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Global Studies: Scholar Access Grant  
301 Ingraham Hall  
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**Scholar Access Grant Project Title:** Development of a Comparative Sociology Class Focused on Contemporary Russian Life: Economics, Education, Environment and Health

**Purpose of Project:**

Students at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (8,129 undergraduate students) lacked an exposure to and understanding of Russian society. In the fall semester of 2006, 16 students enrolled in my SOC 480, Comparative Sociology Course, and were immersed in Russian society. They read about families, government, the economy, the educational system, the justice system and health care and the environment in Russia. They participated in class discussions around PowerPoint Presentations I created from photographs I took during my visit to Moscow in August, 2006 and research I gathered from a visit to UW-Madison in July, 2006. They also watched short documentaries I created for the course from video and still photographs I took in Moscow. Throughout the semester, the students conducted their own research comparing a social issue in Russia to the same issue in another country. They used the World Values Survey or other comparative data to analyze similarities and differences between Russia and their country of choice and reported their results in a research paper and presented their findings in class through research posters. The posters contained their research results, photographs (from my collection and some of their own from their study abroad experiences, if they had them) and relevant quotes from e-mail correspondence they conducted with a Russian student from Moscow State University.

**How objectives were met:**

In order to gather materials for presentation in class lectures and discussions and for the students to use in their research reports, I traveled to Madison and then to Moscow. First, through support from a Scholar Access Grant awarded by the Institute for Global Studies and co-sponsored by the Center for Russia, East Europe and Central Asia (CREECA) I traveled to Madison. At UW-Madison, I compiled information for classroom lectures and discussions about the Russian economy, Russia's educational

system, and Russia's environmental and health issues and the criminal and civil justice system by visiting UW-Madison's global and international studies library collections and meeting with experts on these issues. This required a four-day trip (July 17-20) to access the academic research available as well as the audio/visual materials they had archived at the CREECA. On my first day in Madison, I met with Andrew Spencer, the Bibliographer in Slavic studies at Memorial Library. He searched for information around the main topics I presented in the class, the economy, education and the environment/health. He located a few articles that were very useful and then showed me some of the databases available at UW-Madison that contained Russian studies information. Specifically, he showed me how to search the Moscow Times and Moscow News archives for articles relevant to my topics. I was able to spend the rest of my time in the library for the next three days after that reading about current events relevant to my topics. I downloaded and saved approximately 15 news stories and social science articles that were directly relevant to my course. I definitely did not have access to these databases at UW-La Crosse, and was only able to access these databases by being physically present on the UW-Madison campus. The most useful materials were about Russia's problem with alcohol use and abuse and how it impacts the health and criminal justice system. I incorporated that information into a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Law and/or Order(s): Russian Style" and another, "Russia's Health and the Environment." In addition to using the databases that Andrew Spenser demonstrated to me, I searched the library catalog for books related to my course. I was able to locate and then have sent to my library at UW-L three books: *Marriages in Russia: Couples through the Economic Transition* (Rimashevskaya, Cubbins, and Malysheva 1999), which provided information I used in the class discussion about attitudes about marriage and divorce in Russia. I located the book, *Religion and Identity in Modern Russia: The Revival of Orthodoxy and Islam* (Forest, Johnson and Stepaniants 2005) that was very useful in our class discussion about the struggle that the Orthodox Church faces as it tries to re-establish itself in Russian society. Finally, I borrowed the book, *Economic Crime in Russia* (Ledeneva 2000), which was useful when I discussed Russian police culture and how it differs from beliefs about law and order in the U.S. For some reason I could not access these books available at UW-Madison through Universal Borrowing, but thankfully was able to locate them while on the UW-Madison campus. I returned to the library and conducted searches all four days I was in Madison, in between meetings I set up with UW-Madison staff and faculty.

On my second day, I met with Lara Kain, the Outreach Coordinator at CREECA. She showed me all the visual materials available on Russia and allowed me to check out whatever I thought would work best in my class. I borrowed a PBS series "The People's Century" that had segments about the Russian Revolution, life during the Cold War and the end of the Cold War ("The Brave New World"). I reviewed them at home and used the segment on the end of the Cold War in my class, and it helped generate a very nice discussion of how the whole world, not just the U.S. and Soviet Union, was affected by the Cold War and why it came to an end. Additionally, I checked out a short video on the AIDS epidemic in Russia. By luck, the portion of the course in which we discussed health issues, specifically AIDS, fell on World AIDS Day, so the video depiction of a young Russian, HIV-positive, couple was particularly poignant. Although I have accessed CREECA's video archive on-line, it was nice to be able to sit in Lara's office

and read over the descriptions and choose videos in person because she provided more background on the videos than is available on the jacket covers or on-line descriptions.

That same afternoon, I met with Professor Theodore Gerber, in sociology. He was another good resource in that he allowed me to tape our discussion on the Russian labor market and educational system. I not only used the information he provided in my explanation of the transitions in educational system in the short documentary I created, but I created a podcast of his interview that my students could download and listen to on their own (<http://www.uwlax.edu/faculty/millerc/podcasts/gerber.mp3>).

Wednesday was spent in the Memorial Library and the Geography Library. In the Geography Library I found a journal that was focused on the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet geography issues. I sat and read through titles of published in that journal in the last 5 years and found 4 articles that I believed to be directly relevant to issues I was going to discuss in my course. I was also able to meet with sociologist Wava Haney (UW-Colleges) to discuss my project. On Thursday, I met with Professor Kathryn Handley (CREECA Director), who teaches courses on Russian law and politics. She explained how the arbitrazh courts she has been studying have changed during the transition to a market economy. I believe her research, as well as classroom ideas she has used, were extremely helpful in the development of my course. She gave me a couple very useful suggestions about places to visit and how to use the Metro during my trip to Moscow too. Professor Handley also agreed to having our discussion recorded and I made that available to my students as podcast (<http://www.uwlax.edu/faculty/millerc/podcasts/hendley.mp3>). I was unable to discuss Russia's forest management history with Peter Bloch, another CREECA faculty member in the Department of Forest Ecology and Management, because he was off-campus during my visit.

Following my SAG-sponsored visit to UW-Madison, I traveled to Moscow. The main objectives of the trip were to gather visual information about Russia through photographs taken while visiting Moscow to set up an email exchange with Moscow State University students by coordinating with one of their professors. The photographs I obtained were be archived made available on-line to allow students to use photographs relevant to their topics in their research reports. I also used the photos to produce three video/photograph presentations on DVD for classrooms and for students to use outside of class. These were entitled: *Moscow: the state, religion and family*, *Moscow: a global city?* and *Moscow: education in transition*. For this portion of the course development project, I was awarded a UW-L Foundation Grant. For the travel expenses, I was awarded a Faculty International Development Grant from UW-L. Although I was unable to meet with anyone from Moscow State University to discuss an email exchange because, as one professor explained, the university is very quiet during the summer because everyone is resting and gardening on their dachas, I was able to discuss the project via email. I contacted the sociology department and ended up corresponding with Anastasia Gorodnicheva. Together, we exchanged students' email addresses and encouraged our students to correspond. However, only approximately half of my students, for reasons I will need to investigate, were able to conduct a meaningful exchange with the Russian students.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, developing this course was incredibly challenging and rewarding. I do believe that the students learned a lot about Russia, and just as importantly, they learned to look at their own society differently because of their experiences comparing Russia to the United States and to another country of interest. As Professor Gerber explained, studying Russia as it goes through the transition is very insightful to a sociologist. It is like watching the end and the beginning of two social, political and economic experiments as we observe how Russia deals with the legacy of communism and the struggles of becoming a market economy. I am extremely grateful to the Institute for Global Studies (IGS) and the Center for Russia, East Europe and Central Asia (CREECA) for the support and the opportunity to access UW-Madison's resources. Thank you!

If you would like to see any of my PowerPoint presentations or short documentaries, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

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