The Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center awarded the competitive Fisher Fellowship, now in its second year, to a participant of the Summer Research Lab (SRL). The fellowship, named after Dr. Ralph Fisher, the founder of SRL and REEEC, and a champion for building the Slavic collection at the University of Illinois Library, provides full domestic travel support, a housing grant, and an honorarium to a scholar with a particularly promising research project. This year’s Fisher Fellow was Pey-Yi Chu, Assistant Professor of History at Pomona College in Claremont, California.

While at SRL, Prof. Chu will work on research and writing for her book manuscript *Permafrost Country: Science and Environment in Eastern Siberia, 1830s-1950s*, which is about the history of frozen earth research and its connections to economic development in eastern Siberia. She will use the University of Illinois’ vast Slavic collections and the help of the Slavic Reference Service staff to “fill those gaps” in her knowledge and in the source base for her project. Additionally, Prof. Chu will concentrate on developing a more systematic and comprehensive picture of economic practices and environmental change in the Lena River valley before 1917. She will also track down published material (older books, scientific articles, conference reports) about frozen earth research and permafrost science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After SRL, Prof. Chu will begin synthesizing the material and move forward with writing one of her book’s chapters, as well as finishing an article on mapping permafrost.

Prof. Chu learned about SRL a few years ago and had it in the back of her mind as a program she wanted to take advantage of at some point. More recently, she spoke with a colleague who had previously participated in SRL. He praised the reference services, library resources, and peaceful atmosphere in Champaign-Urbana, which encouraged her to apply. Since Pomona College does not have a large research library, she was looking for a place over the summer that could be a “one-stop shop” in terms of the scale of its Slavic collection and the availability of library experts who can help her obtain sources. SRL has turned out to be “exactly” what she was looking for. Moreover, she was “surprised, delighted, and honored” to receive the Fisher Fellowship.

The application for the 2015 Fisher Fellowship will open in January 2015. Doctoral candidates at the dissertation stage of their research and post-doctoral scholars in any discipline with a focus on Russia, Eastern Europe, or Eurasia are encouraged to apply.

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