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Dear CREES Community,

I'm delighted to welcome everyone in our CREES community back to campus for the start of the Fall 2026 semester. I'd also like to extend a special welcome to the new students who are joining us this year. Please mark your calendars for **Friday, August 28**, when we will have our annual Fall Party, offering a chance for us to gather and swap stories, whether you spent your summer traveling or stayed closer to home. For me, the summer was a mixture of exciting travel (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland) and rather intensive grant writing. In something of a surprise move, in early June the Department of Education announced a grant competition for "Centers Aligned with Areas of National Need," essentially the successor to the Title VI National Resource Center program. With the support of CREES's staff, faculty, and partners in KU International Affairs, we were able to submit a strong application despite the exceptionally short turnaround time. We will keep you posted as soon as we learn the results of the competition.

We have a wonderful lineup of events planned for the new academic year: lectures on music, memes, poetry, politics, and history in Eastern Europe and Eurasia; a Polish paper cutting (*wycinanki*) workshop; and SEEES club craft and holiday gatherings. Read on for details of what's to come! In perusing the *Courier*, you'll also learn about some of the recent accomplishments of our faculty and the latest news from our students and alumni.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to share some significant news from CREES. Esra Predolac, who has done outstanding work as CREES Assistant Director for the past five years, has accepted a new position as Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of Slavic, German, and Eurasian Studies. I am truly grateful for Esra's thoughtful leadership and all that she has done to support CREES's students, faculty, and grant programs in the past half decade, and I wish her the best of luck in her new role. I am happy to announce that Megan Luttrell, who has dramatically expanded CREES's public engagement and programming as Outreach Coordinator, will be starting as CREES's new Assistant Director this fall. With this shift, Mariya Borisova will be taking on a greater role in planning and organizing CREES events and outreach activities. I feel fortunate to be part of such a fantastic team at CREES.

I wish you a wonderful start to the year ahead, and I look forward to seeing you soon!

Best wishes,

Phil B. Smith

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Director of KU's Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies

Fall Events Schedule



CREES Fall Party

August 28, 5:00-7:00pm

Watkins Museum Community Room

Cheese and charcuterie provided, BYOB

Live music by No Bow Tie

SEES Club Bliny Social

Learn to make bliny and all about SEES Club. Drop in as your schedule allows

September 9, 9:00am-12:30pm

Bailey Hall, Room 318

SEES Club

BLINY SOCIAL

Learn to make bliny (Eastern European crepes), socialize, and see what SEES Club is all about! Drop in between 9am and 12:30pm as your schedule allows.

Sept. 9 9:00am-12:30pm Bailey 318



Polish Wycinanki Workshop

With local artist Angie Pickman

September 24, 3:30-5:30pm, Spencer Museum of Art, Lee Study Center

Registration is required

Oberih: Arts-based Mental Health Support for Ukrainians During

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with Dr. Midori Samson (School of Music)

September 29, 12:00-1:00pm

Bailey Hall, Room 318

**Oberih: Arts-based Mental Health Support for
Ukrainians During Wartime**



Dr. Midori Samson (KU School of Music)
9/29 12pm Bailey 318

MEMES		Memes as Instruments of Social Influence: A Theoretical Framework with Dr. Alex Kalinin (Center for Cyber-Social Dynamics)
MEME RESEARCH		
A BROWN BAG TALK ABOUT MEME RESEARCH		
USING A MEME TO ADVERTISE A BROWN BAG TALK ABOUT MEME RESEARCH		

10/6 12pm Bailey 318

Memes as Instruments of Social Influence: A Theoretical Framework

with Dr. Alex Kalinin (Center for Cyber-
Social Dynamics)

October 6, 12:00pm, Bailey 318

The Shapes of Exile: Ovid in Russian Literary Imagination

with Dr. Zara Torlone (Miami University)

October 14, 5:00pm

Max Kade Center for German-American
Studies (1134 W. 11th St.)

**The Shapes of Exile:
Ovid in Russian Literary Imagination**

Dr. Zara Torlone (Miami University)

October 14 5:00pm
Max Kade Center (1134 W. 11th St.)

Dept. of Slavic, German, & Eurasian Studies
Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies
Max Kade Center for German-American Studies
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Department of Classics

SEES Club Halloween Party

October 22, 5:00-7:00pm

Bailey Hall, Room 318

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Games, snacks, pumpkin painting, & REE themed costume contest (with prizes!)

Lecture

with Dr. Margarita M. Balmaceda (Seton Hall University)

October 28, 4:00pm, Watson Library West



Brownbag Lecture

With Dr. Mehmet Yavuz (K State)

October 29, 12:00-1:00pm

Bailey Hall, Room 318

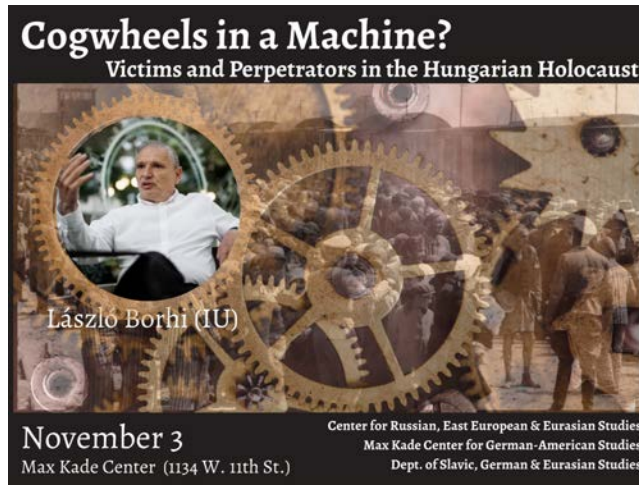
Faculty Recital Series: Chamber Music of Smetana

Sunday November 1, 7:30pm

Swarthout Recital Hall



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Cogwheels in a machine? Victims and Perpetrators in the Hungarian Holocaust

with Dr. László Borhi (Indiana University)

November 3, 4:00pm

Max Kade Center (1134 W. 11th St.)

Reading & Discussion with Ukrainian Poet Yaryna Chornohuz

November 9, 5:00pm

Max Kade Center (1134 W. 11th St.)



SEEES Club Craft Night: Moravian Folk Painting

November 18, 5:00-7:00pm

Bailey Hall, Room 318

An Evening with the Polish Ambassador



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November 19, time TBD

Dole Institute of Politics



SEEES Club Holiday Party

December 9, 5:00-7:00pm

Bailey Hall, Room 318



Vitaly Chernetsky (SGES) During the first half of 2026, Prof. Chernetsky delivered a keynote address at the *Ukraine New Cinema* symposium at Yale University and a paper titled “Ukraine’s Literatures and Their History” at the *Understanding Ukraine, Rethinking Europe* conference in Ascona, sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Prof. Chernetsky's biographical essay on Yuri Andrukhovych was published in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. His chapter on Ukrainian neo-noir cinema came out in the book *The Haunted Present: Slavic Neo-Noir Cinema and Television*, edited by Aleksandr Brakhorov, Elena Brakhorova.

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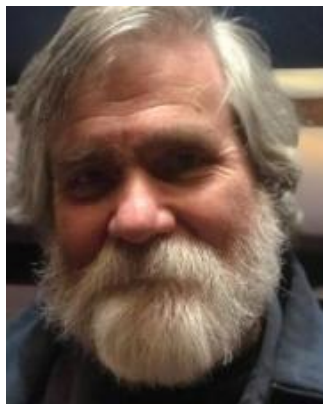
updated version of his earlier article on Sophia Andrukhovych's novel *Felix Austria* came out as a chapter in *Russo-Soviet Imperialist Hauntings: Neogothic Geographies in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, co-edited by Svitlana Krys and Maryna Romanets (Manchester University Press). Prof. Chernetsky also contributed translations of poetry and literary manifestos to the newly published two-volume anthology *Ukrainian Literary Modernism of the 1910s–mid-1930s: A Critical Reader*, edited by Halyna Babak, Yuliya Ilchuk, and Andrei Ustinov (Academic Studies Press).

As part of the new in-depth partnership between KU and the University of Regensburg, Prof. Chernetsky received a summer fellowship in Regensburg.

He presented "Subversive Aesthetic Strategies in Kira Muratova's *Brief Encounters* (1967) and *The Long Farewell* (1971)" and was a panelist on the book forum "*Anthology of Ukrainian Literary Modernism* (Academic Studies Press, 2025)" at the 2026 AATSEEL Convention in New Orleans in February.



L-R: Jordan Zaugg, Prof. Vitaly Chernestky, and Oksana Vykhopen at the "Translating Ukraine Summer Institute," in Wrocław, Poland at the National Ossoliński Institute



Dennis Christilles (Theater & Dance) retired after 37 years at KU. Congratulations, Dennis!

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Stephen Dickey (SGES) published "Referential Metonymy and the East Slavic Perfective" in *The Slavic Verb. Part 1: Comparative Perspectives* edited by Simeon Dekker and Egbert Fortuin and Jaap Kamphuis in 2026.



Jon Giullian (Libraries) embarked on a multi-faced trip to Eastern Europe in spring 2026 where he presented a paper at a conference, attended two book fairs, visited major East European Libraries, and made connections with colleagues in the region. In Prague Czech Republic, he attended a the ABDOS Conference and gave a talk, "Libraries & Archives, Curators & Collections, Publishing & Processing, Émigrés & Exiles, 27 YEARS, on the Pages of *Slavic & East European Information Resources (SEEIR)*. As part of the conference attendees were introduced to the extensive holdings of the Slavonic Library (nearly one million volumes dedicated to SEEE studies). While in Prague, he attended the book fair, Book World Prague 2026 (Svět knihy Praha 2026), where he purchased books for KU Libraries' new language learning library in the International Collections reading room in Watson Library. At the conference Jon made news connections with many colleagues in Europe and looks forward to strengthening ties between Slavic and East European librarians in North America and Europe.

From there he traveled to Wrocław, Poland, where he visited the Ossolineum publishing house, research center, and museum. Next it was on to Kraków, where he visited the Jagiellonian Library, which is one of the two depository libraries in Poland along with the Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw. While at the Jagiellonian Library, Jon met with colleagues to discuss cooperation in book acquisitions, share experiences about Library events and outreach, and toured the Libraries collections. He was also privileged to meet with Remigius Sapa, Director of the Library to talk about KU Libraries new Institute for Globally Engaged Librarianship (IGEL) and potentially opportunities for partnership. Jon presented him with the book, *The Jayhawk: The Story of the University of Kansas's Beloved Mascot*, and he gave me two books about the Jagiellonian Library's history and collections. While in Kraków, Jon had the opportunity to visit two cultural sites: (1) the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp sites in the town of Oświęcim, where he learned

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preserved and memorialized; and the famous Wieliczka Salt Mine, which was such an important source of development and revenue during the medieval period in Kraków.

Jon then traveled to Warsaw, where he gave two presentations about the history of KU's Polish collection and KU Libraries' IGEL, one at the University of Warsaw Library and one at the National Library of Poland (Biblioteka Narodowa). He toured both libraries, viewing up close, the spaces that make Warsaw University Library such a unique, modern library that is a mecca for students. At the Biblioteka Narodowa he viewed many of the country's manuscript and book treasures on display and visited their digital lab, observing first-hand how their ambitious digitization program operates. Also in Warsaw, he visited the office of our Polish book vendor, Lexikon, and attended the Warsaw International Book Fair, where he purchased juvenile books in Polish for the IC language learning library.

Finally, Jon headed to Germany and the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, where Olaf Hamann, Director of the Eastern Europe Department gave him a tour of the one of the largest collections of Slavic and East European materials in Europe. While in Berlin Jon had the opportunity to learn more about the Library's relations under Soviet influence and the unique characteristics of East Berlin. He also visited the bookstore, Babel Books, which specializes in Russian emigre literature, in particular, the many Russian opposition writers who fled Russia in recent years following Putin's crackdown on publishing.



Ted Goebel (Anthropology) participated in KU's Red Hot Research series on February 20. The theme of the session was "Mapping, Detection, Response."



Marike Janzen (SGES) received the 2026 CARES (Career Advancement/ Research Enhancement Semester) Award. She published “Flüchtlinge und internationale Solidarität in Seghers’ Transit” in *Argonautenschiff: Jahrbuch der Anna Seghers Gesellschaft*, Vol. 33 (2026).



Nadzeya Kardash (Achievement & Assessment Institute) retired after 13 years at KU. Congratulations, Nadzeya!



Rebecca Johnston (CREES) published the article "Growing Better: Culture and Agriculture in the Post-Stalin Era" in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 27, no. 2 (2026).

She also gave a guest lecture about Russian politics and society to the AP Comparative Government class at Lawrence Free State High School, spoke to the International Relations Council in Kansas City about disinformation and misinformation in Russian cultural politics, and guest lectured (remotely) about Russian film and the War in Ukraine to a class at Vanderbilt University.



Megan Luttrell (CREES) led the annual CREES Ukrainian Pysanky workshop in March. She was interviewed for the radio show Ukraine 2 4 2 about Pysanky. [Listen to the interview here](#). In August, Megan was promoted to CREES Assistant Director. She is excited to continue working with CREES in the new role!

In June, Megan performed Russian and Ukrainian music at the Sugar Creek Slavic Festival. In August she released a new single, titled "Cassidy," which you can [read about in the *Kansas City Pitch*](#). She placed in the top five for the 2026 Best of Lawrence Solo Musician category (winner to be announced in September).



Martin Nedbal (School of Music) co-edited *Bedřich Smetana: The Life and the Works* by Jan Löwenbach, which was published by the University of Rochester Press in 2026.



Shannon O'Lear (Geography) published "[Elevating the Discipline: Creating Pathways for Geographers as Public Scholars](#)" in *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 1–18 and "[Slow Violence](#)" in *The Encyclopedia of Human Geography*.

She also published three encyclopedia entries this year: Asaka, Jeremiah Ogonda; Chalecki, Elizabeth; and O'Lear, Shannon. Forthcoming. "Ecoterrorism," entry for *Essential Concepts of Environmental Peacebuilding: An A–Z Guide*. Edited by Carl Bruch, Rachel Weaver, Richard Matthew, Erika Weinthal and Larry Swatuk. New York: Routledge, p. 47, O'Lear, Shannon. 2026. "Environmental Geopolitics." In *Elgar Concise Encyclopedia of Geopolitics*, Colin Flint, editor. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 60-62, and O'Lear, Shannon. 2024. "[Slow Violence](#)," entry in *The Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, edited by Barney Warf. Springer Nature Reference.



RB Perelmutter (SGES/Jewish Studies) published "Rejecting Cure: The Strugatskys' Roadside Picnic and Tarkovsky's Stalker as Disability Narratives" in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 45 (2) and "Edward, Jeff, Blackbeard, Kraken: Name changes and intersectional identities in Our Flag Means Death" in *Science Fiction Film and Television* (March 2026).



Irina Six (SGES) After 24 years at KU, Dr. Irina Six retired in spring 2026. Congratulations, Irina, and many thanks for your years of service and dedication to CREES and SGES!



Erik Scott (History) published the article "Unauthorized Emigration from East Central Europe Since the 19th Century" in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Migration Studies* in April. Read about it in KU Today. He traveled to Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia over the summer for research.



Anton Shirikov (Political Science) won the Spring 2026 College Research Product Award for his forthcoming book *How Propaganda Wins: The Making of Loyal Audiences in Autocracies*. The award recognizes College faculty for creating an outstanding research product that makes significant contributions to the scholar's discipline. The book will be published with Oxford University Press.

Dr. Shirikov also received the First Book Subvention Award from the Harriman Institute at Columbia University in 2026 and the KU General Research Fund Research Award. He participated in

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KU's "Red Hot Research" series in May 2026 on the theme "growth, scale, and spread."



Svetlana Vassileva-Karagyozyova (SGES) published the article "A Literary Form for the Post-Communist Transition: Michal Viewegh's and Irena Dousková's Coming-of-Age Novels and Their Sequels" in *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 68, no. 2 (2026): 1–22, and the book chapter "Reinventing the Polish City of Wałbrzych through Film" in *Historical and Contemporary Urban Challenges for Central European Cities: Narrating Contested Urban Space*, edited by Elisa-Maria Hiemer and Anna Seidel (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2026), 195–214.



Nina Vyatkina (SGES) published the article "Expanding data-driven learning to less commonly taught languages: Perceived and evidence-based effectiveness of teacher education" in *Second Language Teacher Education*, 5(1).



Oleksandra Wallo (SGES) presented one paper and participated in three roundtables on various aspects of teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language at the AATSEEL conference in New Orleans. She also participated in the virtual roundtable, "Teaching Ukrainian as a Foreign Language in the Context of Decolonization of Slavic Studies," at the international conference on Ukrainian as a foreign language organized by the Ivan Franko National University in Lviv, Ukraine. One article and one edited volume chapter by Dr. Wallo came out in the spring: "Teaching Basic Ukrainian Grammar through Processing Instruction" was published in the Lviv-based journal *Theory and Practice of Teaching Ukrainian as a Foreign Language* and "The Ghosts of the Soviet Past: Traumatic Comic Gothic in Natalka Vorozhbyt's Take the Rubbish Out, Sasha" appeared in *Russo-Soviet Imperialist Hauntings: Neo-Gothic Geographies in Central and*

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University Press. Dr. Wallo was awarded the Hall Center for the Humanities Resident Fellowship and will spend the fall working on her book project on contemporary Ukrainian theater.

In the spring semester of 2026, Dr. Wallo greatly enjoyed teaching a graduate seminar on Eastern European theater and drama. The students in this course took part in the global initiative, “Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings,” by preparing and giving a public rehearsed reading of *Tolyk the Dairyman*, a contemporary Ukrainian play by Maksym Kurochkin.



Dr. Wallo and her students in the theater seminar giving a rehearsed reading of Maksym Kurochkin’s contemporary play, *Tolyk the Dairyman*, on May 7, 2026.



Nathan Wood (History) received an International Travel Fund for Humanistic Research grant from KU International Affairs in spring 2026 with which he traveled to Poland to conduct research on nature conservation and the creation of national parks in interwar Poland in the Polish Academy of Sciences Archive in Kraków. He presented “‘Bicycular Vision’: Bicycle-enabled Perspectives in Kazimierz Nowak’s African Reportage (1931-36) and Bernard Newman’s *Pedalling Poland* (1935),” at the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences (PIASA) 10th World Congress on Polish Studies in Lublin. He published “Returning ‘Our Royal Animal’ to its ‘Fatherland’: The Near-extinction and Restoration of Bison in Poland after World War I” in *Slavic Review* 85 1 (Spring 2026).

He published “Returning ‘Our Royal Animal’ to its ‘Fatherland’: The Near-extinction and Restoration of Bison in Poland after World War I” in *Slavic Review* 85 1 (July 2026).



Dr. Wood in Białowieża in 2024 and a wild bison bull he photographed there

Congratulations, CREES Faculty & Staff!



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STUDENT & ALUMNI UPDATES



Andriyana Baran (SGES) presented "Shaping Ukrainian Proficiency Testing Through Comparative Insights from Slavic Language Exams" and "Challenges in Ukrainian Language Proficiency Testing: Lessons from the SOUL Test Development," and spoke on the roundtable "Current Issues in the Teaching of Ukrainian as a Foreign Language" at the 2026 AATSEEL Convention in New Orleans in February.

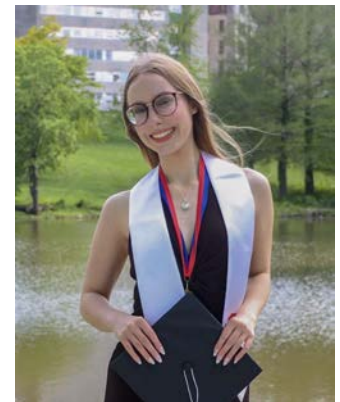
Andriyana started a new position this fall as instructor of Ukrainian and Polish at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Adrianna Brady was selected as a finalist for a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant position for 2026-2027 in Armenia. Adrianna graduated with a degree in history and SGES (Russian concentration) in spring 2026, graduating with Honors, after successfully defending her thesis "Our Lands, Our Lands: Armenian National Revival in the Soviet Union."

Adrianna also had the opportunity to present her thesis at the Southern Conference on Slavic Studies at Georgetown University and the REESNe conference hosted by the University of Pittsburgh and Yale.

Adrianna represented Poland at the KU Model NATO simulation on May 6. She was inducted into the Dobro Slovo Honor Society



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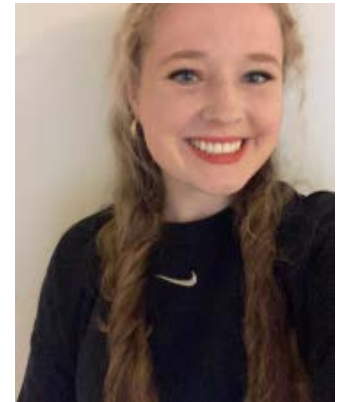
European, and Eurasian Studies and in History. She was also a FMSO Research Fellow.

Dr. Krzysztof Borowski (University of Wisconsin-Madison, KU SGES Alum) presented "Teaching Polish Language and Culture Globally and Locally: Polish Netflix TV Series and their Application to Classroom Pedagogy" and chaired the panel "Beyond the Horizon: New Approaches to Reading and Teaching Polish Culture I - New Readings" at the 2026 AATSEEL Convention in New Orleans in February.



Eryn Cannon (SGES) presented "Sports Citizenship and Athlete Identity Among Elite Figure Skaters in Russia, East Europe, and Eurasia" at the Slavic Graduate Student Conference in April 2026 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The conference theme was nationality, identity, and memory.

Eryn led several events for SEES Club this year. She used her figure skating skills to lead a skating event in late April. Eryn also created a Digital Culture Tour on skating in Russia and the Soviet Union. Eryn received an award for excellence in Advanced Russian in May.



Dr. Laura Dean spoke to KU students in POLS 471: The Politics of Human Trafficking in March 2026. The class professor, Dr. Hannah Britton, noted that the class would not have been possible without Dr. Dean's human trafficking work. In February, she was on Latvijas Radio's (ne)Diplomātiskās pusdienas podcast talking about the Epstein files and their connections to Latvia. Latvian speakers can listen to the episode "Epstīna faili: Cilvēku tirdzniecība – sievietes, vara un Eiropas klusā krīze."



In January, Dr. Dean organized the Ninth Annual Human Trafficking Prevention Month panel at Millikin University. The panel focused on labor trafficking. Listen to Dr. Dean discuss the panel in an interview with Byers and Co.

Dr. Dean started a new position this fall as Associate Professor of Government & International Affairs at Augustana University.

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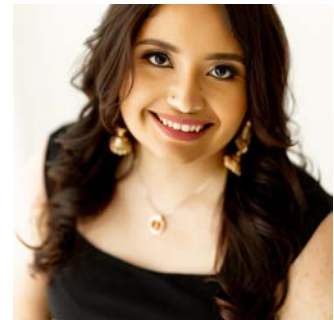
Dr. Laura Dean at Augustana University, where she will begin a new position as Associate Professor of Government & International Affairs

Dagan Fultz won the 2026 Laird Essay Contest in the undergraduate division. He received an undergraduate research award for his project "Does a 'Political Accent' Exist?" mentored by Dr. Lacey Wade (linguistics).



Naomi Galindo won second place in the graduate division of the KU Library Snyder Book Collecting Contest for "Mapping the Soviet Union: A Language Tour of the USSR," a collection she started as a high school sophomore. [Read about this year's winning collections in KU Today.](#) Naomi was named a finalist for a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant position for 2026-2027 in Uzbekistan.

On May 6, Naomi represented Portugal at the KU Model NATO simulation. She won the SGES award for Outstanding Service to the Department by a Graduate Student and successfully defended her MA thesis. She graduated in May 2026 with a MA in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies and a certificate in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.



Naomi won the 2026 Laird Essay Contest in the graduate

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Controversies between Russia and Ukraine in Europe's Song Contest."



2026 Snyder Book Collecting Contest Winners. Naomi Galindo (left center), sporting a CREES t shirt, won second place in the contest's graduate division

Molly Godwin-Jones (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa/KU SGES) spoke on the roundtable "Publishing in Slavic: A Conversation with Editors" at the 2026 AATSEEL Convention in New Orleans in February.



Marta Kapszewicz (SGES) defended her PhD portfolio in spring 2026 and passed with Honors.



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Marta Kapszewicz with her committee. L-R: Dr. Oleksandra Wallo, Dr. Paul Scott (French & Italian), Marta Kapszewicz, Dr. Vitaly Chernetsky, and Dr. RB Perelmutter

Dr. Frane Karabatic (UT Austin, KU SGES alum) presented "Design Principles and Pedagogical Practice in Croatian OER Textbooks: *Tako lako* and *Navrh jezika*" and "*Navrh jezika*: A New Online OER Textbook for Intermediate-Level L2 Croatian," chaired the panel "Open by Design: Building the Future of Slavic Language Instruction II," spoke on the roundtable "Open by Design: Building the Future of Slavic Language Instruction - Building a Community of Practice: The Open Slavic Project," and chaired the panel "Teaching the Less Commonly Taught Slavic and East European Languages II" at the 2026 AATSEEL Convention in New Orleans in February.



Kelly Knickmeier-Cummings (Howard University, KU SGES Alum) spoke on two roundtables, "Significant Learning Experiences in the Literature and Culture Curriculum" and "Place-Based Approaches in the Teaching of Eurasian Literatures, Languages, and Cultures," at the 2026 AATSEEL Convention in New Orleans in February.



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Krystle Kwiatkowska completed two theses for her double undergrad majors (English Literature: Creative Writing and Slavic Language & Literature: Polish Concentration). Her SGES thesis was titled "Tumultuous Relationships in Tumultuous Times: The Romances in Bolesław Prus' 'Lalka' and Oscar Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray.'" Her English Literature thesis was titled "The Polish Language in Western Modernity: A Critical Analysis of How Authors in the Polish Diaspora Utilize Polish in Speculative Fiction."



Krystle received an award for excellence in intermediate Polish language and was inducted into the Dobro Slovo Honor Society in May and initiated into Phi Beta Kappa. Krystle was also named the outstanding graduating senior in Polish studies. She published "Poe in Translation: A Comparative of the English and Polish Manuscripts," in the Spring 2026 issue of *Troika*. It was also published in KU Scholarworks.

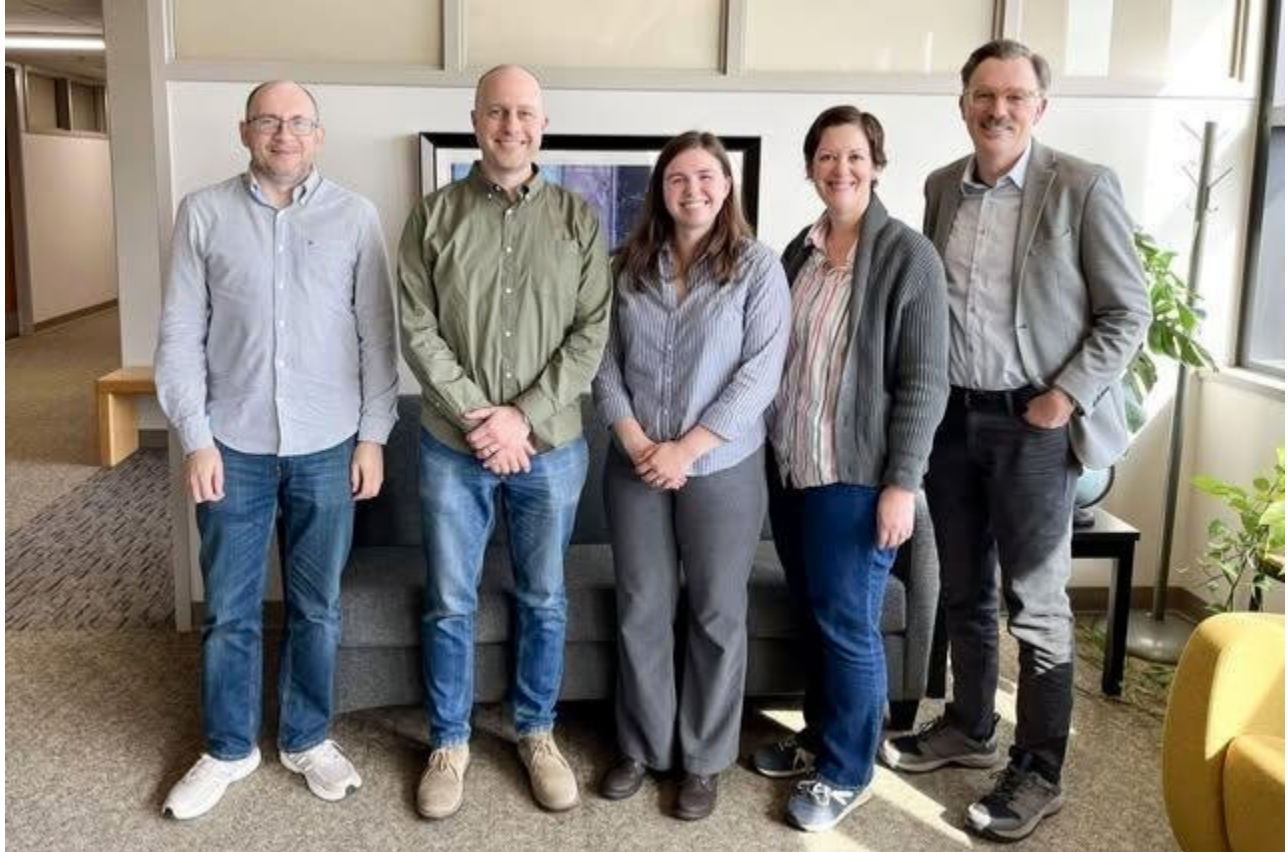
Krystle studied abroad at Uniwersytet Jagielloński (Jagiellonian University), one of the most prestigious universities in Poland from February to June 2026.



Krystle Kwiatkowska at the Wawel Castle, in front of the infamous Wawel Dragon

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Keegan Ludman (History) defended her PhD portfolio in May 2026 and passed with Honors. She presented the paper "Détente and Soviet American Trade: Energy Development Landscapes in a Shifting Cold War World" at the SHAFR (Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations) conference in Columbus, OH in June. Keegan received the Norman Saul Travel Award to present her paper.



Keegan Ludman and her committee following her PhD portfolio defense. L-R: Dr. Anton Shirikov, Dr. Erik Scott (advisor), Keegan Ludman, Dr. Sheyda Jahanbani, Dr. Nathan Wood.

Landon Nett (SGES) passed his MA/PhD Qualifying Exam for the linguistics track of the PhD in Slavic Languages & Literatures.



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Mariia Shismareva (SGES) received the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award in the spring.



Oksana Vykhopen (SGES) presented at the REECAS Northwest Conference in Seattle in April 2026. Her presentation was titled "Language Switch to Ukrainian in Digital Spaces: Identity Negotiation and Co-Construction in the YouTube Comment Section." Oksana successfully defended her PhD portfolio in the spring.



Over the summer, Oksana traveled to Wrocław, Poland to participate in the 2026 Translating Ukraine Summer Institute at the National Ossoliński Institute. Her translation project is the play *The Year One Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty-Three* by Serhii Kokot-Ledianskyi (Тисяча дев'яцот тридцять третій рік, Сергій Кокот-Ледянський). This play explores the horrors of the Holodomor through the experiences of Kyiv Komsomol students.



Oksana Vykhopen presenting at the April 2026 REECAS Conference in Seattle (left) and Oksana with her committee following her PhD portfolio defense (right). L-R: Dr. RB Perelmutter (SGES), Dr. Oleksandra Wallo (SGES), Oksana Vykhopen, Dr. Phil Duncan (Linguistics), Dr. Vitaly Chernetsky (SGES).

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Jordan Zaugg (SGES) successfully defended his PhD portfolio in the spring and received the award for excellence in advanced Ukrainian. Over the summer, Jordan traveled to Wrocław, Poland to participate in the 2026 Translating Ukraine Summer Institute at the National Ossoliński Institute.

His project was the play *At the Beginning and the End of Times* by Pavlo Arie (На початку і наприкінці часів, Павло Аріє). The play is about the struggles of a "returnee" family living in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone, where they legally do not exist.



Jordan with his committee. L-R: Dr. Oleksandra Wallo, Dr. Shannon O'Lear, Jordan Jaugg, Dr. Vitaly Chernetsky, and Dr. RB Perelmutter

Shiqi Zhuang (History) will present the paper "The Rise and Fall of the Siberia-Aral Canal Project (1970-1991)" as part of a panel titled "Borderlands Under Pressure: Violence, Resources, and Political Imagination in Eurasian Peripheries" at the 58th Annual Convention of ASEEES in Chicago in November 2026. He received the Norman Saul Travel Award to attend the conference.



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CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S AWARD WINNERS



Bramlage & Willcoxon Scholarship

Eryn Cannon

Clowes Russian Language Award

Nicholas Ayers

Palij Family Book Award

Farrukhbek Varisov

George C. Jerkovich Award

Marissa Tenorio

Laird Essay Contest

Dagan Fultz (undergraduate)

Naomi Galindo (graduate)

2026 Laird Essay Contest Winners

Naomi Galindo and Dagan Fultz have won the graduate and undergraduate divisions of the annual Laird Essay Contest for their essays titled "Are We REALLY United By Music?: The Eurovision Song Contest, Countries in Time of War, and Political Controversies between Russia and Ukraine in Europe's Song Contest" and "The Nationalism Inequality."

A committee of four REES faculty read and independently rated the anonymous essays submitted for the contest. One committee member said of the essays, "Both of these papers shared a similar call to action, which was to question dominant narratives and include the perspectives of marginalized groups while conducting rigorous, fact-based analysis. That is a timeless imperative that could not be more relevant today."

The essay contest is named after the late Roy Laird, a longtime member of the Russian,

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whose support makes this prize possible. 2026 marks the contest's 32nd year.



Dagan Fultz, Undergraduate Winner



Naomi Galindo, Graduate Winner

Dagan is from Wamego, Kansas. There he Majors in Russian, Eastern European & Eurasian studies, and Linguistics. His academic interests are in Sociolinguistics, Phonosemantics, and Lavender Linguistics in the Post-Soviet space. In the future, he plans to attend graduate school to study Linguistics.

Naomi Galindo is from El Dorado, Kansas. Galindo just completed her master's in Russian, East European, and Eurasian studies and a certificate in Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. Since 2013, Naomi has followed the Eurovision Song Contest and has been a freelance writer for fan sites dedicated to the contest. Her interests include Central Asian and European studies, geopolitics, gender, migration, and ethnomusicology. In the Fall, she will start her Fulbright fellowship as an English Teaching Assistant in Uzbekistan. Naomi hopes to pursue a PhD in Slavic and Eurasian studies and continue to combine her interests.

Thank you to Dr. Esra Predolac!

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After 5 years of service as the CREES Assistant Director, Dr. Esra Predolac will transition into a new role at KU. Esra will be the new German Language Coordinator for the Dept. of Slavic, German, and Eurasian Studies.

CREES is grateful to Esra not only for her tireless efforts as Assistant Director and her support of the Turkish language program at KU, but also for being a wonderful colleague and friend.



CREES ON CAMPUS: A YEAR IN REVIEW



The 2025-2026 academic year was another busy one for CREES despite the loss of Title VI funds. In summer and fall 2025, CREES hosted 13 campus events, and 18 campus events in spring 2026. These events included lectures by visiting scholars, the CREES brownbag lecture series, film screenings, art events, and collaborations with other KU units such as KU Libraries, Political Science, and the Center for East Asian Studies.

CREES also hosted some online events in 2025-2026. On February 17, 2026, CREES and SGES held an online event titled "Ethnic Diversity and Media Freedom in the South Caucasus: The Voice of Radio Marneuli," a webinar led by journalists from Radio Marneuli, a community media outlet serving one of Georgia's most ethnically diverse regions. [You can watch the webinar on our YouTube channel.](#)

CREES also participated in annual events like the International Javhawk Festival.

Additionally, CREES co-sponsored the

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the Global Brunch, the International Career Series, and the Palij Lecture.

This year's Palij Lecture, delivered by renowned Ukrainian author Andrey Kurkov, can be viewed on the [CREES YouTube channel](#).



Dr. Alex Kalinin (Center for Cyber Social Dynamics) delivering his talk "The Meme History of Russia" in February 2026

webinar series, designed to support educators in bringing the arts of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia into their classrooms. KU CREES' Dr. Megan Luttrell presented "Ukrainian Pysanky: Through History and Symbolism into Today's Classroom." The series is available on the [Davis Center's YouTube channel](#).



Dr. Shannon O'Lear (Geography) and Zachary Shearer delivering their brownbag lecture "The Kaleidoscope of Karabakh" in April 2026

There were four brownbag lectures this year, two in the fall and two in the spring. On October 21, Dr. Dave Besson (Physics) gave a talk titled "The Cautionary Tale of Russian Science," and the following week Dr. Alexander Diener (Geography) delivered the talk "Perspectives on Decolonizing Central Asian Borders." On February 10, Dr. Alex Kalinin (Center for Cyber Social Dynamics) gave the talk "The Meme History of Russia." On April 21, Dr. Shannon O'Lear (Geography) and her student Zachary Shearer gave a talk titled "The Kaleidoscope of Karabakh: Overlapping Geopolitics of De- and Re-colonization Efforts in the South Caucasus and Beyond."

CREES had three film screenings this academic year. In September, Liberty Hall showed the film *Strike* (1925) as part its 100 Years of Movies Series, celebrating 100 years of Liberty Hall's movie theater.



Professor Chernetsky introducing *2000 Meters to Andriivka* on February 24

dangerously caught between two regimes.

The movie offers a harrowing portrait of real-life callousness and courage in the face of geopolitical gamesmanship and global inequality. Dr. Nathan Wood (History) introduced the film.

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movie from 1925 each month of 2025. CREES' Dr. Rebecca Johnston introduced *Strike*, a silent film directed by Sergei Eisenstein that depicts a workers' strike at a 1903 pre-Revolutionary Russian factory.

In November, CREES screened *Green Border* (2023). The film, directed by Agnieszka Holland, explores the intimate and often brutal human experience of a cynically-manufactured crisis along the densely forested and swampy border of Poland and Belarus, where refugees from the Middle East and Africa, lured by Alexander Lukashenko's false promises of easy crossing into the EU, instead found themselves in a harsh environment,

On February 24, 2026, the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, CREES showed the documentary *2000 Meters to Andriivka*. A stunning portrayal of war in the trenches from the Oscar®-winning team behind *20 Days in Mariupol*. A FRONTLINE and Associated Press collaboration, this documentary reveals combat bodycam-footage and powerful moments of reflection, following a Ukrainian platoon trying to liberate a village. Professor Vitaly Chernetsky (SGES) introduced the film and led a Q&A following the screening. CREES is grateful to [Razom for Ukraine](#) for sponsoring the screening.

Palij Lecture with Andrey Kurkov

Kurkov began his talk by discussing the day of the full-scale invasion, February 24, 2022. He told the story of how he was awoken by explosions outside his window in Kyiv. He described a long journey to Lviv to find his children during which he encountered roads blocked by traffic of people escaping, sleeping on the side of the road, scarce fuel, and the kindness of strangers.

He continued by describing how Ukraine has changed, and how he has changed, since 2022. He noted that he could not write fiction for the first years of the war and has only just returned to the novel he began pre-invasion. Before the war, he could not describe anything violent in his novels. "The war," he said "made me tolerant to violence" because it is a part of the daily reality.

His talk also included thoughts on Ukrainian history, the differences between Russian and Ukrainian cultural consciousness, and his predictions about the war and its aftermath.



Andrey Kurkov delivering the annual Palij Lecture on November 13, 2025

Great's ban on education in Ukrainian language.

He then turned to culture in Ukraine today, describing how at first Ukrainian culture flourished underground in bomb shelters and metro stations. Independent bookstores thrived as people bought books not necessarily to read, but to

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He discussed the three components of cultural identity: language, culture, and history, and argued that when the language of a place is replaced, the people become part of the foreign culture and history.

He described many historical examples of Russia's attack on Ukrainian culture and language, noting that it is language that connects a people to their land.

Kurkov noted many historical examples of Russia's cultural war against Ukraine, describing, for example Catherine the

supporting Ukrainian culture is to support Ukrainian independence.

In late 2023 and early 2024, Kurkov noted that book sales began to fall as people became fatigued from the war. People escaped reality by reading foreign best sellers in Ukrainian translation.

He explained that "life is very dynamic as war is very dynamic." There is an ebb and flow. "We don't know what will happen tomorrow," he said, "but we know what will happen if Ukraine loses the war."

Andrey Kurkov born in 1961 near Leningrad, grew up and lives in Kyiv. He is a Ukrainian novelist who writes in Russian and Ukrainian. He is the author of more than 20 novels and 10 books for children. His work is currently translated into 45 languages, including English, Japanese, French, Chinese, Swedish and Hebrew. He has also written assorted articles for various publications worldwide including New York Times, The Guardian, Financial Times, New Statesman, La Liberation, Le Monde, Die Welt, Die Zeit. From 2018 till 2022 he was acting President of PEN Ukraine, running international and national literary and socio-political projects.



Andrey Kurkov's novel *Grey Bees* on display at the Raven Bookstore

For his novels, for literary and human rights activities he was awarded Halldor Laxness Prize (Iceland, 2022), "Legion d'Honneur" (France 2015), Medici Prize for Best foreign Novel (France 2022), "Freedom of Expression Award" (Index on Censorship, London 2022), "Readers' Award" (France, 2012), Hans and Sophie Scholl Prize (Germany, 2022), National Critic Circle Award (USA, 2023) and others.

His books are full of black humor. They are mostly set in post-Soviet reality. He also published his diaries about Euromaidan and Russian-Ukrainian war.

"Waging Art: Artists and the Far-Right in the Global Culture Wars"

Dr. Kristóf Nagy (Princeton University)

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On January 22, Dr. Kristóf Nagy (Princeton University) spoke at the Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, an event that was so well attended the venue was standing room only. Dr. Nagy's talk was titled "'Waging Art: Artists and the Far-Right in the Global Culture Wars.'"

We often think of culture wars as battles over ideas and values. But what if they're really about jobs, funding, and institutional control? In his lecture, Nagy reframed the concept of "culture wars"—a defining feature of contemporary far-right politics—by examining how they operate within cultural institutions themselves. Instead of treating culture wars primarily as ideological clashes, he argued that they are material struggles over resources and institutional power between competing factions of cultural elites during periods of capitalist crisis.

Through the case of Viktor Orbán's Hungarian Academy of Arts, Nagy demonstrated how the current rapid transformation of post-WWII capitalist geopolitics fuels not only trade wars, but also culture wars among artists and intellectuals. He addressed two urgent questions: How do far-right forces mobilize culture to consolidate power? And why do artists—often considered the vanguard of liberal cosmopolitanism—participate in authoritarian projects? By grounding culture wars in their material conditions rather than treating them as purely symbolic contests, the lecture offered a framework for understanding the rising coalition between artists, intellectuals and far-right politics.

CREES co-sponsored the event with the Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, the Department of Slavic, German, and Eurasian Studies (SGES), and the Hall Center for the Humanities.



Dr. Kristóf Nagy speaking to a packed house at the Max Kade Center in January

Kristóf Nagy is a historical anthropologist and sociologist, based at Princeton University as a Fung Global Fellow at Princeton University in 2025/2026. With a background in art history from the Courtauld Institute of Art (London) and a Ph.D. in social sciences from Central European University (Vienna), he is specializing in the cultural politics of contemporary far-right governments. His research explores the intersections of imperialism, cultural infrastructures and far-right culture wars through ethnographic and historical methods. At Princeton, he is developing his first monograph on far-right cultural policies and their global historical connections, centering the case of Hungary as a laboratory for contemporary culture wars. For seven years, he has edited *Fordulat*, a journal of left social theory.

"The Party's Interests Come First: The Life of Xi Zhongxun, Father of Xi Jinping"

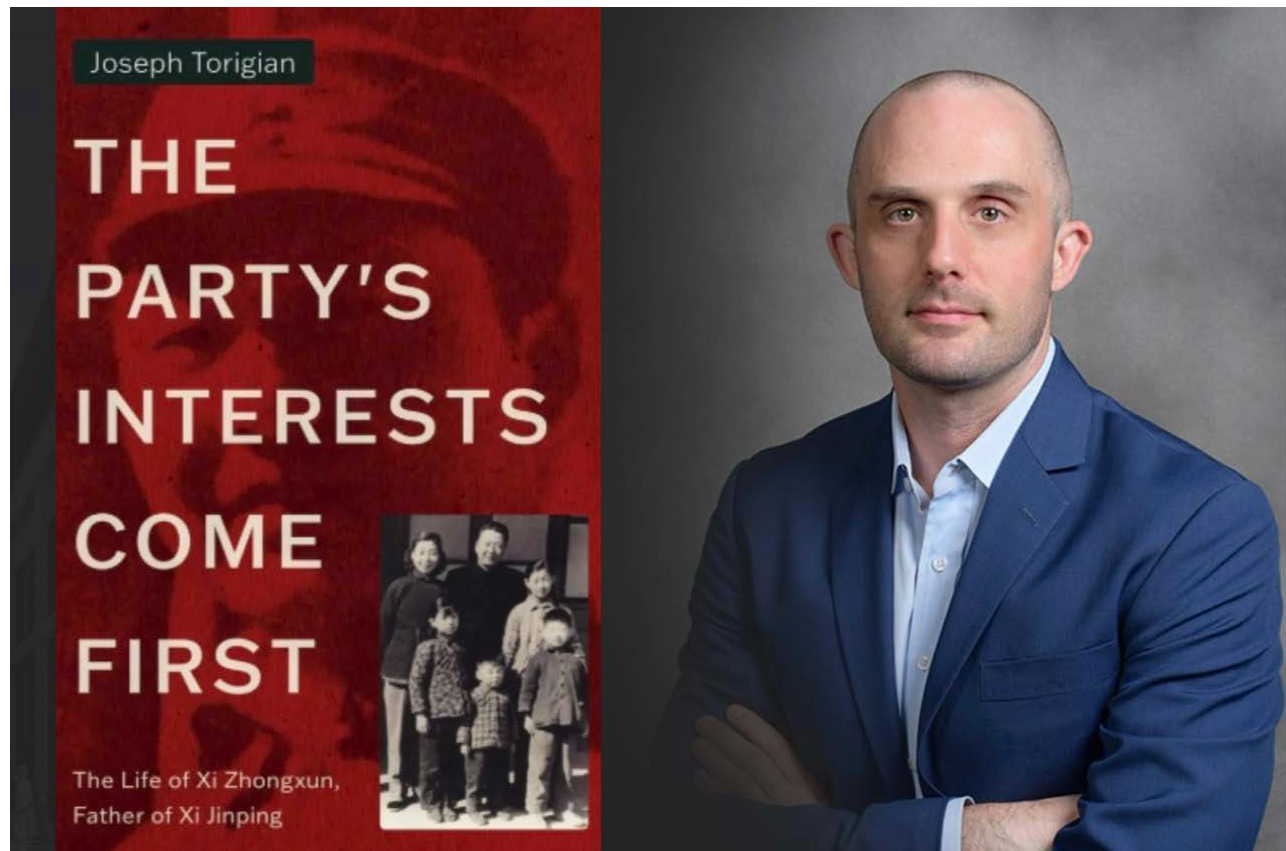
Dr. Joseph Torigian (American University)

On March 3, CREES and the KU Center for East Asian Studies (CEAS) co-sponsored a book talk by Dr. Joseph Torigian (American University). He discussed his book *The Party's Interests Come First: The Life of Xi Zhongxun, Father of Xi Jinping*. His is the first biography of Xi Zhongxun written in English. Lawrence's Raven Bookstore had copies of *The Party's Interests Come First* for purchase and signing at the talk.

China's leader, Xi Jinping, is one of the most powerful individuals in the world—and one of the least understood. Much can be learned, however, about both Xi Jinping and the nature of the party he leads from the memory and legacy of his father, the revolutionary Xi Zhongxun (1913–2002). The elder Xi served the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for more than seven decades. He worked at the right hand of prominent leaders Zhou Enlai and Hu Yaobang. He helped build the Communist base area that saved Mao Zedong in 1935, and he initiated the Special Economic Zones that launched China into the reform era after Mao's death.

He led the Party's United Front efforts toward Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Taiwanese. And though in 1989 he initially sought to avoid violence, he ultimately supported the Party's crackdown on the Tiananmen protesters.

Torigian's biography of Xi Zhongxun is at once a sweeping story of the Chinese revolution and the first several decades of the People's Republic of China and a deeply personal story about making sense of one's own identity within a larger political context. Drawing on an array of new documents, interviews, diaries, and periodicals, Torigian vividly tells the life story of Xi Zhongxun, a man who spent his entire life struggling to balance his own feelings with the Party's demands. Through the eyes of Xi Jinping's father, Torigian reveals the extraordinary organizational, ideological, and coercive power of the CCP—and the terrible cost in human suffering that comes with it.



Dr. Joseph Torigian and the cover of his book *The Party's Interests Come First: The Life of Xi Zhongxun, Father of Xi Jinping*

Joseph Torigian is an associate professor at the School of International Service at American University in Washington, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and a Center Associate of the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. Previously, he was a Research Fellow at Stanford's Hoover History Lab, a Visiting Fellow at the China in the World Program at Australian National University, a Stanton Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, Postdoctoral Fellow at Princeton-Harvard's China and the World Program, a Postdoctoral (and Predoctoral) Fellow at Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), a Predoctoral Fellow at George Washington University's Institute for Security and Conflict Studies, an IREX scholar affiliated with the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, and a Fulbright Scholar at Fudan University in Shanghai. His first book, *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles in the Soviet Union and China after Stalin and Mao* was released with Yale University Press, and *The Party's Interests Come First: The Life of Xi Zhongxun, Father of Xi Jinping* was published by Stanford University Press in 2025.

"Incentives & Adaptation: Regional Governance in Contemporary Russia"

Dr. Dmitriy Vorobyev (European Research University)

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On March 10, CREES and the Department of Political Science hosted Dr. Dmitriy Vorobyev (European Research University, Ostrava, Czech Republic). Dr. Vorobyev delivered the lecture "Incentives and Adaptation: Regional Governance in Contemporary Russia."

Russia's regional governors operate within a complex web of incentives such as federal expectations, electoral pressures, local demands, and personal career ambitions. Vorobyev explored how these forces shape their behavior and policy choices, from budget allocation and corruption to political loyalty and electoral management. By examining how regional leaders respond to shifting institutional and political environments, he highlighted what these dynamics reveal about the functioning of the Russian governance system. Drawing on insights from economics, political science, and recent interdisciplinary research, he discussed how incentives at the top translate into everyday governance across Russia's regions.



Dr. Dmitriy Vorobyev delivering his March 10 lecture "Incentives and Adaptation: Regional Governance in Contemporary Russia"

Dmitriy Vorobyev is a microeconomist with research interests in political economy, public economics, and the economics of information. He holds a PhD in Economics from CERGE-EI (Czech Republic) and an MA in mathematics and computer science from Baltic Federal University (Russia). After graduation, Dmitriy pursued an academic career as an assistant professor of economics at Ural Federal University (Yekaterinburg, Russia) and as a research associate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, before joining European Research University in 2020.

Dmitriy's research focuses on the role of information in political processes, the efficiency of political institutions, regional governance, and corruption. A number of his papers, both theoretical and empirical, have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals, including the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Public Choice*,

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of Public Administration Research and Theory. He also teaches a variety of courses, including microeconomics, game theory, information economics, and public economics.

2026 Security Conference: Arctic Security: The New Front Line

Ambassador Michael Sfraga (ret.), former Ambassador-at-Large for Arctic Affairs

On May 5, over 120 people came to the Dole Institute of Politics for the 2026 Security Conference, Arctic Security: The New Front Line. Ambassador Michael Sfraga, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Arctic Affairs, and Col. Russell Vanderlugt Commanding Officer, 11th Airborne Division's Arctic Aviation Command, discussed the growing strategic importance of the Arctic to U.S. national security. Gerald F. Seib, former Executive Washington Editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, moderated the conversation.

Seib began the event by noting President Trump's play for Greenland has reminded us that the stakes are very high in the Arctic regarding its strategic and economic importance, and asked Vanderlugt and Sfraga, what the Arctic is, who owns it, and what resources are there. Sfraga said the Arctic is place that conjures different images and emotions and jokingly said it would take 3 hours to define. He then explained that the Arctic is well-governed by the 8 nations with ownership (Canada, Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States).

The U.S. arctic has critical and rare earths, trade routes, strategic real estate, fisheries, oil and gas, and timber. It is a place that is geopolitically connected to everything, according to Sfraga.

Sfraga then discussed Arctic exceptionalism, defining it as a "bubble" of 8 nations cooperating. He noted that the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia and the 2014 annexation of Crimea both put pressure on the bubble, but in 2022 it was "fundamentally frayed after the full-scale invasion" of Ukraine when Arctic Council paused Russia's high level diplomatic relations.

Vanderlugt, discussing increased Russian and Chinese activity in the Arctic, noted a need to monitor and respond to adversary activity. He explained that the U.S. military cannot assess and respond to adversaries if it cannot monitor the area. He was unable to describe specific threats due to information being classified. He called Alaska a forward layer for U.S. defense.

In the second half of the talk, Seib noted two elephants in the room: Greenland and climate change. Sfraga explained that he sees Greenland as critical to North American security but does not think a purchase or rental is the way to go. Instead, he recommended investing in Greenland and increasing the U.S. footprint there. He said the U.S. should help Greenland build a diversified economic portfolio invest in K-12 capabilities and higher education. Vanderlugt talked about historical ties between Alaska and Greenland, and stated Alaska should be U.S.'s top priority

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When discussing the Arctic in terms of strategic chokepoints, Vanderlugt identified Bering Strait and GI UK gap as bookends for the North American Arctic that have the potential to be strategic choke points.

The conversation turned to climate change, which Sfraga called “real, rapid, and relentless.” He said that “climate change is literally reshaping the contours



Arctic Security: The New Front Line at the Dole Institute of Politics. L-R: Gerald Seib, Ambassador Michael Sfraga, and Colonel Russell Vanderlugt

of the Arctic,” noting two typhoons that hit Alaska and its impact on indigenous communities.

He described the melting permafrost’s impact on the cost of maintaining roads and civil and military airports in Alaska. He explained that the coastline, along with people’s homes, is falling into the ocean and that cemeteries are at risk of being washed away. He also mentioned the economic impact of climate change, asking how do you manage fisheries or plan to build a port in such conditions.

He cited NASA satellite footage that shows how since late 1970s the Arctic Ocean ice cap has lost 50% of thickness 50% of area and 75% of its volume. Vanderlugt spoke about climate change’s effect on the military, explaining how the U.S. military in Alaska needs to build helicopter fleet because of road issues and how they are extending military operational reach through air born fleets.

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The speakers then took questions from the audience. During the Q&A both speakers recommended books to help understand the Arctic. Sfraga recommended *Maps and Dreams* to put the landscape in perspective. Vanderlugt, as a historian, recommended *Thousand-Mile War: World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians* by Brian Garfield. Seib mentioned the *Journal of Arctic Security* as another good resource.

This talk was sponsored by the Dole Institute of Politics, and the University of Kansas' International Affairs, Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Department of Political Science, National Defense Initiatives, and Intelligence Community Center for Academic Excellence. [Watch the discussion on the Dole Institute's YouTube channel.](#)

Model NATO Student Simulation

A NATO simulation on May 6 was the culmination of a semester of work for students in KU's inaugural Model NATO class, taught by Dr. Rebecca Johnston (Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies) and Dr. Kurt Preston (National Defense Initiatives). KU undergraduate and graduate students represented each of the 32 NATO nations. After researching their assigned country, students acted as ambassadors who had to diplomatically reach a consensus in response to a world crisis.

The simulation, presented in cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Allied Command Transformation (ACT), centered on a fictitious situation in which Russian cyber-attacks on water facilities in the Baltic states led a contaminated water supply and some fatalities. The simulation was an urgent meeting of NATO Ambassadors to determine if the situation warranted invoking Article 5, the cornerstone of the alliance, in which an armed attack against one member is seen as an attack against all, committing members to collective defense.

The event, which took place at the new KU Conference Center, was a full-day affair. It began with welcoming remarks by Colonel Mike Denning (Assistant Vice Chancellor, KU National Defense Initiatives), Ambassador Michael Sfraga (former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Arctic Affairs), and University of Kansas Provost Arash Mafi.

In his remarks, Provost Mafi said that he often speaks about "preparing students, not simply for careers, but for citizenship in an interconnected world--one that demands critical thinking, respect for human rights and individual freedoms, empathy, and that values diverse perspectives and the inherent worth of each person through their respective laws, institutions, and cultural values. In higher education, we must ensure our students are able to work through difficult problems with others." He explained that the NATO simulation would allow students to do just that, using "foundational skills for leadership, diplomacy, public service, science, business, and democratic life."



Students who participated in the May 6 Model NATO simulation, Ambassador Michael Sfraga, CREES Director Erik Scott, Model NATO instructors Dr. Rebecca Johnston and Kurt Preseton, Ashley Urban of Intelligence Community Center for Academic Excellence, and NATO Allied Command Transformation representatives Luisa Freuter, Jay Paxton, and Vianna Unland.

Before the simulation began, NATO ACT representatives Luisa Freutel (academic outreach) and Jay Paxton (chief corporate and media relations) spoke to the students about what work at NATO is really like, reviewed the rules of decorum for the simulation, and explained that communication skills beyond linguistic competence are vital, noting the importance of cultural awareness.

The simulation included discussion between ambassadors moderated by the Secretary General, as well as unmoderated breaks, where ambassadors could continue talks in small groups. After hours of negotiations, during which student ambassadors held true to their countries' alliances and individual interests, the ambassadors approved a statement which outlined response

The Model NATO class, cross-listed in Political Science, History, and Slavic, German, and Eurasian Studies, had three distinct sections throughout the semester. It began with direct instruction, providing students with the foundational knowledge required for a basic understanding of multilateral institutions generally and the context of NATO specifically. Ayan Dave, a student in the NATO course, noted that the class "created something rare, an environment where students engage with international decision-making as active participants rather than passive observers."

The course shifted to an experiential learning phase, during which each student was assigned a NATO country and asked to prepare the necessary briefing materials to fulfill their role as national

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humanitarian aid, bolstered NATO presence in the Baltic states, and limited cyber offense. The group did not opt to invoke Article 5.

The simulation ended a little after 4pm and was followed by a debrief by NATO ACT. They reminded students that ambassadors must be very clear about their beliefs and the organization they represent, noting “you may only get one minute or one chance to speak.” Throughout the debriefing, students mentioned their gratitude for both the simulation experience and the Model NATO class offering as a whole.

The class instructors were as grateful for their students’ work as the students were for the class. Dr. Johnston said, “we asked a lot of them and the knowledge, tact, and professionalism that the students displayed at the simulation showed that they truly rose to the challenge... I couldn't be more proud of how our students performed.”

semester, the students transitioned into a collaborative phase that emphasized the importance of interaction in the learning process.

Dr. Johnston noted, “In designing the Model NATO course, we thought holistically about what skills and information students would need to step into the shoes of a NATO ambassador. They had to be informed about the history and politics of NATO as well as ongoing debates about the organization. They had to apply practical skills in research, critical analysis, and cultural awareness to build an understanding of the individual country each would represent.”

Discussing the student briefing book project and the simulation, student Ayan Dave, commented that “the process of building toward something tangible made complex topics like security, international cooperation, and consensus-building not only more accessible, but genuinely compelling.”



Amy W., speaking on behalf of Latvia.
Photo by Dan Oetting, KUIA



CREES students at the Model NATO simulation L-R: Adrianna Brady (Poland), Naomi Galindo (Portugal), Joseph Piver (N. Macedonia), Alex Hoefel (Slovakia), Dakota Morgan (Slovenia)

Amy W., the student ambassador for Latvia, said “this course has shown me, as an interdisciplinary student, that meaningful career paths in this space are more viable than I'd assumed – and has sharpened my understanding of diplomacy in ways that will

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The initiative was co-organized by the KU National Defense Initiatives, Intelligence Community Center for Academic Excellence, Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Department of Political Science, and KU International Affairs. NATO ACT and KU plan to collaborate for future events like the May 6 simulation

Campus Outreach

CREES participated in several on campus outreach events in the 2025-2026 academic year. We started things off in August with the annual Global Brunch. Incoming and current students interested in international education attended for food and an information fair.

In November, the Area Studies Centers teamed up with Student Union Activities to offer an international version of their Tea at Three series. CREES brought a samovar and showcased Russian zavarka style tea. Attendees also took home QR codes for a [Digital Culture Tour](#) to learn more about samovars and Russian tea culture.

In the spring, CREES faculty and FLTAs worked with ISS for its Atlas series.



CREES at the 2025 Global Brunch

The first event, on March 2, focused on



Tajik Atlas Event. Photo by Dan Oetting

Attendees learned about Tajikistan's mountain culture, multilingualism (Tajik, Russian, and English), traditions of food and hospitality, natural and cultural landmarks, music, dance, and clothing.

On April 7, [the series focused on Turkey](#). Turkish FLTA Elif Pekel gave a fascinating presentation about the rich culture of Turkey, from traditional art and music to geography facts, history, and even cats! The event featured a performance of an Anatolian folk song played on the bağlama by local musician Dandelion Lakewood.

Participants learned to dance the Damat Halayi, viewed a variety of cultural items such as Turkish tea glasses, carpets, tiles coffee cups, and evil eye amulets.

People also enjoyed Turkish food and drink including stuffed grape leaves

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music and dance, a quiz with Tajik souvenirs as prizes, a fashion showcase of regional attire, and homemade Tajik food.

delight, and börek. [Learn more about Turkish culture with this CREES Digital Culture Tour.](#)



Turkish FLTA Elif Pekel Presenting Turkish culture at the Atlas Series



Dandelion Lakewood performing on the baglama for Atlas Series: Turkey

On April 15, CREES and the other area studies centers participated in the tenth annual International Jayhawk Festival. Visitors to the CREES table answered trivia questions about Eastern Europe and Eurasia and put together a map puzzle of the region.

SEES Club received a Pederson Grant to participate in the IJF. Eryn Cannon created Montessori tiles for letters in the Cyrillic alphabet. Other CREES region tables included the Persian Language Club, the Ukrainian Student Association, a table about Tajikistan, and the Department of Slavic, German, and Eurasian Studies. Our friends at Mavka performed Ukrainian folk dance.



The CREES region was well-represented at the 2026 International Jayhawk Festival

Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (SEEEES) Club

SEEEES Club was busy this year, hosting monthly events on a variety of themes. In the fall, the club held a trivia event in September and a screening of the film *Russian Ark* in October.

On November 19, SEEEES Club participated in the SUA Flavors of the World event, making bulochki and potato and mushroom pirozhki. They took home third place in the food competition!

SEEEES Club got crafty in November and January. They learned to make

SEEEES Club partnered with the Turkish FLTAs on the January event.

In February, the month of love, the club held an event on matchmaking, love, and family themed Slavic fortune telling. Participants learned a little about the traditions of fortunetelling (гадание) in East Slavic culture and tried various methods of divination themselves.

In March, the club held a game night that featured a variety of games of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia. The event

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November 21 and learned the Turkish art of paper marbling (ebru) and to paint İznik tiles in January.

puzzle race. Want to give it a try? You can download the puzzle here and check your answers here.



Making Wycinanki at Craft Night in November



Painting İznik tiles at Turkish Craft Night



Making ebru at Turkish Craft Night in January

SEES Club teamed up with the Persian Language Club at the end of March to help with their Nowruz Celebration, which was held at the Burge Union. The name Nowruz comes from Persian, meaning 'new day', and corresponds with the vernal equinox. The holiday is a time of renewal and rebirth and is celebrated annually by millions of people around the world. The Persian Language Club and 120+ guests celebrated with chicken kabobs, rice, tea, and dessert set to the traditional Persian music. The club set up a beautiful *haft-sin/haftseen* table complete with the seven traditional items starting with the Persian letter 's' (*sin*) that symbolize various good fortunes in the coming year.



Haft Seen Table at the Nowruz Celebration on March 25

On April 24, SEEES Club attended a coffee club skate at Kansas City Ice Center. The day started with a talk on the history of figure skating in Russia, East Europe, and Eurasia from Peter I to today by CREES Graduate Student Assistant, Eryn Cannon.

Skaters then started with an off-ice lesson on how to fall and stand up and then headed out to the ice. Some attendees skated for the first time while others learned new skills. The event wrapped up with cinnamon rolls, mini muffins, and coffee provided by the rink.

We are especially grateful to Eryn Cannon for her work on this event and the corresponding Digital Culture Tour!



Sam Reda enjoying the SEEES Club Skating Event



CREES IN THE COMMUNITY: PUBLIC OUTREACH



Multicultural Fairs: Lawrence Library & Watkins Museum of History

On August 16, 2025, CREES participated in Lawrence Public Library's Multicultural Fair. Attendees could color Polish Wycinanki or a Russian Matryoshka doll. They could have their name written in Russian or create a Turkish tulip craft.

On December 7, 2025, CREES participated in the 13th annual Tails and Traditions event held at the Watkins Museum of History. Participants could color a Ukrainian pysanka ornament, Russian matryoshka ornament, or create a Ukrainian Christmas spider ornament.



Office Manager Mariya Borisova at the Lawrence Library Multicultural Fair in August

Everyone went home with a craft, a QR code to the [CREES Region Reading List](#), and QR codes for the Digital Culture tour that corresponded to their craft. Those who made a Christmas spider, received a copy of the legend that inspired to craft to take home. We look forward to participating in the Tails and Traditions event again next year!

2026 CREES Spring Festival

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Scenes from the 2026 CREES Spring Festival: Bliny, Gerald Trimble & Jambaroque, Big Happy Photobooth, Bulgarian Martenitsa dolls, door prizes, and Mavka Ukrainian Dance Group. Photos by Dan Oetting, Logan Pierson, and Megan Luttrell

The annual CREES Spring Festival took place on Sunday March 1, 2026 at Lawrence's historic Liberty Hall. The festival was once again, our biggest event of the year, drawing about 300 attendees despite the less than spring-like weather.

Festival goers snacked on the hundreds of bliny prepared by the CREES team while enjoying music by KC's six-piece band Gerland Trimble and Jambaroque, who performed a set of traditional music from Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Greece, and the Caucasus. The band engaged the crowd by beginning their performance walking through the venue, allowing people to get a better look at their rare and traditional instruments.

Following their performance, Olathe's Ukrainian dance group Mavka took the stage for a riveting performance of folk and character dance. Their performance featured dancers of all levels from the Mavka dance school, from students as young as 7 to the semi-professional adult company. With colorful and authentic costumes, soaring leaps, and energetic renditions of the famous Hopak dance, Mavka had the entire venue enthralled.

In case the performances weren't enough to look at, Summit's Steps Minerals had a gorgeous display of mineral specimens from Eastern Europe and Eurasia, representing several countries including Ukraine, Bulgaria, Russia, Czechia, Romania, Kosovo, and Kazakhstan.

Three lucky people took home door prizes this year including a framed 11 x 17 Turkish ebru art piece, a decorative lacquer plate featuring Moscow's iconic St. Basil's Cathedral, and of course, a CREES swag bundle.

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Eurasian themed props hand made by the CREES outreach coordinator. Each prop had a corresponding information sheet on display so people could learn more about what they are and their place in REE culture. You can learn about the props at the [festival website](#).

CREES is grateful to the event sponsors [Central Bank](#) and [Summit's Steps Minerals](#) for their support.

Read about the festival in an article in the [University Daily Kansan](#) or in an article in the [Lawrence Times](#).

Ukrainian Workshops: Dances, Stars, and Pysanky



People had a great time learning about the Ukrainian star-making tradition with local artist Zoriana Lylo-Otkovich

CREES held three cultural workshops this academic year, focusing on Ukraine. In November, Mavka led a Ukrainian folk-dance workshop, in December, renowned Lviv artist Zoriana Lylo-Otkovich taught a workshop on Ukrainian star making.

Danielle Price, who attended the workshop, said "I was delighted to attend the Ukrainian Star Workshop. I learned so much about the history and symbolism of the

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one-on-one attention from Zoriana all while listening to Ukrainian holiday music. I keep my star, which I decorated like a sunflower, in my office. I think about Kansas and Ukraine every day I am in the office."

Zoriana was born in Lviv (Ukraine) in 1968. Art critic, artist of decorative and applied arts, graphic artist, teacher of Lviv Professional College of Decorative and Applied Arts. I. Trusha in the departments of restoration, painting and professional disciplines. Her works are stored in private collections in Ukraine, Germany, Poland, USA and other. By balancing on the border of graphics and works of decorative and applied art, she creates unique products that resonate with folk art.



Scenes from the sold out Ukrainian Pysanky Workshop on March 27

In March, CREES Outreach Coordinator Megan Luttrell gave the annual Ukrainian pysanky workshop. Participants learned about the history of pysanky, dating back to Neolithic times, through Paganism, the adoption of Christianity, Soviet suppression of the art, through the artform's role in the war with Russia.

Attendees learned the talismanic uses of pysanky in pre-Christian times, the symbolism of designs and colors and how they changed after the adoption of Christianity in the 10th century, and even what types of designs were given to different types of people.

Lisa Doty, who drove from Topeka to attend the workshop, said "I knew pysanky to be a

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Megan Luttrell opened a whole world of colorways and symbolism, making the tradition feel alive in a way I hadn't expected. And she's a fantastic facilitator — this was so much more than a craft workshop. Three hours disappeared in a blink. I met some great people, and the cost was genuinely accessible, which felt like a gift in itself."



Folk-dance workshop with Mavka Ukrainian Dance Troupe in November

In the fall, CREES welcomed back Olathe-based Ukrainian Dance Group, Mavka, for another folkdance workshop. Instructors Kristina and Matthew led the group in a few traditional dances, taught some foundational dance steps, and presented various cultural items including traditional folkdance costumes, embroidery, holiday stars, woodwork, and more. Mavka also performed at the 2026 International Jayhawk Festival.

Roll with the Dole, Kites & Cultures at the Spencer Museum

On April 4, CREES participated for a second time in the annual Roll with the Dole Easter event. We had a display of decorated eggs showcasing different artistic techniques from Eastern Europe.

Participants took home a QR code to the Digital Culture Tour page on egg art in Eastern Europe, a QR code to our REES reading list by age group, and a chart explaining the symbolism of color and

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Czech Slovak drop wax kraslice, Ukrainian wood inlay, maliovanky from Russia and Ukraine, and naklejanki. Not sure what the differences are between these styles of egg decoration? [Check out our digital culture tour on egg art!](#)



People of all ages were amazed by the intricate designs of the various East European decorated eggs

Did you know the world's largest Czech egg is located right here in Kansas or that egg decorating in Eastern Europe dates back to Neolithic times? Well, everyone at the Roll with the Dole knows because while enjoying the display, decorating a styrofoam egg, or coloring Ukrainian pysanka coloring pages, attendees learned fun egg-related facts from a slideshow that ran during the event.

brought our pysanky photobooth props from the Spring Festival.

We look forward to participating in the Roll with the Dole again next year and adding some new activities!



People playing Gorodki

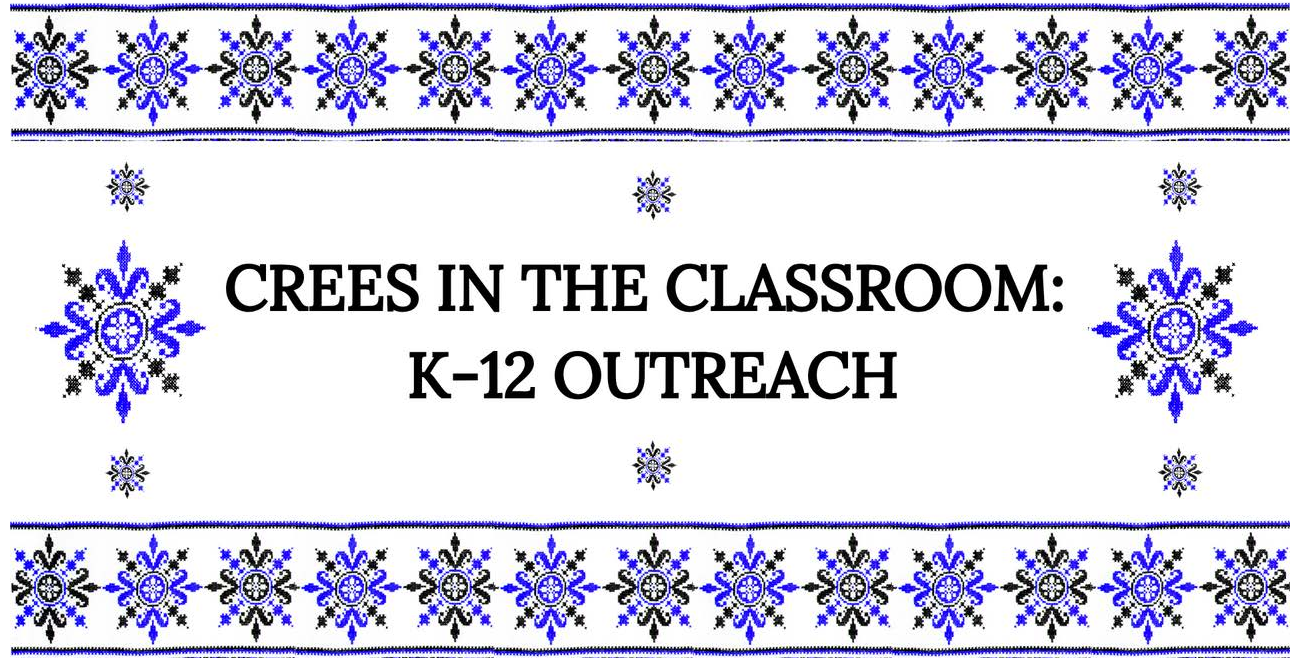
On May 2, the KU Area Studies Centers hosted Color the Sky: A Kite and Culture Celebration. Each center hosted a craft and a game related to its world region.

Outside of the Spencer Museum of Art, attendees could play a game from Korea, Russia, Peru, and Egypt. CREES hosted the Russian game Gorodki, in which players had to try and knock wooden dowls in 1 of 15 formations out of a set area.



Inside the Kansas Union, people could try a number of crafts or other activities. At the CREES table, people made Turkish nazar boncuğu (evil eye beads) and made wishes on a Turkish wishing tree just in time for the spring holiday Hıdırellez.

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CREES continued its outreach to preK-12 classrooms this academic year. In May 2025, Outreach Coordinator Dr. Megan Luttrell spoke to AP art students at Baldwin City High School. She presented on Russian and Ukrainian fine arts, discussing Realism, Cubo-Futurism, Rayonism, and Suprematism. The AP art class focuses on creating art, so it was interesting for students to learn how art historians analyze works of art through things like line, color, composition, contemporary events, and even a work's title.



Students at Baldwin City High discuss Repin's "Barge Haulers on the Volga"



Cultural items from class visits to Baldwin City Junior High, where students learned Russian language

CREES continued its partnership with Baldwin City Junior High's World Language Class. Luttrell taught Russian for a week in December 2025 and a week in April 2026. During these visits, students learn to read the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, introduce themselves, count to 10, ask/answer the question "how are you?" and learn the colors in Russian. They discuss the importance of language study, study abroad, and Russian culture from folk arts to Hermitage cats and more!

Berenice Applegate, the teacher for World Languages at Baldwin Junior High, has grown the class from 4 students its first quarter to 18 this past spring. CREES has visited her class each semester for several years. The Russian language visits are "a fan favorite among students!"

The Russian lessons include music and games and activities "that the students enjoy and remember fondly," Applegate notes. She shares that each round of CREES class visits "inspires them to travel and explore the world around them."

In April and May CREES taught Turkish and Russian to eighth graders at St. John's school in Lawrence. Claudia Olea, the Spanish teacher whose class CREES visited, said "we learned useful phrases, writing systems, geography, music, art and traditions associated with each language. Thank you so much for making your lessons so fun and accessible to our students!"

In November 2025, CREES led a matryoshka painting workshop for students at the Baldwin City Primary Center as part of a series on international arts. The series was funded by a grant from the Baldwin City Education Foundation. The Primary Center's art teacher, Jackie Holstetler, was able to fund the series with an arts grant. She said of the matryoshka class, "It was such a treat to have Dr. Luttrell join us for an afternoon of art, language and play! It isn't often that first graders in Kansas get to take part in such a unique cultural experience, and Dr. Luttrell more than delivered with her engaging lesson!"



The four-year-old room at Googols of Learning Child Development Center learned about Ukraine this January! (Photos used with parental permission)

In January, CREES led a special Ukrainian storytime at Googols of Learning Childhood Development Center. The four-year-old room read the classic Ukrainian tale "The Mitten" and learned the various animal names that appear in the story in Ukrainian. They learned about symbols of Ukraine such as the sunflower, pysanka, and tryzub, and were able to interact with cultural items like vinok and vyshyvanka.

In February, CREES visited Hillcrest Elementary School in Lawrence for career day. Outreach Coordinator Megan Luttrell spoke about her career arc and the importance of learning another language, the doors it can open for many types of careers, and how art and music can both be careers, not just hobbies. The three different classes were able to interact with cultural items from Russia, sing a song and learn a few words in Russian.



Dr. Esra Predolac teaching Turkish at the 2026 World Language Fair in Topeka



KASC, CEAS, and CREES at the Pittsburg Community Middle School Culture Fair

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CREES and the other Area Studies Centers conducted two Traveling World Language Fairs this spring. The first took place on March 9 in Topeka. Students from the three high schools in Topeka attended. They learned Turkish, Arabic, Japanese, and Guarani.

On March 25, CREES, KASC, and CEAS traveled to Pittsburg Community Middle School to lead participate in the school's multicultural fair. Students learned Russian, Arabic, Kiswahili, and Japanese. Over 30 cultures were represented at the event.

In December 2025 and March 2026, CREES visited the Phoenix Collective in Lawrence, a secular homeschooling group that inspires youth to explore the world, uncover their passions, build their toolbox, and thrive in community. In December, Outreach Coordinator Megan Luttrell taught students of the collective Russian language including how to introduce oneself and ask/answer "how are you?" She brought cultural items such as matryoshka dolls, khokhloma, and Russian musical instruments for the students to explore, and led them in a singalong of "Kalinka." In March, she presented about the history and symbolism of Ukrainian pysanky.



The Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies has been a national leader since 1959 and is the only federally designated resource center on this crucial world area in the Great Plains. Special events, renowned speakers, scholarships, and study abroad opportunities are just some of the ways your donations can help us maintain the center's vitality and expand its impact in Kansas and beyond. We hope that you will contribute generously to strengthen the center's programs by sending your gift today. Your gifts are tax deductible as allowed by law. Thank you for your support!

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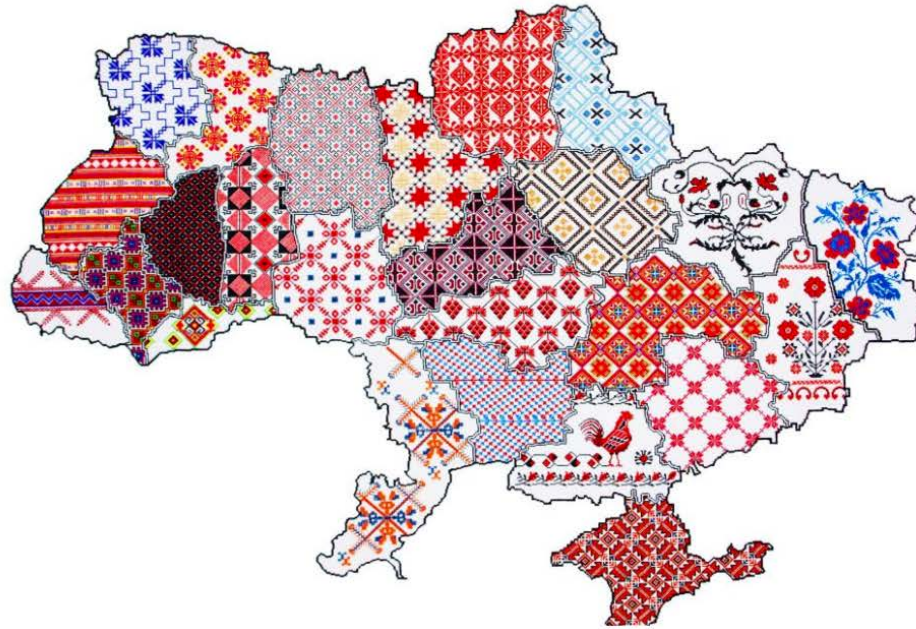
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The theme of this CREES Courier newsletter is Ukrainian embroidery. To learn more about this beautiful artistic tradition check out [this CREES Digital Culture Tour](#).

Embroidery / Вишивка



SYMBOLISM IN UKRAINIAN EMBROIDERY



PERFECTION, HARMONY,
ORDER, EARTH, MATTER,
ORDER, EXCELLENCE, INNER
PEACE, AND FERTILITY

Squares



MIGHTY AMULET AGAINST
EVIL, NEGATIVITY, AND
POWERLESSNESS. THE
STARS ALSO REPRESENT
PEOPLE'S CONNECTION
WITH THE STARS IN THE
COSMOS

Stars



UNION OF MASCULINE AND
FEMININE TO CREATE LIFE,
KNOWN AS THE MOTHER'S
STAR

8-Pointed Star (mallow)



POWERFUL AMULET
AGAINST EVIL. IT
SYMBOLIZES THE IDEA OF
CENTRICITY RATHER THAN
THE DIVISION OF SPACE,
UNLIKE THE SQUARE AND
CIRCLE. THE STRAIGHT
CROSS REPRESENTS THE
CREATOR, THE SUN, AND
THE MASCULINE PRINCIPLE.
THE DIAGONAL CROSS
REPRESENTS THE FEMININE

Cross



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