In the Spring/Summer 2016 issue of the ACTR Letter, I provided a brief introduction to the Russian Flagship Program. The Russian Flagship Program is part of the Language Flagship Program, an initiative funded by the National Security Education Program in the US Department of Defense, with the goal of enabling undergraduate students in any major to graduate from college with professional-level proficiency, measured at Superior on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale or 3 on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale used by the federal government, in one of ten languages deemed critical to US national security and economic competitiveness. The Language Flagship is also intended to enable students to attain the intercultural competency necessary for them to interact appropriately and perform well in a wide variety of professional settings (see Davidson et al.). Admission to the academic-year Flagship capstone study abroad program, called the Russian Overseas Flagship (ROF) program, managed by American Councils for International Education and housed at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty, Kazakhstan, requires ACTFL Advanced (ILR 2) proficiency in most or all skills, including speaking, so that capstone participants are poised to achieve Superior-level (ILR 3) proficiency after intensive study and an internship abroad during the capstone year. There are only four domestic Russian Flagship programs (at Bryn Mawr College, UCLA, Portland State University, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison), among only 27 Language Flagship programs in 10 critical languages at 22 colleges and universities in the United States. How can we enable more students outside Flagship programs to achieve this kind of success? What practices have worked particularly well in Flagship programs, and in those programs whose students have regularly achieved Advanced proficiency and been admitted “at large” to the Russian Overseas Flagship capstone program, and how can they be more broadly applied?

Two events in 2016 have provided us as a profession with opportunities to think about ways in which we enable undergraduate students to achieve ACTFL Superior–level proficiency: the publication of a collection of papers entitled Exploring the US Language Flagship Program: Professional Competence in a Second Language by Graduation, which I had the honor of co-editing with Dianna Murphy, Associate Director of the UW–Madison Language Institute and Russian Flagship, and an inspiring roundtable of Russian Overseas Flagship alumni at the annual meeting of the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), in Washington, entitled “The Language Flagship and Beyond: the Impact of the Russian Flagship on Professional Development and National Security.” The insights of colleagues in this volume, at Language Flagship annual meetings, and at other conferences, as well as the insights of some of our most successful alumni, have provided a wealth of ideas about how we can enable our students to set and achieve ambitious goals in their language learning and become the
Уважаемые коллеги, дорогие друзья!

Международная ассоциация преподавателей русского языка и литературы поздравляет вас с наступающим Новым годом и Рождеством!

Уходящий год был для мира в целом и русского мира в частности непростым в политическом и экономическом плане. В этих условиях на первый план выходят академическая и культурная составляющие международного сотрудничества, объединяющие людей не по национальной идентичности или гражданству, а на основе понимания возможностей человеческого разума, интеллектуального созидания, совместного творчества представителей разных народов – в технологической, предпринимательской, образовательной, литературной сфере. Универсальным культурным кодом для такого многопланового сотрудничества является русский язык, что возлагает на нас, педагогов – русистов, совершенно особую ответственность.

Наши с вами возможности широки, как никогда прежде. Исследования функционирования русского языка на различных уровнях образования, оценка качества его преподавания, составление национально ориентированных учебников, формирование методик интеграционного тестирования, разработка и обсуждение концептуальных составляющих языкового обучения все эти задачи необходимо решать только совместными усилиями, с привлечением лучших преподавателей, методистов, руководителей образовательных учреждений.

Реализуя разнообразные проекты на каждом из этих направлений, мы в очередной раз убедились в ценности такого взаимодействия.

Мы благодарим вас за искреннее, неформальное отношение к любимому делу и желаем вам в новом году всего самого доброго, здоровья, счастья и успехов вам, вашим близким, друзьям и коллегам.

С уважением,
Секретариат МАПРЯЛ
Greetings and best wishes for 2017! With a shift in government administration, the New Year certainly promises to bring substantial change to US domestic and foreign policy. While such substantial shifts are frequently accompanied by challenges, they also present a number of opportunities. You have probably noticed that Russia has taken center stage in a number of high-level conversations during the transition to a Trump White House, and with this increased presence in the media and press may come renewed interest in Russian language and area studies. There is certainly no question that Russia and Russian global interests will be an integral part of the new administration’s agenda.

Increasingly, the national need for Russian area specialists has included knowledge of the language and culture at the ACTFL Advanced or higher level of proficiency in addition to field-specific knowledge. It is no longer acceptable for specialists in Russian demography, electorate voting patterns, or military border maneuvers to rely exclusively on in-country translators/interpreters to conduct their research or field work. The expectation that global area specialists will also possess the requisite language and culture skills necessary to perform their day-to-day professional duties is now becoming a given. From the Department of State to the Department of Defense, from Wall Street to Main Street, and from Exxon to Greenpeace, agencies, businesses, and organizations globally now recognize the overwhelming benefits of employees and staff who can functional in country at the professional level of proficiency in the relevant language.

Since 2002 the federal government has been preparing for and addressing this growing national and global need through a key initiative. The creation of the Language Flagship Program has sought to build and support university programs for undergraduate and graduate students to develop Superior-level skills in critical languages and cultures across the U.S. Russian Flagship programs are currently housed at Bryn Mawr College, Portland State University, University of California at Los Angeles, and University of Wisconsin at Madison. Through intensive coordinated instruction in domestic and in-country programs, the Russian Flagship Program has maintained a solid record of bringing its students to this goal that was once considered unattainable in a four-year program. The history, programs, and models of the Language Flagship have recently been documented in a unique volume compiled and edited by Karen Evans-Romaine and Dianna Murphy of the U Wisconsin Russian Flagship, Exploring the US Language Program: Professional Competence in a Second Language by Graduation (Multilingual Matters, 2016). The volume convincingly lays out many of the challenges and successes of Flagship programs in addressing the national need for global professionals.

In addition to the creation of Flagship and Flagship-like programs, other current national initiatives are also supporting the movement toward professional global competence in Russian language and culture. Among these, the World Readiness Standards in Russian stand out as a model for K-16 integration and articulation. Developed under the auspices of ACTR, the Russian Standards will offer educators from elementary school to universities a roadmap to help create programs that address the interlinked nature of skill and proficiency development. Sample Progress Indicators and Learning Scenarios will offer teachers at all levels models and suggestions for integrating the Standards into virtually any curriculum. The proficiency orientation of the Russian Standards will further serve to make their application as flexible as possible.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the crucial role that our national organization, ACTR, plays in the professional development of faculty, students, and programs that all strive toward the goal of professional proficiency. Membership in ACTR offers members participation in webinars on current issues in teaching and learning Russian, access to online resources for classroom use, and subscription to the scholarly publication Russian Language Journal, among other benefits. The organization offers students opportunities to develop their Russian language and culture skills through immersion programs in various Russian-speaking countries and settings. ACTR also sponsors panels and roundtables at national conferences each year that showcase current developments in Russian language teaching. In sum, membership and participation in ACTR is an integral part of the development and maintenance of Russian-speaking global professionals.

I wish you all the best for 2017 and hope to see you in San Francisco at the ACTR Membership Meeting at the AATSEEL annual conference!

~ Tom Garza
“global professionals” for whose sake the Language Flagship was established.

In Chapter 2 of the Language Flagship volume, Murphy et al. (34-35) describe six components shared by Language Flagship programs:

1) a persistent focus on language development and proficiency-based assessments;
2) options for intensive and accelerated programs of study, as well as advanced coursework in the language of study (L2);
3) opportunities for disciplinary learning in the L2, connecting the students’ L2 study with their study of other subjects;
4) focused attention and support for individual learners, including individual and small-group tutoring;
5) extensive co- and extra-curricular programming that provides students with opportunities to use their language outside a formal classroom setting;
6) articulated domestic and overseas programs of study, including a capstone overseas experience featuring “direct enrollment” courses (those offered for local university students as part of the regular university curriculum) and professional internships.

The chapter provides snapshots of how these practices are carried out in three Language Flagship programs—University of Maryland Arabic Flagship, University of Oregon Chinese Flagship, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison Russian Flagship. Yet many or even most of these components are already present in some form in a variety of Russian language programs at the secondary and post-secondary level. What practices are more broadly applicable and feasible? Consider the following:

1) establishing a culture of high expectations and, in that context, helping students to set and to maintain a focus on their goals for their own learning and how to achieve them;
2) offering Russian-language instruction across the curriculum to enable a student to discuss topics other than Russian language and literature in Russian;
3) providing individualized and small-group instruction focused on the needs of each student, be that in the classroom or through tutoring;
4) organizing co-curricular activities to increase students’ language use outside the classroom and to encourage informal conversation in Russian;
5) encouraging engagement with communities of Russian speakers;
6) meeting students where they are and welcoming student input into their learning.

In this issue of the ACTR Letter, I will focus on some approaches to learning in the classroom that can help achieve the above goals, that is, on points 1 and 2 above. In the following issue, I will focus on some approaches to enhance learning outside the classroom, that is, on points 3 through 6.

Raising Students’ Awareness of Their Learning

As teachers, we all set goals and check in with students to help them achieve them. One of the keys to their success in achieving ambitious proficiency goals is enabling students to monitor their own learning against a set of concrete benchmarks which they have a role in setting. In the UW-Madison Russian Flagship program (see Murphy et al., 35-36), we introduce students to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines during information sessions on the Russian Flagship program for prospective students and again upon their admission. One alumnus at the ASEEES alumni roundtable said that the ACTFL reverse pyramid representing the proficiency guidelines—the “formidable, infamous ACTFL cone,” as he described it—provided him with a concrete goal and a sense that achievement of Advanced-level proficiency on campus, then Superior-level proficiency after an academic year of study abroad, would be a “worthwhile pursuit.” During advising meetings with students each semester, we discuss their progress up this pyramid and areas on which they need to focus. Helping students achieve concrete benchmarks requires regular assessment measured against constant and recognizable standards. The University of Wisconsin–Madison has developed its own set of online assessments in reading, listening, and grammar in order to help us work with students in assessing their proficiency, and we have students take these exams, and an internal/advisory Oral Proficiency Interview, at the beginning of every academic year. Language programs could engage in less extensive forms of assessment, however, through in-class assessments of these skills, using the ACTFL guidelines in addition to grades as a marker of progress, and through internal/advisory OPIs. Graduate students and alumni of the Slavic Ph.D. program at UW–Madison program have frequently noted that ACTFL OPI certification, or at least participation in an ACTFL OPI training workshop, provides extremely helpful guidance for assessment. For students, having the opportunity to take relatively frequent, low-stakes advisory OPIs prepares them for the high-stakes OPIs that could be used for admission to study abroad programs, admission to graduate school, and hiring.

A vital aspect of assessment is students’ awareness of their learning and monitoring of their own progress in gaining proficiency and an excellent example of the Lifelong Learning goal within the ACTFL World–Readiness Standard for Communities. The NCSSFL–ACTFL Can-Do Statements
(a collaborative effort of the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages and ACTFL) and the ILR self-assessments provide useful benchmarks for students to assess their own progress against recognized standards. In addition, talking regularly with students about effective learning strategies, about study strategies and approaches to learning that do and don’t work well for them, and about facing the challenges of a classroom environment in which teachers must work with students with a wide variety of talents and learning styles, is an important part of advising. Peter Glanville’s contribution to the Language Flagship volume, “The Road to Superior: Building Learner Independence” (Murphy et al., 70-89), provides useful insights on helping students to develop their interpretive skills through self-monitoring and independent learning strategies.

The assessment culture of a Russian program need not have as its goal the attainment of Superior–level, or even Advanced-level proficiency. The recently established organization PLUS, or Partners for Languages in the US, housed at the University of Texas at Austin, has the goal to establish “a nationwide system of successful programs unified by a common set of professional standards and rigorous accountability. Through peer review and accreditation of national language programs, PLUS seeks to recognize the highest standards in teaching and learning to advance the use of languages in all domains and at all levels.” (Garza, 240; emphasis mine) Any program can establish standards appropriate to its students and instructional context; peer review can help that program build on its strengths and develop appropriately rigorous proficiency-based standards.

Language Across the Curriculum and Interdisciplinary Learning

One of the key principles of the Language Flagship is interdisciplinary learning in the language of study, and that corresponds well with the needs of many students who decide to study Russian. Many students in Russian classes across the United States major in an area other than Russian, and often our Russian majors have double majors. The philosophy of the Language Flagship encourages students to use the target language as a tool to pursue another disciplinary area, so that they can practice a profession after graduation using their acquired Flagship language and cultural skills, gaining access to sources of knowledge in their chosen profession, and to cultural insights significant to their profession, which they might not otherwise have grasped. The professional internship that forms a core aspect of all Language Flagship capstone overseas experiences, including the Russian Overseas Flagship developed and managed by American Councils, is related to the student’s area of study. Internships have included work in a laboratory at the Russian Academy of Sciences Influenza Institute in St. Petersburg, where the ROF was located until Fall 2014 (Discourse: Newsletter of the Language Flagship, Spring 2014); work at non-profit organizations focusing on human rights, environmental issues, and at the Soldiers’ Mothers’ organization in St. Petersburg; work in various media outlets; and work at a telephone hotline in Almaty. All of these internships, as alumni have reported, have had a profound influence on their career trajectories, on their insights into Russian or Kazakh culture, on their sense of what they can do with the language, and on their confidence generally. Virtually all of the overseas internships have tapped into students’ knowledge not only of Russian, but of another disciplinary area or major, such as biochemistry, international security studies, and psychology in the cases listed above.

So how do we prepare students for these internships, and ultimately to use Russian in their careers? Madeline Spring, director of the Chinese Flagship at the University of Hawaii, has written about Language for Special Purposes instruction as integral to Flagship learning. Freels et al. in their chapter from the Language Flagship volume (51-69) have examined the tremendous variety of forms that interdisciplinary language learning can take, including courses outside language, literature, and culture taught entirely in the target language (such as an economics course taught in Chinese by a native-speaking instructor); “bridge” courses that prepare students for study of another discipline in the target language; and an academic-year course at the Portland State University Russian Flagship entitled “Russian in the Major,” which provides students with the opportunity to learn about how their major is taught in Russia, to build a personalized vocabulary specific to their major, and to write and present a research paper. Thus this course introduces students to a variety of disciplines in Russian, as they all present their ongoing research to each other. Following a suggestion by Benjamin Rifkin, Ithaca College, I developed a similar, although more loosely structured, format for a “Flagship Research Seminar” in which students choose a research topic in their major and present their ongoing research at weekly meetings, sending out a two-page working paper and a reading for other students in advance of the seminar meetings. At these seminar meetings students are required to read each others’ assigned readings and working papers, and to prepare questions for each presenter in advance of each meeting.

Interdisciplinary learning can take place in a hybrid classroom–tutorial environment as well. At the University of Wisconsin–Madison Russian Flagship, we require all upper-level students to complete a one-credit “Russian Across the Curriculum” tutorial in which they work weekly with a graduate student, university staff member, or other member of the community on readings assigned by the tutor and write a five-page final paper in Russian on a topic related to the tutorial, which in itself is intended to be linked to the student’s major (preferably with the second major if the student is majoring in...
an area other than Russian). We provide guidelines for the RAC tutorial on our website and request from students one semester in advance the proposed general area of their tutorial, so that we can find an appropriate tutor. In all of these formats—be it a “Russian in the Major” course, a research seminar, or an RAC tutorial, as Freels et al. point out, “The students are the specialists, while the instructor answers for the quality and clarity of the language and the conventions of academic discourse.” (Freels et al., 62) The RAC tutorials provide graduate students from outside Slavic, usually native speakers of Russian, a unique teaching opportunity, as well as rich learning opportunities and new connections for the student taking the tutorial.

Arrangements like an informal research seminar or RAC tutorial can be recreated in various forms. Faculty from other departments can be involved: at UW–Madison, the History Department has a tradition of working with students to read and analyze original-language sources and to integrate analysis of those sources into a final research paper. Colleges and universities with native Russian-speaking students can arrange for a more formal version of a conversation exchange in which students exchange not only language practice, but interdisciplinary knowledge: a native speaker of Russian can work with a Russian major in Russian on math, business, or economics, in exchange for tutoring sessions on the same or other subjects in English, for example. Research colloquia and symposia, such as the annual UCLA Undergraduate Research Conference on Slavic and East/Central European Studies (http://www.russian.ucla.edu/conference/conference/Welcome.html), provide undergraduates with the opportunity to present their research in a formal setting before peers, graduate students, and faculty from a variety of disciplines. Such undergraduate conferences could be arranged in English or in Russian, or in both languages.

Students in the UW–Madison Russian Flagship have not only been enthusiastic in applying to participate in the UCLA Undergraduate Research Conference and ecstatic in their reviews of that conference, but have requested similar opportunities for them to present their research, in English or in Russian, on their home campus. This and similar feedback from Russian Flagship students show student initiative. Students can take the lead in programming and, along with alumni, be our guides as our program continues to develop. In the next issue of the ACTR Letter I will discuss various kinds of activities outside the classroom, including tutoring and co-curricular programming, that increase students’ exposure to Russian and enhance their learning, and I will discuss ways in which we encourage student input. We continually learn from our students and look forward to continuing to learn from them, and from our colleagues.

Acknowledgments
I am enormously grateful to Dianna Murphy and Jane Shuffelton for their excellent editorial suggestions on this article. Of course, I alone bear responsibility for any errors or shortcomings.

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~ Submitted by
Karen Evans-Romaine
Director, Russian Flagship Program, University of Wisconsin–Madison
Experiencing Russian Language and Culture through Local Events

Finding a balance between rigorous teaching and creating a relaxed learning environment has become a true challenge for all the 21st century teachers. Being confined by standardized testing, Can Do’s, benchmarks, IPA’s, curriculum requirements we truly struggle to find common ground in order to motivate and to satisfy individual needs of our students. Throughout the past 20 years of teaching Russian at Linden High School, Linden, New Jersey, I have been lucky enough to provide many excellent, rich in cultural content, as well as linguistically valuable educational events. I would probably place our annual trip to Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, NY, as the number one on the list since it offers a very unique, first-hand experience of Russian lifestyle and culture. Yearly excursions to some local universities, such as Rutgers University, Drew University and to the New Jersey State Theater to see “The Nutcracker” around Christmas have become our tradition.

The State of New Jersey is fortunate to have its own and, at the same time, one of the biggest collections of the Soviet Nonconformist art in the country. The Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University is the place where I truly enjoy spending quality time with my students of Russian. The Russian and Soviet nonconformist art exhibits hold over 22,000 objects and provide a one of a kind overview from the fourteenth century to the present. There are over 20,000 works by more than 1,000 artists that represent an entire culture of Socialist Realism conventions. Almost all media can be found here, including paintings on canvas and panel, sculpture, assemblage, works on paper, and photography. The entire array of nonconformist art extends from the beginning of Khrushchev’s cultural “thaw” to Gorbachev’s glasnost’ and perestroika. The Zimmerli’s Soviet nonconformist art reveals the achievements of such artists as Oskar Rabin, Lydia Masterkova, Vladimir Nemukhin, Mikhail Kulakov, Leonid Borisov, and Evgeny Mikhnov-Voitenko. The Zimmerli Art Museum contains works of truly historical importance. You can also find here significant artwork by Grisha Bruskin, Alexander Kosolapov, Boris Orlov, and Rostislav Lebedev.

Through visiting art exhibits, especially the collection that pertains to Soviet culture, art, and lifestyle, my students become familiarized with Russian culture, with special emphasis placed on

the Soviet period. At the same time the students have a one of a kind opportunity to practice reading in Russian by decoding slogans, reading posters, and reading short descriptions of the artifacts. In order to reinforce their knowledge the students are assigned a follow-up project. “Adopt a Russian Painter” is a multi-step procedure where they are expected to replicate original paintings in watercolor or oil. Then, the students have to describe their final product in a target language by either filling out a teacher-made worksheet (Beginning- Novice-Mid students) or providing their own more detailed description (Intermediate and Advanced).

The Beginning through Novice-Mid levels are expected to either fill in or to underline information.

Example I:

1. Картина называется ............
2. Художник.................. Картину написал...........
3. Картина написана маслом или акварелью?..............................
4. Картина представляет (что?)...............(кого?)
5. Главная тема картины это.........................
   Здесь представлен важный исторический момент, ежедневная сцена.
6. Это портрет, пейзаж, натюрморт. Вы можете описать подробнее?
7. Вам нравится эта картина? Почему?

The Intermediate and Advanced levels may follow the format below:

Example II:

Как правильно описать картину?

1. Название картины
2. Автор
3. Период написания картины
4. Стиль, жанр
5. Техника (акварель, масло)
6. Колорит (теплый, холодный); Цвет/краска; Свет .
7. Композиция (динамичная, статичная; на переднем/заднем плане; справа, слева, в центре картины);
8. Идея картины
9. Восприятие картины; какого впечатления добивался художник?

“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.”
— Albert Einstein
Experiencing Russian Language…, continued from p. 7.

My students’ responses will give you an idea of how much they learned and appreciated discovering Russia and Russian through this unforgettable, real-life, highly educational event. This experience not only helped them understand one of the most challenging periods of Russian history, but also taught them how to understand, interpret, and appreciate art in general.

See the students’ comments. They are the best statement in regards to what we were able to accomplish through this trip.

Nelson Valente, Russian 2
“I learned a lot about how rough it really was for Russians when they had to live with 20 other families in their apartments. Also, the art showed how the Russians wanted to let the world know that Russia had no freedom. Most of the art was abstract, and the Soviet Union declined releasing it to the public. The artifacts presented here sent important messages to the public - that there is hope for the people. I learned so much more about Russia from the trip. I am very thankful for that.”

Bryan Alarcon, Russian 2
“Our trip to the Zimmerli Art Museum was one of the most influential trips yet. We were privileged to see art collection from the Soviet Union era… Nonconformist art was forbidden and those who performed this kind of art were punished. It wasn’t allowed due to the fact that it didn’t resemble anything real and also because the hidden messages were embedded in most of the paintings. This kind of art gave people a freedom of speech, and it was something that the Soviet Union didn’t want. One of the most interesting pieces was a sculpture where the head of a general was small and his ribbons and medals were huge in comparison to his head, which meant that these were people with little brains and that the only thing they possessed was power. Overall it was a wonderful experience and once again Ms. Szulc finds a way to amaze us on her trips.”

Arinee Brinson, PERIOD 1
“On Thursday, April 29th, 2016 our Russian classes attended the Zimmerli Art Museum. To me it was one of the best learning experiences. I had a chance to dive first hand into Soviet Russia during the 1900’s. Learning about Russian history in class and hearing about the way Russians were feeling and going through during that time period was one way to learn, though really being there and seeing the art was so different. Before this I, like many other people in the world had the impression that Russians were cold, hard, dull people. Seeing their emotions and feelings expressed through their art was a life changing experience for me. These people were going against their government and making these paintings even when they knew it was a crime punishable by execution. Walking through the museum was a very eerie experience because I really felt their pain and suffering through this art. This field trip was an amazing experience because my daily lessons were truly brought to life. I thank Mrs. Szulc for bringing us there because if not I wouldn’t have been able to truly connect with the language I’m learning. Now I have more drive to really delve into.”

Bozena Szulc graduated from Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland and the Pushkin Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow, Russia with an MA in the area of the Russian Language and Literature. She also attended Kean University, from which she obtained teaching certificates in the following areas: ESL, Bilingual/Bicultural Education, Elementary Education, and Foreign Language. She taught the Polish Bilingual Program at one of the elementary schools in Linden NJ from 1991-1996. Since then she has taught ESL and Russian at Linden HS. She is a founder and an advisor of the Polish Club and SLAVA - the Russian National Honor Society there. She spent a summer as Resident Director of Golden Ring Program in Vladimir, Russia. During the summer of 2012 she participated in the STARTALK/Critical Languages Program in Glastonbury, CT. She is a member of a number of professional organizations, including ACTR. She has served as judge of the ACTR National Russian Essay Contest.
The ACTR National Russian Essay Contest provides high school and middle school students the opportunity to demonstrate their writing proficiency in Russian in a meaningful context. This year, 1,207 traditional learners, heritage learners, and native speakers, who represent 45 schools and 82 teachers in 16 states and the District of Columbia, wrote essays in a two-hour period during the week of November 14-18.

New participating schools and teachers in the contest this year included: Baltimore International Academy (MD), Inga Webster; Lexington High School (SC), Jessica Latham; Linden High School (NJ), Bozena Szulc; Middle Union High School (VT), Betsy Sandstrom; Pushkin School (TX), Katia Pronina; Rainey School (NJ), Francisco Picon; Russian Kids Club (CA), Ilona Tombu; Russian Language School Cykku Net (CA), Lyudmila Andreyeva; Russian School “Olympus” (DC), Lidia Krasnov; Sparta High School (NJ), William Brennan and Eric Hood.

The topic this year was particularly challenging: “Письмо историческому персонажу”. The topic prompt was as follows: Your goal is to write a letter to a historical figure who is a role model in your eyes. This person may be generally well-known from history or not. You might select, for example, a pioneer or explorer in early America, a civil rights leader, a scientist, an artist or writer, an athlete, or a political or religious leader. You need not limit yourself to a historical figure from the United States. You might explain why you look up to this person, and why you find his or her life and personal traits especially remarkable and inspiring. You might decide to tell this person how your life today differs from his or her life. You might pose several questions to this person and even ask for advice to solve a personal challenge or contemporary issue. Lastly, you may write to this person in the present tense if you so choose.

Judges received coded essays at the end of December and by the middle of January will have read and assessed them according to communicative guidelines. Judges were instructed to look first at whether the students were able to communicate their thoughts to a tolerant native speaker, and then to judge the content, effort, style, and grammar presented in the essays. First-round NREC results will be provided early in February.

~ Submitted by Paavo Huesen, Co-Chair NREC

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The annual meeting of SLAVA/Olympiada was called to order at 2:05 in the Quincy room of the Westin Conference Center hotel in Boston. The meeting was chaired by Betsy Sandstrom. Those present were Ruth Edelman, Lee Roby, Betsy Sandstrom, and Shannon Johnson. It was confirmed that we will remove the SLAVA annual meeting from the AATSEEL schedule beginning this year. Going forward, we will hold the annual meeting at ACTFL under the auspices of ACTR.

There was discussion of the timing of inducting students into SLAVA—whether after the completion of three years or at the end of the senior year, and how this relates to the awarding of SLAVA scholarships. There was a proposal to solicit this information from participating schools. Part of the discussion involved the role of service in SLAVA and how different schools have understood the service requirement. The SLAVA structure of governance was also discussed and a review of the names of the current regional vice-presidents: Lee Roby, Mary Bordes, and Michele Whaley. Vice Presidents approve new memberships and the award of SLAVA scholarships. When we have more than 5 applicants, Vice Presidents make the decisions on awards.

There was discussion regarding SLAVA scholarships for participants in the International Olympiada. These awards are made directly to American Councils. The feeling is that these awards support a good relationship with ACTR and help ACTR’s Olympiada winners finance the trip.

There was discussion of some historical practices, such as chapters submitting written reports to SLAVA each year. We agreed to review and circulate the constitution and bylaws of SLAVA. With decreased participation in SLAVA over the years, it was proposed that we reach out to our contact list of chapters to gauge and encourage interest. SLAVA Vice Presidents may reach out to their region and gather information about SLAVA practices. There was agreement to create a Google form for collecting information from chapters.

The Executive Secretary gave a report on the SLAVA budget and level of membership. At the start of the year the financial report for the financial year 2015-2016 showed a balance of $5902.34. Income for the year was $1095.00. Expenses totaled $381.85 for postage and printing of certificates, leaving a remaining balance of $6615.49. Slava served 16 schools with a total of 125 students, including one new school that was inducted this year. The newest member is C. E. Jordan High School in Durham, NC.

Participating schools are:

Booker T Washington, OK; Cherokee High, NJ; Sparta, NJ; Maggie Walters Governor’s School, VA; Austin Prep School; Enloe HS; Bellaire World Languages Academy; C. E. Jordan HS; Glastonbury HS, CT; Vineland HS, NJ; CD Hylton, VA; Langley HS, VA; Academy of Information Technology and Engineering; Middleborough HS; Friends School of Baltimore; Roland Park Country School.

There was interest in introducing the new officers and extending an invitation to take on the role of the Mid-West regional Vice President in an up-coming ACTR newsletter.

Regarding the Olympiada it was noted that the international participants were flying to Moscow for the International Olympiad on November 19. The annual Olympiada Teleconference will take place on December 9, 2016. Finding a date for the OLY is becoming difficult for everyone. Regarding the Olympiada level 1 materials, there was talk of reducing the amount of information related to the map, rather than requiring cities, rivers, lakes, and seas, to make a few topics deeper.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:10.

~ Respectfully submitted by Shannon Johnson, Executive Secretary/Treasurer
Announcement

ACTR SERVICE AWARD

This award, originally established in memory of Jane Barley and Fred Johnson, is given annually to recognize outstanding service to ACTR. The award is traditionally presented at the annual ACTR membership meeting.

Nominees must be members of ACTR in good standing. They should have demonstrated prominent service to ACTR in the form of active involvement in the work of the organization and promotion of its goals. Additional considerations include demonstrated devotion to the profession in terms of activities such as teaching, professional involvement, and activities in the field beyond ACTR and the classroom. Those were qualities exemplified by Jane Barley and Fred Johnson, in whose memory the award was established.

Members of the awards committee are Elena Farkas, William Rivers, and Jane Shuffelton. Nominations for the award to be given in February 2018 may be addressed to committee Chair Jane Shuffelton at shuffelton@aol.com. The deadline for nominations is October 1, 2017 – nominations may be forwarded at any time before that date.

Past recipients:
- 1995 – George Morris
- 1996 – Marian Walters
- 1997 – Zita Dabars
- 1998 – John Schilling
- 1999 – Irwin Weil
- 2000 – Elizabeth Neatour
- 2001 – Renate Bialy
- 2002 – Jane Shuffelton
- 2003 – John Mohan
- 2004 – Halina Danchenko
- 2005 – John Sheehan, Richard Brecht*
- 2006 – Robert Channon
- 2007 – Betty Leaver
- 2008 – Elizabeth Sandstrom, Vitaly G. Kostomarov*
- 2009 – Maria Lekic
- 2011 – Patricia Zody
- 2012 – Thomas Garza
- 2013 – Peter Merrill
- 2014 – Benjamin Rifkin
- 2015 – Dan Davidson (special lifetime award)
- 2016 – Cynthia Ruder

*special award

2017 Discover Russian STARTALK: Teacher Professional Development

American Councils for International Education and Fairfax County Public Schools/TJHSST will offer a professional development program for teachers of Russian: “Roadmap for the Teaching and Learning of Russian with the World-Readiness Standards”

Program Dates: July 17–28, 2017 (FAIRFAX, VA)
Arrival Date: Out of town participants may arrive On Sunday, July 16, 2017.
Last Day of Program: Friday, July 28th is a half-day. Program ends by Noon.

Applications for 2017 are due by May 19, 2017 and are available: http://tinyurl.com/2017startalkteacherprogram
For additional information, please contact Nataliya Ushakova at nushakova@gmail.com or (347) 267-9826.

During the course of the program, teacher participants will:
- observe Russian language lessons in our co-existing student program
- design mini lessons to demo in the student program
- have access to shared lessons created within the teacher program
- learn and review how technology can be integrated with lessons

Participating teachers will receive:
- Full Program Tuition
- A two-day MOPI (Modified Oral Proficiency Interview) training
- A modest stipend upon successful program completion
- Catered lunch provided at the program site
- Optional graduate credit at a special registration fee
For out of town participants we provide:
- Lodging in historic Old Town Alexandria, VA
- Daily Breakfast is available at the hotel
WINNERS OF ACTR/SLAVA OLYMPIADA AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN THE STUDY OF RUSSIAN

The most recent issue (Fall 2016) of the ACTR Letter listed the names of those students at regional contests of the ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian in 2016 who have distinguished themselves as recipients of the ACTR/Slava Olympiada Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Study of Russian. Below we print awardee photographs that were submitted to the National Co-chairs for the ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian, along with names of the awardees' Russian teachers and schools.

Поздравляем!

Wilton Farmwald
Teacher
Michele Whaley
West High School
ALASKA

Krishna Nautiyal
Teacher
Alla Grikurova
Lathrop High School
ALASKA

Natalya Ter-Saakov
Teacher
Alla Agranovskaya
Independent Student
DELAWARE VALLEY

Thomas Gillin
Teacher
Vlada Jackson
Vineland High School
DELAWARE VALLEY

Amelia Parkes
Teacher
Julia Denne
By the Onion Sea
ILLINOIS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katherine Edwards</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>By the Onion Sea</td>
<td>ILLINOIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Gilley</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Heather Rogers Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics, and Humanities</td>
<td>ILLINOIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle Spawn</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Elizabeth Lee Roby Friends School of Baltimore</td>
<td>MARYLAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine Nurminsny</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Jim Sweigert Roland Park Country School</td>
<td>MARYLAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Schmulewitz</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Oksana Cox Saint Paul Central High School</td>
<td>MINNESOTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen Huhn</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Eric Hood Sparta High School</td>
<td>NEW JERSEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madara Gulbe</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Eric Hood Sparta High School</td>
<td>NEW JERSEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Brzac</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Galina Kats Shaker High School</td>
<td>NEW YORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanna Diehl</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Anna Shkaf Shaker High School</td>
<td>NEW YORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanna Diehl</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Anna Levina Furr High School</td>
<td>TEXAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Russell</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Natallia Viktorovna Shamshyna de Adler Forest Park High School</td>
<td>VIRGINIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa Lee</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Betsy Sandstrom Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology</td>
<td>VIRGINIA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Поздравляем всех учеников! Успехов и удачи в будущем!**
Мichele Whaley was named one of ACTFL’s five candidates for National Language Teacher of the Year 2017. She was honored, along with the other nominees, at the opening session of the annual ACTFL convention in Boston on November 18, 2016. The award went to another candidate, Katrina Griffin, a teacher of German from North County High School in Glen Burnie, Maryland. Nonetheless, Michele’s presence on stage represented a major honor for her and it was a significant moment for the Russian field.

Michele’s route to the convention stage began with her award as Teacher of the Year 2014 from AFLA (Alaskans for Language Acquisition). In 2016 she was named Teacher of the Year by the PNCFL (Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Languages). ACTFL then named her a finalist for the national award. The finalist process involved a rigorous series of videos, portfolios, and interviews. She has had a distinguished career of teaching at middle school and high school levels in Anchorage, Alaska. From 1985 to 1998 she taught English, Russian, Social Studies, and other electives at East High School. She taught Russian at Romig Middle School from 2005 to 2011, and at West High School from 1998 to 2016.

Michele has been and continues to be a leader in the Russian field. She has taken on a number of responsibilities in her home state and beyond, including the leadership of a Professional Learning Community in Anchorage, gathering World Language teachers monthly to discuss and practice the teaching craft. She has twice served on the Board of Directors of ACTR and served a term as Secretary of the organization. Since 2011, she has coordinated the judging for the ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian in the Alaska region. From 1990 to 2011 she chaired the Alaska regional ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian, a yearly contest which involved up to 200 high school student competitors, 12 schools, and 40 judges. She is co-chair of the contest as of 2016. Her service with AFLA included a term as President of the association. She also led student exchanges with Russia through US-USSR Partnership Exchanges (later under the name of High School Academic Partnership Exchanges) under the auspices of USIA, ACTR, and the Ford Foundation.

Hers has been a strong presence at conferences, with a long list of presentations at AATSEEL, ACTFL, AFLA, and other venues. She has presented at several Startalk and other workshops for teachers. She has also contributed a number of articles to the ACTR Letter, on topics such as methodology, the value of language clubs, and technology in the classroom.

Those are some of the accomplishments in Michele’s career, but they don’t reveal the person she is or her deeply committed professional persona. Her engagement and enthusiasm for pedagogy set her apart – she is always eager to explore and adapt innovative concepts and methodology and then to share her discoveries with others. Her excitement for TPRS is an example. Anyone who hears her talk about using TPRS with her classes or her activities for helping learners be better readers can sense her delight in her work. Always ready to embrace new technology, she readily shares her experience with her colleagues – and her enthusiasm. A number of awards attest to her community service and to her professional achievements. Those include recognition from the Russian Embassy as teacher of the first American student to win the Moscow Olympiada (2005) and British Petroleum Teacher of Excellence (1998).

Michele has always been distinguished by her devotion to her students and her sincere desire to engage them in learning and help them succeed. She is truly a “star” in the galaxy of US language teachers.
**June 5 – July 28, 2017**

**Title VIII Fellowships**

- Competitive funding for US graduate students, scholars, and professionals for summer intensive language training (US citizenship required).
- Fellowship covers tuition, fees, and provides a generous stipend.
- Funding available for study at the Summer Language Workshop and programs abroad (complete list of languages funded for study abroad available online).
- Fellows attending the Workshop complete one year of language study and receive transferable Indiana University credit.

**Accepting Rolling Applications**

Funding for all Title VIII fellowships is provided through the Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Office of Outreach Title VIII Program for Research and Training on Eastern Europe and Eurasia (Independent States of the Former Soviet Union). All terms and conditions related to the scholarship will be outlined in a formal scholarship offer letter upon acceptance.

**Letter from the Other World** (Письмо с того света) was first printed in the 1970s under my editorship. This is also a Soviet mystery story with interesting twists and turns that maintain interest. This story also proved popular for use in high school and college classrooms. Письмо went out of print at about the same time as Домик.

Since I retired from teaching in 1997 and after I retired from my responsibilities with ACTR I decided that it was time to venture into something new. I had regularly read ebooks and it struck me that ebook readers for Russian students would serve a real purpose. With an ebook our students can find a definition with a brief touch on the offending unknown word in the onscreen text. Домик and Письмо are fully accented and the font is larger, more readable than in the print version. This incarnation of Домик also includes a facsimile copy of the 1989 reprinting.

These are iBooks, Apple Computer’s version of ebooks, so they are designed to be read on iPad, iPhone, and Mac. Cost is minimal ($.99 per copy of Домик, compared to $3.00 for the 1989 printed copy). Письмо is $1.99 per ebook.

ISBN for **Little House in the Swamp** is 978-1-4951-7790-3; for **Letter from the Other World** the ISBN is 978-1-6841-9286-1. Email contact for inquiries about these ebooks is morrustext@gmail.com.

~Submitted by George Morris
Go Beyond Ordinary.
For more than 40 years, American Councils has conducted comprehensive study abroad and research programs in the Balkans, the Baltics, Eurasia, and Russia. From intensive language and cultural immersion to internships, American Councils has a program to advance your education and career. Applications for summer programs are due February 15th; applications for fall and academic year programs are due March 15th.

*Fellowships for Teachers, Graduate Students, & Scholars:

- **GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP FOR ADVANCED, OVERSEAS LANGUAGE STUDY** Provides partial funding to U.S. teachers, graduate students, and scholars, who are participating in American Councils summer, semester, and academic year language immersion programs in Russia, Eurasia, and the Balkans.

- **TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM** Provides full support for research in policy-relevant fields for 3 to 9 months in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe. Fellowships include roundtrip international travel, housing and living stipends, visas, medical insurance, archive access, and logistical support. Open to U.S. graduate students, post-doctoral scholars, and faculty. Applications for the next grant cycle are due January 17th, 2017.

- **TITLE VIII COMBINED RESEARCH & LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAM** Provides full support for research and individualized, advanced language instruction for 3 to 9 months in Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe. Includes equivalent support to the Title VIII Research Scholar Program with the addition of language training. Applications for the next grant cycle are due January 17th, 2017.

*FELLOWSHIP FUNDING FOR AMERICAN COUNCILS PROGRAMS IS PROVIDED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (TITLE VIII), AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FULBRIGHT-HAYS, GROUP PROJECTS ABROAD (GPA).*

**Intensive Language & Cultural Immersion Programs:**

- **ADVANCED RUSSIAN LANGUAGE & AREA STUDIES PROGRAM (RLASP)** RLASP combines intensive classroom instruction with a wide range of extracurricular activities, including internships and volunteering, cultural excursions, and regional field studies. Programs available in Moscow, Vladimir, St. Petersburg, as well as in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Fulbright-Hays fellowship awards of $7,000 are available for the Moscow RLASP site.

- **BUSINESS RUSSIAN LANGUAGE & INTERNSHIP (BRI) PROGRAM** Combining intensive language classes and substantive internships in Moscow or St. Petersburg, BRII gives students invaluable insight into the Russian workplace and prepares them to use Russian in a professional context.

- **POLITICS & PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA** Designed to give participants new insights into the country today, the Politics & Public Diplomacy in Contemporary Russia program explores regional developments and conflict, economic and political reforms under Vladimir Putin, the role of mass media in society, and new cultural phenomena shaping today’s Russia.

Start Your Journey Today. [www.acStudyAbroad.org](http://www.acStudyAbroad.org)
**Bridge to Russian:**
Team Initiative Strives to Create Access to Russian Classes in Maryland

The Teach to Lead–Bridge to Russian initiative began as a proposal for a leadership summit sponsored by Teach to Lead–Maryland, which was organized by The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in July 2016. Teach to Lead comes from the U.S. Department of Education and aims to identify those teachers who are outstanding leaders who lead from the classroom, not from an office. Proposals are chosen for this initiative based on their feasibility. Our proposal imagined that any child interested in studying Russian could turn to an adult in his school or learning community and ask to begin learning the language. Rather than turn that child away, the adult would be able to help him connect to a network of qualified Russian teachers, one that would be in proximity to the child’s school or available through broadcast or online learning. Even if Russian were not offered at his school, the student would have access to and be able to experiment with Russian for a few years or earn high school credit and/or prepare for the National Examination in World Languages–Russian (NEWL). NEWL is the equivalent of the Prototype® Advanced Placement Exam in Russian Language and Culture now endorsed by The College Board and bundled now with NEWL Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese. Our proposal was chosen due to its emphasis on creating access to a Russian class for a wide range of students from various backgrounds across the state.

Taking stock of Russian Language programs in Maryland, we realized that Russian is offered in nine places, in a mix of public and private schools, in addition to several Saturday schools. When it occurs, it is often found in affluent communities or in private venues with established programs. This also means that Russian is not available to every student in the state. Additionally, Russian seems to “dead end” or be limited in several school districts. In some cases, students can study Russian in public school grades K–8, but there is no high school program to receive them. In others, there is no middle school program feeding into a high school program, which leaves high school teachers four years to prepare students for the NEWL Russian exam.

Bridge to Russian aims to fill the gaps in elementary and secondary preparation, while simultaneously identifying Russian language instructors who need to be certified to teach in Maryland, need recertification, or would like more training in use of technology in the classroom. We plan to reach students through traditional classroom instruction, as well as through hybrid, broadcast, online, and/or distance learning. We are working toward having our advanced students earn dual enrollment credit through participating universities and identifying broadcast centers that will allow live instruction throughout the day as students log in and interact with their teachers from a variety of schools.

This effort also requires advocacy. We began asking why Russian has been slowly disappearing from public schools. The answer is that these are local decisions, which may not seem that important as Russian appears or disappears, but collectively those local decisions deny students access to the language and the opportunities that come with it, not only in Maryland, but across the country. Advocacy means attending many meetings, pitching ideas, adjusting “pitch” strategies, sharing data that reveals students want more choices in World Language course offerings, and asking tough questions at the local level about staffing allocations. The data we have collected from Maryland students grades K–12 indicates that we need staffing allocations in the public schools to match student interests. They currently do not. This is how teacher salaries are funded annually. We need good stewards of those allocations. Our team estimated that student interest in Russian is about 20–30 students per school. So far, we have been accurate in this estimation. That number may not warrant a Russian I class in a school, but if we begin to connect those 20-30 students across several schools in a district to a qualified instructor via broadcast learning or some other means, Russian resurfaces and becomes accessible to many learning communities. We aim to connect with those students in every Maryland school district.

It has been approximately six months since our team gathered in Annapolis, Maryland, and learned how to move from ideas on paper to taking action. We are building opportunities for students and teachers. We have an audience that includes local and state leadership who are on board with bringing Russian forward for students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Bridge to Russian began with a question from an eighth-grader who asked, “How do I start learning Russian?” She needed a straight answer from the adults in her midst, and she needed to be able to enroll in Russian 1 without obstacles to her registration. Other students will soon ask this question. Let’s have an answer and a network ready for them.

**Want to build a Bridge to Russian in your state? Here are some ideas:**

* Gather a team and/or apply to a Teach to Lead two–day summit in your state. We recommend no more than five Russian language educators who represent a variety of school programs, public and private, secondary and post–secondary. Team members may come and go, but the team’s goals will remain the same.
Michelle Quackenbush

teaches English and all levels of Russian, 1–6, at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, Maryland. She teaches American literature and composition to 9th and 11th Graders, while hosting Russian (mixed-level) in one or two sections, depending on enrollment. Russian 1 began at Whitman as a club on September 13, 2001. Russian 1 was added to course curriculum in Fall 2002. The program has since grown to include advanced Russian classes and preparation for NEWL Russian. Prior to Whitman, Michelle worked in international development and also served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan (1994–1996). Ideas for Bridge to Russian developed as students began signing up for Russian in every part of her work day, including during English classes, where they would surface as independent learners and apart from the Russian classes already offered. There are too many phenomenal classes to choose from at Walt Whitman High School; scheduling conflicts are numerous as a result. Two out of 26 high schools in her school district, Montgomery County, offer Russian at this time.

* Create a hub, a learning community: Find a college or university with a K–12 Outreach Coordinator, someone who works with area schools and creates learning opportunities for children as part of outreach to the district. This university “hub” becomes the place where Russian language instructors can become certified through a School of Education, work on professional development courses, and/or design curriculum with university colleagues. Meet with leadership at the college or university first to pitch ideas and to discuss what will be possible through that institution. Then, at a later date, gather local and state leadership at this first “hub” to discuss possibilities for Russian, K–16, in the region.

* Seek dual enrollment credit or a way to create a challenging course for advanced students. Who will work with you and your school to create a rigorous learning environment for advanced students of Russian? Let the school district figure out what an advanced Russian class will look like with input from institutions of higher learning.

* Establish NEWL test sites around the state for Russian and the other NEWL languages. Be open to working with other teachers in the less commonly taught languages.

* Connect the hubs in the state. While there is no one set curriculum for a state, connecting these learning communities will enhance Russian language instruction, materials, and learning for everyone. Create an online portal through your state’s Department of Education where the materials for Russian language instruction are visible to all. There is no need to work in isolation. Collaborate and innovate with colleagues, grades K–16.

* Broadcast live instruction to those parts of the state which are located far away from the hubs. Figure out where the technology needs to be upgraded to support instruction in remote areas. Write a grant to request funding in support of the technology upgrade for other school districts.

* Create community-based partnerships that will support Russian Language Learning.

From the Bridge to Russian Team in Maryland, we wish you all the best as you begin to create learning communities in your state. It is possible, realistic, and exciting. We are not certain where our bridge will lead, but we do know we will be making a difference for students and teachers, one connection at a time.

Please feel free to contact any one of us with questions:

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Inna Hart, Director, Erudite Russian School, Bethesda, Maryland info@russianerudite.com

Michelle Quackenbush, Walt Whitman High School, Bethesda, Maryland michelle.m.quackenbush@mcpsmd.net

Julie Steimel, College Park Academy, Hyattsville, Maryland jsteimel@verizon.net

James Sweigert, Roland Park Country School, Baltimore, Maryland james_sweigert@yahoo.com

This article submitted by Michelle Quackenbush
Reviewer’s Corner


People interested in Russian culture and preparing for travel, study, or work in Russia face a problematical task when trying to find a single, multi-faceted, thorough treatment of the culture of Russia. In fact, the very definition of culture, as presented in guidebooks and other resources attempting to encompass the elusive nature of culture, varies widely. The Cambridge Dictionary offers the following two definitions of culture: 1) the way of life of a particular people, especially as shown in their ordinary behavior and habits, their attitudes toward each other, and their moral and religious beliefs and 2) the arts of describing, showing, or performing that represent the traditions or the way of life of a particular people or group: literature, art, music, dance, theater, etc.

These two definitions are reflected in the works of Nelson Brooks, *Language and Language Learning: Theory and Practice* and Barry Tomalin and Susan Stempleski, *Cultural Awareness*. These authors distinguish between what has become known in language teaching circles as “capital C” or “big C”, culture, which refers to the celebrated visual or performance arts of a culture and “little C” or “small C” culture, which includes a culture’s informal and often hidden patterns of human interactions and viewpoints. A precise understanding of both types of culture provides optimal preparation for any travel, study, or work in Russia. To this end, *Picturing Russia: a research guide to Russian Culture* will be considered in this review as a tool for providing that optimal preparation for successful work, study, and travel to the Russian Federation.

The purpose of the work in the context of fully understanding Russian culture

The book’s author, Alla Kourova, has dedicated nearly a decade to “researching the integration of cultural knowledge and intercultural competence into the foreign language curriculum” (p. 2). She describes the overall purpose of her book in the preface, stating, “This book is about understanding and studying Russian Culture. [The book] can be used as a basis for further research of Russian Culture by scholars of various disciplines and by students who are interested in cultural analysis” (p. v). Kourova aims to include an introduction to elements of history, literature, art, music, and architecture into the objectives for her work. In tandem with these cultural elements, the text offers opportunities for cross-cultural analysis, linguistic data analysis about cultural perceptions, and Russian language development. Furthermore, the author designed the book “to enhance cultural understanding between American and Russian students” (p. 1), referring to linguistic experiments that show that these two groups experience a lack of such understanding in their interactions.

Structure of the book

The first chapter opens with a history of the work that led to the creation of the book. The author states her objectives and the benefit of her text to her own university. According to Kourova, the text purports to “provide an international focus to our curricula and research programs”. Her belief is that the book “offers a unique learning experience for faculty and students by facilitating understanding of Russian culture on an individual level and creating new opportunities for
interaction, dialogue, and collaboration” (p. 4). Such benefits could easily be utilized in other universities and educational establishments, meeting such institutions’ overarching goals for international-level cooperation.

The second chapter presents a fascinating word study conducted by the author herself using the 1992 model of Dr. Svetlana Ter–Minasova of Moscow State University. In 1999, and then again between 2011 and 2014, Kourova asked approximately 300 students of English in high schools and universities in Penza, Russia, to give five words that “express their vision of America and Americans” (p. 5). She asked both Russian and American students for single-word responses to the categories of Features of the Russian (or American) character, Features of contemporary life in Russia (or the United States), Nature and Landscape, and Proper Names. She also compares the five-word language pictures of Russia provided by American students before and after an academic year spent becoming acquainted with the language and culture of Russia. For Russian-language professionals, these words can serve to paint a picture of each culture’s perception of the other and how such perceptions change with the introduction of certain dynamics (political or social shifts, academic training, etc.) in the test subjects’ environment.

The third chapter offers a fascinating cross-cultural study grounded in Russian culture as the point of departure for comparison. The chapter begins with definitions of culture and then describes twenty-four types of “cultural ways” or concepts rated by 100 students participating in a joint Russia–American program and/or in an intensive Russian language study program. These students used the criteria of pertinence to their own lives to rate the cultural ways in order of importance. Some of the cultural ways represent rites of passage such as marriage, childbirth, family, and death. Others are more sociological: religion, work, gender, family, age. Further categories include learning, food, dress, magic, naming, sports, time, wealth, building, freedom, power, and speech. The remainder of the chapter illustrates the manner in which these cultural ways are expressed, viewed, and perceived by Russians with the understanding that the American audience is the point of reference.

As a continuation of the cross-cultural study begun in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 describes the similarities between the United States and Russia and then illustrates the misunderstandings that come from the often nuanced, sometimes glaring differences in areas such as values, nonverbal behavior, the perception of time, educational and other customs, gestures, and superstitious beliefs.

Chapter 5 centers around five pillars of mainly “big C” Russian Culture with some elements of “small c” culture included. These pillars are literature, architecture, music, art, and the interaction and history of religion in Russia. To illuminate each pillar, the author offers the reader texts in English side-by-side with the same text in Russian. Sub-categories of each of the five pillars of culture follow, but the dual-language texts deserve special commentary. Each of the texts in the sub-categories is laid out in a visually-appealing way with a photograph or image illustrating each text’s content. The author has included succinct texts that give the reader an overview of the significance of each figure or phenomenon for a Russian person. The fifth chapter evokes Genevra Gerhart and Eloise Boyle’s invaluable contributions to the Russian language profession: The Russian’s World: Life and Language and The Russian Context: the Culture behind the Language. Kourova’s approach, akin to that of Gerhart and Boyle, endeavors to give students of Russia and Russian language a sense of what phenomena Russians themselves hold significant in their cultural self-perceptions. An additional benefit of Chapter 5 for students of Russian and English is the value of these texts for developing reading comprehension. The pillars of Russian Culture/culture

Reviewer’s Corner, to be continued on p 20.
**Conclusion**

The complexities of an odyssey into another culture can be subtle, if not confounding. Paul Sturges, a proponent of library scientists widening their understanding of various cultures, writes, “The sheer difficulty of entering into the minds of people from different cultures is frequently undervalued...” (p. 16). However, for those who are determined to make such an attempt, *Picturing Russia*, recommends itself as a rare, in-depth, and painstakingly-prepared guide. The author, her colleagues, and her research participants are to be congratulated on an excellent resource, indispensable for the library and classrooms of any institution or individual keen on entering the minds of people from either Russian or American culture.

The Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede describes culture as the “software of the mind”. The analogy of a computer operating system that directs the actions of the hardware and software of a computer may fall short for an adequate description of human beings. However, successful work, study, and life in Russia and the United States depend heavily on developing a certain understanding of and possibly even an appreciation for those things that the native members of that culture hold dear.

~Submitted by Aimee Roebuck-Johnson,

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There are two unforgettable moments that I believe every foreigner travelling to Moscow will have during their sojourn. The first is the sense of a preeminent space one feels when stepping into Red Square for the first time. Any effort to imagine this place in advance is time well spent; any fears of disappointment will evaporate in an instant. The imposing stature of this space, the gaping expanse, the powerful feeling of being submerged in history, is all real. The Kremlin and St. Basil’s Cathedral are real, and better than what could ever be conjured in the daydreams of a student of Russia. The square embraces hundreds if not thousands of people at all hours of the day, natives and foreigners alike. It is here that one first believes he has finally made it to this beautiful country across the world.

The second moment is one’s first trip to Lenin’s Mausoleum. Even for those not particularly interested in Russia’s history, the feeling one has in the mausoleum is inescapable. It is dark, ominous, and secretive. Compared to the time spent waiting and walking through the lines into the crypt, you see Lenin for only a moment. But, he is there! If ever a history of a whole century could be imagined in a moment, it is upon seeing him lying there. The experience leaves you only with speechlessness.

Despite these two moments, I cannot say that either truly defines what my experience in Russia thus far has held. Both remind one of the past, of what constitutes the Russian soul, and their collective memory. But what of today’s Russia? In my view, there is only one place in Moscow that demonstrates what it means to live there today: ПАРК ГОРЬКОГО, Gorky Park.

Gorky Park is a massive space near the center of Moscow where young people, families, and the elderly alike go to spend time with a variety of amusements. There are beautiful flower gardens, innumerable fountains, and places to hike in the forest. There is a beach with real sand and water that smells of the sea. There is a complex for all sports imaginable, even the obscure: beach volleyball, table tennis, and chess, among others. The grounds are littered with ice cream shops, little food stands, and full service restaurants. One can visit a variety of nearby exhibits or walk along the Moscow River, even go to an outdoor movie theater.

I have only been in Moscow for a few weeks now, but much of my time is spent in Gorky Park. It is ideal in which to relax, to study, to do work, to exercise, and to think. There is so much to do and so much to see that it feels impossible ever to grow bored in this beautiful place. A few years ago, the Russian government charged an admission price to enter the park. For now, it is free to all. This decision reflects a different character both of the Russian people and their government, based on a mutual consideration for creating happiness.

It is not an overstatement to say that Gorky Park is my favorite place on earth. It can always be a place to which to return after a long day of study and excursions. I hope that all who read this will have the fortune to visit this oasis.

William O’Brien studied on the Advanced Russian Language and Area Studies Program in Moscow during the summer of 2016, and is continuing through the 2016-2017 academic year. He is currently a PhD Candidate at Ohio State University, studying Russian history. His academic interests range from European history to public diplomacy, and Will hopes to use his command of the Russian language to work on historical translations and to help academics, policy makers, and US citizens better understand the Russian people. He is also a recipient of US Department of State Title VIII funding for the program, which is administered through American Councils for International Education.
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