FROM THE DIRECTOR

The spring semester is already off to a flurry of activity. KU’s Spencer Museum of Art has launched two exhibits for the spring semester “Russian Constructivist Photography” and “El Lissitzky: Futurist Portfolios.” REES will take advantage of these exhibits to focus its April workshop for K-12 teachers on revolution, art and politics at the turn of the twentieth century.

On February 5-6, the Center hosted Steven Pifer, the former US ambassador to Ukraine, and currently senior adviser with the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program. In addition to a brown bag presentation, Ambassador Pifer delivered the annual Maria Palij Memorial Lecture, where he outlined the national successes that Ukraine has achieved in the years since independence.

We are fortunate to have four scholars from Eurasia on campus this spring under auspices of the Junior Faculty Development program. They are: Edina Sudzuka and Marko Beverda (both from Bosnia-Herzegovina and affiliated with the Law School), Nela Savkovic from Montenegro working with Communications Studies, and Dilbar Shermurodova from Tajikistan working in the School of Education.

On 7 March REES will be sponsoring a Spring Festival at the EMC building to mark a set of spring holidays celebrated throughout Eurasia, including the Bulgarian Martenitsa, the Russian Maslenitsa, and

International Women’s Day. The center’s staff and volunteers will contribute bliny to the festival, and guests are asked to bring a dish to share.

At the end of January, Erik Herron announced his intention to return full-time to his teaching and research work at the end of his sabbatical this spring, and so the Center will be conducting a search for a new director. The REES Executive Committee has already met with Dean Steinmetz to launch the search, and the position announcement will be circulated shortly. By the end of spring, I will be ready to pass a very active program onto a new director.

William Comer
Anna Cienciala, Professor Emerita, taught East European History at KU for 37 years and has been an enthusiastic and strong supporter of CREES since her arrival at KU in 1965, when it was called the Center for Russian and Slavic Studies. We spoke with her about her most recent book, Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment, for which she received an award and about the changes that she has seen in the university.

1. It has been nearly 70 years since the awful events of early spring 1940 when the Soviet authorities committed these atrocities at Katyn, Kharkov and Kalinin/Tver (all now subsumed under: Katyn). Why is this topic still relevant today?

I suppose the primary reason has to do with, for want of a better term, “closure.” Because the Soviet authorities deliberately concealed their responsibility for so long, and then when Gorbachev and Yeltsin finally did admit Soviet guilt, they did so with ulterior motives. Gorbachev spoke up to preempt articles by Russian historians revealing Soviet guilt as well as to improve Polish-Soviet relations, and Yeltsin to damage the reputation of the communist party in Russia because it opposed his policies. Many Poles still feel the need for a more open and honest Russian assessment of Soviet guilt and an official apology by Moscow. The Russians, for their part, think they have done enough, while some even doubt the documents published on Katyn are genuine. The situation has not been helped by the recently released Polish film "Katyn," directed by Andrzej Wajda, which some Russians allege distorts the historical record.

2. Most pundits on world affairs proclaim that the world has changed since 9-11 (or 1989 or 1991). Is there still a cogent reason for KU to maintain regional/historical expertise in the area known as “Eastern Europe”?

Yes, absolutely. Russia is a large and increasingly influential power and it is important that we understand both Russia and its western neighbors for historical, cultural, economic and geopolitical reasons.

3. Have you read anything in the past year that might qualify as a “great” book, or one that at least deserves greater attention?

After completing my editorial work on: Katyn. A Crime Without Punishment, I have time to do a lot of reading. I have recently read the second work on Stalin by Simon S. Montefiore, The Young Stalin (2007. The first was: Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar, 2004). In these books - based on extensive archival research as well as interviews - you see the Janus-like character of Stalin. On the one hand, he was an excellent administrator and organizer, and on the other, a cold-blooded criminal. The worst of his crimes, in my opinion, was the manmade famine of 1932 in Ukraine, where an estimated three million died of hunger and several million more were deported to Siberia, of whom many also died. I don’t see Stalin’s vindictive behavior as necessarily stemming from his not-so-loving childhood. You can’t blame the millions who perished in Ukraine and then in the purges of 1935-38, as well as the massacre of Polish prisoners of war in spring 1940 (Katyn) and the death of millions of Soviet citizens, on the fact that Stalin’s father occasionally beat him. In fact, according to Montefiore’s book, The Young Stalin, he was protected by prosperous neighbors, one of whom may have been his real father. Stalin, of course, is still a subject of great interest and different interpretations. I recently read that authors of Russian school textbooks are being instructed now to skim over the famine, the terror, and the Gulag, by stating that some of his policies were necessary in order to modernize Russia. This was the line in Soviet textbooks before the collapse of communism and the USSR in December 1991.

4. In the year 2007, we can look back in disbelief at communist ideology, but you taught at a time when it still had some currency, at least in academic circles. How did you present communism as an ideology and system during this time?

I had visited Poland in 1959-63, then 1971-73, and fall 1989 also the USSR for ten days in 1962 and Prague for a week in August 1968, so I saw how the system really worked, and its economic failures. Of course, I wasn’t alone in these observations. I think that after Khrushchev’s speech at the 20th Party Congress in Feb. 1956, when he revealed some of Stalin’s crimes, and again after the invasion into Czechoslovakia in 1968, there were few believers in the future of communism (at least in the countries where it was being practiced). Communism failed in Eastern Europe, not only because it was inherently flawed, but mainly because it was a foreign system imposed by an outside force. The countries of Eastern Europe resented having to follow their Kremlin masters. For the Poles in particular, it was a Russian-imposed system. Indeed, had not General Jaruzelski imposed martial law in December 1981, I am sure that the Soviet Union would have invaded Poland, although many scholars do not share this view.
5. You were one of the first K.U. faculty to put your course texts on-line. Why did you decide to do this and have there been any unforeseen benefits/problems?

I wanted to spare the students the exorbitant cost of some required texts and since students were so enamored of computers, I thought if I placed the texts on-line, students might actually read them. I am sure that most of the students did not read all of the texts, but to this day, I field queries from various countries.

For the text of Dr. Cienciala’s on-line course on Nationalism and Communism in East Central Europe, see “Lecture Notes”: http://web.ku.edu/~eceurope/hist557/index.htm

6. What are the most profound changes you have seen within the university in your 37 years of teaching History at KU?

The university has certainly grown larger and is now computerized, but I would say that the new KU student today is somewhat less prepared to handle university studies than in the late nineteen-sixties. When I arrived in 1965, I was quite impressed by the students’ interest in their courses and their overall preparation for college life. I think some of this has been lost, at least in History, and it seems to me that high schools are not doing enough to help students prepare for college. Some students today view university studies simply as a means of increasing their income potential, and hence, fail to see any “relevance” to the study of history or the Humanities in general.

7. Do you have any memorable teaching moments (i.e. something funny/touching)?

I remember one course that I taught called “Communist Nations” that was very popular in 1980-81 (Polish Solidarity) and again in 1989 (collapse of communism in the Soviet bloc, beginning with Poland), because of all the dramatic changes that were taking place in Eastern Europe at the time. It was something of a challenge to teach 90 students, especially when it came to grading their essays. Alas, it would appear that students are drawn to history courses more by headlines than by genuine historical interest.

8. Is there any great lesson that you as a historian, can draw from your experience in studying this region for more than half a century?

No, I don’t believe we can draw a specific lesson from this region, or others in any given time period. Each generation has different interests, asks its own questions and draws its own conclusions. I do think, however, that one of the important facts in this region during the 20th century has been the role that nationalism has played and continues to play. It has proven to be both a positive and negative force, and to fully understand its importance, we have to understand the cultures in the region. I believe that despite the creation of multinational organizations like the EU, nationalism will be around for a long time.

9. What advice would you give to the young student who dreams of becoming an academic?

Follow your dreams, but understand that you’ll never become wealthy from teaching history and publishing history books. Both require a lot of hard work. To be a good teacher you need to be a bit of an actor/actress to keep the students’ attention, and to be a good publishing historian requires thorough research, intellectual objectivity, and strong organizational skills. Good luck to all aspiring young and old historians of Eastern Europe!

Interview of Prof. Cienciala by Ray Finch, Dec. 20, 2007

The Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies & Spencer Museum of Art
Time: 10 AM-1 PM Date: Saturday, April 12
Spencer Museum of Art, Reception Room, 307
The workshop will be connected to Russian exhibits. See page 8 for exhibits information.
To register contact: 785-864-4237 or tvw@ku.edu

Dr. Anna Cienciala talks with Dr. Nathan Wood, History, KU, after a lecture given by Ms. Barbara Masin.
FALL 2007 VISITORS

Visitors to the REES 220 course, Societies and Cultures of Eurasia, discuss the role of women in Eurasia. From left to right, Ms. Barbara Masin, independent author; Ms. Subinuer Maimati, AEC student from the western part of China; Margarita Karnysheva, from Ulan Ude in the Buryatia region of Russia; and Battsetseg Serj, from Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia.

Besides coordinating a number of formal guest speakers to augment our academic programming, CREES also helped to host various foreign delegations visiting KU. In September 2007, CREES helped to host a group of Ukrainian journalism instructors.

Below, Dr. Comer meets with this group.

Mr. David Omar (left), a guest lecturer from Lawrence, discusses the fundamentals of Islam with students enrolled in the REES 220 course, Societies and Cultures of Eurasia, September 2007.

During her visit to the University of Kansas, National Resource Center program officer Ms. Cheryl Gibbs (center) takes part in a CREES brownbag discussion with REES MA students, Matt Stein (right) and Kelly MacDonald (left).
On 28 August, Alex Tsiovkh, CREES, KU, gave a brownbag titled: “The Orange, post-Orange, and post-post-Orange battle goes on: Ukraine - Summer ’07.”


On 18 September, Dr. Margaret Paxson, Senior Associate, Kennan Institute, gave a brownbag titled: “What’s in a Story?: Memory, History, and Research Methodologies.”

On 23 October, Jerry Mikkelson, CREES, KU, gave a brownbag titled: “Boris Pasternak and Doctor Zhivago: Fifty Years Since the Nobel Award.”

On 4 December, Mr. Tom Wilhelm (right), Director Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS, (REES MA, 1991, KU), gave a brownbag titled: “Conflict and Armed Forces in Pakistan’s Tribal Area.”

In 2008, KU and Ivan Franko National University in L’viv celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Summer Institute on Language and Culture. Since its inception, this program has brought Ukrainian language students to L’viv for six weeks in the summer, and has also served as a point of continuity in the long and strong collaboration between the two institutions. Many KU faculty members have traveled to L’viv for short- or long-term stints teaching and conducting research. I continued the tradition this semester on a Fulbright teaching and research fellowship.

My main research interest, elections, was at the forefront of Ukrainian life during my visit. After the short-lived post-Orange Revolution honeymoon, President Viktor Yushchenko found his authority withering away, damaged by his own missteps as well as Viktor Yanukovych’s efforts to enhance his own authority after returning to the prime minister’s post in 2006. The conflict culminated in Yushchenko’s spring 2007 announcement of an early parliamentary election. After acrimonious debates and several re-statements of the decree, the election moved forward in fall 2007.

While politicians directed most of their attention to contested regions in the center of Ukraine, L’viv hosted high profile campaign stops by the Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defense Bloc (OU-PSD), featuring the president, the top candidates on the ballot, and the local hero and rock star Slava Vakarchuk. A large enthusiastic crowd greeted President Yushchenko, but he failed to channel their enthusiasm in his speech, delivering an unfocused address lacking the confidence and resolve he displayed on Maidan in 2004.

The tenor of the president’s visit differed sharply from Yuliya Tymoshenko’s campaign stop. Tymoshenko arrived in L’viv to much fanfare a few days before the election. In her press conference and rally, Tymoshenko spoke less about the upcoming election and more about the process of forming a “coalition of democratic forces” in parliament after victory. Her confidence was well-founded, as the Bloc of Yuliya Tymoshenko (BYuT) finished second in balloting. Combined with the third-place finish of OU-PSD, the “coalition of democratic forces” seemed to be poised to regain control of government.

But, the weakness of party organizations, underlying conflict between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko’s forces, and an obstructionist Party of Regions hoping to exploit these factors to its advantage, delayed the inauguration of the newly elected parliament and contributed to contentious sessions after parliament began its work. The government was finally formed after a coalition agreement was struck among most deputies affiliated with BYuT and OU-PSD; several disputed votes for speaker and prime minister; allegations of sabotage to the electronic voting system in the Verkhovna Rada; and the theft of the parliamentary speaker’s voting card by a member of the Party of Regions, preventing the speaker from recording his vote for Tymoshenko. A voice vote confirmed Tymoshenko with no votes to spare – she received the bare minimum of 226.

Tymoshenko’s new government will be challenged by rising inflation, contentious relations with Russia, extensive and expensive campaign promises, and the need to form situational alliances to garner the votes necessary to pass bills. It will likely be short-lived, with politicians already eyeing the next prize: the upcoming presidential election. A final note: Tymoshenko’s government features at least one honorary Jayhawk. She selected the rector of IFNU to serve as Minister of Education.

Erik Herron
WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THE CREATION OF THE
CARL AND MARGARET HUSIC AWARD
TO SUPPORT LIBRARIANSHIP
IN LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT LANGUAGES

This new award is funded by Geoff Husic, Slavic Languages Librarian.
The $1200 annual award will support graduate study in librarianship and honors Geoff’s parents,
Margaret Kelley Husic and the late Carl John Husic Sr.

The award, which will be announced in May, 2008 is intended for students who have applied and been accepted to a graduate program in librarianship.
Preference will be given to those whose primary interest is in foreign-language librarianship and Area Studies and who can demonstrate in their essay their intent to use their knowledge of Less Commonly Taught Language in their library career.

Please help us spread the word of this unique award to students who may be interested in applying. To learn more about the award, or to download an application, please go to: www.lib.ku.edu/linguistics/husic_award.shtml

THE APPLICATION DEADLINE IS APRIL 1, 2008

Please also join us in thanking Geoff for his gift, as well as his efforts to ensure continuity in a very important area of our profession.


In November 2007, Jerry Mikkelson, CREES, delivered a scholarly paper in Russian called “Валентин Распутин семидесятилетия: второе дыхание писателя” [Valentin Rasputin at 70: A Writer’s Second Wind] at an international conference in Moscow commemorating the 70th birthday of the living Russian writer Valentin Rasputin, (author of “Live and Remember”, “Farewell to Matyora”, “The Fire.”) This conference was held at the Moscow State Pedagogical University and co-sponsored by the Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Later that month, he gave a lecture on the poetry of Fyodor Tyutchev to an audience of approximately 75 students and faculty members at Moscow State Pedagogical University.


Jon has selected and written annotations for approximately 250 dictionaries, with cross references to more than 30 additional dictionaries, that will be included in the Guide. Languages include: Albanian, Armenian, Azerbaijani (Azeri), Belarusian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Georgian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Old Church Slavic, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, and Ukrainian.

In August 2007, Giullian received a New Faculty award from the university’s General Research Fund (NFGFRF) to study changes that have taken place in Eastern European libraries since 1989.

Over the past three semesters, Jon has worked with Maria Carlson, Adrienne Harris-Boggess, and Natalie Bazan to implement an information literacy (library research skills) component into the undergraduate course on Slavic folklore (SLAV 148). Although still evolving, the component has increased awareness of library resources among undergraduates enrolled in the course.

The University of Kansas
Center for Russian, East European
& Eurasian Studies
1440 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 320
Lawrence, KS 66045-7574

Adrienne Harris-Boggess speaks
about Russian language and culture
to students at the Kansas City,
Kansas, Central Elementary school
during KU’s World Language Day.

Malgorzata Stamm shares Polish language and culture
with students at the Kansas City Central Elementary School during the
World Language Day event.