REEEC Associate Joe Lenkart Wins Prestigious Academic Professional’s Award

REEEC congratulates Joe Lenkart on winning the Outstanding Academic Professional’s Award for the University of Illinois Library System. Mr. Lenkart holds an MA in Russian and East European Studies and an MS in Library and Information Science. He has been Research Associate and Reference Specialist at the Slavic Reference Service (SRS) since 2009. From the four Slavic research librarians, Lenkart is the only full-time staff member at SRS, where he assists numerous students, faculty, and other scholars with research queries day-to-day. Above all, he admits that it is a particular “joy to work with students, a motivation for all the staff” at SRS.

Mr. Lenkart was one of ten award recipients among hundreds of staff working in the approximately 20 libraries at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. After being nominated by Mara Thacker of the International and Area Studies Library and SRS interim manager Kit Condill, Lenkart received his award this August at a ceremony for library faculty and academic professionals. Though this distinction earned him a monetary prize, Lenkart emphasized that what gave him the most happiness and pride was the recognition SRS received. According to Lenkart, SRS handled over 2,600 questions in July 1, 2012 – May 30, 2013. “We take on a lot of work for faculty and students, not only on campus, but from all over” and “SRS needs all the support we can get,” he added. With the incredible amount of resources available online, SRS expands its reach worldwide. “No one has as large and generous a collection as us,” Joe observed. “We're one of the few places with lengthy inter-library loan periods.” Receiving the award was a real help to SRS, both within the library and within the University at large. For forty years, SRS has been “reliable, efficient, and reassuring,” prioritizing its many patrons and their needs. Lenkart hopes that the greater recognition will lead to more demand for SRS. “The more questions, the better,” he underscored. Lenkart acknowledged the tremendous support from University faculty, particularly those affiliated with REEEC. Always humble, he stressed that he is indebted to the other staff members at SRS. “We've always been a team. Day in and day out, we're a team,” he added.

Joe has worked with REEEC’s Summer Research Laboratory (SRL), which celebrated its 40th anniversary this summer. The group of researchers that came was the largest ever. Joe noted that they were surprised by the small size of the SRS staff, expecting a much larger organization befitting the stellar reputation and intensive query load of the service. He hopes that the increased visibility and recognition of SRS will contribute to more support from the University.