

“Rethinking Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies in light of Russia’s War in Ukraine”

Proposal:

On February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a “special military operation” in Ukraine. The war his regime unleashed by Putin’s regime has destabilized the international European and global political order, displacing millions of Ukrainians citizens. Some have called for Putin to be named a war criminal and the actions of the Russian army in Ukraine, a genocide. Within Russia, the state has eliminated all free media, and “misrepresenting” the actions of Russia’s military has become a crime. More than five million people have left Ukraine, seeking refuge from Putin’s bloody war, while tens of thousands of Russian citizens have fled increasing repression at home for an uncertain future abroad.

In the wake of this immeasurable – and ongoing – tragedy, calls to “decolonize” the study of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia have taken on new weight. As teachers and scholars of Russian language, history, culture, and politics, we now confront fundamental questions about the structures and assumptions that shape our respective fields. While this crisis confronts institutions of higher education across the United States and the world, liberal arts institutions face unique challenges. Finite resources and small departments and student bodies limit the range of courses we offer; some institutions lack specialists in Russian history, politics, or culture, to say nothing of specialists in the language, history, and culture of Ukraine.

How should we as scholars, teachers, and researchers respond to this critical historical moment? This interdisciplinary workshop will unite interdisciplinary, bringing together scholars and teachers of Russian, Eastern Europe, and Eurasian languages, histories, cultures, politics, sociology, and economics from across AALAC institutions to address three main areas: teaching, research, and institutional structures. For teaching, we will interrogate the question of how our course offerings can and should shift in light of recent events. What sort of course offerings should we develop? How do we support a robust offering in small liberal arts colleges while acknowledging our staffing limitations? Our discussion of research will consider how we adapt our scholarly inquiries in this new era. How has and will Russia’s war in Ukraine affect scholarly productivity with respect to how we access sources and archives and approach subject matter? Finally, in our consideration of institutional structures, we will probe questions ranging from the titles of departments, many of which are Cold War relics of the Cold War, to approaches to language teaching, including the challenges of maintaining offering study abroad in Russian when access to Russia itself is closed for the foreseeable future.

Primary Liaison

Michael Kunichika, Associate Professor of Russian. Director, Amherst Center for Russian Culture; Interim Director, Mead Art Museum. Amherst College.

Organizing Committee

Julie Cassiday, Wilcox B. and Harriet M. Adsit Professor of Russian, Williams College; Michael Kunichika; Rebecca Mitchell, Associate Professor of Russian, Middlebury College; Thomas Roberts, Assistant Professor of Russian, Smith College; Roman Utkin, Assistant Professor of Russian, Wesleyan University.