

# the slavic scene

volume 39, spring 2024

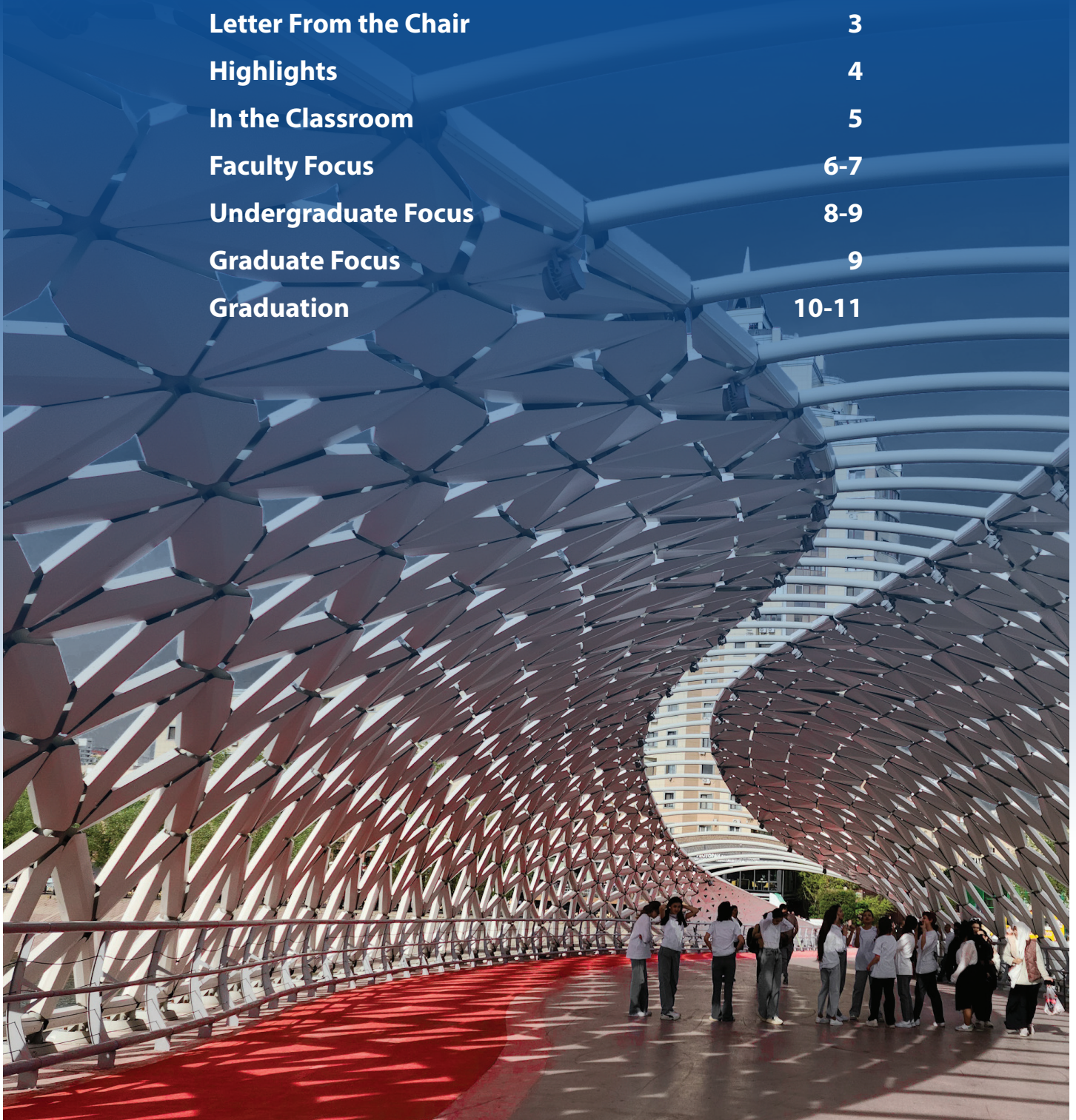


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# table of contents

<b>Letter From the Chair</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Highlights</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>In the Classroom</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Faculty Focus</b>	<b>6-7</b>
<b>Undergraduate Focus</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<b>Graduate Focus</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Graduation</b>	<b>10-11</b>



# letter from the chair



## Dear friends,

It has been an active and exciting year for our department, and I hope that after you have read this issue of *Slavic Scene*, whose pages are necessarily too limited to tell you about everything we have been up to, you will pass it on to someone else and consider getting involved yourself. Write to us to let us know how you are taking what you've learned at Michigan out into the world, and tell us if you might be interested in sharing your perspective with our current students. Attend our sponsored events, many of which are now streamed live online. And please consider making a donation to support our work.

We have much positive news to report since our last issue. Our faculty and graduate student instructors have once again demonstrated the enormous value that our instruction provides to students across this campus—not only to those specializing in Eastern Europe

and Eurasia, but also to those who are growing their expertise in such diverse fields as engineering, computer science, government, economics, and public policy, with the intention of pursuing careers that reach into our region of focus, using our languages, and benefiting from the critical and analytic tools that we cultivate in our courses.

I like to remind people that “No one trips and falls into a Slavic Department.” We work on extremely challenging and, for many, exotic material. It doesn't come easy; you have to seek it out. Nevertheless, nearly two thousand undergraduates were enrolled in courses taught in our department this academic year. That's a lot of people seeking us out, rising to the challenge, and very often coming back for more!

We are especially pleased to honor the undergraduates who have just completed their majors and minors with us (pg. 10). One of the great advantages of doing a degree in a smaller humanities department like ours is that there are no strangers here. Everyone knows everyone, and we get to know our students very well. So, while we are sad to see them move on, we take great pride in the work we have accomplished together, and we look forward to hearing back from them about wherever their lives take them. (We'd make it a degree requirement if we could: Stay in touch!) We are also delighted to celebrate Dr. Grace Mahoney, who recently completed her Ph.D. with a specialization in Ukraine and Russia (pg. 9). Dr. Mahoney has been a central, positive

presence in our department since she first arrived here. Congratulations, Grace!

In the coming academic year, we mark a major step forward in our work together by welcoming two new faculty members. Dr. Alex Averbuch, who is joining us as an LSA Collegiate Fellow, will be our first tenure-track appointment in Ukrainian Studies (pg. 6) in many years. Dr. Mina Magda, who has been awarded a Junior Fellowship with the Michigan Society of Fellows, studies Russian performing arts, its international reach, and race. You'll learn more about Dr. Magda in our next *Slavic Scene* Newsletter. We look forward to working with them.

This summer, our faculty and graduate students have once again been scattered to the four corners of the earth, from London to Prague, from Riga to Shanghai (where I am writing this), and just about every point across Central Asia. We're not on vacation. The study of Eastern Europe is global. We are not simply looking at one particular region from outside, but rather starting in that region and looking outward. The following pages provide a small glimpse of how.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Paloff  
Professor and Chair, Department of  
Slavic Languages & Literatures



# ■ highlights

## Copernicus Center for Polish Studies Lecture: "What's in a Name? – A lot!" *From Gypsy to Rom: The Roma in Polish Discourse on Minorities*

*Ewa Małachowska-Pasek, Ladislav Matějka Collegiate Lecturer*

In Poland, the Romani make up a scant 0.13% of the population. Yet, the archetype of the "Gypsy" is so deeply embedded within Polish culture and consciousness that it acts as a permanent exhibit in the nation's conceptual museum, meticulously curated but often at odds with the lived reality.

During a lecture on March 14, 2024, **Ewa Małachowska-Pasek** shared her research on the Polish discourse surrounding the position and role of ethnic and national minorities in contemporary society. Her talk dissected the dynamic role of language in mirroring, shaping, and perpetuating the relationship between the Romani ethnic minority and the Polish majority, framed against the postcolonial discourse on self-determination and identity.

She placed particular emphasis on the shift in nomenclature – lexical renomination – from the exonym "Gypsies" to the endonym "Roma," scrutinizing how the Polish majority employs discursive strategies—both deliberate and inadvertent—to uphold their perceptions and behaviors towards the Roma. She also examined how the concept of political correctness inadvertently hampers the recognition and acceptance of this lexical change, exploring the extent to which discourse around political correctness appropriates and negatively affects public opinion on the terminological shift.

Ewa Małachowska-Pasek's analysis drew upon a diverse sample of internet content, including newspaper articles, online discussions, advertisements, social media commentaries, and memes. The collection spanned a wide ideological and political gamut to showcase an array of societal stances. This compilation unveiled a rich tapestry of discourses, ranging from the integration of Romani culture into Polish folk traditions to the facade of tolerance and inclusion in a largely homogenous society, and issues implicating the ethics and values of the Polish majority.

Through her analysis, Ewa Małachowska-Pasek highlighted the stark contrast between the espoused values of Polish society and their practical implementation, emphasizing the pressing need for improved civic education to foster a deeper understanding of concepts such as "citizen," "nation," "ethnic group," and "multiculturalism." Her findings, currently being prepared for book publication, are set to contribute to ongoing debates on ethnic and national minorities in Poland, and will be released by the Polish Academy of Sciences in the fall of 2024.

This lecture was part of the comprehensive offerings of the Copernicus Center for Polish Studies lecture series, and was co-sponsored by the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, the Center for European Studies, and the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies.



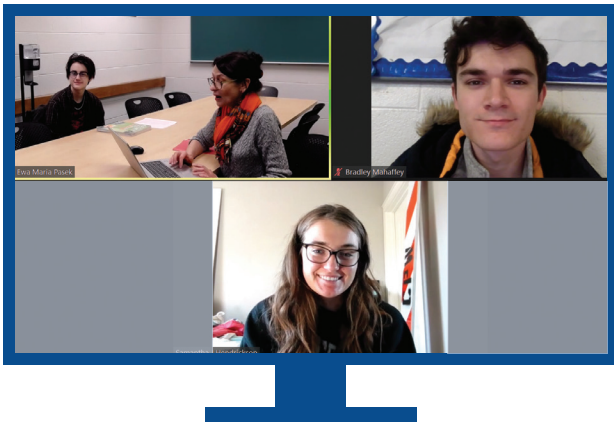


# in the classroom

## Teaching CourseShare Classes in the Post-COVID World

*Ewa Małachowska-Pasek, Ladislav Matějka Collegiate Lecturer*

In Fall 2012, I had the opportunity to teach my first CourseShare language class—seven years after the Big Ten Academic Alliance Liberal Arts and Sciences Deans initiated the CourseShare Program. This program, designed as a strategic approach to course sharing, aimed to broaden the availability of specialized graduate and undergraduate courses. Three years prior to my involvement, the LSA Deans refined the program's emphasis to concentrate specifically on Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL). My first-year Czech course drew students from both the University of Michigan (U-M) and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). At the time, I recognized the value of the experience but remained skeptical about its effectiveness for quality teaching and learning.



Fast forward to 2024, and that initial foray into remote instruction now seems like a relic from a bygone era in education. The distance learning landscape has been transformed—not just technologically, with our shift from BlueJeans to the more capable Zoom platform, which has virtually eliminated audio latency and enhanced screen display and sharing capabilities—but also psychologically. The COVID-19 pandemic dismantled mental barriers, propelling distance learning into a normalized educational practice. I can discern a palpable shift in the engagement of language learners, who now readily embrace knowledge acquisition via their computer screens.



The constriction of physical space no longer impedes the establishment of personal connections between an instructor and students or among the students themselves. Although it is more challenging, we have learned to create and nurture these bonds. Concrete evidence of the substantive relationships that have developed through remote learning emerged when a UIUC student visited Ann Arbor after our course concluded in December 2023. We toured U-M's campus and had lunch together—an affirmation of the genuine connections forged despite the physical distance.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, our department offered four CourseShare language classes, with participation from both U-M and UIUC students. In the fall semester, Marija Rosic expertly led a Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian class, while I was privileged to instruct courses in Polish and Czech—continuing with Czech into the winter term. Offering this breadth of language instruction is a remarkable feat for the department, the smallest within the University of Michigan, yet its influence is significant—small in size, but large in impact.

**We want to connect you to other students or alums who share the same academic or professional trajectory. Please send your story or information to [slavic@umich.edu](mailto:slavic@umich.edu).**



# faculty focus

## Krakov volunteer work

Benjamin Paloff, Chair and Professor



In June 2022, shortly after Russia launched its full-scale assault on Ukraine, I landed in Krakow to attend a translation conference and begin a summer of long-planned research, my first opportunity to work in the region since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. Having followed the war and its regional impact closely, I had already made arrangements to volunteer a portion of my time with the local Jewish Community Center (JCC), a nonprofit charitable organization that serves people of all racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, and gender identities. (Ninety-eight percent of those who have received war-related aid from JCC are non-Jews.) At the time, I was still directing the University of Michigan's Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, where we had been actively involved in arranging programming and fellowship opportunities around the war. I was as prepared as anyone reasonably could be.

And yet I was completely unprepared for what I encountered. JCC had assumed a central role as one of the main distribution points of food aid for refugees in southern Poland. In addition, it had secured housing for hundreds of Ukrainian refugees, even turning a defunct *szlachta* palace outside of the city into a makeshift village for displaced mothers and their children. International volunteers and newly hired staff, many of whom are themselves refugees, made the whole thing work. For me, it quickly became a full-time activity. We were feeding 600 people each day.

So the following summer, I returned with my family to Krakow and made the food distribution program a central feature of my research into the region's cultural transformations. I'm too disorganized to be a good organizer, and I'm probably too cynical to be effective as an activist. But I know the precise value of a basket of food freely given to someone in need of it. I ought to. By the end of 2023, JCC Krakow had given out over 700 tons.

For more information, see: <https://www.friendsofjcckrakow.org/ukraine>



Zeke Paloff, Benjamin Paloff, and Megan Thomas

## Welcome Dr. Averbuch!

Dr. **Alex Averbuch**, will be joining us this fall for a one-year appointment as a LSA Collegiate Fellow, followed by an appointment as Assistant Professor, our first tenure-track appointment in Ukrainian Studies in many years. Dr. Averbuch holds a B.A. in Comparative and Hebrew Literature and Communications from Tel Aviv University, an M.A. in German, Russian, and East European Studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a Ph.D. in Slavic Languages and Literatures and Jewish Studies from the University of Toronto. His dissertation, *Trading Words for Things: Solicitory Poetry in Russian, Ukrainian, and Hebrew*, is a comparative analysis of texts produced in three literary traditions. In addition to his academic achievements, he is a recognized poet and translator in Ukrainian, Russian, and Hebrew. Since completing his Ph.D. he has held two prestigious post-doctoral fellowships in Ukrainian Studies, at the University of Alberta and, currently, the Davis Center at Harvard University. Throughout his studies and fellowships, he has won over two dozen prestigious awards in Israel, Canada, and the U.S. We look forward to working with Dr. Averbuch and the promise he brings to the department.



Please see the next issue of the *Slavic Scene* for an extended introduction to Dr. Mina Magda! She will also join the department in the fall. Dr. Magda recently completed her doctorate at Yale and will be a Junior Fellow with the Michigan Society of Fellows. She studies Russian performing arts, its international reach, and race.



For the full article, check out *The Record* at:

<https://record.umich.edu/articles/lecturer-crushing-it-as-youth-soccer-coach/>



## Crushing it as youth soccer coach

Jeff Bleiler, *The University Record*

**Piotr Westwalewicz** grew up playing soccer in his native Poland.

There's nothing remarkable about that because, as Westwalewicz likes to joke with his students in classes on Polish culture, "Ninety-five percent of the population belongs to the Catholic church and 100% belongs to the church of soccer."

In the 1970s and '80s, when students in Poland reach high school age, they were given the choice to attend a sports high school, where pursuing athletic goals was an important objective, or one where academics was the primary focus.

His eighth-grade school gym teacher sat young Westwalewicz down for what he calls today his "shortest and most accurate player evaluation" he's ever had.

"He was a big guy with a big beard, funny and jovial but brutally direct, and was well-loved and respected by me and my friends because he always made our success his mission," Westwalewicz said. "He said, 'So, Piotr, how are your grades?' Oh, excellent, straight A's. He said, 'I think you should stick with that.' And he was right. I am a much better coach than I would ever have been a player."

Westwalewicz went to a high school where academics are stressed, made his way to the United States in 1985 and the University of Michigan not long after, and serves as a lecturer IV in Slavic languages and literatures in LSA.



Photo courtesy of Piotr Westwalewicz

But soccer never left him. He still belongs to the church of soccer.

He holds a U.S. Soccer Federation A Coaching License and has coached at many levels of the game: developmental, competitive youth travel, U.S. Soccer Federation Olympic Development Program at the state and regional levels, college and semi-professional.

Since 2005, his time and passion have been invested in Ann Arbor CRUSH, a club Westwalewicz started at the

behest of a coaching friend who said his daughter's team of recreational soccer players was interested in playing travel soccer but wanted to stay together as a team.

Westwalewicz was already coaching for the Novi Jaguars Soccer Club and for Concordia University — plus teaching at U-M — when he learned of this team concerned for its future.

"He said, 'If they go to a travel club, they'd get separated. Would you coach them?'" Westwalewicz said. "And because I wasn't busy enough, I said yes. I had a team, but I didn't have a name. I decided to go with orange uniforms, influenced by the remarkable protest movement in Poland, the Orange Alternative, and the girls decided they wanted to be Orange Crush."

Word spread quickly about the new club, which started with those 15 players, then their siblings, and eventually hundreds of others in the community. What started as a program for girls only opened to boys, and Westwalewicz and his wife, Jennifer, now oversee a club with players ranging in age from 2½ to 19 years old playing on between 20-25 teams, along with skill-building and recreational programs.

## In Memoriam



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**Vitaly Shevoroshkin, Ph.D., professor emeritus of Linguistics and professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures, passed away on December 22, 2023, at the age of 91. Dr. Shevoroshkin was born in 1932 in Georgia (USSR) and earned his Dr. of Philological Sciences degree from the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1965. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1974 and came to U-M as a visiting associate professor in 1978, joining the faculty as professor in 1979.**

**Professor Shevoroshkin played a key role in the Slavic department and in the Linguistics program at U-M. He retired from U-M in May 2009. His erudition, enthusiasm, and warmth in dealing with colleagues and students will be remembered.**



# undergraduate focus

## Reflections on My Summer in Poland

Cindy Ye Sang, BA of Music, Performance/Piano and Music History/Piano, Class of 2023

When the Russian invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, I decided to learn Polish as a path to gain an informed understanding of the region. Around that same time, I became interested in researching composers Krzysztof Penderecki and Henryk Górecki and their connection to U-M, but the project came to a halt as I found very few documents about their visits between 1995 and 1996. To further my studies, I arranged for internships in Poland and spent this past summer there with the support of the Copernicus Center for Polish Studies. Inspired by the research works of scholars on Polish music such as Makenzie Pierce, my mentor at U-M, Lisa Jakelski, and Andrea Bohlman, I was excited to delve into Polish music history and performance throughout my three-month stay.



***"Shortly after I arrived in Kraków, I came to the sober realization that I would need to adjust my expectations for how I could study music in Poland."***

Shortly after I arrived in Kraków, I came to the sober realization that I would need to adjust my expectations for how I could study music in Poland. For example, at U-M, concert programs were available in abundance and without charge, while in Poland they had to be acquired for an additional fee. Also, there were fewer materials translated into English than I envisioned; Polish was the primary language of almost all the musical experiences I encountered. When I had hoped to gain more insight into Stanisław Moniuszko's contributions to Polish music by watching his opera *The Haunted Manor* during my residency, the three-hour production I chose to attend did not offer English subtitles. Even though I only understood a jumble of words, I did my very best to empathize with the characters and stories through music.

My internship at Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne (known as PWM Edition) culminated my exploration of Polish music. It was life-changing to make connections, bounce ideas off, and collaborate with colleagues in the field. At PWM Edition, the most prominent music publishing house in the country, I was surrounded by extensive archival and contemporary materials, as well as colleagues with a wide range of backgrounds and areas of expertise. The tasks I completed rotated depending on my host departments, and this flexibility enabled me to venture into many creative projects, including photoshopping digitized music scores, interacting with customers at the bookstore, and translating book excerpts from Polish into English. Ultimately,

I came to appreciate the efforts PWM Edition had made into documenting, presenting, and preserving Polish music on the ground since its founding in 1945.

***"As the war continues raging, I have come to see music as a cultural entity that traverses time and borders."***

The lessons I have learned from this visit led me to expand my musical interests beyond the music of Poland. As the war continues raging, I have come to see music as a cultural entity that traverses time and borders. The weight that music carries is monumental. I experienced it in concert halls, where Russian repertoire has been largely erased from programming. I felt it in conversations

***"Ultimately, I came to appreciate the efforts this institution had made into documenting, presenting, and preserving Polish music on the ground since its founding in 1945."***



with colleagues about Ukrainian musicologists who have died at the frontline. I witnessed it on the streets, where the Ukrainian national anthem was performed to teenage fundraising crews and international tourists alike. I cherished it at a food bank for Ukrainian refugees, where my fellow volunteers and I bonded over chosen playlists and packed supplies for hours on end. With much more to learn, I look forward to returning to Poland for more research adventures.



## graduate focus



### Congratulations to Grace Mahoney, our newest Ph.D.



Professor Sofya Khagi and Dr. Grace Mahoney

Congratulations to Dr. **Grace Mahoney** on earning her Ph.D. with her groundbreaking dissertation, *Mutable Monuments: (De)Constructing Memorials to National Writers in Ukraine and Russia*, blending literature, culture, and memory studies. Her dissertation

committee members Professors **Sofya Khagi, Mikhail Krutikov, Olga Maiorova**, and **Kerstin Barndt** recognize Grace as mature, committed, and versatile. Peter McIsaac

and Vitaly Chernetsky (professor at the University of Kansas) were also on her dissertation committee. Her scholarly publications, including analyses of historic famines and a chapter on Victor Pelevin, have distinguished her contributions to her field. With her forthcoming book based on her dissertation, Grace is poised to leave a significant mark in Slavic Studies. Grace has shone as a graduate student teacher in Ukrainian and Russian studies, earning accolades from both students and faculty alike. We celebrate her exemplary scholarship and teaching and wish her all the best in her future endeavors!

### Genocide and Survivor's Community Conference

*Katie Kasperian, Ph.D. Student*

This summer I had the opportunity to attend the International Network for Genocide Scholar's (INoGS) 9th Annual Conference in Los Angeles. There, I discussed my research on a new wave of post-Yugoslav documentaries that represent and memorialize mass graves through landscape imagery. While I was very excited to present my findings, I left the conference feeling incredibly grateful for the global network of scholars I met. I met professors and fellow graduate students from across the world who understood the underpinnings of my research in a way I hadn't experienced yet, and through daily hosted lunches, I forged bonds with people I continue to chat with.

The learning was not just limited to panels hosted at the University of Southern California. On the third day of the conference, attendees were instead taken on excursions across the surrounding area. I attended a trip that introduced attendees to the Los Angeles Armenian diaspora community, where we went to the Armenian Genocide Martyrs Monument, toured the Holy Cross Armenian Cathedral, and visited Artsakh Street and a community bookstore. Getting to meet with people working to memorialize the Armenian genocide further illuminated the important role that scholars of genocide have in the fight for recognition.

After such an incredible experience, I am already thinking of the paper I will propose for next year's conference!



Katie Kasperian, 2nd from right, with other conference attendees



# graduation

## Congratulations to our Graduates

*Patricia Kalosa, Executive Assistant*

On Friday, May 3, 2024, the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures celebrated our talented students and their many accomplishments in a standing-room-only graduation ceremony in the Michigan Room at the Michigan League. The ceremony included a heartfelt welcome and remarks from Professor and Department Chair **Benjamin Paloff** and recognition of this year's graduates and award winners by our department faculty, including **Michael Makin, Ewa Malachowska-Pasek, Marija Rosic, Eugene Bondarenko, Svitlana Rogovyk, Nina Shkolnik**, and **Piotr Westwalewicz**. See our website, [Isa.umich.edu/slavic](http://Isa.umich.edu/slavic), for ceremony photos and additional details. Thank you to our amazing graduates, their friends, and families, and to all Slavic Languages and Literatures faculty and staff who helped to create a wonderful and lasting memory for our graduates!



*Graduates listed in alphabetical order. Not all graduates pictured.*

### Russian Majors:

*Elizabeth Blackwell  
Nicholas Collins  
Riley Fish\*  
Amanda Gretzinger  
Grant Landry  
Monica Mashkevich  
John Redfield  
Greyson Tingstad-Carl  
Zachary Tiplady  
Allan Vanzandt*

### Polish Majors:

*Michele Jennings  
Patrick Pullis*



### Polish Language Literature, and Culture Minors:

*Emma Peplinski  
Not pictured:  
James Kolasinski*



### East European and Eurasian Studies Minors:

*Alexander Dontu  
Not pictured:  
Isabella Imiowicz*



### Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian Literature and Culture Minor:

*Nikolina Guberinich*



**Ukrainian Language, Literature and Culture Minor:** *Grieta Blaka*, pictured with her instructors and family from Lithuania



# Slavic Department Undergraduate Awards 2024

## BEST PAPER IN A STUDENT'S NATIVE LANGUAGE

**Grieta Blaka,**  
(Herbert Eagle, Slavic 312)  
"Unveiling Soviet realities  
contradicting the Party's ideological  
position through Ukrainian Films of  
the 1960s-1980s"

## BEST WRITTEN WORK IN A LANGUAGE STUDIED IN THE SLAVIC DEPARTMENT

**Henry MacKeen-Shapiro,**  
(Alina Makin, RCLANG 323)  
"An Advertisement for the Future:  
the Collaboration between  
Vladimir Mayakovskii and  
Aleksandr Rodchenko"

## BEST SPECIAL PROJECT

**Drake Zhao,**  
(Piotr Westwalewicz, Polish 214)  
Video presentation on the  
Slovenian musical group Laibach



*Excellence in Ukrainian Studies Award*  
Pelageya Williams



*Excellence in Bosnian/Croatian/  
Serbian Language Studies Award*  
Brigitte Zamor



*Excellence in Polish Language  
Studies Award*  
Catherine Bennett



*Excellence in Czech Language  
Studies Award*  
Kathryn Podolan



*Excellence in Russian Language  
Studies Award*  
Timothy Olson



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**LSA Priorities:** <https://leadersandbest.umich.edu/find/#!/scu/lisa/priority>