

ASEEES NewsNet

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Association for Slavic, East European &
Eurasian Studies (ASEEES), established
in 1948, is a nonprofit, nonpolitical,
scholarly society and is the leading private
organization dedicated to the advancement
of knowledge about Russia, Central
Eurasia, and Eastern & Central Europe.

A vertical photograph of a large, cylindrical object, possibly a barrel or drum, covered in black and pink graffiti. The graffiti includes words like 'NAIN', 'WOMAN', 'KAD', 'FEMME', and 'LURRA'. The background is a textured, grey surface.

A vertical photograph of a large, cylindrical object, possibly a barrel or drum, covered in black and pink graffiti. The graffiti includes words like 'NAIN', 'WOMAN', 'KAD', 'FEMME', and 'LURRA'. The background is a textured, grey surface.

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When critiques of Russocentrism are dismissed as NATO sympathies, as geopolitical posturing, or as emotional “trauma,” they are stripped of their analytic force and dislocated from the intersectional concerns that feminist scholarship has long foregrounded.

Recent Russian military interventions—[and the responses to them](#)—have intensified a long-standing question: Why has the legacy of Russian and Soviet imperialism remained so consistently obscured in scholarship? Why have disciplinary routines—from area studies’ linguistic hierarchies to certain feminist frameworks shaped by Cold War imaginaries—so often defended rather than interrogated this imperial afterlife? When critiques of Russocentrism are dismissed as NATO sympathies, geopolitical posturing, or emotional “trauma,” they are stripped of their analytic force and dislocated from the intersectional concerns—gendered violence, racialized hierarchies, and militarism—that feminist scholarship has long foregrounded elsewhere. Yet the Eurasian borderlands often emerge as a “unique” exception to global capitalist and imperial dynamics.

Before 2022, raising these questions often felt futile. Critiques of Soviet imperial formations were frequently dismissed as local grievances, while the claim that the Soviet Union was not an empire circulated as common sense. Feminist scholars will recognize the pattern: structural critique reduced to personal affect, “nuance” invoked to derail discussions of power, and appeals to shared suffering or complicity used to obscure hierarchy. Such reflexes—present in both transnational feminist and

Eurasian studies—have long inhibited recognizing Russocentrism as an epistemic formation comparable to Eurocentrism: one that quietly organizes what counts as knowledge, whose histories are centered, and which differences are rendered insignificant.

At first glance, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine seemed to [disrupt these avoidance strategies](#). Across the humanities and social sciences, [scholars](#) reexamined the epistemic foundations of the field: [its linguistic defaults, assumptions about cultural legibility, methodological attachments to Russia as the gravitational center](#), that shaped even [expectations about what people in the region were supposed to feel, think, or fight for](#). Feminist scholars, too, confronted uncomfortable questions about how [Cold War epistemologies have shaped our understanding of former state socialist spaces](#)—questions about whiteness, race, imperial legacies, and geographies of feminist solidarity that many U.S.-based frameworks have struggled to hold.

And yet, even as calls to “decolonize” proliferated, the infrastructures of knowledge remained largely intact. Funding priorities still privilege Russian language training; job ads continue to prioritize “Russia;” [citation networks continue to center Russian scholarship](#); and narratives of the region are still measured against Russian developments. New forms of [Westsplaining](#), [leftsplaining](#), and [whataboutism](#) flourished—often appropriating anti-imperialist language to excuse or minimize Russian violence. Even radical or [anarchist opposition to Russian imperialism](#) in support for Ukraine was, at times, recast as alignment with Western military interests. Meanwhile, histories of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Tatarstan, Belarus, and others

continued to be [interpreted through Russian categories of meaning](#), often at odds with local political and feminist commitments and rarely situated within their broader global entanglements.

Even as calls to “decolonize” proliferated, the infrastructures of knowledge remained largely intact.

[Maria Sonevytsky](#) reminds us that decolonization requires confronting not only political domination but also epistemic imperialism, which casts Russian—and Western—perspectives as universal. For those of us in the borderlands of empire, this is not abstract. As a Belarusian feminist scholar in the U.S. academy, I am positioned within both WGSS and Eurasian studies and often encounter a split form of misrecognitions. In transnational feminist scholarship, Eurasia is frequently treated as a secondary case or illustration rather than a region that generates theoretical and global insights. At the same time, my WGSS affiliation in Eurasian studies makes me legible when speaking about “culture,” “gender,” or “identity,” but not about the imperial and racial structures that shape the region. These dynamics expose how disciplinary habits separate “theory” from “area,” “native informants” from “experts,” feminist critique from geopolitics, and transnational feminism from the post-socialist critique.

Unlearning Russocentrism, then, is not only an area studies project. It is a feminist one, requiring attention to how gendered, racialized, and imperial relations persist in the epistemic structures of academia and the Eurasian borderlands. It entails tracing how empire endures through categories of analysis, institutional infrastructures, and narrative conventions that render



A Thousand Mother Tongues Tree, [performative poetics action and installation by artist, organizer, writer, and migrant Ani Menua](#) and [de_coloniallanguage](#). This action/installation explores linguistic hierarchies and the feminist labor of sustaining minoritized and marginalized languages against imperial epistemic dominance. Open Air Museum of Decoloniality, Berlin, July 2025. Photo reproduced with permission from [de_coloniallanguage](#).

some perspectives universal and others supplementary. For feminist scholars outside Eurasian studies, it means seeing the region not as an outlier or “white postcolony,” but as a site where multiple imperialisms—Soviet, Russian, European, Ottoman, Cold War, and neoliberal—intersect, and where feminist, Indigenous, and anti-imperialist traditions have long grappled with these entanglements.

This essay examines the afterlife of empire—its endurance, not its collapse. Drawing on [feminist theory](#), [critical imperial studies](#), and [post-socialist scholarship](#), I trace

how Russocentrism persists as an epistemic formation shaping scholarly authority, linguistic hierarchies, and the valuation of feminist knowledge. I argue that confronting this afterlife requires more than redistributing attention or broadening the canon. It demands rethinking the infrastructures through which knowledge is produced, circulated, and legitimized: the languages that confer authority, the labor that sustain scholarship, and the relational practices that allow feminist and area studies to imagine otherwise. This intervention is offered from the space I inhabit—between WGSS

and Eurasian studies, between the U.S. academy and Belarus, between feminist commitments and regional political urgencies. It is written for scholars navigating the complexities of Russian and Soviet imperial legacies while building transnational feminist frameworks that refuse Cold War binaries, Russocentric defaults, and the epistemic inequities that continue to shape our understanding of Eurasia.

How Russocentrism Became the Field’s “Neutral” Center

Russocentrism is often described as an overemphasis on Russia, but its power lies in how it functions as a *grammar of knowledge*—a set of assumptions about expertise, authoritative archives, and which languages and subjects confer intellectual legitimacy. Rather than simply privileging Russia, it structures what counts as evidence, who counts as an expert, and which histories are presumed to illuminate the rest. For those of us trained within feminist, queer, and decolonial traditions, these are recognizable dynamics: they mirror the [broader epistemic hierarchies through which universality is constructed and maintained](#). Imperial structures endure not only politically but through knowledge practices. As [feminist](#) and [decolonial](#) scholars note, [epistemic capital—like economic capital—accumulates unevenly](#). Russocentrism persists, then, not merely as a matter of overemphasis but as a value form: a mechanism through which cultural domination becomes epistemic legitimacy and scholarly common sense.

Throughout the twentieth century, Soviet and Western institutions jointly produced [Russia as the region’s universal mediator](#). Even critiques of the USSR often relied on Russian perspectives, rendering non-Russian contexts intelligible only when refracted through the lens of Russian

experience. Under Tsarist and Soviet rule, [Russian language and cultural norms](#) functioned as intellectual currency and gatekeeping mechanism: activists, writers, and scholars from across Eurasian borderlands often had to translate their politics into metropolitan idioms to be legible. This translation was never neutral. [To be heard required speaking the dominant language](#); yet translating local experience into Russian risked reproducing the very hierarchies one sought to challenge. Such tensions—between visibility and autonomy—remain familiar within feminist, Indigenous, and postcolonial studies, where [marginalized communities have long been required to translate themselves to dominant publics](#).

[Cold War area studies consolidated these patterns](#) by naturalizing a Russian-centered view of the region. [“Russia” became shorthand for the Soviet Union](#), and non-Russian republics were relegated to the periphery, described as variations or footnotes to a central narrative. [These assumptions became embedded in the design of departments, graduate training pipelines,](#)

[funding structures, and archival infrastructures](#). Collections in non-Russian languages were underfunded or treated as supplemental rather than foundational. Even today, these habits endure less through intentional exclusion than through [institutional inertia](#). Russian-language sources remain the “primary archive,” [non-Russian scholarship is meaningful only once translated into metropolitan languages](#), and [theoretical innovation is imagined to originate in Western centers](#) while regional scholars supply empirical detail. These hierarchies have become so normalized that they appear practical rather than political.

From a feminist perspective, these arrangements are unmistakably political. They reflect what [feminist epistemologists](#) have long revealed: [knowledge production is shaped by structures of power](#), not simply by methodological preference. [Soviet internationalism](#), for example, promised gender and racial equality while translating hierarchy into developmentalist idioms of “fraternity,” “progress,” and “modernization.” Russian became the language not only of upward mobility

but of legibility: [to appear modern, or to be recognized as politically sophisticated, was to be interpretable within Russian frames](#). The afterlives of these logics persist today when Russian-language scholarship is treated as universally accessible, while work in Ukrainian, Kazakh, Georgian, Uzbek, or Tatar is coded as “regional,” “local,” or “specialized.” Empire sediments: its infrastructures of language, expertise, and recognition outlast political form, shaping how we read, cite, translate, teach, and assign relevance. Because access to Russian language programs and archives has become increasingly limited, many institutions are turning to Central Asia and the Caucasus as alternative sites for language study or research. Yet this shift raises critical questions about whether such displacement genuinely challenges established centers of authority or merely treats these regions as substitutes rather than as sources of their own analytic and epistemic perspectives. So, to understand the endurance of Russocentrism requires recognizing it not as a residue of the past but as a living epistemic formation that continues to organize value.

Also, from a feminist, transnational perspective, unlearning Russocentrism is necessarily [collective work](#). Solidarity is not sentiment but practice: redistributing resources, supporting multilingual publication, citing and translating beyond Russian, co-authoring rather than extracting, and challenging the linguistic hierarchies that delimit participation in regional knowledge production. [Accountability](#) also requires interrogating how Russocentric norms within our own institutions and movements marginalize Indigenous, minority, and non-Russian epistemologies.



Party of the Other, participative action and installation by de_coloniallanguage. This work speaks to issues of relationality, collectivity, and the refusal of imperial frameworks that assign center and periphery. Open Air Museum of Decoloniality, Berlin, March 2024. Photo reproduced with permission from de_coloniallanguage.

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These suggestions are not hypothetical. They emerge from the work of scholars, artists, and activists already generating alternative genealogies, knowledges, and ways of being: Belarusian [scholars](#) and [artists](#) analyzing authoritarianism through [local intellectual traditions](#) and [embodied experiences](#); Central Asian [artists](#) and [scholars](#) revisiting 1930s women's activism in Uzbekistan to reveal how Soviet "emancipation" masked violence, state control, and colonial tensions; feminist [art residency in Kyrgyzstan uncovering the histories of women's labor in Issyk-Kul's opium fields](#); scholars from Ukraine challenging dominant [narratives of modernity](#) and the [racial-sexual logics](#) shaping postcolonial and post-socialist contexts; and [Eurasian diaspora thinkers](#) exploring the loss of languages and [life-worlds](#), to name a few. These epistemologies exist, expand, and innovate; the problem is not their scarcity, but the structures that render some forms of knowledge central and others supplementary.

Unsettling Exceptionalism and Unlearning Imperialism

[Exceptionalism](#) remains one of the most persistent temptations in thinking about Eurasia. Scholars across disciplines, while sometimes rightly cautioning against collapsing Russian/Soviet and Western European colonial projects, often reproduce Russocentric logics by insisting on the region's incomparability. This stance isolates Eurasia from global histories of race,

extraction, and empire, suggesting that Russian and Soviet formations are either too unique for comparison or too politically sensitive for inclusion in broader decolonial frameworks, or too weak—or not too bad—in comparison to the all-permeating power of the U.S. While historical and geographic specificity matters, exceptionalism frequently operates as a protective device—shielding Russian and Soviet projects from the analytic interrogation that is common for feminist, Indigenous, and postcolonial studies, or reinforcing a unipolar worldview in which only the West is imagined as an imperial actor.

A feminist relational approach counters this isolation by tracing how imperial formations—Russian, Soviet, European, U.S., and others—operate [through shared structures of domination](#). Such an approach does not erase differences; rather, it highlights how techniques of rule travel across time and space: military conquest, territorial enclosure, resource extraction, civilizational rhetoric, and the remaking of gendered and racialized subjects. Soviet modernization campaigns—celebrated in the idioms of gender equality, liberation, and international solidarity—often mirrored European civilizing missions in their methods of intervention and discipline, whether in collectivization in Central Asia, Indigenous dispossession in Siberia, or Russification across the Caucasus. The USSR's claims to represent a [supranational socialist humanity echoed Western liberalism's universalist pretenses](#), both drawing on Enlightenment genealogies that [masked colonial hierarchies](#).

In this light, relationality becomes a method of exposure rather than equivalence. It reveals how [extraction could be reframed as development](#), [linguistic dominance as internationalism](#), and [claims to](#)

[universality as tools of political and epistemic centralization](#). At the same time, a relational feminist approach also illuminates what was genuinely distinct—[socialist vocabularies of solidarity](#), the [USSR's semi-peripheral position in global capitalism](#), and the [enduring tension between anti-imperial rhetoric and imperial practice](#). These tensions become apparent when situated alongside other imperial histories rather than isolated from them. Seen relationally, racial formations likewise appear both mobile and context-specific: Soviet practices [racialized](#) Central Asian, Caucasian, and Indigenous Siberian peoples through gendered and civilizational discourses, revealing both the travel of racial logics and their distinct articulation within Soviet imperialism.

Feminist theory clarifies these dynamics. Scholars such as Chandra Mohanty, María Lugones, Patricia Hill Collins, and Sara Ahmed show that universal figures—"woman," "citizen," or "worker"—are never neutral but produced through gendered, racialized, and geopolitical hierarchies. Soviet notions of the "citizen" and "worker" operated similarly, [obscuring regional, ethnic, and gendered inequalities](#) under the veneer of socialist equality. When we foreground reproductive labor, care work, mobility regimes, and translation, a different map of empire emerges: one that centers the Central Asian, Siberian, Indigenous, and non-Russian communities whose [labor sustained Soviet development](#), the [gendered infrastructures of care that underwrote socialist internationalism](#), and the [translation work that determines whose scholarship circulates transnationally](#). Translation here is not merely linguistic conversion but the broader labor of making marginalized knowledges legible across linguistic, cultural, and academic boundaries.



UN-Fence Handbook, street intervention by de_colonialanguage. This intervention seeks to highlight how imperial infrastructures shape everyday life and knowledge production, revealing the material and symbolic boundaries that must be unsettled in decolonial feminist practice. Open Air Museum of Decoloniality, Berlin, May 2024. Photo reproduced with permission from de_colonialanguage.

In this light, challenging narratives of Russian or Soviet exceptionalism requires tracing the flows of labor and knowledge these narratives obscure. Claims that the USSR or Russia were sui generis mask the structural continuities linking Russian and Soviet rule to other imperial formations and shield dominant frameworks from critique. By foregrounding care, reproductive labor, and translation, a relational feminist approach unsettles such claims to uniqueness, revealing both the mobility of imperial logics and their distinct expressions in Eurasia. Unlearning Russocentrism is thus not merely a matter of diversifying syllabi but a feminist epistemic intervention: one that interrogates inherited hierarchies of expertise, unsettles disciplinary exceptionalism, and attends to the gendered, racialized, and imperial infrastructures shaping knowledge production.

Decolonization as Method, Not Metaphor

Following [Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang](#) as well as recent [Madina Tlostinova's intervention](#), it is crucial to caution against turning “decolonization” into a moral slogan detached from structural change. Treating decolonization as method focuses attention on the infrastructures that make knowledge possible. A feminist politics of method asks: Who maintains archives and translates? Who is cited? Which theories become canonical? Who sustains multilingual classrooms and research networks? The question is no longer whether to decolonize, but how: whether the field will settle for symbolic pluralism, or build accountable, relational institutions that redistribute value and transform inherited hierarchies. Unlearning Russocentrism thus means not erasing the past but reshaping the epistemic structures through which it continues to organize knowledge.

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Decolonization is also a labor question—a point long emphasized by feminist scholars. Universities that celebrate global diversity often rely on precarious instructors, frequently women and minoritized scholars, to teach the languages and histories that make such diversity thinkable. Valuing this labor—materially, intellectually, and institutionally—is a prerequisite for meaningful change. Signs of this shift are emerging: [scholars link Central Asian labor migration to global supply chains](#); connect [Soviet extraction to ecological crisis](#); read [Indigenous critique alongside analyses of Russian and Soviet imperialism](#); and theorize [Eurasia as central rather than exceptional in global modernity](#). These approaches refuse Cold War binaries and resist the epistemic isolation reinforced by Russocentrism

and, at times, by Western feminist frameworks.

What might Eurasian studies become if organized around relation rather than hierarchy? Rather than centering a single linguistic or political formation, the field could form a constellation of interconnected histories: migration, capitalism, ecological change, anticolonial and feminist resistance, Indigenous and borderland epistemologies, transnational social movements, and the region's many linguistic worlds. Such an approach would treat Eurasia not as an object but as a generative site for theorizing global questions of empire, race, gender, labor, and relationality.

Yet Russocentrism remains an important problem for any such analytic reorientation. Calls for “nuance” can at times deflect or depoliticize critiques of imperial power, particularly when they leave existing hierarchies of knowledge production intact. What is at stake is not simply interpretive pluralism, but how the field engages the material conditions that shape who produces knowledge and whose work circulates. From a feminist and decolonial perspective, unlearning

Russocentrism might therefore be understood less as a search for innocence or purity than as a practice of situated accountability: attending to the infrastructures that sustain scholarship, supporting precarious labor, and cultivating more reciprocal and collaborative forms of intellectual exchange. This also requires closer attention to how epistemic capital is reproduced, how imperial formations linger in scholarly habits, and how resources might be redistributed—not only through more inclusive citation practices, but through broader transformations in how the field organizes knowledge.

Reimagining how we read, teach, translate, and collaborate allows the study of empire to become a practice of solidarity—not as metaphor, but as shared responsibility and material engagement. Decolonization, understood methodologically, also demands intellectual humility: learning from analytic traditions that fall outside Western academic forms but offer theoretical insights grounded in local histories, languages, and epistemologies. It invites us to build a field capacious enough to treat these knowledges not as supplemental but as foundational to understanding the region and its imperial afterlives.



Tatsiana Shchurko is Assistant Professor of Instruction in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of South Florida. As a scholar and activist from Belarus and now working in the U.S., she brings a transnational and intersectional feminist lens to her research — committed to de-centering Western epistemologies and highlighting transformative knowledge production across Eurasia and the U.S. Her work focuses on the politics of empire, post-socialist and Eurasian studies, and feminist genealogies of solidarity, migration, labor, racialization, and knowledge infrastructure. Her current book project — supported by an ACLS Fellowship (2023) — explores the connections between Black women's international activism and Eurasian feminist knowledge production. Through teaching, research, translation, and digital archiving, she seeks to build relational scholarly practices that challenge Russocentric and Eurocentric defaults while amplifying marginalized voices and life-worlds across the region.



ASEEES 58th Annual Convention



Palmer House Hilton, Chicago – November 12-15, 2026
Virtual Convention – October 16-17, 2026

Theme: States and Empires Spotlight on Balkan Studies

2026 ASEEEES President
Oxana Shevel, Tufts University

Important Dates

May 15 – All convention participants appearing in the program must be current ASEEEES members. View the membership policy [here](#). Renew/join [here](#).

September 1 – deadline for [ancillary event space requests](#)

September 10 – deadline for [session change requests](#)
(subsequent changes may not appear in print program)

Note: The online submission platform closed for session proposals on March 1, but remains open for ancillary event space requests until September 1.

Online Program

View the [online program](#) to see the preliminary schedules for the Annual Convention!

Palmer House Hilton

Book your stay early! Use the ASEEEES [room link](#) to book at the discounted rate.

Session Changes

To make changes to your session, use the

[Session Change Request Form](#).

Convention Grants

DEADLINE May 20

[Graduate Student Travel Grant](#) – open to MA or PhD student members presenting papers at the convention

[Regional Scholar Travel Grant](#) – open to regular members residing full-time in Eastern Europe/ Eurasia presenting papers at the convention

[Convention Opportunity Travel Grant](#) – open to regular members at income level <\$30,000 presenting papers at the convention

DEADLINE August 31

[Convention Inclusion Travel Grant](#) – open to BA, MA, and PhD students from all backgrounds, regardless of participation in the convention

Please review the [best practices for fostering accessibility and inclusivity](#) at the Annual Convention.

#ASEEES26

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Now more than ever, ASEES travel grants play a crucial role in supporting graduate students, contingent faculty, scholars in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and other essential members of our community. As funding for research and conference travel becomes increasingly scarce, your contributions help ensure these scholars can participate in the Annual Convention.



“The ASEES Graduate Student Travel Grant has kindly supported the participation at my first ever overseas convention! As a young scholar working on South Slavic literatures, the ASEES Annual Convention was a valuable opportunity to step out of my comfort zone, share research with peers, engage in rich discussions, enhance previous and gain new professional connections. Being a part of this vibrant community of scholars, as well as having a chance to organize a panel myself, was a truly rewarding academic and networking experience and has made a positive impact on my confidence as an early career scholar.”

Sofija Todorović (University of Belgrade)
2025 Graduate Student Travel Grant Recipient

ASEEES Awarded 2026 American Council of Learned Societies Intention Foundry Microgrant

ASEEES has been awarded a [2026 Intention Foundry Learned Society Extended Engagement Microgrant by the American Council of Learned Societies](#) (ACLS). The microgrants support efforts by [ACLS member societies](#) that address the social, intellectual, and financial precarity scholars currently face.

From the program’s largest applicant pool to date, ACLS awarded [20 microgrants](#), including seven multi-society collaborative projects.

Applicants proposed projects that centered equity, justice, and wellbeing for scholars who disproportionately experience precarity in their fields, while also noting how the projects would inform their societies’ strategic priorities.

ASEEES has been awarded \$10,000 to sustain its programs which address precarity among scholars of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.

The funding will be used to offer travel grants to scholars at all stages who face disproportionate financial burdens related to conference travel and to fund the REEES Undergraduate Think Tank program, which supports young scholars from underrepresented communities who are enthusiastic about pursuing graduate studies.

De-Siloing: For Robust Interdisciplinary Engagement

By Zach Rewinski

Ivory towers usually do not have bridges to others. Intellectual siloing has been discussed as a problem of American academia for decades. Even with today's emphasis on interdisciplinarity, collegial interaction across disciplines is often woefully limited. Our campus spaces physically embody intellectual estrangement: at my current institution, I typically walk 100 meters or less from my office to the classrooms I've been assigned. It is generally considered a misfortune to teach a class in a building that does not also house your office.

In this article, I want to describe an interdisciplinary collaboration that I recently participated in as an inroad to a discussion of more robust interdisciplinary engagement. The project revealed much to me about what we lose when we fail to interact across disciplines. Though I actually jumped into another researcher's ongoing, long-term research agenda, from my perspective, the collaboration was completely unexpected.

One afternoon a faculty member stopped by my office. He introduced himself as Niklas Manz, professor of physics. He had stopped by to ask if I could recommend a student to work with him on Russian-language materials. Being new to the institution, I was not aware that student Russian learners and speakers had been working with him for years on a variety of language-based tasks for a project about the Belousov-Zhabotinsky Reaction. Niklas explained that he was writing a history of the reaction, and as part of that project, he was cataloging variations in the naming of the reaction. I suggested that I might be able to contribute some linguistic savvy. Thus began our collaboration.

In summer 2025, working in collaboration with scientists from Moscow and Budapest as well as our own campus, we published an [article, "Finding the Eponym for the Belousov-](#)

[Zhabotinsky Reaction,"](#) in the international journal of chemistry *Chaos*. The article discusses the history of the reaction's discovery in the Soviet Union by Boris Belousov and the subsequent research of Anatole Zhabotinsky, among others, and includes a lengthy bibliography of research on the reaction. We catalog variations in the reaction's naming and attempt to categorize them systematically: what spellings reflect Library of Congress norms? Norms for speakers of French? Individual decisions by native speakers of Russian, German, or Polish writing in English? When might a native speaker of English have recorded a name that they had heard, but not seen in writing, and thus spelled phonetically (BelAusof, ZhabAtinsky...)? In what cases is the most likely explanation just poor copy editing (ZhaBTinsky)?

The BZ reaction, as it is known in short, is an oscillating non-linear chemical reaction. Experiments, images, and videos of the reaction can be found on the website of the [College of Wooster Wave Lab](#) and YouTube. The oscillation is truly mesmerizing – fans of scientific, fractal, or geometric art are sure to be entranced.

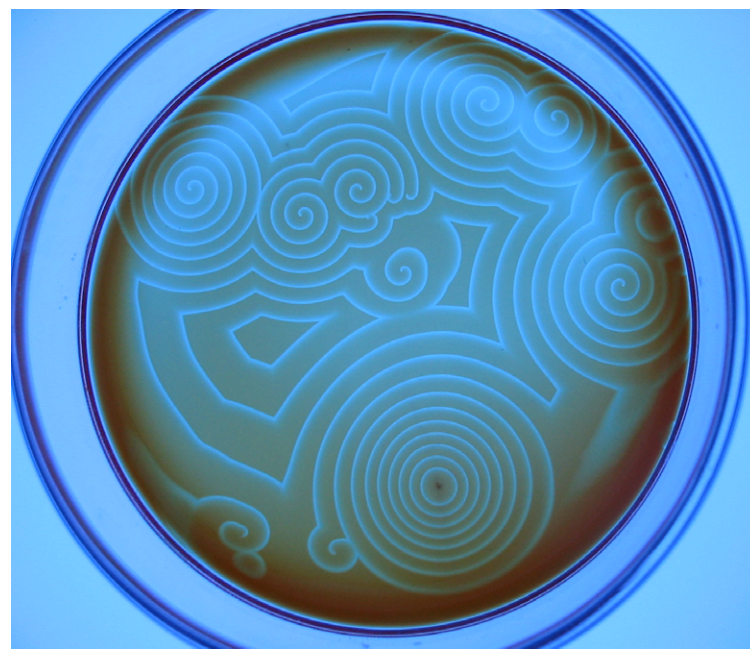


Image of the Belousov-Zhabotinsky Reaction from the Wave Lab at the College of Wooster. Reproduced with permission from Niklas Manz.

When we started working on the project, Niklas asked a seemingly simple question: why doesn't everyone just adhere to one standard? It was more understandable that a researcher could use the French norm, or the Soviet GOST transliteration system, or the Library of Congress system, than create ad hoc rules. Here the disciplinary perspective that I offered fell well short of satisfying the scientist's impulse toward standardization.

Over the course of our collaboration, we discussed many such questions of disciplinary norms, methods, and perspectives. We learned from each other, and for me, one of the most important lessons was just how much we did not know about each other and the fields we represent. In the remainder of this article, I will summarize three ideas that I think are worthy of broad consideration.

I have already gestured toward the first lesson: we, meaning academia at large, have a dangerous problem of believing that we understand about others more than we do. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing (whose phrase is this – Albert Einstein's or Alexander Pope's? If only there was a discipline that investigated such things.). We often do not really understand what happens in other disciplines in terms of research, and maybe even less, instruction. We rarely observe classes outside of our own discipline and have only vague conceptions of what type of work students do in those courses: we hear "problem set," "presentation," "lab report," and think we understand, but often have little sense of the specifics.

Second, seemingly disparate fields of knowledge are not, or at least, need not be, as disconnected as we might imagine. It might come as a revelation to some of our colleagues around campus that humanistic scholarship is not a long-form

version of an American high school "personal response" essay. Rather, by directly interacting on academic matters, we can see ourselves in each other: that all of us work with systems of knowledge, systems of signs and symbols, attempt to bridge concrete observations and theoretical propositions, and so on. We could think of ourselves as different but overlapping rather than as opposing camps (in the American system, literally "divisions").

Seemingly disparate fields of knowledge are not, or at least, need not be, as disconnected as we might imagine.

This point has been raised from within the quantitative sciences as well, including, recently, in the book *Feminism in the Wild: How Human Biases Shape Our Understanding of Animal Behavior* by Melina Packer and Amina Kamath, published in 2025. The thesis of the book is, in essence, that although science claims objectivity and rationality, it unavoidably bears the imprint of the society in which it is created. Insofar as a great deal of science has been created in societies that are racist, misogynistic, homophobic, imperialist, and capitalist, scientific perspectives (here we must admit that this applies to all fields of knowledge, our own included) reflect those biases, leading to a distorted view. Society always leaves its indelible mark, and the authors provide ample examples of how zoology, even in the twenty-first century, continues to apply Victorian-era gender norms to animal life, how eugenics continues to influence how scientists understand natural selection, how social Darwinism has been reflected back onto other animals. In order to overcome these applications of human thought and behavioral systems in zoology – whether by design or not – the authors argue for the incorporation of

humanistic and social critical theory into the quantitative sciences. This also means greater attention to such "literary" issues as rhetoric, narrative, and metaphor in scientific thinking and communication – as many readers of this article know, these choices are never natural or neutral.

Returning to our collaboration, it is perhaps unsurprising that another point of debate concerned the social grounding of knowledge vs. its immanence.

The third lesson is that intellectual disagreement is perhaps inevitable, maybe even guaranteed under conditions of estrangement, but also productive of knowledge and generative of new ideas. One of the most important elements of my collaboration with Niklas was not the project itself, but the conversations we had around the project. There were points that we disagreed on, and did or did not reach consensus, as well as points of agreement. On the level of the everyday, too often dismissed as banal (in my view, a vestige of the social class from which the professoriate has historically originated), we got to understand one another's time commitments, teaching obligations, professional and service labor, and intellectual commitments on a deeper level.

One key issue we debated was about how our project was, or was not, political. For those of us who, like me, view all scholarship, and indeed all knowledge, as inherently political in manifest ways, it is important to recognize that a common view in STEM fields is that knowledge is not only quantifiable, measurable, but also transcendent, and if all of these, then also uncorruptible by political concerns. Working from such a definition, they naturally see humanities and social sciences as "subjectivism" and "opinion." But

history, literature, philosophy, art, and any other human creativity has never taken place in a lab setting under controlled conditions, and it does not follow from this fact that there are not methodologies and ways of knowing them. This is a battle for legitimacy for the humanities and social sciences, and one that I will not describe further because I am sure that it is already in my dear reader's daily experience.

In response to the claim that our research exists outside of the political sphere, I would quip that the only reason for our project to exist was Cold War politics. For us to work on this project, for me, was also a political concern. But rather than proving that intellectual collaboration is possible even when international relations are tense, I saw our project as more fundamentally dissociating individuals who happen to live and work in one country from their respective political entities. How many of us have stressed to students that not every Russian automatically supports the Putin government by the fact of holding a Russian passport? How many of us would resent the same assumption of support on the basis of where we live or work?



The non-linear, oscillating nature of the Belousov-Zhabotinsky Reaction can be observed in real time. Reproduced with permission from Niklas Manz.

Of course, there also were points of agreement. The most exciting example of this for me was a case of multiple discovery: Niklas and I had independently come up with the same essential idea about how to break out of academic siloing. We believe that academic communities would find greater internal solidarity, that we would practice what we preach about expanding the mind with the pursuit of knowledge, that we model and benefit from lifelong learning, if we regularly audited courses from other departments and divisions. In my grandiose version of the idea, certainly impossible until we win major changes in academic labor at large, auditing a course would be counted as faculty workload, akin to the continuing education and professional development that takes place in other fields. In his version of the idea, Niklas proposed a voluntary, unpaid addition to workload.

We conclude our article in *Chaos* with an argument for standardization of linguistic practices, in keeping with the broader practice of standardization as a facility for understanding – after all, no twenty-first century scientist measures in poods or cubits, but grams and meters. We acknowledge that this might still be messy: sometimes we will write zh, but also sometimes ž, and the rationale for one or the other will remain concealed from those lacking the requisite linguistic knowledge. Worse still, those who don't know also might not know what question to ask to get at the answer. Were we to reach a common understanding of knowledge as co-constituted with human experience, we might be better able to handle that messiness.

We also gently suggest that something is lost by the hegemony of English as the *lingua franca* of academic communication. A problem that I sincerely hope scientists will grapple

with (and find funding for) is the tremendous volume of research that was published by Soviet multinational researchers that remains inaccessible to Anglophone researchers because of the language divide. One of the most interesting responses to this project that I have received was from another scientist who discovered that their US federal government-funded project was quite similar in design and objectives to a Soviet project of the 1960-70s. "We've found their papers and can kind of decode their tables," they said, "at least enough to know that we're duplicating their work." Witness also the Western 'discovery' of the biosphere in the early days of its postwar environmental movement, decades after Vladimir Vernadsky had extensively theorized it.

Were we to reach a common understanding of knowledge as co-constituted with human experience, we might be better able to handle that messiness.

In one sense, my story has a sad ending: my time at the institution ended with non-renewal of my contract, as the administration had by then marginalized the Russian program enough to render faculty unneeded. It wouldn't be fair to expect this collaboration alone to save that program, underfunded, understaffed, and unsupported as it was even in its most halcyon days. But were collaborations like ours to spread, or short of that, were we to *talk to our colleagues in other disciplines about what we actually do, and what they actually do, and how we are all related in ways beyond mission statements, committee service, and perfunctory votes at faculty meetings*, higher ed might come closer to the model of the liberal arts in the classic sense that some of us still believe in: that specialization is

well and good, but broad knowledge, the ability to compare perspectives, and access to a range of ways of thinking is a positive for academic researchers, students, and human beings (like college graduates) in general.

We in the humanities and social sciences often like to think of ourselves as in the vanguard of issues like decolonization, amplifying the voices of the dispossessed, and giving due attention to marginalized knowledge traditions. A central feature of many indigenous knowledge systems is the interrelatedness of all with all. If we can genuinely make this insight a part of our practice, not only as educators and researchers, but as academic laborers, then perhaps we can work in concert and solidarity across disciplines.



Zach Rewinski (PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2021) is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian at Colby College. His research interests lie mainly on the intersection of literary culture with social and political history in times of revolutionary upheaval. Himself a product of a diverse liberal arts education (BA, Oberlin College, 2010), Zach advocates for holistic, multi- and interdisciplinary ways of thinking and knowing.

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NEW FROM SLAVICA PUBLISHERS

Evgeny Sergeev. *Illusory Dawn: Paradoxes of Soviet-British Relations in the Post-Locarno Era, 1925–32*, xx + 276 p. (978-089357-541-0), \$35.95.

Like Sergeev's earlier books on the history of Ruso-(Soviet)-British relations, this volume reconstructs key episodes that influenced the dialogue between Moscow and London. *Illusory Dawn* focuses on internal British political dynamics against the background of international developments in the political, economic, and cultural spheres in the years 1925–32, known as the post-Locarno era. The author meticulously surveys important trends in Soviet-British relations in a number of regions, including Europe and Central and East Asia, illuminating the actions of prominent statesmen, diplomats, military commanders, and public figures who contributed to the establish-

ment of bilateral contacts, even if these contacts were interrupted by sporadic conflicts that made illusory the long-awaited dawn.

Eugeniusz Iwaniec. *History of the Russian Old Believers on Polish Lands*, trans. **Bethany Romashov and Jeffrey D. Holdemann**, xxvi + 288 p. (ISBN 978-089357-473-4), \$34.95.

First published in Polish in 1977, this book created a sensation: after a long silence in People's Poland, the resident Old Believers, with their rich cultural and folklore traditions, were being spoken about publicly as a religious society. The present translation opens a significant chapter of history to a wide English-language audience, including Old Believers in the eastern US, the vast majority of whom are descended from ancestors from Polish lands.



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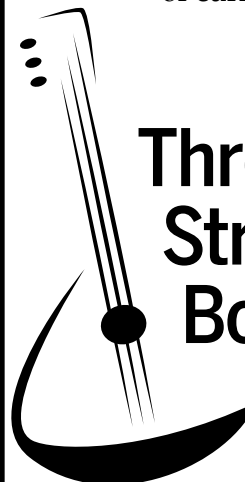
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Three String Books is an imprint of Slavica Publishers devoted to translations of literary works and belles-lettres from Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia and the other successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Julia Nemirovskaya and Anna Krushelnitskaya, eds., *Dislocation: An Anthology of Poetic Response to Russia's War in Ukraine*, xxv + 469 p. (978-089357-524-3), \$44.95.

This collection reflects the developments and effects of the Ukraine War as seen by Russophone poets from all over the world. Divided into thematic clusters, the book delves into the death, despair, displacements, and dislocations brought on by the war, and explores the complexities and conflicts of affiliation with the language and culture of the country ruled by Putin's aggressive and repressive regime. The featured poems were sourced from Kopilka, a repository of current antiwar poetry.



Dobri Voinikov. *The Misunderstood Civilization: A Satirical Play in Five Acts*, trans. **Stoyan Tchaprakov**, xviii + 97 p., 2025 (ISBN 978-089357-536-6), \$19.95.

Recipient of a 2023 PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant. "A caustic satire from 1871, Dobri Voinikov's play *The Misunderstood Civilization* is an indictment of the drive to westernize in the years leading up to Bulgaria's independence from the Ottoman Empire. Hadji Kosta, the protagonist of the play and a wealthy shopkeeper, tries to hold his family together as his wife, daughter, and son are each bewitched by flourishes of European decadence from the play's villain Margaridi... The play's commentary on the contradictions of gender roles, the trappings of tradition, and westernization as blind imitation has since made it a staple in Bulgarian theater and film. Stoyan Tchaprakov's nimble translation captures Voinikov's sharp-tongued mockery and the heteroglossia of the late Ottoman Bulgaria, breathing new life into a work that remains uneasily relevant to the present." — Judge



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Writing Romanian Military History: Perspectives from a SEEES Scholar with a Day Job

By Grant Thomas Harward

In 2025, for Romania's national day on 1 December (remembering the "Great Union" in 1918 when Transylvania followed Bessarabia and Bukovina in joining the Old Kingdom of Romania to create "Greater Romania"), Nicușor Dan, the president of Romania, decided to decorate a 107-year-old veteran of the Second World War, Col. (ret.) Ion Vasile Banu, with the Order of Military Virtue with the rank of Knight in recognition of his role in fighting to "liberate" Bessarabia in 1941 as well as at the Don Bend outside of Stalingrad in 1942. The president praised the "courage, sacrifice, and worthiness" of the veteran—and by implication that of the Romanian Army—during the conflict. This action caused a minor furor in Romania because the atrocities that Romanian troops committed against Jews on the Eastern Front, including this individual's regiment, were airbrushed out of the presidential message. It is no coincidence that much of the Republic of Moldova was carved out of Bessarabia by the USSR, so this message had clear unionist overtones. While some were

outraged that the president would echo wartime "holy war" propaganda, others asked what the big deal was and argued that veterans should be given respect.

This example shows just how large the Second World War still looms in Romania. Indeed, that conflict plays a central role in national identities across Eastern Europe, and the war in Ukraine has seen its history used (and abused) by both sides to buttress their respective war efforts. More widely, military history remains prominent in the public imagination across Eastern Europe. The legacy of a once-militarized Europe, taken to new heights during the Cold War with large armies of conscripts and regular displays of military pomp (in fact, Romania's national day is still celebrated with parades of troops, weapons, and equipment), still shapes current popular sentiments about past martial glory. The fact that the capitalist West and communist East never went to war means that for many countries in Eastern Europe, the Second World War was the



The Romanian military cemetery near Țiganca in the Republic of Moldova. This "cemetery of honor" was restored by the Romanian state in 2005. Similar efforts to refurbish Romanian military cemeteries neglected or destroyed under the communist era continue today.

last major conflict in which they took part. Additionally, the First World War resulted in the expansion, creation, and recreation of many countries in the region. Military history is crucial for understanding Eastern Europe and Eurasia, with regard to both key turning points in wartime but also shifts driven by military rivalry in peacetime. Therefore, both global conflagrations still attract much public fascination as well as state study. Romania emerged victorious from the First World War, having nearly doubled in size, but ended up on the losing side in the Second World War, ceding eastern territories and becoming Sovietized.

Military history is crucial for understanding Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

When I decided as an undergraduate to become a historian, I assumed – rather naïvely in retrospect – that my path would lead to academia. That seemed to be the only option if I wanted to make history a career. It was not until I had already started my master’s degree that I began to understand just how difficult finding a job in academia would be. I was fortunate that my decision to focus on military history led almost naturally to being exposed to other employment options at a time when that was still not yet the norm at many universities. Working on my doctoral degree at an institution with one of the top military history programs in the country meant that I soon was made aware of the large number of “alt-ac” jobs in the U.S. armed forces. Perhaps best known is the Professional Military Education system, which is a miniature academia offering advanced studies to future military leaders. Each uniformed service, however, also boasts an array of history centers, archives, presses, and museums. Former “Aggies” employed by the armed forces visited campus and

explained these job opportunities and my fellow graduate students and I had opportunities for paid internships as historians across the Department of Defense.

In 2018, I obtained a temporary position at the U.S. AMEDD (Army Medical Department) Center of History and Heritage in San Antonio, Texas. This umbrella organization brought together a military medicine history office, the U.S. AMEDD Museum, an archive, and the U.S. AMEDD Regiment (a heritage office responsible for fostering esprit de corps among Army medical personnel). My duties included research projects, conducting oral history interviews with key individuals, compiling an annual report, responding to requests for information from the AMEDD, wider Army, other government agencies, and the public, and more. I also had the opportunity to cross-train in archival and museum practices. In 2022, I secured a permanent position at the U.S. Army Center of Military History in Washington, D.C., where I still work. This organization is the flagship history office for the service, which produces official histories, tracks the lineage and honors of units, oversees museums, and performs other historical duties. My division supports the Army Secretariat and Army Staff in the Pentagon by writing an annual historical summary, carrying out oral histories, producing short office histories, responding to requests for information, and providing other historical products.

For the last eight years, while my day job has been researching and writing U.S. Army history, I have continued to work on the Romanian Army in my free time. ASEES became a critical connection for me to be able to keep pace with wider developments in military history in Eastern Europe. My first goal was to turn my dissertation

into a book. In 2021, Cornell University Press published *Romania’s Holy War: Soldiers, Motivation, and the Holocaust*, which analyzed why Romanian soldiers fought, and committed atrocities, on the Eastern Front. Due to being limited to working in the evenings and on weekends and lacking a summer break to use for research trips, I could not immediately embark upon a major new book project – I still plan on writing a social-political history of the Romanian home front during the Second World War once I build up enough paid time off to be able to visit the archives. In the meantime, I decided to focus on smaller projects, and I was fortunate to have several drop into my lap. Editura Corint (Corinth Publishing) obtained the rights to translate my book into Romanian. While they did the translating, the proof editing proved to require more of my time than I expected, but the Romanian edition was published in 2024 to much success. Meanwhile, Osprey Publishing contacted me about writing one of their short, illustrated volumes about the fighting in Romania in 1944, which also came out in 2024. I also wrote journal articles, contributed to edited volumes, and wrote pieces for popular magazines. I now have pieces published in English (of course), French, Romanian, and Spanish. Additionally, for the last four years, I have been the co-convenor of the Holocaust and the Second World War Working Group of the Society for Romanian Studies that uses internet virtual conferencing to regularly bring together researchers from the United States, Europe, and Israel.

Finding the time outside of my nine-to-five job to work on my personal projects has become more difficult. The shift to teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic was a boon because I did not have to spend hours

commuting to and from work each day – but now I am back in the office full time. Public transit has allowed me to fit in some work on the go. My wife and I have two lovely children, one of whom has autism, and they keep us both busy. Whenever I agree to a new project, I set an expectation for myself to work an hour or two each evening during the work week. Currently, my children are old enough to sleep through the night but young enough to have a relatively early bedtime, so that helps to give me a period of alone time to work. In between projects, I prioritize setting aside time to read in my field, books in Romanian if possible – to help keep up my language skills. My membership in ASEES has helped me enormously in keeping up to date with developments in Romanian studies. I am privileged to live in the Washington, DC, area which also provides me opportunities to take part in events organized by the Romanian or Moldovan embassies and connect with visiting scholars. I try to take full advantage of the increasing number of virtual events on military history and Holocaust studies organized by various organizations.

In addition to writing, I have prioritized social media and other public outreach. While social media can often feel like shouting into the void or an endless battle with trolls, it has also allowed me to develop new relationships with others doing Romanian history as well as other fields across Eastern Europe. My social media presence was also the way that I was contacted by content creators looking for guests for podcasts and live streams. Perhaps, in part, to make up for not having a classroom, I have found it gratifying to have an opportunity to share my research with the wider public. Currently, the public demand for history is great. Moreover, military history has always been popular. Therefore, I have had a lot of chances to speak about the Romanian

Army as well as the Holocaust in Romania. The subject of my research also has made me feel an obligation to share it as widely as possible – especially as public debates about the Second World War in Romania still occur consistently.

Unexpectedly, I have had steady opportunities to use my expertise in the Romanian Army and the Eastern Front since I began working for the U.S. Army. Following the end of major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military shifted its focus from counterinsurgency against guerillas or terrorists to large-scale combat operations against a near-peer rival. The Russian occupation of Crimea and Donbas in 2014 resulted in a strengthening of U.S. forces along NATO's eastern border. There was a renewed demand for knowledge about the region. For example, I lectured about the Stalingrad campaign to officers attending a course at the U.S. Army's school for medical personnel. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 only increased the requests for information about the Nazi-Soviet war. I found

myself regularly providing support for "staff rides" being organized by American units deploying for a rotation in the Baltic states, Poland, and Romania. These exercises are historical studies of a battle or campaign that focus on terrain, tactics, command decisions, and other issues. This approach highlights unchanging and timeless realities of making war that repeatedly shaped the history of Eastern Europe. The military is keen to learn the lessons of the past to apply in the future.

“War and Society,” an approach examining war through wider social, cultural, and economic perspectives, is only starting to become more common in Romania.

My experience as a U.S. Army historian has also given me some wider insights into institutional military culture that informs my understanding of the state of military history in Romania. Militaries tend to be very utilitarian in their approach to history, whether using it as a



The Holocaust memorial in Bălți in the Republic of Moldova. Opened in 1998. Romanian and German soldiers massacred many Jews after seizing the city with the survivors later being deported farther east.

pedagogical tool, compiling “lessons learned” to revise doctrine, training, practices, etc., or preserving heritage to inspire soldiers. Also, as with any institution there is also a tendency toward group think and navel gazing when it comes to its own history. This seems even more pronounced in the case of the Romanian Army, which remains dominated by traditional military history – frontline combat, operations, strategy, and technology. “War and Society,” an approach examining war through wider social, cultural, and economic perspectives that has become part of mainstream military history in the United States (even in military circles), is only starting to become more common in Romania. There is immense value in this more multifaceted approach to delving into the crucible of war and its wider repercussions. Yet, Romanian military history remains dominated by historians in the Romanian armed forces. Only a few years ago during a public discussion Petru Otu, one of the most prolific and respected military historians in the country, felt it necessary to emphasize that one didn’t need to have “rank on the shoulder” to write military history – although he himself is a retired officer. An artificial division between military history and Holocaust history, still common the world over, only adds to the myopia of many Romanian military

historians of the Second World War.

This state of affairs helps to explain how the current Romanian president, advised by the Romanian ministry of defense, could decide to recognize a veteran whose regiment was implicated in the Iași pogrom and other atrocities targeting Jews eighty-five years ago. Romanian military history focuses on the fighting on the front, emphasizing bravery and sacrifice, a focus that conveniently overlooks what was going on in the rear, including not just the Holocaust but also brutal antipartisan warfare. The ongoing war in Ukraine, along with the rise in anti-Russian sentiments, further encourages a whitewashed depiction of the war against Soviet Russia to rally support for Ukraine. In fact, similar rhetoric is being increasingly used in the Republic of Moldova. While Soviet military cemeteries become neglected, Romanian military cemeteries are refurbished, and crosses are raised to the Romanian fallen in cities with monuments to Jewish victims. I am sure that the situation in Romania is familiar to ASEEEES members. The world wars of the twentieth century continue to loom over Eastern Europe. Hopefully, new research, new approaches can correct mistaken views of those conflicts and change how they are remembered today.



Grant T. Harward completed his BA in history at Brigham Young University in 2009, his MSc in the Second World War in Europe at the University of Edinburgh in 2010, and his PhD in history at Texas A&M University in 2018. He is a former Auschwitz Jewish Center fellow, a former Fulbright scholar to Romania, and a former Mandel Center fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. He was a historian for the U.S. Army Medical Department Center of History and Heritage from 2018 to 2021. He now works as a historian for the U.S. Army Center of Military History. His research outside of work focuses on the Romanian Army in the Second World War using the lens of War and Society or social-military history. Cornell University Press published his book, *Romania’s Holy War: Soldiers, Motivation, and the Holocaust* in 2021, which won ASEEEES’s Barbara Jelavich Book Prize in 2022. Editura Corint finished a Romanian translation of this work in 2024. Osprey published his volume *Romania 1944: The Turning of Arms against Nazi Germany* in its Campaign Series also in 2024. He is a co-convenor of the Society for Romanian Studies’ Holocaust and the Second World War Working Group.

Disclaimer: These are the views and opinions of the author and do not represent the official position of the U.S. Army, U.S. Department of Defense, or U.S. Government.

2026 Next Generation Fellows

ASEEES congratulates the 2026 Next Generation Dissertation Fellows. We thank the generous donors to the ASEEES Next Generation Emergency Research Fund for supporting this program.



**Zhanara
Almazbekova**
Georgetown University

“Coercive Modernization: Women’s Liberation in Soviet Central Asia (1917-1956)”

How did local women respond to the Soviet revolutionary call in Central Asia after 1917? Some, like Shairbubu Tezikbaeva and Zuurakan Kaynazarova, enthusiastically joined the socialist cause, both becoming one of the first female Kyrgyz deputies in the USSR Supreme Soviet in 1939. Their transformation from illiterate farmworkers into educated political leaders embodied the ambitions of the Bolshevik state but, above all, exemplified the ongoing Soviet emancipation project aimed at overturning women’s oppression. My dissertation examines this emancipatory program's ideological foundations and practical outcomes in Central Asia through a focused case study of Soviet Kyrgyzstan between 1917 and 1956. Centering on local women-activists, it analyzes their encounters with, and responses to, Bolshevik initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality. In particular, the project investigates women’s roles in two key arenas of Soviet emancipation: literacy campaigns and legal reforms targeting traditional marriage practices. By foregrounding local, principally women-actors, my thesis explores not only the lived experiences of the Bolshevik pursuit of a socialist utopia but also the broader intersections of gender with state-building, national identity formation, and modernization in Soviet Central Asia.



Ivan Cherniakov
University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign

Anne D. Rassweiler Dissertation Research Fellow

“‘State Farms in Construction:’ Photography and the Making of the Soviet Agricultural Landscape”

My dissertation focuses on the pictorial genre of agricultural landscape as constructed by photographers in the Soviet Union during collectivization in the 1930s. I aim to understand how the Soviet agricultural landscape generated novel representational devices, progressive and affirmative, yet also complicit in obscuring famine, environmental degradation, economic dependency, and poverty. In my project, I examine photographic representations from archival sources and the illustrated press, with particular focus on the magazine *Na Stroyke MTS i Sovkhozov* (State Farms and Machine Tractor Stations in Construction) (1934-37). By far the most spectacular print venue devoted to collectivization, State Farms developed proposals for ways of conceiving the relationships between land and labor by featuring stories about collectivization across numerous Soviet republics, including Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Using the genre of landscape as my main analytical framework, I ask how a focus on visual materials can contribute to understandings of collectivization’s outcomes in different territorial, national, and ethnic contexts. I explore how landscape representations served to refashion land use and national and class identities of recently “decolonized” subjects of the Russian Empire, at the same time as the Soviet economy became increasingly reliant on their resources and labor.



**Genevieve
Dally-Watkins**
Harvard University

“Bordered Bodies & Borderless Dose: Radioactivity, Ecology, and Empire from the Soviet Century to Today”

My dissertation reveals how radioactivity reshaped modern science and empire by bringing together the Ore Mountains of Central Europe and the Fergana Valley of Central Asia. The dissertation is organised into three chronological sections. The first traces how radioactive ores from both regions underpinned Marie Curie’s radiological research and Vladimir Vernadsky’s geochemical theories, establishing transnational scientific networks. I then examine how radioactive expertise became a strategic military investment in the Cold War. I focus on Wismut (a Soviet–GDR enterprise that became a primary source of uranium for the atomic project) and compare it to uranium towns in the Fergana Valley. My analysis demonstrates how protection was unevenly distributed within the Soviet atomic system: intensive monitoring and occupational medicine were concentrated at Wismut, while weaker medical infrastructures existed in Central Asia. I conclude by following Wismut’s transformation after 1990 from an extraction enterprise to a remediation agency and its work in the Fergana Valley since 2010. This section reveals how Cold War expertise was repurposed to address radioactive legacies. This dissertation analyses uranium extraction as a site of scientific practice, medical governance, and imperial differentiation, revealing how the same ore produced both new forms of knowledge and lasting, unevenly distributed harm.



Alexey Kotelvas
University of Florida

“Divided Nations: Politics of Identity in Romanian-Moldovan Tourism and Cultural Diplomacy (1964-1991)”

"Divided Nations" examines the history of Romanian-Moldovan tourism and cultural diplomacy (1965-1991). Despite being socialist states, the USSR and Romania maintained a complex and often contentious relationship from the 1960s onward. In the case of the Moldovan SSR, this tension was particularly pronounced due to historical territorial disputes and the military conflict of World War II. While sharing very similar cultures, the emphasis on their differences became politically significant. For example, Soviet Moldova adopted the Cyrillic alphabet to write Romanian, officially referring to the language as “Moldovan.” The Moldovan case is particularly noteworthy due to the separation of two languages, a phenomenon that is rare in world history. This research explores how identity politics were enacted through tourism and cultural diplomacy practices. The limited and carefully curated Romanian-Moldovan encounters appear to have been designed not to bring the two nations closer, but to encourage them to disregard their shared history. Alongside earlier studies on Ukraine-Poland, Azerbaijan-Turkey, and Karelia-Finland, this research contributes to the development of new generalizations about Soviet diplomatic strategies in border regions. The project also sheds light on the ideological compromises made by communist Romania in balancing between the two superpowers.

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Ilya Slavutskiy

Rutgers, The State
University of New Jersey

“Road Not Taken: Ukrainian Soviet Power and the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries, 1917”

This dissertation, set in Ukraine during the revolutionary events of 1917, focuses on the Ukrainian Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries (UPSR), the largest political party in 1917 Ukraine, and the soviets of workers’, soldiers’, and peasants’ deputies. The soviets were deliberative councils and acted as sites of contention over power in 1917. The UPSR, by virtue of its size and ubiquitous involvement in the activity of the soviets, posed the biggest obstacle to Bolshevik aspirations for power in revolutionary Ukraine. The notion of “soviet power” - the idea that these bodies should wield state authority - was a famous rallying cry, almost entirely associated with the Bolsheviks. But the UPSR also had a plan for a form of soviet power by late 1917. Soviets were a symbol of the revolution that was molded into the service of the Bolshevik party and its nascent state, Soviet Russia, which was itself, not incidentally, also named after these bodies. But the world of the soviets in 1917 Ukraine was far from Bolshevik-controlled.



**Konstantinos
Zivas** Yale University

“Empire by Credit: Imperial Russia and the Politics of Debt in the Territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1793-1863)”

“Empire by Credit” reconstructs how, over the decades following the Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, 1795), the Russian Empire established a pervasive form of economic governance over the wealthiest and most powerful Polish-Lithuanian noble families by assuming the role of creditor, arbiter, and guarantor of their vast private debts. In 1793, amid financial collapse, several magnates defaulted on their payments, and Empress Catherine II and her successors intervened, promising to compensate domestic and international creditors. Seeking to consolidate Polish-Lithuanian nobles’ allegiance to the empire, the Russian state began servicing the debts of prominent families such as the Radziwiłł, Potocki, and Lubomirski, and established debt commissions to adjudicate several hundred legal claims against them. In exchange, state officials extracted assets in the form of cash, land, people, and privately-owned towns. Polish-Lithuanian nobles faced payment deadlines, negotiated debt restructuring, and navigated a new legal framework regulating loans issued by state banking institutions. Until the radical transformation of the legal and political order following the January Uprising of 1863, this form of governance expanded imperial jurisdiction over land and people and accelerated the transfer of property from the Polish-Lithuanian nobility to the Russian imperial state.

2026 Cohen-Tucker Dissertation Research Fellows



**Daniil
Kabotyanski**
Indiana University

Cohen-Tucker Dissertation Research Fellowship for Women's and Gender Studies Recipient

“Between the Manchu Bogd Khan and the Great White Tsar: Empire, Slavery, and Society on the 18th-19th Century Eurasian Steppe”

During the 18th and early 19th centuries, nomadic polities across the Eurasian steppe came under the control of the sedentary Qing and Romanov empires. Though this is usually ascribed to superior technology and modern social organization, the role of nomadic elites in this process is usually neglected. My dissertation analyzes Kazakh responses to Russian and Manchu imperialism, including attempts by Kazakh khans to consolidate their authority using imperial benefits. However, I reveal the effects of imperial expansion beyond the lives of male elites by shifting readers' focus to the steppe's most vulnerable inhabitants: enslaved women. I chronicle a forgotten trade in Oirat (Kalmyk and Zunghar) captives between Russia and the Kazakh steppe that was made possible by the Qing conquest of Zungharia and the Russian colonization of Kalmykia. My dissertation tells a story of mobility, connectivity, and exchange on the 18th and 19th century steppe through the eyes of enslaved Oirat women who maneuvered between different social statuses, economic systems, and religions (Tibetan Buddhism, Sunni Islam, and Orthodox Christianity). I also analyze the economic and demographic changes in Kazakh and Russian society resulting from the trade in Oirat captives and the important political role of enslaved Oirats in Kazakh society.



Yee Rem Kim
University of California,
Los Angeles

“Visions of Belonging: Korean Public Culture in the Soviet Union, 1920s-1950s”

My dissertation examines the development and expansion of Soviet Korean diasporic networks across the Soviet Union from the 1920s through the mid-1950s, challenging the predominant focus on Stalin's deportation of Koreans from the Russian Far East to Central Asia in 1937 as the defining moment of Soviet Korean history. Soviet Koreans were not merely victims of Stalin's ethnic cleansing, relegated to the sidelines. Through institutions such as the community organization Koryŏinhoe, Korean kolkhozes, theater, and newspapers, Soviet Koreans created their own public culture and expanded their networks, which continued to serve their interests even after the deportation. By investigating these institutions together for the first time, I demonstrate how Soviet Koreans strategically navigated official structures while renegotiating their relationship to Soviet socialism, Korean nationalism, and anti-colonial struggle. Drawing on extensive archival materials from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Russia, and South Korea, my dissertation shows how Soviet Koreans harnessed the political, social, and cultural forms sanctioned by the Soviet state to advance their interests across Eurasia.



Hayate Murayama

University of California,
Santa Barbara

“Inscribed Memories: Japanese POWs and the Afterlives of Forced Labor in Post Soviet Central Asia”

My dissertation recuperates the history of Japanese prisoners of war (POWs) in Central Asia by showing how their labor shaped local memories on multiple scales. After WWII, nearly 600,000 Japanese POWs were sent to gulags across the Soviet Union, with approximately 100,000 sent to Central Asia. Their histories have largely been forgotten, yet physical buildings, urban sites, and other material infrastructures still bear the imprints of their labor. By focusing on everyday encounters through labor, care, exchange, and commemoration, my dissertation investigates how interpersonal relationships complicate state-centered narratives of Soviet forced labor and violence. Rather than treating Japanese POWs solely as victims of Stalinist repression, I examine how local residents remember them as neighbors, workers, and, at times, objects of sympathy and care, and how these memories emerge from lived encounters that challenge state-centered narratives of Soviet violence. Part I situates Japanese POW labor within Stalinist labor regimes, analyzing their roles in postwar construction projects and their interactions with local communities, many of whom also endured Soviet repression. Part II explores how these experiences are remembered in the post-Soviet era, focusing on material remnants as sites of memory that mediate local interpretations of the Soviet past.

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SCHOLAR STORY

Dr. Hrachak
UKRAINE

Dr. Tetiana Hrachak is a historian with over 20 years of experience whose work examines the intersections of politics, culture, and memory. Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, her scholarship and outspoken pro-Ukrainian stance placed her at significant risk under Russian occupation. To ensure her safety and continue her work, she made the difficult decision to leave Ukraine. In August 2023, she worked with SAR to secure a position at Syracuse University, where she taught Ukrainian history and remains a tireless advocate for Ukraine through her writing and public speaking.



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An Interview with 2025 Wayne S. Vucinich Book Prize Winner Masha Salazkina

Romancing Yesenia: How a Mexican Melodrama Shaped Global Popular Culture (University of California Press, 2024)

ASEEES thanks Douglas Rogers (Yale University) for chairing the prize committee and formulating the interview questions.

What drew you to this topic?

Over the years, I came across many books on the history of Soviet cinema that mentioned a curious fact—that the highest grossing movie in the history of Soviet film exhibition was a 1970s Mexican melodrama. I had never seen the movie myself—either as a child growing up in the Soviet Union, or later, as a student of cinema in Mexico. But because my first book was on Eisenstein in Mexico, I have been asked about it over the years. But, of course, my prior work on Mexico—which was, after all, on the postrevolutionary avant-garde cultures of the 1920s and 1930s—had not in any way prepared me to answer that question. To most people it just seemed a strange thing that a socialist country—one that produced so many important films—would be crazy about a Mexican melodrama that most people had never heard of.

Then a few years ago, the film website MUBI contacted me about a podcast on movies with weird international exhibition histories, including ones that were inexplicably more popular abroad than in their home countries, and they wanted to talk to me about *Yesenia*. I decided that this was my chance to get to the bottom of the story.

Why do you think that scholars overlooked the popularity of *Yesenia* for so long?

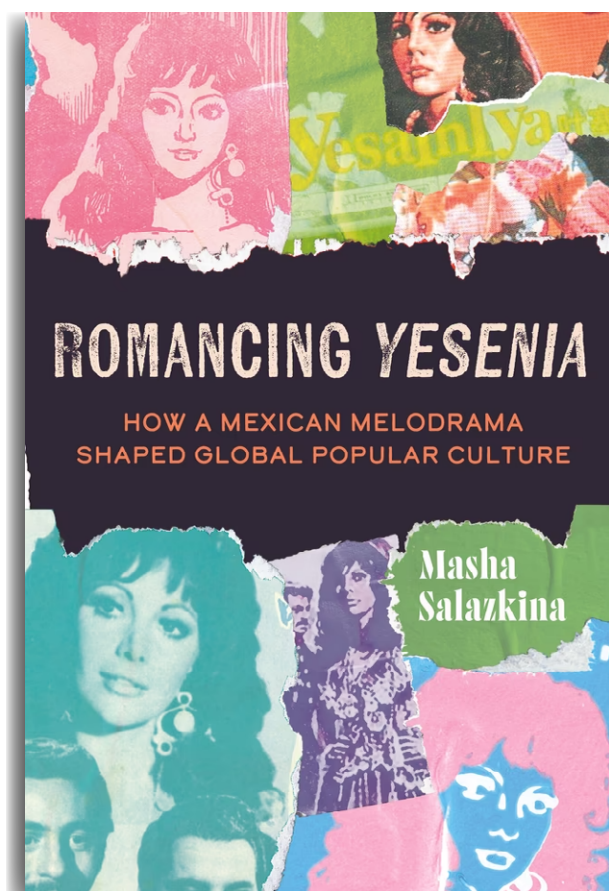
There is of course the pragmatic reason—which is that because it is a topic that involves popular culture of the Soviet Union and Mexico, to engage with the question of this film's popularity, you would need to know a lot about both. Even if one were to take just the reception (i.e. Soviet) side of this story, because *Yesenia* is a minor movie (and a remake of a soap opera

that was itself a version of a comic book series), not part of the world cultural heritage, so to speak—it's not Frida Kahlo or *One Hundred Years of Solitude*—it's not easy to know what to make of it unless you know the Mexican context and have access to those materials, which are not that easily available.

But, of course, there is also the issue of the cultural and academic value of doing work on something that the majority of academics consider to be, simply, trash. In fact, as so much of the book ended up being about the formation of taste culture and the Soviet intelligentsia's disdain toward popular culture, and especially popular culture from what we now call the Global South, it was fairly obvious to me that this attitude is not all that different from that of most of our contemporary academics.

Why is melodrama an important topic for you? What kinds of insights does attention to it enable?

I was not initially interested in melodrama per se—this focus emerged only as I looked into the reception of the film in the Soviet press in the 1970s. I was genuinely amazed by what a moral panic its success triggered—and, at the same time, how ardently audiences defended it against the critics' attacks. "Melodrama" was the term that seemed to crystalize this opposition at that moment—as a genre or mode that was simultaneously not supposed to be part of the socialist aesthetic repertoire, but was, in fact, extremely prevalent and powerful. And, as everywhere in the world, it was also a term that was very gendered, associated with femininity, thus foregrounding many of the dynamics within Soviet sexual politics, which is a topic that has always interested me.



How have concepts such as “popular” or “melodrama” themselves have been understood and explored differently in these different contexts?

And as much as my book is really a history of the global 1970s, there are so many issues in this story that still resonate today: our false assumptions about what could and could not be popular in any given place; the rift between the scholars of cinema and the regular viewers over what touches them; or what is considered “progressive” or “backwards” politically at any given moment.

How do you see this book making contributions beyond the ASEES region, for instance to the study of “global popular culture”?

One of the objectives in writing this book for me was to show that the media world was much more interconnected before globalization than we tend to assume. Even more importantly, I wanted to challenge many assumptions that are still held

within the Anglophone scholarship: whether it’s about the primacy of American or “Western” media within popular culture around the world, or about the dominance of auteur or art films as the main form of transnational or “world cinema.”

But also, to make the point that in order to study global popular culture, it is crucial to engage not only with its regional and local manifestations, but also with the way that the concepts such as “popular” or “melodrama” themselves have been understood and explored differently in these different contexts. In moments of transnational exchange, these different notions also come into interaction, challenging us to theorize their relationship rather than just apply the familiar, dominant conceptual apparatus we’ve all learned. This for me is the methodological intervention of this book, to continue expanding our theoretical references and citational politics.

What are you working on now?

I continue working in two directions at the same time: one, continuing the strand which is very visible in my previous book, *World Socialist Cinema* (which won the ASEES USC Book Prize in 2024), has to do with leftist political cinema around the world and its contemporary legacies. I have two co-edited volumes on cinemas of global solidarity coming out later this year (one with OUP, the other with meson press), as well as a guest-edited issue of *Feminist Media Histories* on developmentalism, gender, and media; and I am currently working as part of a collaborative project restoring the legacy of the Spanish-born, Soviet-educated Cuban filmmaker Rosina Prado.

And the other strand continues my engagement with popular culture: I

am finishing a co-authored book on the global circulation of the German-Caribbean disco group Boney M (which, as most ASEES members probably remember, was enormously popular all over the socialist bloc in the 1970s-1980s—but also beyond), and starting to work on a new book which picks up exactly where *Yesenia* leaves off, with the arrival of Latin American soap operas on (post) socialist screens in the 1980s and 1990s.



Masha Salazkina is Professor of Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University, Montreal. She is the author of *In Excess: Sergei Eisenstein’s Mexico* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), *World Socialist Cinema: Alliances, Affinities and Solidarities in the Global Cold War* (University of California Press, 2023) and *Romancing Yesenia: How a Mexican Melodrama Shaped Global Popular Culture* (University of California Press, 2024), and co-editor of *Sound Speech Music in Russian and Soviet Cinema* (Indiana University Press, 2015), *Global Approaches to Amateur Film Histories and Cultures* (Indiana University Press, 2021), and *Teaching Migration in Literature, Film, and Media* (2025). Her two new edited volumes, *Cinemas of Global Solidarity* (Oxford University Press) and *Global Solidarity and/in Cinematic Practices. Conversations* (meson press) are forthcoming in 2026.

ASEEES First Book Subvention Program

The ASEEES [First Book Subvention Program](#) awards up to **\$2500** for subvention of books by first-time authors.

Deadline: September 1, 2026

Call for Submissions

Beth Holmgren Graduate Student Essay Prize

The [Beth Holmgren Graduate Student Essay Prize](#), established in 1990 and named in honor of Professor Holmgren in 2021, is awarded for an outstanding essay by a graduate student in Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.

Deadline: June 15, 2026

SLAVIC REVIEW

[Slavic Review 85.1 Spring Issue](#)
in this issue

**CLUSTER: DISABILITY IN EASTERN EUROPE
AND RUSSIA**

“Constructing and Deconstructing Disability in
Eastern Europe and Russia”
by Maria Cristina Galmarini And Maria Bucur

“Deafness in the Interwar Romanian Press: From
‘Abnormal’ Children to Celebrated Soccer Stars”
by Maria Bucur

“Contested Normalities: Concepts of Autism in
Socialist Bulgaria”
by Gergana Mircheva

“The Invalid Fund: Disabled Afghan War Veterans,
Violence, and Organized Crime in Post-Soviet
Russia”
by Emily Hoge

ARTICLES

“Returning ‘Our Royal Animal’ to its ‘Fatherland’:
The Near-extinction and Restoration of Bison in
Poland after World War I”
by Nathaniel D. Wood

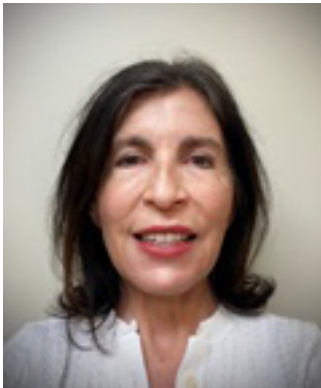
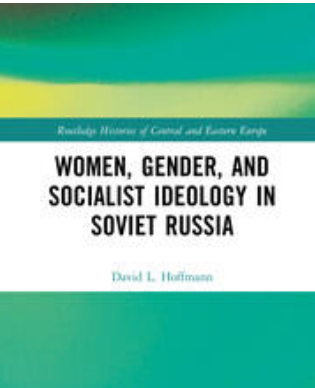
“The Lviv Pogrom as an Epistemic Event: Violence,
Denial, and Knowledge in Postimperial Poland”
by Jagoda Wierzejska

“The Barber-Surgeon and the Schismatic: Reframing
an Icon of Russian Modernity”
by Ernest A. Zitser

“The Rise of Ruscism/Russism: Pro-War
Contemporary Art in Russia and Its Genealogy”
by Nikolay Smirnov

BOOK FORUM: Crucibles of Power

Member News



David L. Hoffmann published [*Women, Gender, and Socialist Ideology in Soviet Russia*](#) with Routledge.

David L. Hoffmann was recently awarded the Ohio State University Distinguished Scholar Award, one of the university's highest honors.

Kyrill M. Kunakhovich and **Michael Lavery** were named 2026 ACLS Fellows.

Jovana Lazic, Dragana Prvulovic, Ewa Siwak, and Oana Adelina Stefan were selected to participate in the 2026 ACLS Summer Institute for the Study of East Central and Southeastern Europe.

Yevhenii Monastyrskyi was awarded a 2026 Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Innovation Fellowship.

Anatoly Pinsky received a two-year research grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation.



Call for Applications: REEES Undergraduate Think Tank

The REEES Undergraduate Think Tank is a national program based at The Ohio State University and Howard University and sponsored in part by ThinkREEES.org.

Now in its seventh year, the REEES Undergraduate Think Tank offers students an opportunity to:

- Create a research project with faculty mentor support
- Participate in the University of Illinois Virtual Summer Research Laboratory
- Present at a professional conference. Opportunities include:
 - The Midwest Slavic Association Conference at The Ohio State University
 - The Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) Conference in Chicago
 - The Southern Conference on Slavic Studies
- Develop AI-literacy through a curated workshop series
- Learn digital humanities skills
- Publish a digital research project on our website

The program runs from June 2026 - April 2027. Student Fellows meet regularly over Zoom on Fridays.

Applications are due June 5, 2026.

Learn more about the program at: <https://www.reeesthinktank.com/>

