroom.

While for some students the Spring semester break from campus may have been welcome, others had to return to unsafe home environments. Some students had to help care for younger siblings, while others started working full time to help their families financially. Some went home to areas without reliable internet service. While barriers to education existed before the Covid-19 crisis, these barriers became starker in our current situation.

I asked myself many times: how do I acknowledge very real impediments to my student’s learning, while maintaining the progress and intensity that a regular semester requires? Thinking that the situation would be temporary, I adopted generous policies in my class. I accepted all late work. I stopped taking attendance. I completely restructured how I tested them. When the Covid-19 crisis continued into Fall 2020, I kept these policies. Did my students still learn Russian as effectively as usual? In my opinion, mostly yes. Our learning situation is not ideal: not everyone thrives learning online, under such flexible standards, and in the pain of this moment. Despite these factors, I am still seeing comparable progress from most students.

But I must ask, does it even matter even if my students showed slightly less progress in a semester of crisis? In a semester full of death and sickness, must I prioritize the perfect memorization of genitive plural endings? I promise you that students will not care if they have to relearn a grammar lesson or two (and any Russian student knows, you will have to under usual circumstances anyway ☺), but they will remember the professors who showed them no compassion when they really needed it. For me, my teaching priorities have changed. On the one hand, I still give them plenty of tough love for the sake of thoroughly learning the content. On the other hand, I am doing what I can so that they can pull through this moment. Teachers have always done both, but now especially.
Faculty awards and recognitions:

David Cooper received a Book Award for Best Scholarly Translation, for The Queen’s Court and Green Mountain Manuscripts, with Other Forgeries of the Czech Revival (2018), from the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL). More recently, he has been selected a National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) Faculty Fellow award for his digital humanities project: “Successful forgeries: Analyzing fakelore for oral-formulaic epic poetry characteristics.”

Laura Davies Brenier continues to split her teaching between our department and the Department of Speech and Hearing Science, where she teaches a large-enrollment course “Language and Culture of Deaf Communities.” In Spring 2021, she is offering a long-awaited course in the Slavic Department, SLAV 505: Old Church Slavonic.

George Gasyna has been named a 2020 Conrad Humanities Scholar. This award recognizes mid-career scholars with potential for continued achievement in humanities. Professor Gasyna is completing a monograph, A Time for the Province: Palimpsest and Contact in Twentieth-Century Polish Borderland Literature.

Roman Ivashkiv has been promoted to the rank of Senior Lecturer effective 2020-21. He is the translation editor for Alisa Lozhkina, Permanent Revolution: Art in Ukraine in the 20th and 21st Centuries, trans. by Nathan Jeffers (ArtHuss, 2020). His other recent publications include “(Un)translatability revisited: Transmetric and intertextual puns in Viktor Pelevin’s Generation “P” and its translations,” Multilingual Humour in Translation, special issue of The European Journal of Humour Research 7. 1 (2019): 109-125; and Yuri Izdryk, Smokes (co-translated with Erin Moure, Lost Horse Press, 2019). Dr. Ivashkiv is currently working on a book manuscript, titled Transmesis in Slavic Cultures, Film, and Fiction.

Lilya Kaganovsky was appointed as a Richard and Margaret Romano Professorial Scholar in 2019 and has joined journal The Russian Review as Associate Editor for Film and Media Studies in 2020. She will serve as Acting Head of the Department for the Spring 2021 semester.

Harriet Murav received a Humanities Research Institute (HRI) faculty fellowship for this academic year for her next book project Archive of Violence: The Literature of Abandonment and the Russian Civil War. In 2019, Prof. Murav became the Catherine and Bruce Bastian Professor of Global and Transnational Studies, and in 2020 she was appointed a Professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois. In December 2020, Professor Murav received an honorable mention from the MLA Fenia and Yaakov Leviant Memorial Prize in Yiddish Studies for her book David Bergelson’s Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity, published by Indiana University Press. The prize is awarded each even-numbered year and is given alternately to an outstanding translation of a Yiddish literary work and to an outstanding scholarly work in English in the field of Yiddish.

Valeria Sobol published a new book, Haunted Empire: Gothic and the Russian Imperial Uncanny (Northern Illinois University Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2020). She won the prize for the Best Article in the field of Ukrainian history, politics, language, literature and culture (2018-19) from the American Association for Ukrainian Studies, for her article, “‘Tis Eighty Years Since: Panteleimon Kulish’s Gothic Ukraine,” published in Slavic Review.

Richard Tempest has been promoted to the rank of Professor effective fall 2020. In December 2019, he published his monumental study of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Overwriting Chaos: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s Fictive Worlds (Academic Studies Press, 2019).
Meet our new faculty member, Dr. Peter Q. Wright

I am a cultural historian of Eastern Europe with a focus on socialist Yugoslavia. I joined UIUC’s Slavic Languages and Literature Department in Fall 2020 after completing my PhD at UIUC’s History Department. Before coming to Urbana-Champaign, I studied for varying amounts of time at Middlebury College in Vermont, the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London, and at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. In addition to my focus on the history of the Balkans, these stops included graduate work in Russian language, literature, and cinema.

At UIUC, I teach courses that cover the languages, history, and culture of the Yugoslav region, the wider Balkans, and central and Eastern Europe. In terms of research and writing, I study Yugoslav socialism’s global impact and, conversely, the ways that international connections have shaped identity and culture in Yugoslavia. I very much look forward to helping students connect the Balkans and Eastern Europe to a wider global context in order to reinforce their continuing relevance.

Outside of academia, I still find ways to weave my interest in the Balkans into my hobbies. Most notably, I have played the violin in Balkanalia — UIUC’s Balkan folk music ensemble — when it has been active on campus. When not teaching or under Covid quarantine, I also enjoy vacationing along the Dalmatian coast and exploring the rich urban landscapes of places like Belgrade and Sarajevo.
Eugene Avrutin (History) spent the bulk of the spring editing (with Elissa Bemporad) Pogroms: A Documentary History (forthcoming with Oxford University Press), consisting of short essays and primary sources intended primarily as a teaching tool. He gave virtual talks on his current book project, a short history of racism in modern Russia, at the conference “Thinking ‘Race’ in the Russian and Soviet Empires,” at the University of Illinois, Chicago and the University of Chicago, as well as the Carolina Russia Seminar. A Russian edition of his book, The Velizh Affair, appeared in the series Contemporary Western Rusistika with Academic Studies Press. Together with Joseph Lenkart, Harriet Murav, and colleagues at the UIC, he received a grant from the American Academy for Jewish Research to organize a Junior Scholars workshop, which will take place virtually in May 2021.

John Randolph (History and REEEC) has joined the editorial board of Vivliofilika: E-Journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies, which has transitioned from Duke University Libraries to its new institutional home at the Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.


Mark Steinberg (History) has completed a manuscript, Utopian Russia, for new book series from Bloomsbury Press “Russian Shorts.” In the winter and spring of 2020 (until sent home by the pandemic), he conducted research in Mumbai (with the support of a fellowship from American Institute of Indian Studies) for his new book, Crooked and Straight in the City: Street, Night, and Morality in New York, Odessa, and Bombay in the 1920s and 1930s. Prof. Steinberg published a few articles and an edited collection, including “Ghostly Fogs in a Decaying Empire: Disoriented and Melancholy Experience in Russia’s Metropole” Cultural Studies, 34:5, 747-762; and Grazhanskaia voina v Rossii: zhizn’ v epokhu sotsial’nykh eksperimentov i voennykh ispytanii, 1917-1922 (Materiały mezhdunarodnogo kollokviuma), coedited with Nikolai Mikhailov as “responsible editors” (St. Petersburg, 2020).

Dmitry Bobyshev, Emeritus Professor and a renowned Russian poet, has been awarded the prestigious prize “Pushkin and the Twenty-first Century.” His memoir “ZY, ili Post Scriptum” has been published by Sem’ iskusstv publisher in Hannover, Germany, in the beginning of 2020 as an additional volume to his trilogy Chelovekotekst. A book of his poetry, Peterburgskie nebozhiteli, has been published in October 2020 by the Liberty Publishing House. His numerous interviews and essays on Russian poetry have been featured in many prominent Russian-language venues, such as Nezavisimaia gazeta, as well as on his personal website, and can be found at https://dbobyshev.wordpress.com

Michal Finke, Emeritus Professor and the former Head of the Slavic Department, retired in August 2019 but has been keeping active. His most recent book, titled provisionally Freedom from Violence and Lies: Life and Works of Anton Chekhov, is forthcoming from Reaktion Press (UK).

Vekich Scholarship news

With the addition of Peter Wright to the department, we now have a full-time faculty member in South Slavic. This will greatly benefit that area, which also has support available for students through the Vekich Scholarship, thanks to a generous donation by Anne Vekich.

For the 2021-22 academic year, the Vekich Scholarship is changing shape. The award will now be a competitive $1,000 scholarship toward tuition and fees that will be part of students’ financial aid packages. Scholarship recipients will be required to take at least one course in the Slavic department, preferably focused on the Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian language region, and to serve as a good ambassador for the department and the region. Watch for the announcement of the scholarship competition in the Spring semester. Multiple awards are available for the coming year.
**Graduate students awards and news**

**Tyler Dolan** is a 2020-21 recipient of the Gendell Family and Shiner Family Award from the Program in Jewish Culture and Society for work on his dissertation provisionally titled “On the Threshold: Literary Responses to Violence in the East European Borderlands.”

**LeiAnna Hamel** was awarded an ASEEES Summer 2020 Dissertation Writing Grant for work on her dissertation, “Undisciplined Bodies: Deviant Female Sexuality in Russian and Yiddish Literatures, 1870s-1930.” She also received the Karasik Scholarship for Study Abroad (deferred to Summer 2021), as well as a 2020-21 Fellowship from the Program in Jewish Culture & Society.

**Alex Karsavin** has been selected as a 2020 Virtual ALTA (American Literary Translators Association) travel fellow. They also became a co-recipient of the RusTRANS grant for translating Ilya Danishevsky’s *Mannelig in Chains.* Alex’s translations were published recently in the *F Letter: New Russian Feminist Poetry* anthology, ed. Galina Rymbu, Eugene Ostashevsky and Ainsley Morse.

**Serenity Stanton Orengo** and **Diana Sacilowski** were awarded the Davis Graduate Student Travel Grant from the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.

**Diana Sacilowski** is a recipient of the School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics Dissertation Completion Fellowship for 2020-21, for her dissertation project “Strategies of Silence: Representations of Jewish Poles in Polish Literature since the 1980s.”

**Alumni news**

**Jack Hutchens (PhD, 16)** won the 2019 Article of the Year Award from the Canadian Association of Slavists for “Julian Stryjkowski: Polish, Jewish, Queer,” published in *Canadian Slavonic Papers.* He was also awarded a Fulbright Scholars Fellowship to Poland for 2020-21 (deferred to 2021-2022 academic year). Dr. Hutchens has recently published a book of poetry: *There/Here: Poems of Journey and Home* (Main Street Rag Press) and a monograph: *Queer Transgressions in Twentieth-Century Polish Fiction: Gender, Nation, Politics* (Lexington Books). He has been teaching courses in Polish language and literature at the University of Illinois and Loyola University.

**Oleksandra Wallo (PhD, 13)** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Languages and Literatures at the University of Kansas. In 2020, the University of Toronto Press published her book, *Ukrainian Women Writers and the National Imaginary: From the Collapse of the USSR to the Euromaidan.* Also this year, an article by Dr. Wallo on Serhiy Loznytsia’s acclaimed documentary film, *Maidan,* came out in a volume dedicated to the memory of Dmytro Shtohryn, Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a lifelong champion of Ukrainian studies. In early 2020, working with KU’s Open Language Resource Center, Dr. Wallo launched a website for her open-access online textbook of basic Ukrainian grammar, *Dobra forma* ([https://dobraforma.ku.edu/](https://dobraforma.ku.edu/)). At the University of Kansas, Dr. Wallo teaches courses in the Ukrainian language, Slavic literatures, and methods of teaching Slavic languages. She also currently serves as the KU Slavic department’s Director of Graduate Studies.

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Attention, Alumni/ae:  
we would love to hear from you.  
Please send us your story or your recent news (250 words maximum) to slavic@illinois.edu

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On September 25, 2019, we received the sad news that our longtime colleague Professor Dmytro Shtohryn passed away. Born in Ukraine, Professor Shtohryn lived a long and active life and made innumerable contributions to scholarship and to our community over six decades. A leader of Ukrainian studies in the United States, he was Professor of Library Administration at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and was instrumental in building our world-renowned collections.

Professor Shtohryn studied at the Ukrainian Free University in Munich, University of Minnesota, and University of Ottawa where he received his MA and PhD in Slavic studies, as well as Bachelor of Liberal Studies in library science. He worked tirelessly to promote and encourage scholarship on Ukraine, organizing the annual Ukrainian Conference at the University of Illinois and helping to build networks among scholars and the Ukrainian community in the US and internationally. He continued to teach Ukrainian language, literature, and culture and to support the Ukrainian Conference, long after his retirement in 1995. He was an active member of many professional and scholarly organizations in our field, including the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, American Library Association (chairman of its Slavic and East European Section), and the Shevchenko Scientific Society in America. He was a man of incredible commitment, modesty, and good will. In his honor and through the generosity of his daughter Liuda Shtohryn, the Dmytro Shtohryn Endowment in Ukrainian Studies was established at the University in 2017.

For more information about Professor Shtohryn's remarkable life and career, read here: https://www.news-gazette.com/obituaries/dmytro-shtohryn/article_0da01b92-e0ec-11e9-95a2-308d99b27af4.html

A tribute to Professor Shtohryn's life and contributions to our field, authored by Valeria Sobol (Slavic) and Joseph Lenkart (Library), was published in the Winter 2019 issue of Slavic Review.

The Renowned Slavic Review at Illinois

Slavic Review, the flagship publication of the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, is housed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign under the auspices of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. Slavic Review is an international interdisciplinary journal devoted to the study of eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, past and present. The journal publishes articles of original and significant research and interpretation, reviews of scholarly books and films, and topical review essays and discussion forums.

Students in the department have the opportunity to work as Editorial Assistants at Slavic Review, in which capacity they interact with scholars all over the world, have access to the latest research in the form of new book and article publication, and learn about scholarly publication. Editorial Assistants also have the opportunity to suggest new initiatives for the journal's content. Thus, for example, in light of this summer's protests for racial justice, graduate student Editorial Assistants proposed a special issue of the journal on race and bias in the profession, to be published in June 2021. The Slavic Review “Forum on Race and Bias” will seek to address current social and political upheaval around systemic racism and to engage with questions of race and bias in our profession, our field, and our research, by inviting submissions on any aspect of race in the profession and or race as an object of study in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe.
Together with a world-wide pandemic, this past summer was rocked by national (and international) protests against police brutality and in support of Black Lives. Many of our students participated actively in the movement, and their commitment to anti-racism work has led, among other things, to a profound reconsideration of how we talk about race in our field and how we teach it in our program. In June, the Slavic Graduate Students’ Association drafted a statement, committing the Department to better addressing issues of race in the classroom and beyond; to creating safer, more inclusive spaces for minoritized students; and to promoting the voices of marginalized artists, educators, and scholars. The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign stands united with those all over the nation rightfully protesting to demand an immediate end to police violence against Black people. We join our voices with those demanding justice, accountability, and change.

To address some of our field’s historic lack of attention to issues of race, the Slavic department has developed a new US-minorities course RUSS 122: “Russia and Black America,” a survey of the interactions and intersections between key African American figures and cultural practices, and Russian imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet culture. With an overview of the historical, social, and political contexts, this course emphasizes Russian-sourced cultural transfers that influenced and sometimes shaped the Black American experience and which functioned as the currency and medium of the African American-Russian connection.

Renewed attention to issues of race in Slavic studies were likewise marked early this fall by a roundtable discussion on the role of race and racism in our region and scholarship, sponsored by the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center and with participation of Slavic department students and faculty. This Kickoff Event for this year’s New Directions Series included Eugene Avrutin (History), Justin Balcor (Musicology), Alejandra-Isabel Otero Pires (Slavic Languages and Literatures), and Valeria Sobol (Slavic Languages and Literatures), and dealt with issues both scholarly — race as historical discourse in Russia; and personal — experiences of racial discrimination when doing research in the field. This was followed by a REEEC New Directions lecture by Emily Wang and Korey Garibaldi, “Interrogating the Declining Significance of Pushkin’s Blackness: Henry James, Ivan Turgenev, and Literary Nationalism”; and the continuing series, “Race in Focus: From Critical Pedagogies to Research Practice and Public Engagement in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.” Co-sponsored by all of the prominent institutions in Slavic studies, this series is designed to elevate conversations about teaching on race and continued disparities in our field while also bringing research by scholars and/or on communities of color to the center stage.
There are several ways to invest into the future of our department:

**LAS Annual Fund for Slavic Languages and Literatures**
Supports undergraduate education, scholarships, programming, and the overall strength of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures.

**Graduate Student Support in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures**
Supports the creation of a named fellowship for graduate study, graduate research, and graduate travel.

**Dmytro Shtohryn Endowment in Ukrainian Studies**
This fund is intended to benefit the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and will be used to support lectures, symposia, conferences, or presentations in Ukrainian studies. This exciting development is made possible by a gift from Liuda Shtohryn, the daughter of our own former Professor Dmytro Shtohryn, and is intended to honor her father’s legacy and accomplishments in the field of Ukrainian studies.

**Scott Maltby Memorial Fund**
Scott K. Maltby was a second-year graduate student in our program who passed away unexpectedly of natural causes in February, 2015. His family established the endowed Scott K. Maltby Memorial Fund that will provide support for graduate students in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. This includes travel for research, language study, or conference presentation; or an award for excellence in scholarship (term paper, publication, or conference presentation) by a graduate student.

You can explore more here: [https://slavic.illinois.edu/giving](https://slavic.illinois.edu/giving)