

## **ACTR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES**

### **American Council of Teachers of Russian Annual Membership Meeting**

Drake Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, January 10, 2014

President Betsy Sandstrom welcomed those present and called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Minutes of the January 5, 2013 Membership Meeting were approved as published in the Spring 2013 *ACTR Letter*.

#### **Treasurer's Report**

Sandstrom gave Treasurer Cynthia Ruder's report. ACTR's expenses outstrip receipts. Ruder will suggest ways to establish a working budget at the spring meeting. Questions may be directed to Ruder directly or through Sandstrom or Whaley.

#### **Membership Secretary Report**

Board Secretary Michele Whaley shared Membership Secretary Bonny Einstein's membership report. As of January 4, 2014, ACTR shows 61 active members, 120 life members, and 523 memberships with expiration dates of 2012 or 2013. A year ago there were 47 active members at this time, 122 life members, and 885 memberships with expiration dates in the last year. However, checks are still coming in for current year memberships, so the active member list will grow.

#### **Report from the American Councils Board of Trustees**

Sandstrom reported for Richard Brecht the continuing Trustee satisfaction with ACTR, and added that the ACTR Board will hear a trustees report in April. There is some restructuring on the Board with a new Vice Chair position. The Trustees approved the creation of an American Councils Research Center; Brecht will be Co-Director of that center.

### **REPORTS ON CONTEST AND AWARDS**

#### **Olympiada of Spoken Russian**

Co-chair Mark Trotter reported that Olympiada numbers are up: over 46 schools sent students to a regional Olympiada with a total of just under 1100 participants, an increase in the number of participants for the first time in four years. Several states and regions are accepting applicants from other regions. Trotter asked ACTR members to encourage teachers in their regions to participate.

#### **National Russian Essay Contest (NREC)**

Jane Shuffelton remarked that the *ACTR Letter* published reports on the 31st NREC for 2012, and reported for NREC Co-Chair Paavo Husen that 2013 was a transition year. Bozena Szulc was unable to continue as Co-Chair. For the 32<sup>nd</sup> ACTR National Russian Essay Contest there

are three co-chairs. Husen registered 1261 students from 41 programs and 47 teachers. Co-chair John Rook sent essays out to judges. Co-chair Evgeny Dengub will send certificates and medals. The topic was “What is important in my life.”

Irwin Weil shared the fact that readers in Russia were tremendously impressed with essays they received.

### **Post-Secondary Russian Scholar Laureate Award (PSRSLA)**

Chair Alla Smyslova reported that nomination takes place in February for the Post-Secondary Russian Scholar Laureate Award. Last year there were 50 nominees. This year’s deadline is March 1.

### **National Post-Secondary Russian Essay Contest (NPSREC)**

Chair Tony Brown thanked Alla Smyslova and Bob Channon for their efforts on this committee to review the level and category descriptors. A major change is one additional category: heritage speakers of Slavic languages other than Russian. The committee will meet to systematize medal distribution. February 1 is the deadline for registration.

### **Report on Publications**

*RLJ* Editor Bill Rivers reported that Volume 63 was mailed from American Councils in mid-December with thirteen articles and three reviews. Ewa Golonka is now an associate editor, joining Michael Gorham. The current size is about 320 pages. The editors discussed the potential for doing multiple numbers in a year, and will report a financial analysis in spring. The acceptance rate for articles submitted is 38%. *RLJ* will maintain double-blind peer review for all submissions.

Volume 64 will include a section edited by Tony Brown. It will focus on the Humanities Plus Conference that RGUU is sponsoring at BYU on January 30, 2014.

ACTR Board members are listed on the editorial board of *RLJ* but may opt out. They may be asked to solicit submissions and reviewers, etc. *RLJ* does not list reviewers.

*RLJ* is now indexed by MLA Bibliography, for all volumes going back to issue 55. JSTOR will be reviewing *RLJ* again in 2014 to consider including *RLJ* in its bibliography. Editors hope *RLJ* will soon be integrated in Google Scholar.

Prior issues of *RLJ* are available on-line.

### **ACTR Academic Programs**

American Councils Director Dan Davidson spoke about the current US-Russia relationship. The environment remains complex; unfortunately, no official meeting between Presidents Putin and Obama has yet taken place. The presidents did hold an off-the-record meeting at the G-9 Summit in September, and there is hope for a meeting in the year ahead.

In American Councils (AC) programs, students can now earn credits for subject areas other than

Russian. The expanded program should help students continue to work toward degrees while in-country, thereby being able to extend their stays to the full academic year.

Internships and home stays are some of the most valuable assets in AC Russia programs.

### **Flagship Program**

Davidson reported for Masha Lekic the news that 100% of the students finishing in June 2013 demonstrated at least Level 3 proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing; the average has been 92% for ten years. Twenty-eight percent of the graduates demonstrated Level 3+ and Level 4 proficiency. Eleven of the sixteen in the current group tested at full Level 3 already this December on the TORFL and are thus Level 4 candidates. All are double majors; some are not even Russian majors.

The Flagship Program is open to at-large students who can demonstrate Level 2 proficiency.

The NSLI-Y Program is also showing a higher yield than formerly, even for summer participants. Seventy percent of the NSLI-Y participants, including those who enter with no Russian, leave the program as Intermediate level. Of those who attended for the academic year, 56% completed the program as Advanced Low. They are seventeen years old when they finish, and are now able to complete the CLS program or later apply for the Flagship program. Among CLS students, 87% had measurable gain, and 57% had a threshold gain.

Irwin Weil commented that not all exchanges are higher levels of government. He mentioned Conductor Valery Georgiev, whose concert train across Russia performed two concerts in two different towns each day. Georgiev heard about AC programs and invited students and professors to join him this summer.

The 2014 Summer Language Teachers program (SLT) will include the twelve 2013 SLT participants who were unable to participate previously because of a visa issue. AC is opening the application and encouraging K-12 teachers to apply. K-12 teachers made up four of twelve of the original cohort. The other eight participants are from a mix of professional backgrounds.

Davidson commented that there is a mandate from the current administration to focus on K-12 and on issues of access. He noted an MLA College Board panel on a new portfolio of AP offerings for small-enrollment languages. Russian is the only operational model at this point. The new leadership is ready to go forth with Persian, Hindi, Arabic, among ten new languages.

This year's student flow has not been greatly diminished thanks to State Department and Department of Defense ability to protect the CLS, NSLI-Y and Flagship programs. The competition for NSLI-Y is ten to one, and is similar for the CLS program. RLASP has had a good year despite the diminution of Department of Education funding: Title VI Fulbright-Hays funding was heavily affected. Title VIII was not funded on 30 September.

American Councils and ACTR sent a total of 552 students to Russia in 2013. In outbound programs, there were 162 high school students, 323 undergrads, 48 grad students, 28 research scholars, four faculty and seven professionals. Coming from the Russian Federation were 1108 Russians, including 478 high school students, 120 undergrads, eight graduate students, and 600

teachers and professionals. Russia is still American Council's largest partner country.

Southeast Europe and the CIS sent 2,250 students, with 221 American students outbound.

From other Slavic and CIS nations, over 100 students and professionals were from Tajikistan, with strong activity in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Bulgaria, Serbia, Kosovo and Croatia.

Overall American Councils activity included 7,911 exchanges, the largest year in AC's history, despite the environment of diminished federal funding. AC/ACTR must work to protect the vulnerable funding. There is a great deal of interest and need to get access to these places at a high level.

Margaret Stephenson of American Councils announced a significant change in that American Councils can now award credit for area studies. Courses in history, political science, linguistics, sociology, and even the sciences (taught in Russian) are eligible for credit. AC is not changing coursework but is awarding appropriate credit for academic work. For example, in Vladimir, the history course will no longer be listed as a Russian one, but as HIS. In St. Petersburg it will be a political science course: a survey of political figures and political science history. In Moscow, a hybrid course in economic geography, political science and history is now called "Modern Russia." Students can still take courses with Russians in any discipline and can be awarded appropriate credits.

There are also short-term courses available. One this summer is "Peace and Security in the South Caucasus." The program, in Georgia, will cover nation-building, democratization, crisis management, and other similar courses to be taught in English. Students will choose to study Russian, Georgian, or Chechen, also with credit from Bryn Mawr College. This is mostly for undergrad and grad students but high school teachers may apply.

### **ACTFL – Delegate Assembly**

#### **Report on the Revision of Russian Specific Standards**

Jane Shuffelton, ACTR delegate to ACTFL, and Sandstrom attended the assembly of delegates. Shuffelton shared an interesting presentation by the Longview Foundation with a US Global Heat Map of Languages. She also reported a new ACTFL document co-sponsored by the national council of state supervisors and ACTFL, available on the ACTFL website home page: "Can-do Statements," or progress indicators of what students can do at all ACTFL levels. The document is meant to help teachers design curricula and tie the Standards to proficiency levels, and students can monitor their own progress in all areas. These do not change standards or the Proficiency Guidelines, but are another tool.

Shuffelton reported on the Standards collaborative and progress in revising the national standards, now including those for post-secondary. The Language-Specific Standards are produced on a CD. Tom Garza, Peter Merrill and Shuffelton have been revising sample progress indicators for proficiency levels rather than grade levels for two years now, and are well ahead of what the Standards Collaborative Board is expecting at this point. The Collaborative wants learning scenario updates. ACTR contributors have written twelve learning scenarios, but the

project is short on elementary scenarios.

The new generic standards are already on the ACTFL website.

Ben Rifkin, now on the ACTFL Conference Committee, asked all those who propose Russian sessions to mark them as applicable to all languages but then alert him so as to avoid scheduling conflicts of Russian language sessions. He remarked that ASEEEES is scheduled at the same time as ACTFL next year, so he hopes that there will be greater Slavicist attendance at ACTFL. Fifteen Russian-oriented sessions have already been proposed for ACTFL. He requests that those whose proposals are accepted send him notice to rifkin@tcnj.edu so that announce workshops on SEELANGS and create a website for Russianists.

### **Report from JNCL-NCLIS**

Bill Rivers gave an update on JNCL-NCLIS, which began as two organizations, one founded in 1974 as a loose coalition of eight scholarly societies including ACTR. The National Council for Language and International Studies was founded in order to advocate in Congress for language.

The current administration has greatly cut funding for education in general and language in specific. Title VIII (FLAP) was eliminated by the Department of State in an involved bureaucratic mechanism on the last day of the fiscal year. Some of the Title VIII activities will go on, because grant funding had been allocated prior to the end of the fiscal year.

JNCL-NCLIS worked with SSRC, ASEEEES, ACTR, and others to send a request for Title VIII spending to Secretary Kerry in early December and received a polite rejection. The strategy is to pursue appropriations and spend it on Title VIII. There are champions in the State and the House for Title VI funding. Anything that looks like an earmark is rejected immediately. Cuts were motivated not by politics but by budgetary concerns. The president's budget request included a 10% increase for Title VI, about \$7.5 million. Since sequestration has been lifted, the outlook is slightly more positive. The net effect of cuts creates the perception that the administration is backing away from language. The White House is aware of this perception and is trying to change course, because surveys show that there is strong support for language education.

JNCL-NCLIS has grown from 63 members to 90, including the private as well as non-profit sector, and is hoping for more growth from the private sector. Unfortunately, JNCL-NCLIS has lost about \$150,000 in revenue from expiring memberships such as regional teachers' associations. JNCL-NCLIS has a weekly news brief that anyone can sign up for at [languagepolicy.org](http://languagepolicy.org). Betsy Sandstrom receives the monthly newsletter and can redistribute it as ACTR sees fit.

Rivers noted that an ACTFL in-kind donation allows for policy alerts to be sent out including a system to send an email to your congressional representative. Congressional offices track emails, and even a small number of messages can make an impact.

### **ACTR Nominations Committee Report**

Diana Nemec-Ignashev reported that six terms were coming to an end. Masha Lekic and Michael Gorham asked not to be extended. The nominations committee looked for those with interest and

activity in the Slavic field, proposing Nina Lee Bond and Elizabeth Lee Roby as new members, while extending the terms of Dan Davidson, Karen Evans-Romine, Elena Farkas and Paavo Husen. Jane Shuffelton moved that the slate of Board members be accepted. Robert Channon seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. Next, Nemeč-Ignashev announced that this is a presidential election year for the ACTR Board. Ben Rifkin moved, and Bill Rivers seconded, the motion that Betsy Sandstrom and Tom Garza continue as President and Vice President. The motion passed unanimously.

Nemeč-Ignashev thanked Masha Lekic and Michael Gorham for their hard work and many contributions to the Board. Their presence will be missed. Gorham has agreed to continue as co-editor to the *Russian Language Journal*, and Lekic will continue to contribute to the field as she heads the Flagship Program.

Sandstrom added that the Nominations Committee took their work seriously, reading through the bylaws and searching for strong additions to the Board.

### **Old Business**

Diane Nemeč-Ignashev reported that the Summer Language Teachers Program Committee, including Tony Brown, Karen Evans-Romine and Elena Farkas, is now a full-fledged ACTR Board Committee. The complete survey of the program is now in Russian; the committee will present the reports in Russia in February to MGU, which supports changes. The Committee will continue to push for innovations in the program.

### **New Business**

Sandstrom asked members to submit proposals for ACTFL and then turned to the ACTR Service Award. Jane Shuffelton presented the award to Ben Rifkin. Rifkin has taught Russian at Temple University, Middlebury, and the University of Wisconsin. He has contributed to ACTR in many ways, supporting Russian language learning at all levels. He initiated the Post-Secondary National Russian Essay Contest, and began and chaired the Delaware Valley regional Olympiada. Rifkin has received a number of national awards for distinguished service and academic contributions, and he continues to demonstrate his commitment to the cause of Russian language pedagogy, assessment issues, national Standards and the state of the field. He is a valued colleague.

Shuffelton's complete citation appears elsewhere in this copy of the *ACTR Letter*.

**President Betsy Sandstrom adjourned the meeting at 6:42.**