

CIEE Study Center in St. Petersburg, Russia

December 2012

Newsletter #2

Greetings from snowy St. Petersburg! The holiday cheer is in the chilly Arctic air here in Russia's Northern Capital as our students take their exams and shop for last-minute souvenirs. The semester has been a joyful one: here are some highlights!

Field Trip: Kiev + Moscow

For the second year in a row, we explored the capitals of Kiev and Moscow. For this field trip, we held an essay contest, sponsored by our travel agent partners Tari Tour, for the two best descriptions of the five-day adventure. We received twelve submissions with some really wonderful quotes:

"Though I expected the Kiev-Moscow trip to be appealing for such unremarkable reasons as interesting history and architecture, I quickly came to appreciate it for the aid it lent my imagination. I can learn in many ways, but experiences are the most useful. Going on the tours helped me not just to learn, but to care about what I was learning. Seeing what people saw before me hundreds of years ago, I imagine their life better. I do more than remember their story; I understand their reality."

– Anna Sophia Ziton (Kenyon College)

"Although we enjoy our larger such tours and excursions of Moscow's Kremlin, Kiev's St. Sophia Cathedral, and etc., within and between these realities are the flickering personal experiences, and the lowering of a language barrier. Though watching the Russian opera, *The Czar's Bride*, in Moscow's Bolshoi Theater is in itself priceless, the effort of waiting outside for three hours, despite the stop-and-go rainfall, and negotiating with ticket salesmen to allow us the opportunity, truly deepened the experience. Even if these efforts were for a "неудобное место" ("uncomfortable seat"), when the workers allow you to move to empty seats in the sixth row, this printed information is irrelevant."

– Katie Rees (UC – Santa Cruz)

The winners of the essay contest were Mika Kennedy and Bailey Kennedy who returned last week from the trip they won: an all-expenses paid weekend voyage to the ancient Russian cities of Vladimir and Suzdal. To read their winning essays, visit our blog [here](#).

Student Involvement: Ruxi Zhang Chairs Model UN Conference

Ruxi Zhang (Macalester College) formed the first Model UN Club at the Department of Political Science, SPbGU.



"Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the UN and an alumnus of my home university, has inspired me to pursue an interest in international affairs. Since he withdrew from the Syria mission, I have been wondering about possible solutions to the current impasse in the ceasefire negotiation. Chairing this committee allowed me to learn several interesting and thoughtful ideas for a ceasefire from the delegates. I am glad to have connected with the Model UN society in

Russia, to help more students who are passionate about global affairs to practice diplomacy, to share my Model UN experience, and to be inspired by their ideas at the same time. It was very nice to get to know my co-organizer and students of the Model UN club, CIEE and St. Petersburg State University faculty whose support made my organization possible, and delegates from the St. Petersburg Model UN Conference."

To read Ruxi's entire essay about her experience, check out our CIEE St. Petersburg Blog [here](#).

Excursions around St. Petersburg

We continued to offer a wide array of excursions as part of our CIEE cultural program during the second half of the semester. Students were thrilled by the **Yusupov Palace**, where they saw the table where the mystic Rasputin enjoyed his final meal with Felix Yusupov. They also had fun at the **Baltika Brewery**, which has become the largest beer company in Russia.

Fall Project: Diskoteka of the 90's!

From the *stilyagi* of the 60's to the *Leningradskiy* rockers of the 80's, the CIEE fall project has been an exploration of the music, style, politics and social mood of a particular era. This year's group chose the 1990's, a decade of cringe-worthy fashion, saccharine pop music and a brand new country shakily coming into its own. We examined the fascinating recent history of Russia in three stages:

Stage 1: Preparation/Education

Our Student Services staff, Katya and Anton, sparked interest in the 90's topic in November through two separate presentations to our students about fashion, politics, society and music.



To better understand the challenges and realities of this decade, we held a film series on Mondays in which we screened 90's movies including *Brother*, *Window to Paris*, *Prisoner of the Mountains*, and *Genius*. On the 27th of November, the CIEE Discussion Club teamed up with the Student Research Society of the Political Science department to hold a mini-conference on American and Russian stereotypes and how some of them have roots in the 90's (e.g. Russian mafia). This is the discussion club practicing their best "American face."



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Stage 2: Auditions & Rehearsals

After Russian Travel Week, we held auditions for the Diskoteka 90's Concert in Smolny. Then we rented time at a rehearsal space in the middle of the city for three straight evenings. Students had a chance to work with professional musicians on microphone techniques and rehearse their songs with St. Petersburg's up and coming recording artists.



Stage 3: Concert

From Kacie Molzahn (UC-San Diego) working as official makeup artist to Rebecca Boodee (UVA) as stage manager, all of our students played a role to make the concert a hit. There were many Russian Poli Sci students in attendance and on stage – Anna Nikiforova sang "Zombie" by the Cranberries and Pasha Sergeev teamed up with Robert Casty (Georgetown) to sing "Faina" by the Russian boy band NA-NA. A Russian-American girl group covering *Kombinatsiya* featuring CIEE student balalaika players performed back to back with our own CIEE Spice Girls. Lewis & Clark's rockers Tadhg Fendt and David Salkowski pulled off authentic renditions of *Chai*, *Splin* AND Blink 182 without skipping a beat. The final act, Brian Kimball (UNH) and Alan Erickson (Seattle Pacific U.), blew the crowd away with the "Evolution of Dance."

"Music has the notorious ability to cross all sorts of boundaries and this was certainly the case for us. *Diskoteka 90-x* was great because I got to collaborate with top notch Russian musicians, using both American and Russian songs to put on an awesome show that was the epitome of cross-cultural experience." – Tadhg Fendt (Lewis & Clark)



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New Event! International Student Festival

At long last, the neighboring buildings of the Political Science and International Relations departments of St. Petersburg State University have been connected by a corridor. Our departments became even closer last month when our students took part in the inaugural International Student Festival there. Students from over ten different nations were represented and our Resident Director, Irina Makoveeva, was invited to be one of several judges considering three categories of national representation: a 5 minute video, a stand with national souvenirs and traditional food, and a performance. The CIEE American squad of Sara Diaz (U. North Texas), Katie Rees (UC Santa Cruz) and Jarlath McGuckin won Best Performance for a medley of American blues, jazz, rock, pop and rap songs.

Sara Diaz: "At first, I had little to no interest in the festival - I don't consider myself particularly patriotic. However, after working with some awesome people on the project, and actually presenting what we worked so hard on, I realized how much our country has contributed to the international sphere of culture (especially in the music department!)."



Sports: Soccer, Lacrosse, Basketball!

Our students have continued to take part in athletics this semester. CIEE formed a team for a Department-wide indoor soccer tournament. Though the team did not do as well as we'd hoped, they still had a lot of fun and interacted with their Russian peers. Basketball pickup games became even more popular in the second half of the semester. The St. Petersburg White Knights Lacrosse team came up short in a hard fought battle against the Moscow Rebels in Moscow. Keary Iarussi (U. Miami-Ohio), Zach Sessa (College of Wooster), and William Sinkula (UVM) led the team.



CIEE Holiday: Thanksgiving

This year's Thanksgiving Feast was a jubilant occasion. Turkey was in plentiful supply along with gravy, stuffing and all the trimmings, thanks to our wonderful Cooking Committee. A Thanksgiving American Football game was played in the baroque backyard of Smolny Cathedral. After filling up on home-cooked dishes, our students broke out into an American sing-along, the highlight of which was a rousing rendition of "American Pie"!



Your students were a treat to work with. Thank you for sharing them with us for a semester!

All the best,

Всего доброго (*fsyevo dobrovo*),

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