Educating Journalists in Post-Communist Eastern Europe

by Nancy Benson and Martin Loksik

The education of journalists in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, the countries we are personally familiar with, is evolving to reflect the political, economic and social changes of the late 1980’s and 90’s. The transformation of state-controlled media that followed political reform laid the foundation for the development of a relatively liberal and independent media system throughout Eastern Europe.

The resulting boom of private newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations created demand for trained journalists, a demand that could not be adequately met.

There were several key reasons for this. First, the former state-run media outlets were staffed with older workers who were often unable to adapt quickly to the changing political and economic environment. To fill the news reporting slots, news managers hired young people straight out of universities, eager but with no prior experience in journalism. Historically, journalists in many Eastern European countries were seen as public intellectuals and scholars. Journalism programs at universities in the region taught the theory, rather than the practice, of journalism. Steeped in the theories of propaganda and mass communications, journalism graduates possessed no practical knowledge or experience to give them the resources they needed to do the job effectively.

Unfortunately little has changed in the last twelve years. Many of the same professors who taught journalism under Communism teach essentially the same courses with little change in content.

Seeing an opportunity to have an impact on the way journalism was practiced in post-Communist Eastern Europe, Western organizations, such as the New York-based Independent Journalism Foundation, opened offices and began offering workshops aimed at teaching

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reporters how to find sources, balance a story, and incorporate the facts and details needed to give context to a story. The Americans and other Western journalists brought updated equipment and extensive experience in teaching practical journalism skills. Shared seminars led by East European and Western lecturers resulted in a valuable exchange of experience and knowledge. But these workshops and seminars could only reach a small percentage of the practicing and future journalists.

In the last few years, the media market slowly stabilized, and there are now fewer newspapers and magazines. The number of radio and TV stations has remained fairly constant, but many are now under foreign ownership. As media owners start putting efficiency and profits first, the number of available journalism jobs is declining.

Today, young people are being hired as editors and reporters, only if they are willing to work long hours for low wages. But, their formal journalism education still fails to prepare the reporters for the demands of the media marketplace. As a consequence, the quality and content of a story are often of secondary importance, and the news product suffers from simplicity, lack of context, and factual errors.

Recognizing the need for better trained reporters, East European universities are beginning to respond. The journalism program at the Czech Republic’s Charles University is teaching practical reporting skills and acquiring modern equipment to more closely replicate what students will use on the job. Substantial material help toward this end came from the European Union’s education program TEMPUS and the Center for Independent Journalism.

Bucharest University in Romania is also adding more skills courses to the curriculum and this year partnered with the Independent Journalism Foundation to recruit three American faculty members with professional journalism experience to teach photojournalism, radio reporting, television reporting, journalism ethics and investigative reporting techniques. The influence of the West on journalism training and practice is not without controversy. Journalists say that the workshops may raise their reporting standards, but that does not help them argue with an editor who rejects their stories because he does not value their newly acquired skills and reporting techniques.

The influence of the West on journalism training and practice is not without controversy. Journalists say that the workshops may raise their reporting standards, but that does not help them argue with an editor who rejects their stories because he does not value their newly acquired skills and reporting techniques. Some young East European journalists criticize Western trainers for being insensitive to cultural differences and uninterested in local journalism practices. The young reporters say some Western trainers only preach a dogma that may, or may not, apply to the reality journalists face in their evolving democracies and economies. For example, in many East European countries there are still laws on the books making it a crime for reporters to write stories critical of a politician.

Anca Dragu, a Master’s candidate at the U of I Department of Journalism and graduate of journalism training programs in Slovakia and Romania, says she has had to adapt some of what she learned from Western media trainers. “I remember a Dutch trainer talking about business reporting and we journalists laughing because we didn’t have the laws on which she based her arguments. They derived from European Communitarian Law, which, at that time, were not effective in Romania.”

There is debate in the international journalism community about whether there is a universal recipe for high quality journalism, because journalism is such a cultural issue. To account for cultural differences, many Western trainers do not push a particular style of journalism, but rather invite young journalists to think about telling stories differently and adapting what they learn in workshops to their particular situation. Dragu does find common ground with Western journalists. “A professional journalist, in my opinion, is that one who fights for accurately letting other people know what’s really going on. This goal seems to be the same both in the U.S. and in Eastern Europe.”

While cultural differences between Eastern Europe and the West do exist and journalists in a developing democracy face struggles that Western instructors may never fully comprehend, professionalism, i.e., fact-based reporting, context, accuracy, is a standard that can be a goal for all nations. Teaching journalism as a practice rather than a theory to the next generation of journalists, bringing them down from the intellectual ivory tower and into the lives of ordinary people, is giving them the tools to help shape the new course of their countries. After all, democracy is no longer a theory for intellectuals to discuss but a reality for these changing nations. The education of journalists must, and is changing, to reflect this new reality.

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**Journalists—continued**

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**Dovring Gift to Study International Propaganda**

Karin Dovring has established The Karin and Folke Dovring Scholars Program in Analysis of International Propaganda and Persuasion in War and Peace at the U of I with a $500,000 endowment. The program will support research on the role of propaganda and language in international politics. The gift is given in memory of her late husband, Folke Dovring, Professor Emeritus in Land Economics and a REEC faculty and executive committee member. He is the author of *English As Lingua Franca: Double Talk in Global Persuasion* (1997) and *The Road of Propaganda* (1959).
New Faculty Profile

Lilya Kaganovsky

Lilya Kaganovsky joined the UI faculty in Fall 2001 as an assistant professor of both Slavic Languages and Literature and Comparative Literature. She received her BA in English, American and Russian Literatures from the University of California-Santa Cruz (1992) and an MA in Slavic from Columbia University (1994), and her PhD in Comparative Literature with an emphasis on film studies from the University of California-Berkeley (2000). Her dissertation is entitled “Bodily Remains: The ‘Positive Hero’ in Stalinist Fiction.”

When asked about the state of literature and literary trends in Russia today, Kaganovsky believes that literature is still very important to many Russians, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union it isn’t the focal point in people’s lives as much as it was in the past. Part of the problem was that the Soviet government forced literature on people, starting in the classroom. The prominence of literature in Soviet times also represented a lack of other things in people’s lives.

Since 1991, Russian society has become more stratified, and different literary genres are being read by people of different socio-economic strata. Nonetheless, Kaganovsky notes, the present trend in Russian literature appears to move away from the grand epic novel of the 19th and 20th centuries and towards a theme of emptiness of symbols and meaning. The poet Prigov is a prime example. In the 1980s, he was considered the voice of the people. But today you could not say that about him; he writes in his own voice. The trend away from political and philosophical subjects may be another way of rejecting the old regime and its control over literature.

Kaganovsky sees film, rather than literature or art, as the primary way that Russians are rethinking their identity and history. For example, numerous films, including documentaries, have tried to reexamine the Stalinist period. Many filmmakers such as Nikita Mikhalkov, who won an Academy Award for “Burnt By the Sun,” are trying to comprehend what Stalin’s legacy was and how it may still affect Russia today. Two of her favorite contemporary films are “Brother” and its sequel “Brother II,” released in 1993 and 1997 respectively. She notes that “Brother I” with its gloomy tone probably reflects the outlook of many Russians toward the state of the economy and society at that time. “Brother II,” on the other hand, has a more vibrant tone and gives the impression of hope for the future.

This semester Kaganovsky is teaching Slavic 425/C Lit 461, “Stories of Excess and Lack.” In the fall, she will teach Slavic 319/Cine 319, a new course on “The Cold War on Film.”
With a research grant from the American Council of the Teachers of Russian (ACTR), from September until December 2000 I conducted dissertation research on regional politics in Novosibirsk, the largest city of Siberia. With a population of 1.3 million and a strategic location on the Trans-Siberian rail line, I certainly did not consider it remote. Distances may be great—it takes three days by train to reach Moscow, for example—but the city and vibrant academic community in Akademgorodok were considered pillars of Soviet development, research, and scientific achievement.

As is the case with most of Russia, however, times have changed considerably for Novosibirsk. Once among the top ten regions in terms of its level of federal subsidies—a good measure of strategic significance by the government in Moscow—Novosibirsk’s status weakened considerably as a result of the country’s economic transformation and governmental shifts in funding priorities. With serious cutbacks in funds for universities and research, the prestigious scientific institutes of Novosibirsk State University have lost some of their brightest scholars, particularly the younger ones who have sought better employment opportunities in the West. The University itself, like many others in Russia, has also seen shifts in enrollments. Whereas the scientific institutes involving physics and nuclear research once attracted Russia’s best and brightest, students are flocking to the “platnye” or fee-based institutes, such as economics, law, and foreign languages. Even the esteemed Institute of Mathematics takes greater pains to prepare its students for the contingencies of the market economy. Theoretical mathematics, after all, forms much of the basis of computer programming, and many of the Institute’s graduates find employment in local budding computer and information technology firms. Although still a center for traditional heavy industry such as machine building, Novosibirsk’s high-tech service industry is gaining a reputation both in Russia and abroad.

Inasmuch as Novosibirsk has experienced a considerable transformation in its economic and educational infrastructure, regional politics has also undergone several changes. Encumbered with enduring elements of the past given the number of former apparatchiki who have remained in politics and the residuals of Soviet political culture among officials and the population, Novosibirsk nonetheless has niched out a new political space of opportunity in its relations with Moscow and neighboring regions. During the heyday of political tensions between the regions and Moscow, Novosibirsk stood out among the Russian regions (oblasti) that took issue with President Yeltsin’s mercurial governing style vis-à-vis regional governments. In addition, the Novosibirsk leadership initiated the formation of the Siberian Agreement, a coalition of regional representatives who meet to discuss common political and economic issues concerning the regions of Siberia. Although considered politically ineffective as a collective body in resolving disputes with Moscow, the Siberian Agreement has seen a level of inter-regional dialogue unheard of among other Russian regions and fledgling regional associations.

Once the prodigy of the Russian scientific establishment and heavy industry, Novosibirsk certainly has earned its place as a political and economic innovator. As such, it is very much an interesting case of post-Soviet political and economic transformation. And if you can stand the harsh Siberian winters, it’s not a bad place to live, either.

Heather Tafel in front of the monument “Heroes of the Soviet Union” in Novosibirsk

Heather Tafel is a PhD candidate in Political Science.
In Memoriam

Jan Gorecki, 1926-2001

Jan Gorecki, professor emeritus of sociology, died September 18, 2001, at the age of 75. He had been nursed through a long period of Alzheimer’s disease, mainly by his wife, Danuta, a Byzantinist and professor of library administration. She survives, as well as their two adult children, Piotr and Maria.

Like many Poles of Jewish origin, Jan’s parents were thoroughly adapted to Polish culture. They had a Yiddish name (Kraushar), but did not know Yiddish. Jan’s father died when Jan was 6. When Jan was 13, the Nazi conquest of Poland seemed sure to be fatal to him; his two years in the Warsaw ghetto left him with memories so horrible that they tormented him the rest of his days. He escaped death in the Holocaust, however, thanks to Christian Polish friends who procured false papers for him under the name of Gorecki. They managed to get him and his mother out of the ghetto, and sheltered them through the rest of the war, 1942-45. Jan risked his life to work in the non-Communist anti-Nazi Underground. It is therefore not surprising that as a young academic in the early 1950s he fell in love with Danuta Wojnar. Danuta, a Polish Catholic, was known along with her mother for courage in helping Jews during the War at great personal risk. After the War, Danuta’s brave resistance to the postwar Communist regime led to her imprisonment during the years 1946-50. Jan married her despite warnings that he would thereby doom his ambitions for an academic career. By 1968, although clearly anti-Communist, he had managed to establish himself as an associate professor teaching civil law in Kraków’s Jagiellonian University. But the government’s interference in the University and its campaign of 1967-68 against even those few Jews still living in Poland made him decide to leave his much-loved homeland. Fortunately, his scholarly reputation enabled him to come with his family, including his mother Jadwiga, to Stanford and thence to Champaign-Urbana and the University of Illinois.

In the virtually ideal working environment here at Illinois, Jan’s already-impressive scholarship flourished even more. He published solid, thoughtful books and articles on many aspects of sociology and law. He dealt with such varied topics as divorce, the theory of criminal justice, capital punishment, and ethics and human nature. He enhanced the reputation of both our Department of Sociology and our Russian and East European Center, on whose Executive Committee he served.

Although Jan and Danuta practically wore out the sidewalks between their home and the Library (they were famous for choosing to do without a car), they also loved their summer vacations. They usually took three weeks off per year. In Poland, they had enjoyed kayaking on the lakes and back-packing in the Tatras. Jan amused the children by inventing a long-running animal story in the style of Winnie the Pooh. In their Bavarian Alps. Jan’s students, colleagues, and other friends will remember him as exceptionally ethical, decent, conscientious, and considerate. Jan’s students, colleagues, and other friends will remember him as exceptionally ethical, decent, conscientious, and considerate. He never forgot those of his fellow-Poles who had not been so fortunate.

—Ralph Fisher

Visiting Faculty
Spring 2002

Aleksei Kurbanovskiy
(PhD, Russian Academy of Fine Arts) is a Senior Researcher at the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, and specializes in twentieth-century Russian art. He is the author of Art History as a Kind of Writing (St. Petersburg, 2000). For this semester, he is the faculty in residence for the UIUC/Ford Seminar on “Arts of the Sacred,” teaching a course on “Russian and East European Art: Sacred, Profane, Russia and the World.” He will lead a related study tour in Russia this summer for UI undergraduate and graduate students.

Martin Loksik
(PhD, Charles University) is a Lecturer in the Department of Journalism at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, who specializes in television journalism. Along with Nancy Benson (Journalism, UI), he has been active at the New York-based Center for Independent Journalism in Prague, working as a lecturer in TV journalism. Besides teaching, he has made numerous documentaries for Czech television, including “Schindler’s Choice” and “Josef Sudek’s Black & White World.” At the U of I, he is teaching a course this semester on “Media, Politics, and Society in Post-communist Eastern Europe and Russia,” which is sponsored by REEC.
Alexander Ardichvili received the Outstanding Assistant Professor Award from the University Council for Workforce and Human Resource Education in 2001 and received a College of Education Faculty Fellowship for the academic year 2001-02.

Dmitry Bobshev presented a poetry reading at the AATSEEL annual meeting in New Orleans in December 2001.

Marianna Tax Choldin gave a lecture entitled "Intellectual Freedom and the Past" as part of a teleconference at Telekom studio in Tula, Russia. Her book, Fence Around the Empire: Russian Censorship of Western Ideas Under the Tsars, will be translated into Russian. Her articles have been translated into Russian, Croatian, and one has been translated into Serbian to be published in Macedonia.

Zsuzsa Gille has published: with Sean O’Riain, “Global Ethnography,” Annual Review of Sociology (2002); “Social and Spatial Inequalities in Hungarian Environmental Politics: a Historical Perspective” in Livable Cities? The Politics of Urban Livelihood and Sustainability, ed., P. Evans (2001). She also received the LAS Dean’s Teaching Fellowship.

Andrew Green was a participant on a panel entitled “Transatlantic Relations After the Attack on the USA: A Revival of Internationalism?” at a conference sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations’ Atlantic partnership Program and the German Marshall Fund in Washington, DC, in November 2001. In addition, he received a Short Term Grant from the WWICS East European Studies Program for his research project, “Comparative Development of Post-Communist Diffuse and Collective Interest Groups.” His article, “Comparative Development of Post-Communist Civil Societies,” is due out in Europe-Asia Studies in May 2002.

Steven Hill presented “Defining Objectivity ‘Russian Émigré Film/Theatre/Ballet’” at the annual meeting of AATSEEL.

Hans Henrich Hock was appointed to the Committee on Honorary Members of the Linguistic Society of America in January. The appointment is for three years.


Carol Skalnik Leff presented “Ethnopolitics of Central Europe” at the AASSS annual meeting.

Sherban Lupu performed “Voices Within,” a violin solo based on the work of Romanian-American composer Gheorghe Costinescu, at the Concert of East European Music by the Ensemble Sospeso in Concord, MA and New York. He also gave concerts in Romania, Hungary, Sweden, and with the Haifa Symphony in Israel.


Shannon O’Lear received an IPRH Faculty Fellowship for her project, “Environmental and Human Security in ‘The South’: The Case of Azerbaijan,” for the 2002-03 academic year. She was also selected to participate in the Caspian Sea Regional Policy Symposium sponsored by IREX and the Kennan Institute. At the annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Los Angeles, she presented a paper entitled “Abundant Resources, Scarce Security? Human Security Concerns in Oil-Rich Azerbaijan.”


Lynda Park received the LAS Academic Professional Award.

Janice Pilch presented “Market Philosophy and Slavic Acquisitions” at the AAASS annual meeting.

Anke Pinkert presented “Excessive Cure: Tracing War Trauma in Early East German Film” at the conference for the German Studies Association in October 2001.

Vicki Retzolk received the LAS Staff Award. After working at the Center for 16 years, she has moved on to the office of the UI Foundation.

Mark Steinberg, together with Heather Coleman (PhD’98, history) was co-organizer of the national conference “Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russian Culture” held at U of I in February. He also received the LAS Dean’s Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. His recently published book, Voices of Revolution, 1917 (Yale University Press), has an online version of the original Russian documents in the volume at: www.yale.edu/annals/steinberg/golosa.htm.

Helen Sullivan presented “Identifying Slavic Language Resources Without Leaving Home, or How To Use the Slavic Reference Service” at the annual meeting of the American Library Association in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Visiting Scholars Spring 2002**

Evgenia Ivanova (Moscow, Russia) is a senior scholar at the Institute of World Literature. She is a Fulbright Fellow at REEC conducting research on “Aid of the YMCA and the American Relief Association to Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church.”

Yuri Plusnin (Novosibirsk, Russia) is the Head of the Department of Philosophical Sociological Research at the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk. He is a USIA-RSEP scholar conducting research for a project entitled “Social Stability and Instability on the Local Society Level: Analysis of Intrinsic Factors to Overcome Social Crisis.”

Ogulsheker Veyisova (Mary, Turkmenistan), Mortenson Center Associate
Student News

**Brian Felt** (Slavic) presented “The Accentuation of Slavic Prefixed Nouns” at the AATSEEL annual meeting in New Orleans in December.

**Erica Fraser** (History) presented “Of Men and Motherland: Enemy Masculinities in Early Cold War Political Cartoons in the Soviet Union” at the Third Annual Symposium on Women’s and Gender History at UI in March.

**Bryan Ganaway** (History) received the LAS Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching for Graduate Teaching Assistants.

**Sarah Phillips** (Anthropology) presented “Engaging the State: Critical Reflections on NGOs and Civil Society in Ukraine” at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in December and presented “The Ethics of Advocatory Research: Notes from Ukraine” at the Association for Applied Anthropology annual meeting in Atlanta. Her Ukrainian language article, “Shapes in the Wax: Ukrainian Folk Healers (Babki), Their Craft, and Their Role in Ukrainian Village Society,” is forthcoming in a Ukrainian volume on the “Multinational Cultural and Historical Legacies of the Transdniest Region.”

**Cristofer Scarboro** (History) presented “From Turkish Bath to Parliament Building: An Investigation of Colonial Desire” at the Third Annual Symposium on Women’s and Gender History at UI.

**Angela Shand** (Anthropology) presented “Dancing with Downcast Eyes: Dance and Dress in the Production of ‘Authentic’ Gendered Movement Styles in Greek Folk Dance” at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association.

**Lindsay Shaw** (REES) presented “Russian Women’s NGOs and Putin” at the Midwest Slavic Conference in March.

**Tatjana Soldat-Jaffe** (Germanic) received the LAS Humanities Award for Excellence in Teaching.

**2001 Skalnik Prize for Best Essays in REES**

*Graduate:* Marjorie Hilton, “If You Don’t Cheat, You Won’t Sell”

*Undergraduate:* Kory Langhofer, “The Effects of Ethnicity and Nationalism on Russian-Estonian Relations”

*Undergraduate Honorable Mention:* Kiersten Kirby, “Ubiquitous Lips: Zamyatin’s Use of Mouths in We”

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We would love to hear from REES-related alumni. Please send us your news along with the degree(s) earned and year and your current affiliation to the email or street address below.

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**Distinguished Lecturers Colloquium Series**

**“Directions in Russian and East European Studies”**

**Spring 2002**

**February 11**

“From Curses to Castes: Ideologies of Language Function in Stage Romani”

Alaina Lemon (Anthropology, University of Michigan)

**March 25**

“Islam and Politics in Central Asia and the Caucasus”

Shireen Hunter (Islam Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies)

**April 1**

“Imagining the West: Social Thought in Southeastern Europe, 1920-1940”

Keith Hitchins (History, UI)

**May 6**

“People’s Choice: Freedom of Expression and Paradoxes of Russian-American Art”

Svetlana Boym (Slavic & Comparative Literature, Harvard University)

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**Brown Bag Lecture Series**

**Spring 2002**

**January 29**

“Aspects of the Image of Jesus Christ in the Russian Art of the late 18th-19th Centuries”

Aleksei Kurbanovsky (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg; Visiting Faculty, UI)

**February 12**

“For God, Tsar, and Consumerism: Commercial Rituals in Late Imperial Russia”

Marjorie Hilton (History, UI)

**February 26**

“The Making of Russian Studies Centers in the U.S. in the 1940s”

Viacheslav N. Kozliakov (History, Riazan State Pedagogical University, Russia)

**March 8**

“Fighting for the Rodina in Two World Wars: Interpreting War Experience”

Karen Petrone (History, University of Kentucky) & Kenneth Slepyan (History, Transylvania University)

**March 26**

“From the Metallic Bodies of Communism to the Sickly Bodies of Postcommunism: An Emerging Agenda for Historical Research”

Zsuzsa Gille (Sociology, UI)

**April 9**

“Russia in Transition: An Informal Discussion”

Sergei Khrushchev (Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University)

**April 16**

“The Struggle for Media Independence in Post-Communist Countries: The Case of Czech Television”

Martin Loksik (Journalism, Charles University, Prague; REEC Visiting Faculty) & Rhoda Lipton (Journalism, Columbia University)

**April 23**

“New Russia or the Same Old Russia? Changes in Social Attitudes and Values among the ‘Common People’ in the Decade of Crisis” (in Russian)

Yuri Plusnin (Institute of Philosophy and Law, Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Novosibirsk; REEC Visiting Scholar)

**April 29**

“Our Daily Bread: Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin’s Russia, 1927-1941”

Elena Osokina (History, Moscow State University)
2002 Summer Programs

**Summer Research Laboratory on Russia and Eastern Europe, June 10-August 2**
Established in 1973, the Summer Lab provides an opportunity for scholars to utilize the resources of the University Library, which holds the largest Slavic collection west of Washington, DC, and seek advice from the reference librarians of the Slavic and East European Library.

**Baltic Studies Summer Institute, June 10-August 2**
BALSSI offers intensive language courses in Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian and a course on Baltic history & culture.

**Annual Summer Symposium on “Islam from Eastern Europe to Central Asia,” June 22**
This public symposium will address Islamic culture, politics and society in the regions with a focus on contemporary issues.

**Research Workshop, June 17-28**
The Workshop includes sessions on Slavic bibliography workshop online, émigré collections and bibliographies, archives in Russia and Ukraine, grant writing, and Russian language practicum.

**Conference on Masculinity in Russia, June 10-14**

**Annual Ukrainian Conference on “Ukrainian Archives in North America: Their Development and Future,” July 19-20**

**Summer Curriculum Development Workshop on Russia and the Balkans, June 24-28**
This teachers’ workshop includes sessions on Russian and Balkan history, culture, and politics.

**First International Summer Institute for Pre-collegiate Educators on “World Religions,” July 7-13**
This first joint area studies institute will address world religions, including a session on the Eastern Orthodox Church.

**Brown-Bag Lectures, June 11-July 2**

**Film Series, June 10-July 25**

For information on any of our summer programs, please contact the Center at (217) 333-1244 or reec@uiuc.edu. Information and applications are also available on the web: www.reec.uiuc.edu