Spring 2019
Newsletter

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Happy New Year to all! The Slavic Department is still going strong. If you haven’t visited us since 2014, we invite you to come by to see our renovated space, with its interior glass offices for graduate students and a lovely multi-purpose room. We hope that you will join us for our joint awards ceremony and talent show in Alumni Hall 400 on March 22 to meet and encourage the students in our programs today.

This brochure contains reports from our various programs. We are still doing what we always have: teaching the languages and cultures of countries in what remains one of the most important regions of the world. In some cases, we are acquainting students with their own heritage, which they know only partially or hardly at all. Most students who take courses in the department, however, do so for other reasons. In all of our programs, we are awakening students to the incredible variety of human cultures. Each of you reading this message has your own story, your own memories of your education in the languages and cultures that we teach. I myself remember being blown away in university by Russian language and literature, and then querying why I felt that way, why it seemed so profound to me. It was alien too. Deeper immersion into the culture led me to ponder the meaning of differences that I observed but I could not fathom.

Within the university as part of a multidisciplinary education, knowledge of the languages and cultures taught in the Slavic department complements many subject areas, including cinema studies, communication, cultural studies, drama studies, history, linguistics, other literatures and cultures, music, political science, translation studies, and others. The smallness of our programs enriches student life at U of T by providing individual attention to students that larger units cannot offer. Then there is the related value of learning another language and thereby improving your understanding of your own. In a recent case in the Finnish program, for instance, a student now enrolled in a Forestry MA at U of T was a double major in Finnish and Molecular Genetics and Microbiology. (He has no Finnish background.) He praises the program for not only teaching him Finnish, but improving his English language skills, and reports that “I often outperformed my classmates in the sciences when it came to written assignments, and I believe this is partly because I was able to develop writing skills in FIN courses that would not have been developed otherwise.”

In addition to gaining personal satisfaction and the enrichment that comes from knowledge of another language and culture, the graduates of the program and those who take its courses benefit both themselves and society by becoming intermediaries between Canada and the countries whose languages and cultures we teach who find work in government, business, the military, and the arts.

Ours is the only full Slavic department left in Canada, and one of only a few in North America. We came into being and continue to thrive in all our diversity largely because of community support. Think about contributing to our programs either with a donation, or by volunteering to work with students.

You are cordially invited to our departmental Talent and Award Show on March 22 from 2:00-5:00pm at Father Madden Hall (in Carr Hall - 100 St. Joseph Street).

Please contact us at slavic@utoronto.ca if you plan to attend.
Prof. Dragana Obradović won a teaching award from the Faculty of Arts and Science in April 2018 for the curriculum development of the South Slavic program and excellent teaching evaluations.

Prof. Christina E. Kramer is busy working on a project about Skopje, the capital city of Macedonia. In the fall of 2018 she presented papers on this project both at the Aleksanteri Centre conference in Helsinki and at the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) in Boston. For her translation of the novel *Grandma Non-Oui* by Macedonian writer Lidija Dimkovska she has won a grant from the US National Endowment for the Arts. This academic year is her last before retirement and she taught her last Macedonian class to a wonderful group of students. She is particularly grateful for the incredible support she has received from the local Macedonian community throughout her career.

Prof. Ana Petrov joined the Slavic Department in September 2018 to teach Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S) as well as Czech language. In 2019, she will teach a new course on creative writing in Slavic languages to upper-level students.

Last summer, a number of our students travelled to the Balkans to undertake language study or research mostly funded by the generosity of the South Slavic community in Ontario. Two students travelled to Serbia—one for a law internship and another for research for a documentary—after being awarded the Rosa Somborac grant which funds students to travel to the country. Two other students travelled to Split, Croatia and attended the language summer school administered by the University of Split, generously co-funded by AMCA, a Canadian-Croatian organization. Other students found themselves in Macedonia and Bosnia expanding their linguistic and cultural knowledge. Closer to home, last semester saw students from B/C/S elementary and advanced language classes join together for film nights, food evenings, and cultural exchange.
The Fall semester has been busy as usual for the Polish Program. To begin with, Marcin Cieszkiel successfully passed his doctoral examinations, thus embarking on the journey towards his dissertation research project. In September, Dr. Aleksandra Święcka from the Polonicum Centre at the University of Warsaw joined our ranks as the new Polish language coordinator, marking another successful year of the cooperation between the Polish Language and Culture Program at the University of Toronto and the Polonicum Centre in Warsaw. This semester we also hosted Mateusz Pytko, an International Visiting Graduate Student, whose project, “Towards Polish Minor Literature: The Minoritarian Approach to the Works of Julian Stryjkowski, Leopold Buczkowski, Leo Lipski and Grzegorz Musiał” holds the Joanna DeMone Scholarship (the third such scholarship in the last two years) supervised by the Polish Program.

Starting in November, patrons of Robarts Library, the University’s main research hub, could also admire the wonderful exhibit The 100th Anniversary of Poland’s Regained Independence, complete with an audio-tour and accompanying film screenings, prepared by the Polish Program’s alumni, students, and members of the Polish Students’ Association.

The program’s greatest accomplishment this year, however, has been the official launch of Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918. The volume is a monumental intellectual and pedagogical project undertaken by Prof. Tamara Trojanowska and her colleagues, involving over 60 scholarly contributions from all over the world. Being Poland presents the most complete, interdisciplinary, and transnational account of the last hundred years of Polish cultural tradition that is bound to have a significant impact on how Polish culture is taught in the English-speaking world. Conceived by Tamara Trojanowska at the 2006 Polish studies conference in Toronto (itself organized by the Polish Program) and published by the University of Toronto Press with the generous support of numerous Polish community organizations in Toronto, it is a crowning achievement of the program’s half-a-century-old pedagogical mission.

The program has been offering its regular series of extra-curricular language and culture workshops, such as this semester’s “The Mythologies of Cities: Urban Legends in Toronto and Warsaw” and an activity workshop on St. Andrew’s Eve, which present students with community-building, hands-on experiences and showcase different phenomena of Polish culture. The program has also taken the students on a field trip to the Toronto Festival of Authors to meet with a trio of the most popular contemporary Polish prose writers. We plan on building on the successes of fall, 2018 with new publications, guest lectures, and workshops, so please stay tuned to the events at the Polish Program!
Since 2010 the Russian Language Program has had two tracks: Russian as a foreign language and Russian for heritage learners. Our language program provides four years of Russian and attracts students from many different cultural and educational backgrounds. In addition to core language courses students can choose to take a course on contemporary Russian Mass Media, Conversational Russian, and Advanced Writing skills (with the focus on writing academic papers in Russian).

Our students compete annually for the Nancy Park Travel Award. For decades the Nancy Park has helped our students get involved with non-profit organizations from Moscow to Siberia and experience Russian culture, language and life first-hand. We work hard to build a community outside the classroom. Language instructors run a weekly Russian tea where students can chat in Russian in an informal setting. In the spring, the Department runs the Slavic Talent Show. Students from all our language programs perform, and everyone shares a delicious multicultural pot luck.

The Russian program is a part of Community Engagement Learning at the University. Last year, students had a great and enlightening experience working with elderly Russian speaking residents at the Baycrest Centre. This year students regularly visit the Russian House of Toronto to engage with the local community. We approach teaching language seriously and professionally. All of our courses are constructed according to the guidelines set out by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). All our instructors of Russian go through a thorough pedagogical training, and are mentored throughout their entire teaching career here. Russian language instructors are nominated for and receive Teaching Awards. A number of undergraduate students in our Russian program continue into graduate school and become teachers of Russian themselves.
This year the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures hosted the Slavic Film Series (SFS), organized by Patrick Brock, Łukasz Wodzyński (Slavic Department) and Meghan McDonald (Cinema Studies). The SFS bi-weekly film screenings were designed as cross-curricular and cross-lingual events intent on drawing students from multiple disciplines and various backgrounds to share in their love of film. The goal has been to cultivate an inclusive, fun, and engaged community to enjoy contemporary cinema from East-Central Europe.

This fall, our Thursday-evening film screenings included recent, critically well-received, and sometimes controversial films from Russia, Poland, Czech Republic, and Serbia. Before each film, one of the organizers would introduce the film and contextualize it for the audience. The SFS would also provide pizza, snacks, and refreshments. Afterwards, attendees were encouraged to stay and discuss the film, and depending on the time, many attendees would go to a nearby restaurant to continue the conversation. SFC has been a great success, with each screening attracting a sizeable audience of students and faculty from different departments and generating lively debate.

In spring 2019, we are looking forward to continuing to build on the success of the fall semester by holding the SFS screenings on a tri-weekly basis. While last semester saw films from the past 10 years, this semester films will be from a broader range of years. The first film in the spring semester will also be our first public screening. In coordination with the Centre for Comparative Literature, the National Film Centre of Latvia, and the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, the SFS will be screening Rolands Kalniņš’s *Four White Shirts* (*Četri balti krekli*) at the end of January.

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**Czech Language**

**By Professor Ana Petrov**

Learning Czech is not easy, but we are doing it very successfully!

Our lessons, which take place in small groups, give us the opportunity to not only focus on the language, but also to share interesting facts about Czech culture, literature and history. Some of our students are already planning their summer in Czech Republic to improve their language skills in summer schools, do research and “czech” out the beautiful country and culture they are learning about.

We are also very active in extra curricular activities - organizing movie nights and presentations, visiting cultural events and getting ready for this year’s Slavic Department Talent Show.

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Vítejte u nás na Torontské Univerzitě! Těšíme se na Vás!
Greetings from the Finnish Studies Program!

Housed in the Slavic department is an undergraduate program offering courses in Finnish (and Swedish) language, Finnish and Scandinavian literature and culture, and Finnish Studies in Canada. The program is currently offering new courses on modern and contemporary Finnish culture while simultaneously also expanding towards cultural connections and history with our neighboring Nordic and Scandinavian cultures.

The Vikings (FIN238) was offered in 2017 as a guest-taught course in conjunction with a major Viking exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. It turned out to be our most popular course ever. It began with an historical event in 793, when a group of Scandinavians raided the small monastic community of Lindisfarne on the English coast. This is often depicted as the start of the Viking Age, when feared warriors from the North, traveling by sea, ravaged and pillaged Europe. Using archeological and written sources, the course examined this narrative from different perspectives by discussing who the Vikings were, where they came from, their culture and religious beliefs (including their eventual conversion to Christianity), their traces and settlements, and how they influenced the various cultures that they encountered. The course also examined the Vikings as 'foreigners' and settlers and investigated what this can tell us about constructions of ethnic groups and origin. Finally it took a look at the legacy of the Vikings: how they are portrayed in media today, and how they have been used for political purposes in the modern era.

A new intriguing literature course will be offered in 2020. Hot Reads from a Cool Country: Contemporary Finnish Literature (FIN236) will study major developments in Finnish literature over the past 30 years. The course will place literary texts within the historical, cultural, and social context of contemporary Finland. We will also discuss research on contemporary Finnish literature, and we hope to bring some authors to lecture on their works.

See you at the Finnish Studies! We welcome auditors in any of our culture courses.
The Department’s Ukrainian program is growing with the addition of a Visiting Professor of Ukrainian Language and Culture. Thanks to a very generous donation from the Ukrainian Senior Citizens Home of Taras H. Shevchenko of Windsor, Ontario, the department has created a position for a specialist in Ukrainian language pedagogy to join the department on an annual basis. The funding is sufficient for at least five years. The visiting instructor will allow the department to restore a full range of language courses, including an advanced level that can accommodate both students born in Canada and those born in Ukraine who already have significant skills in the language. Such courses have not been offered in our department for over twenty years.

This donation of $400,000—one of the largest donations ever made to Ukrainian language studies at a Canadian university—offers the Department an opportunity to re-build its well-established Ukrainian program. “It is an exciting opportunity to expand our offerings,” says Donna Orwin, Department Chair, “and a strategic vote of confidence in our Ukrainian program.”

The new visiting professor—working closely with the Department’s Ukrainianists, Professors Maxim Tarnawsky and Taras Koznarsky—will teach two Ukrainian language courses per year, help develop curriculum for all three levels of Ukrainian language courses, organize and conduct a weekly Ukrainian language table, and develop an enrichment program of activities for students and the community.

The Ukrainian Senior Citizens Home of Taras H. Shevchenko was initially conceived in 1976 and opened in 1981. It functioned as a living community for Ukrainian seniors for thirty-five years, earning a well-founded reputation for exemplary administration. Over time, circumstances and demographics changed and the trustees and members of the home sold the building. After lengthy deliberations, the trustees identified a number of Ukrainian organizations, institutions, and programs to receive their support, among them the Ukrainian program at the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures of the University of Toronto.

The Department is immensely grateful to the donors, the trustees of the Fund, particularly its president, Bohdan Senchuk, for their generosity, their trust, and their understanding of the need to expand the Ukrainian language program. Their effort offers a perfect example of community involvement and cooperation in support of Ukrainian language learning in particular and Slavic Studies in general.
The Association of Slavic Graduate Students (ASGS) sees its purpose in supporting and representing graduate students, in helping new students to become familiar with the Department and graduate programs, and, most importantly, in facilitating graduate students’ participation in the social and academic life of the Department.

The ASGS periodically organizes a wide range of academic and social activities for all graduate students of the unit. Over the past two years, it has hosted two international graduate conferences in which graduate students presented new research and innovative thinking on Slavic and Eastern European literary, cultural, political, historical, and linguistic studies. The conferences included students from the University of Toronto, other Canadian universities, and universities across the United States. They are the largest of their kind amongst Canadian universities and have established a positive reputation for furthering the participation of scholars in all stages of graduate study.

In addition to such large events, the ASGS regularly arranges academic publishing workshops to expose graduate students to the world of professional academic publishing. Invitees have included members of the editorial board of Canadian Slavonic Papers, an interdisciplinary journal dedicated to Central and Eastern Europe. Faculty members have also been invited to speak on their experiences in publishing their research, and to discuss professional journals with different thematic orientations. The ASGS has also organized an academic job-search workshop, where professors from the department discussed such important aspects of this process as professional networking, application preparation, interviewing, and so on.

The ASGS also strives to develop a diverse cultural program that includes social activities, movie nights, dinners, etc. In 2018, we were delighted to host two famous contemporary Russian poets – Lida Yusupova and Vera Pavlova, who kindly agreed to give a reading of their works and answer the public’s questions. We periodically finance opera and movie outings for our members. Finally, we begin each academic year with a welcoming party for all new students, while the closing event of the year usually combines a planned academic and social occasion with the participation of faculty members and graduate students.

The Association is very grateful to the University of Toronto and to the Slavic Department for their continuous invaluable support of graduate student activities.
It is a pleasure to share the news that the University of Toronto Slavic Choir, formed through the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, held its inaugural rehearsal during the Fall Semester, 2018. Our first meeting saw nine musicians gather in the department lounge, most members meeting for the first time in order to share a common love for the wonders of the Slavic choral tradition. Our halls were filled with the striking chords of Nikolai Nikolaevich Kedrov’s (1871-1914) *Otche Nash*, marking what is hopefully the start of a strong choral society in our field.

The aim of our choir is to embrace sacred and traditional choral masterpieces from across the Slavic spectrum, giving members a rare opportunity to revel in a repertoire that is all too often lost to time and hindered by border. Furthermore, we hope to share these gems with the wider university community, beginning with our Department’s annual Talent Show and with hopes of reaching a wider audience in future months.

Our group consists of an even balance of undergraduates, postgraduates, and staff. Our varied members reflect the choir’s founding principle of bringing together the many disciplines and departments connected with Slavic studies at the University of Toronto. Music offers a unique opportunity for interdisciplinary cooperation, and choral music in particular provides a special medium in which to celebrate the cultural and linguistic heritage of many lands in one common voice.

As with all such ventures, the long-term success of our choir depends greatly on the constant flow of musicians that pass through our university and the availability of a common time to meet and sing. However, I believe that from this humble beginning we set the precedent for greater cohesion and mutual appreciation through music, a gift common to us all and henceforth shared in finer tune.
By Professor Kate Holland

In October 2018 Professor Christina Kramer and I organized a pair of events to coincide with the Canadian Opera Company (COC’s) production of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin. The production happily coincided with my course, SLA145: The Golden Age of Russian Literature, in which we read the novel in verse on which the opera is based, perhaps the most well-known work by Russia’s national poet, Alexander Pushkin. We organized a half-day symposium on the novel in verse and the opera and took 120 U of T students to see the opera dress rehearsal.

Professor Kramer has been taking students to the dress rehearsals at the COC for many years, but the nature of this production and its relevance for the department’s Russian literature courses generated a higher level of interest amongst Slavic Department and other U of T undergraduates than any previous productions. With organizational help from Catherine Willshire from the Canadian Opera Company’s education and outreach department, Professor Kramer and I provided a short introductory lecture on Pushkin’s novel and Tchaikovsky’s opera at the opera house before the performance. Many students who attended the performance were first-time opera goers, and many were studying Pushkin’s novel in verse in their courses, not just in my course, but also in courses taught by Professors Taras Koznarsky and Tatiana Smolyarova. The production, fronted by a Canadian director and producer and mainly Canadian cast of singers, premiered in New York and this was a home-coming of sorts, so it offered students the opportunity to enjoy some Canadian-Russian cultural connections!

The symposium, organized the following week by the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the COC, and co-sponsored by the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, and the Centre for Comparative Literature, brought together students, faculty, and opera enthusiasts for an in-depth discussion of Pushkin’s novel in verse and Tchaikovsky’s opera. It featured presentations on both works from Professors Holland, Koznarsky, and Smolyarova of the Slavic Department, Professor Michael Albano from the Faculty of Music, and Wayne Gooding and Stephan Bonfield from the Canadian Opera Company. Boris Gasparov, Professor Emeritus of Russian and East European Studies at Columbia University and an expert on Russian literature and opera, gave a keynote lecture.

Pushkin’s novel is a key work of Russian romanticism, but the opera was written at the height of Russian realism, at the same time as the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. The combination of watching the opera and studying the novel in verse allowed students in the Slavic Department to experience two of the most important works of nineteenth century Russian culture and to see their resonances and contradictions.
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