Letter from the New Director

It was a pleasure to see so many of you at the REEEC Fall Reception on September 6, and I look forward to getting to know many more of you in the broader REEEC community and working with you in the years ahead. Prior to the reception we inaugurated the Fall semester with a New Directions lecture by our own Diane Koenker of the Department of History on “Vacations, Tourism, and Socialist Consumption in the Post-Stalin USSR.” The successful combination of entertaining and insightful intellectual nourishment with a tasty dessert reception is characteristic of the attention of the outgoing REEEC Director, Richard Tempest, to the mind, as well as the body. I take the wheel at REEEC, of a ship that is riding high and moving under, full steam ahead. At the fall reception we thanked Richard for his hard work and his leading role in the significant accomplishments of REEEC over the past five years. Under his capable stewardship, REEEC was able to assist in securing a number of affiliated faculty positions in several disciplines, most recently in Slavic, Anthropology, and Sociology. Significantly, Richard was able to help bring to fruition, years of discussion with donors to realize their desire to help Ukrainian Studies find an institutional foothold here. Finally, in a period when Federal funding priorities have been volatile, and when the volume of new reporting requirements has expanded exponentially, Richard has led the efforts of a very accomplished staff. With your assistance as well, he has enabled REEEC to outperform its peer institutions in the competition for Federal Title VI and Title VIII grant funds. Donations from the REEEC community allowed us to present Richard with a gift as a token of our appreciation: a Russian first edition of Solzhenitsyn’s novel In the First Circle. There have been a few other transitions at REEEC or in positions close to REEEC over the summer. Most of you have probably heard that Helen Sullivan left her long-term position at the Slavic Reference Service this summer for another position in the library. Many have expressed a desire to recognize Helen and thank her appropriately for the impact her work has had on their scholarship, and the research and scholarship of so many others over the years. REEEC is working with the Slavic librarians to prepare an appropriate recognition and way of thanking her. Please watch this newsletter for your opportunity to be involved if you are interested. REEEC is also working closely with Steven Witt, the Head of the International and Area Studies Library, to pursue the hiring of a new manager of the Reference Service that will ensure the continuity of this critical institution. Some of you also will have noticed that Melissa Agee is no longer sitting at the front desk when you come to REEEC. She moved, in August, to Texas. We are pleased to have the unfortunately temporary, but very capable help of Barbara Unangst for now and will be hiring a new Office Associate before too long. Jennifer Bylsma is also providing additional, essential help in the office for the interim period. We will highlight the new faculty who have joined the university and REEEC in our newsletters over the coming
months.
As I write, the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures is gearing up for a weeklong visit by Alexander Etkind, a Professor at King’s College, University of Cambridge, and principal investigator of the interdisciplinary Memory at War project (see: www.memoryatwar.org). His visit will include multiple lectures and class visits, including a New Directions talk for REEEC on Thursday, the 20th of September. I encourage members of the REEEC community to take advantage of the multiple opportunities that will be available to interact with this leading scholar.

Just one week later, REEEC will welcome our first Distinguished Lecturer, Lidia Grafova, Chairwoman of the Forum of Migration Organizations, for a talk on “Migration and Human Rights in the Russian Federation.” A rich schedule of speakers and conferences will fill the REEEC calendar this year, as always, and we invite your suggestions for speakers via our newly revised web form https://illinois.edu/fb/sec/1154025. The revised form, which should be less of a hurdle to complete, is a part of our efforts to make our communications with you easier and better, as the new look of this monthly email newsletter is another. Hopefully, it will encourage you to click through and read the articles or save them (we now will provide pdf files of articles) for later reading, and to keep up with what the REEEC community is doing. Such a newsletter, of course, also requires your more active participation. Please let REEEC know about your conference presentations, invited lectures, new publications and outreach ventures so that we can share them with the broader REEEC community—it is that communication that helps to make us a community, after all.

Finally, I would like to invite all of you to engage me and the REEEC staff in an ongoing dialogue about our priorities and programs, which are your priorities and programs. How can we improve in our interactions with you? What opportunities does REEEC have for further involvement in your research and in your discipline, for building the kind of intellectual community you want to be involved in? I look forward to hearing from you, and working together to keep REEEC involved at the cutting edge of all that we do.

David L. Cooper