



## 2020 Annual Report

From the Director - Year in Review 2020 - Transitions - CLI 2020 -  
Federal Partnerships - CLI at 30 - Innovation in Research and  
Teaching - Region and Impacts - From the Board Chair - Donor  
Appreciation



Director Keith Brown with General James Mattis, who delivered the 2020 John J. Rhodes lecture at ASU in February 2020.

The event with Sarah Cameron was our last in-person of 2020. It was also a foretaste of the work of juggling timezones, wrangling audio and video, and encouraging interactive learning that was so vital in navigating the past nine months. And in particular, it was the kickstart for that work to begin, to serve the language learning needs and aspirations of students in the Center's 2020 Critical Languages Institute.

CLI Director Irina Levin—running the program for the first time—worked tirelessly from mid-March onward to take the program online. This demanded curricular redesign; negotiation with the State Department and Department of Defense to ensure their needs were met; professional development and technical support for our international corps of instructors and partners; and effective communication to students on what to expect from remote learning. The Melikian family and the entire Advisory Board also provided encouragement and support throughout the adaptive planning process, and program implementation.

The result was one of the largest overall enrollments in the Institute's 30-year history. Our cover image is made up of screenshots of students and instructors captured during their daily synchronous classes in 2020.

In a summer of uncertainty, when familiar rituals of sociability and connection were so disrupted, the challenges and rewards of intensive language study conjured a strong sense of community. The individual testimonies, and the proficiency gains made, bear witness to the dedication and talent of CLI's phenomenal instructors, and the commitment of students who bonded across physical distance.

The spirit of CLI 2020—of technological innovation harnessed to serve student success and to advance knowledge of the language, culture and geopolitics of Russia, Eurasia and East Europe—continues to infuse the Melikian Center's research, training and outreach activities. We hope you'll enjoy reading about the diverse accomplishments and contributions of our students, faculty, alumni, advisory board members and various partners in 2020.

Where were you when the world changed?

For many of us here, the pivot point came on the evening of March 4, 2020 in the College of Design North. The Melikian Center was hosting historian Sarah Cameron from the University of Maryland to speak about the 1930s famine in Kazakhstan, and the increased public attention it is attracting. Colleagues at two Kazakh Universities joined us remotely, hosting morning seminars to hear the talk and participate in the Q and A. We were excited to be exploring our technological capacities for real-time collaboration and dialogue at a distance.

Around 80 Board members, faculty affiliates and student fellows gathered for a reception before Professor Cameron's lecture. It was there that colleagues shared news that ASU was already piloting online synchronous teaching, to test university capacity and student response.

A week later, during ASU's Spring break, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 as a global pandemic. On the same day, ASU announced a temporary halt to in-person classes, which was later extended to the entire semester. On March 23, all ASU summer study abroad programs were cancelled, and on March 30, Governor Doug Ducey issued a stay at home executive order for the State of Arizona.

19 JANUARY

Luncheon Honoring Armenian Delegation



Dr. Gegham Gevorgyan, Rector, Yerevan State University (YSU)  
Dr. Alexander Markarov, Deputy Assistant Rector for International Programs, YSU  
Dr. Vahagn Aglyan, Director Designate, American Studies Center, YSU  
Hosted in the Melikian Hall at St. Apkar's Armenian Apostolic Church

7 FEBRUARY

"Truth, Trust, and Technology in the Digital Age"

Ambassador Jeffrey Bleich, Chair, J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board

Co-sponsored with The Distinguished Global Leaders Series at Barrett, The Honors College



17 FEBRUARY

"Antisemitism, Fascism and Populism"

Federico Finchelstein, Professor of History, The New School for Social Research

2020 Lowe Family Lecture of the ASU Center for Jewish Studies

The Lowe Family Holocaust and Genocide Education Endowment



27 FEBRUARY

"Stalingrad – A Film Screening"  
Melikian Center Film Series  
- Perspectives on WWII: The Eastern Front  
Introduction by Kim Allar and Volker Benkert, SHPRS

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

7-8 FEBRUARY

Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (ACMRS) 2020 Conference "Unfreedom"

Co-sponsored with The College – Division of Humanities; the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts; Department of English; School of International Letters and Cultures; School of Social Transformation; School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies; and the Institute for Humanities Research

Led by Hannah Barker, School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies (SHPRS)



16 FEBRUARY

"A Tribute to Mark L. von Hagen at ASU"

A celebration by friends and colleagues of Mark von Hagen held at the ASU University Club



25 FEBRUARY

"Transcolonial Intimacies: An Ottoman Imam in the Brazilian Empire"  
Ali Kulez, Collegiate Assistant Professor, University of Chicago  
Co-sponsored with Barrett, The Honors College



27 FEBRUARY

"Honeyland – A Film Screening and Discussion"  
Co-sponsored with the United Macedonian Diaspora and the ASU Barrett & O'Connor Washington Center



4 MARCH

"The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan"



Sarah Cameron, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Maryland

6 APRIL

"Kogalym: City of Oil"  
Emerald Peist, Honors Thesis Defense



23 APRIL

"Research Pieces: Melikian Undergraduate Fellows Edition"

Fellow (Mentor)  
Elena Boyd (Adriana Qubaiova)  
Spencer Erjavic (Laurie Manchester)  
Collin Frank and Noah Pensak (Candace Rondeaux)  
Jamie Horowitz (Hilde Hoogenboom)  
McKenna Kellar (Danko Sipka)



16 SEPTEMBER

"The Maribor Uprisings: A Participatory Film"

Maple Razsa, Associate Professor of Global Studies, Colby College, and film director

28 SEPTEMBER to 9 OCTOBER

"Borders, Identity, and Pedagogy" – Dissertation Fieldwork Data Exhibit

Garine Palandjian, PhD student, ASU Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College  
Co-sponsored with the ASU Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts and the ASU Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College



MARCH

APRIL

SEPTEMBER

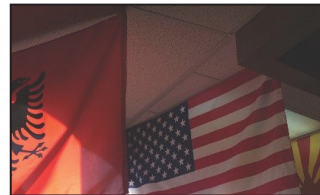


25 MARCH

"Evaluating the Impact of the Tempe Sister Cities International Youth Exchange on Participants' Sustained Global Engagement"  
Nikki Hinshaw, Honors Thesis Defense

11 APRIL

"E Mira Nuk Përmendet': An Oral History of the Albanian-American Community in Arizona"  
Tatum James, Honors Thesis Defense



28 APRIL

"Queer Hedging for Survival: The Case for Syrian Refugees in Beirut"  
ASU Melikian Center Works-in-Progress  
Adriana Qubaiova, Central European University Global Teaching Fellow



10 SEPTEMBER

"Long Live Belarus!": Reflections on a Protest Movement"  
Hanna Liubakova, freelance journalist and researcher from Belarus



17 SEPTEMBER

"Russian Disinformation: A Threat to Democracy?"  
Alina Polyakova, President and CEO, Center for European Policy Analysis  
Major Clyde Daines, Instructor, The U.S. Military Academy at West Point  
An Alexander Hamilton Society event co-sponsored by the ASU Melikian Center

1 OCTOBER and 15 OCTOBER

"Creative Horizons: Art in the Post-Soviet Era"



Victoria Lomasko, muralist, writer, and graphic reporter  
Co-sponsored with the Havighurst Center for Russian & Post-Soviet Studies at Miami University (OH) and the Institute on Russia at the University of South Florida

21 OCTOBER

"Uyghur Human Rights: An Ongoing Crisis"  
Nury Turkel, Commissioner, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom



An Alexander Hamilton Society event co-sponsored by the ASU Melikian Center

12 NOVEMBER

"Confronting Disinformation: Views from the Trenches"

Moderator: Keith Brown, ASU Melikian Center  
Bill Silcock, ASU Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Lauren Gambino, Senior Political Reporter, Guardian News Media  
Holger Roonema, Head of Investigative Team, Ekspress Meedia, Estonia  
Noreen Shams, freelance journalist based in Pakistan

A Phoenix Committee on Foreign Relations (PCFR) event co-sponsored by the McCain Institute, ASU Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and Tempe Sister Cities



3 DECEMBER

"Notes from a Life in Citizen-Diplomacy"

Cynthia Lazaroff, documentary filmmaker and founder of Nuclearwakeupcall.earth  
Mary Choncoff Lecture series co-sponsored with Tempe Sister Cities

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER



8 OCTOBER

"Research Pieces: Fall 2020 Faculty Edition"

Katherine Boyce-Jacino, Barrett, The Honors College  
Imge Oranli, College of Integrative Sciences and Arts

22 OCTOBER

"Not Just A Commercial Deal: How Gazprom Uses Projects Like Nord Stream 2 to Undermine Transatlantic Security"  
Benjamin Schmitt, European Energy Security Advisor, U.S. Department of State (2015-2019)

13 NOVEMBER

"The Business of 'Correct Reading'"  
ASU Melikian Center Works-in-Progress

Jacob Lassin, Postdoctoral Research Scholar, ASU Melikian Center



ПРАВЧЕНИЕ  
ПОСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ



2 DECEMBER

"My Nuclear Wakeup Call: The Need to Restore Russian-American Dialogue"

Cynthia Lazaroff, documentary filmmaker and founder of Nuclearwakeupcall.earth

2020 saw changes in both College-level leadership and internal staffing. After serving for five years as the Dean of Social Sciences in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Libby Wentz took on a new leadership role as Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate College. Libby was a consistent advocate for the Melikian Center as Social Sciences Dean, and we look forward to her continued engagement, especially in helping expand the Center's work with graduate students.



Succeeding Libby in direct oversight of the Center is incoming Social Sciences Dean Pardis Mahdavi, who brings a strong commitment to foreign language and area studies from her own background as an anthropologist focusing on Iran.

At the Center, student assistant Layne Philipson graduated from ASU in May with a BA in Russian. She also won recognition as a Dean's Medalist, and received several scholarships for graduate study, including a Critical Languages Scholarship. Before leaving, she worked alongside incoming student assistant Rae Larsen, who came into the role after taking Russian in CLI 2019, and was therefore able to get up to speed quickly.



Program Coordinator Emily Hopkins left to take up an opportunity to work in cybersecurity, her field of study as an ASU undergraduate. Emily has been a key contributor to CLI programming in particular for

the past six years, including her time as a student worker.

Starting December 1, Kristen Ho joined the Center as Program Coordinator. Kristen graduated from UC Berkeley this year with a major in political science and a minor in Russian. She studied abroad in Russia and wrote her senior thesis comparing the politicization of memory in Kazakhstan and Ukraine—both countries which experienced famine under Soviet rule in the 1930s.

Beyond the classroom, Kristen was a board member at the student-run nonprofit The Queer Alliance and Resource Center, where she was responsible for outreach and publicity. Kristen's interests include all things related to Russian language, poetry, and literature, and U.S.-Russian relations, and she is excited to support the study of a corner of the world she loves.



Two additional members of the Melikian team in 2020-21 are postdoctoral fellow Jacob Lassin, profiled on p.28, and Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) Yasin Başaran. As well as helping ASU students and community members learn Turkish, through an Intermediate Class and a less formal Study Group, Yasin is also learning more about US culture and the teaching profession through the classes he is taking. In addition, he is investing effort to be more involved in the community through volunteer activities and/or cultural events, striving to promote mutual understanding as outlined in FLTA program objectives.

One of Yasin's favorite quotes is "to teach is to learn twice." He believes in the notion that language and culture are inseparably linked. An occasional pessimist, he had imagined a lot of reasons that might have prevented him from having this opportunity, but he had never thought of a global pandemic. Yet, he is here and he is thankful to those who made this happen and helped him through the sometimes painful process of cultural adaptation. He's happy to be benefiting from professional and cultural enrichment opportunities offered by the Melikian Center, but cannot help but wonder what it would be like in a Covid-free world.

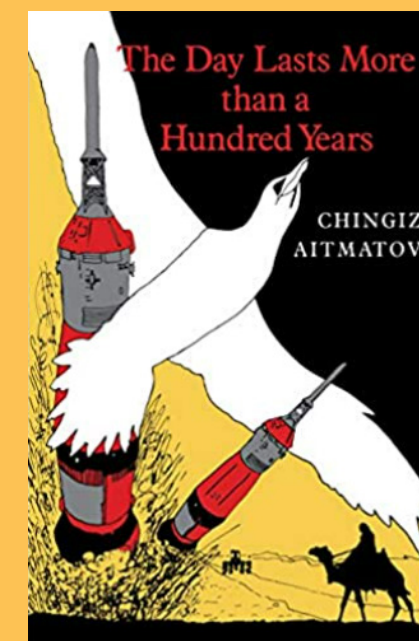


In 2020, the Center bade farewell to several long-time allies and supporters.

In February, over a hundred of Mark von Hagen's colleagues, students and friends gathered with his close family to honor Mark's rich life and legacy. Mark passed away in September 2019, after spending the last decade of his professional life at ASU, combining his own scholarship with a range of leadership roles including service as Interim Director of the Melikian Center, and also with generous mentorship of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as junior faculty.

Founding advisory board member John Roberts passed away this year; so too, from Covid-19, did Nick Rizos, a key supporter of the Mary Choncoff Fund to advance North American-Macedonian relations. The Center also lost a friend in Robert Tancer, who as president of the Board of the Center for Jewish Studies offered good counsel and promoted closer collaboration.

The Advisory Board welcomed as new members David and Claire Merkel, Linda Lederman and Elonia and Arben Lasku. They joined with longer-term members in a new initiative to build community at the Center through a regular reading group. The group is reading works from across Russia, Eurasia and East Europe, and gaining insights into the lives and times of peoples who live well beyond our fence lines. For that reason, regular attendee Stella Saperstein has christened the group "Books without Borders." In Spring 2021, the first book will be *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* by the Kyrgyz author, Chingiz Aitmatov. Currently convening over Zoom, the group is looking forward to meeting in person when the situation allows.



# The Critical Languages Institute

## Director's Report

### by Irina Levin



Last year, reflecting on CLI 2019 in these very pages, I wrote that “our wonderful faculty and students ... never failed to tell me that the best part of CLI was the people it brought together.” When I promised to

take that spirit with me into CLI 2020, I looked forward to creating even more opportunities for all of us to learn from each other while eating, dancing, singing, and laughing together. In March of 2020, when the dawning realities of the Covid-19 pandemic ruled out an in-person program, I questioned whether any of that would be possible—and even whether CLI 2020 would be possible.

So, I turned to our CLI faculty. How did they feel about the prospect of an online CLI program? Saodat Adilova, our Uzbek teacher, wrote that she would find “some bits of joy for summertime” and suggested “online joint dinners.” One of our Russian teachers, Elena Doludenko, wrote back to ask Saodat for her Uzbek *plov* recipe “so we could enjoy it while we are dining together online.” Irina Drigalenko, another Russian teacher, wrote that a “new era” was upon us and that we must “stay positive and patient with each other.” Agnieszka Mielczarek, who teaches Polish, admitted that she had never taught

online before and that the prospect was a frightening one. But, she concluded, she would do her best.

Reading these responses, I knew that our faculty would do everything in their power to make it work. They would stay up ridiculously late or wake up ridiculously early, they would be meticulously prepared, they would be unfailingly generous with their time, they would be creative and tenacious and kind. At CLI, our job was to support them and to make sure our prospective students knew that they would be in good hands. So, we organized Zoom training sessions for the faculty and met with them one-on-one and in small groups so they could feel at home in their new digital classrooms. We provided them with an additional technology budget so that they could upgrade their internet connections and acquire any equipment they needed. Our CLI applicants began getting to know their instructors before classes even began, through short interviews we posted to our website and via email.

By the time May came around, it became clear that CLI 2020 would be one of our biggest cohorts ever, with over 150 students studying all 12 of our languages! I expected a summer filled with panicked emails and WhatsApp messages, but after the first few weeks, things were running quite smoothly. I visited all of the classrooms and found that not only were students learning, but they were actually enjoying themselves! So much so that, following four hours of classes on Zoom, many of them returned to attend our co-curricular activities. Along with our students and faculty, the Melikian Center community joined us for CLI’s jam-packed event schedule. At our Culture Nights, we were once again eating, singing, dancing, and laughing together as we learned from each other.

We welcomed two new faculty members to CLI 2020. To say that Turkish instructor Nilay

Sevinç and Persian instructor Jafar Shokrolah Zadeh joined us during a highly unusual time would be putting it mildly! They brought with them a wealth of teaching experience and an incredible commitment to their students. I loved visiting their lively classrooms and hearing about their students’ accomplishments.

Any time I complimented a CLI faculty member on their achievements in the classroom, they re-directed the praise to their students. The CLI 2020 group, they told me, was something special. In addition to the usual intensive pace of the program, they faced down internet issues and health issues, working in crowded households and working in social isolation, dashed hopes for study and research abroad, and a million other pressures and disappointments, large and small. And still, their Zoom boxes appeared on their instructors’ screen each morning and they were ready to work. At the end of the program, both our in-house and external proficiency tests confirmed just how far they had come.

Our CLI 2020 Graduation Celebration was an absolutely joyous occasion. We got to hear from all of the faculty and many of our students, including an incredible singing performance by Polish student (and Ukrainian alumna) Erica Glenn and a short but stirring speech by Uzbek student (and Russian alum) Albert Cavallaro. We also had the privilege of hearing from the new Dean of the Social Sciences, Pardis Mahdavi. Dean Mahdavi’s words have stayed with me and I will take this opportunity to share them with you:

*I want to take a moment to really commend all of you for taking so seriously the importance of CLI. Language and area*

## CLI 2020 IN NUMBERS

158

STUDENTS STUDIED



12

CRITICAL LANGUAGES



300+

PROFICIENCY LEVELS  
GAINED



43

STUDIED  
WITH  
PARTNER



70

RECEIVED  
SCHOLARSHIPS

SCHOLARSHIPS TOTALING

\$223,360



*studies are probably more vital today than ever before. We are faced with global challenges that cross borders and boundaries at an alarming speed... Bridging and being able to translate is more vital now than at any other point in time... I can't wait to watch the way in which CLI infuses and informs the ways you transform our world.*

As we head into the uncertainty of 2021, my spirits are buoyed by the circle of people—our teachers and students, but also the Melikian Center Advisory Board, faculty affiliates, and members of university leadership—who grasp so deeply the breadth of possibilities that CLI brings into being. CLI 2021, whether it is in person or online, will continue to grow this circle, especially as we work to make our program more accessible and inclusive. I too cannot wait to watch how it inspires our students to transform the world that we all share.

Agnieszka Mielczarek, CLI Polish Instructor, reflects on CLI 2020



I was very happy with my CLI teaching experience in 2020. I had a wonderful group of students. After several years of having a very low number of students, this year the group expanded to six—which was testament to the efforts made by others in CLI to expand the program. Furthermore,

It was certainly a joy to see the students grow in the Polish language so greatly in such a short time. I finished teaching the course knowing the students had made the necessary effort to prepare themselves for travel and study in Poland successfully, and this certainly left me with a very positive feeling!

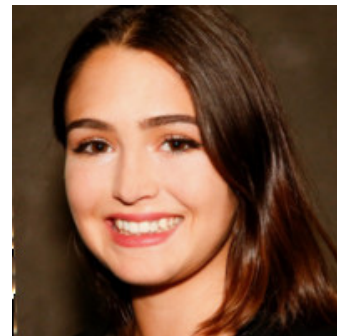
The platform e-polish.eu that we used was a very valuable tool in teaching the course. The platform in conjunction with a traditional book was instrumental in creating a successful learning experience. I was also surprised by how effective Zoom was. The breakout rooms were a great asset, and definitely enriched the program and learning process. The exceptional circumstances of Covid-19 brought out the best in a truly outstanding group of students, and I am truly thankful to them for making this year's CLI the most successful teaching and learning experience in my memory.

the quality of students this year was extremely high, which made this class most enjoyable. I also appreciated the efforts of CLI/ASU in helping with technology. I truly felt that I was part of a team and that CLI cared about teachers, as well as the students. I also felt that switching to online teaching was a pleasant surprise. I was somewhat skeptical going into this new experience, but the efforts of all involved—and I certainly include all of the students—created a very positive learning environment.

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers at CLI

The global pandemic forced the evacuation of over 7,000 Peace Corps volunteers from around the world—the first time in the program's history such a measure had to be taken. After consultation with the Melikian Advisory Board and with agency leadership, CLI asked returned volunteers for expressions of interest in further language study. The response was overwhelming and CLI was able to provide full funding for three Returned Peace Corps Volunteers in each of our Albanian, Macedonian and Ukrainian classes. All nine were enthusiastic and committed participants, generously sharing their own in-country experiences in the classroom, and looking forward, when possible, to resuming their grass-roots work for international understanding.

Carolyn Mesa, CLI Uzbek 2019 alumna and 2020 contributor



This January, I will fly to Urgench, Uzbekistan to serve as a Fulbright ETA for 10 months. After 14 days in quarantine, I will start my new life and apply my Uzbek language.

In 2019, I enrolled in first-year Uzbek at CLI immediately following undergraduate graduation. Our instructor Saodat Adilova made this intensive class manageable and exciting. She opened up our eyes to a new world through film, food, and dance.

One fond memory from CLI is performing the Andijon Polka to our peers during Uzbekistan's culture night. Saodat *Opa*\* choreographed a partnered routine loaded with historic meaning. As a dancer myself, I enjoyed the opportunity to dance with friends and share this culture with the rest of the CLI community. Saodat showed us traditional and modern dances throughout Uzbekistan. I became so enamored by them that I intend to continue learning Uzbek dance while living in the vibrant Khorezm region.

I knew that I wanted to take the knowledge acquired from CLI and apply it. The possibility of a Fulbright grant was brought forward in one of many academic and professional breakout sessions. The Fulbright information session discussed the application process and provided invaluable tips for writing the required statement documents. I left so excited and so motivated that I started my application the same day!

Following my CLI experience, I went to work for a global IT consulting company. Using our research data, I advise organizations on

technology trends and help them come up with their own metrics and KPIs. This glimpse inside the corporate world lends a hand to my personal inquiry between technology, society, and education. I will incorporate these together in the classroom and when obtaining a master's degree related to technology and international affairs.



*Still from Carolyn's co-written Uzbek culture night presentation, as featured on Uzbek television.*

The connections I made while at ASU's CLI are invaluable. I helped this year's Uzbek students learn Uzbek remotely. In addition, our class flexed our language skills during this year's National Uzbek Language Day on a Zoom meeting with the Uzbekistan ambassador! The relationships I made with the professors and students continue to prepare me for success to this day. I am so thankful I received a scholarship and participated in CLI. This experience is the springboard in achieving the career I dreamt of.

*\*Opa - a term of respect or affection which could be translated as "big sister."*

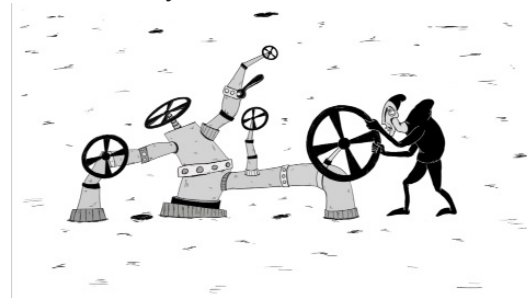
The 2020 Critical Languages Institute was supported by grants from the State Department and the Department of Defense, as well as gifts from the Melikian family, members of the Melikian Advisory Board, and other supporters. A total of 84 students received scholarship funds or fee waivers.

## Title VIII

Sixteen graduate students received awards from the Title VIII program, administered by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the U.S. Department of State. The program's mission is "to ensure that timely, independent, analysis informs foreign policy decisions." Title VIII supports research and training on Russia, Eurasia and East Europe, and encourages grant recipients to make their expertise and insights accessible beyond academic circles. Since CLI first received Title VIII support in 2011, a majority of recipients have attended overseas programs. Spending time in the region is a critical career component for many graduate students, for their language proficiency and also for preliminary archival research, or establishing key contacts for future collaboration.

When the pandemic hit, CLI worked with the 24 Title VIII awardees—from institutions in 11 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Europe—to strategize how best to advance their studies in 2020. Several switched to a different program from their original plans, and emphasized the productive impact that the adjustment made. Maryam Bainazar, for example, from Ohio State University, studied advanced Russian with instructors from long-time CLI partner, the London School of Bishkek in the Kyrgyz Republic. She wrote: "In addition to learning the Russian language, I learned a lot about Kyrgyz family customs and culture... My research focus on the Covid-19 pandemic and the response by the authorities in Central Asia has taken a turn. It is important to study these regions as post-colonial territories to understand their reliance on the Russian economy. The Title VIII- supported language training program allowed me to get involved with organizations in other countries and to adopt the skill to think about the former territories of the Soviet Union as separate entities."

The largest contingent of 2020 Title VIII grantees studied Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS), and appreciated the input of our Sarajevo partner, the Association for Language and Culture, Lingvisti. For Madeline Stull, an ASU graduate student who had already studied BCS for two years, CLI offered the opportunity for an extended master-class on the Western Balkans. Madeline reported: "My professor organized each week thematically to address the culture and history of Bosnia and the surrounding region, which helped me hone my understanding of the region through the eyes of a local and introduce me to new regional issues that I would have not discovered on my own."



*In Summer 2020, Title VIII students had the chance to discuss Central Asian cultures with Mankurt director Ermina Takenova.*

2020 also saw the second iteration of the online class for Title VIII recipients in Post-Soviet Geopolitics. For BCS student Sarah Riendeau, from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, the course was transformative, exposing her to the idea of geopolitics which she had not encountered in her studies before. "This concept," she wrote, "intrigued me and became a starting point for me to analyze my field research data conducted on formal and informal responses to the current wave of migrants traversing Bosnia & Herzegovina to the EU. Additionally this course allowed me to expand my knowledge of geopolitical issues and historical narratives that shape foreign policy objectives." Sarah is applying these new perspectives as she is navigating the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT).

Since 2011, Title VIII has supported 165 fellowships to attend CLI, advancing the regional expertise of 143 US graduate students. CLI's application for support in 2021 was successful; Title VIII funds will support piloting first-year Kazakh, as well as a workshop for alumni from the program, focused on writing for policy impact.

## Project Global Officer

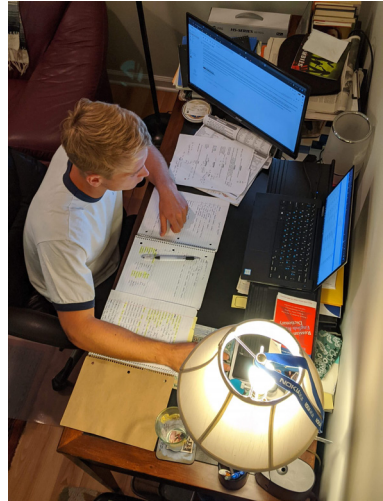
2020 was ASU's 13th year participating in Project GO (Global Officer), a program of the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) which equips future military officers with language skills, regional expertise, and intercultural communication skills. In previous years, the Critical Languages Institute's programs in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz Republic and in Denpasar, Indonesia have provided ROTC cadets with a rich study abroad experience alongside their intensive language study. In 2020, in concert with the other universities that contribute to this national program, ASU adapted the program to the constraints on in-person travel. CLI's partners in both locations went the extra mile to enhance the online classroom experience for the 25 Project GO students. Cadets had virtual excursions, and regular Zoom interactions with their "virtual" host families, providing opportunities to practice their language skills in semi-structured settings.



*ASU's orientation videos included music from Kyrgyz performer Kenjagul Kubatova*

This was the second year that the Melikian Center partnered with IIE to host the Central Asia PDO. It was the first experiment by the Fulbright Program in offering a remote PDO. ASU's experience and expertise in both synchronous and asynchronous online education were major assets in the planning and implementation process. Videographer Ari Gajraj, who has made major contributions to the Center's enhanced multimedia outreach efforts, produced videos which, according to IIE staff, set a new standard for other regional PDOs. Key contributors included Dan Hart in ASU's Study Abroad Office and Carla Mahnke from the Office of Equity and Inclusion, who briefed participants on issues of personal health and safety in the region. Additional orientation for the English Teaching Assistants was provided in synchronous sessions run by colleagues Shane Dixon, Vincent Lauter and Dilafruz Vosieva from ASU's Global Launch. Elizabeth Blackburn, two-time CLI alumna (2014, 2016), former Fulbright ETA in Kazakhstan (2016-17) and now Program Coordinator for Global Initiatives at the Cronkite School, also drew on her own experience to address questions and concerns expressed by the new Fulbrighters, eager to take up their delayed awards.

CLI aimed to deliver the same proficiency targets as in prior years: for introductory level students to reach ILR 1, and for intermediate-level students to reach ILR 1+ or better. Out of the 23 PGO students who completed exit assessments, 21 achieved or surpassed those targets. This achievement, in this year of remote learning, is testament to the robustness of ASU's pedagogical approach, the exceptional instructional team, and the commitment of the students. Particularly impressive were the gains made by students in both the Russian and Indonesian programs, who came in with 1+ or higher and were nonetheless able to make measurable progress in proficiency.



*Project GO participant Zach Velling in his submission for CLI's 2020 photo contest.*

## Fulbright Pre-Departure Orientation

In October 2020, in cooperation with the Institute for International Education (IIE), the Melikian Center hosted a virtual pre-departure orientation (PDO) for U.S. Fulbright scholars, student researchers, and English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) heading in January 2021 to five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and to Bhutan. This is a program of the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government, administered by IIE.

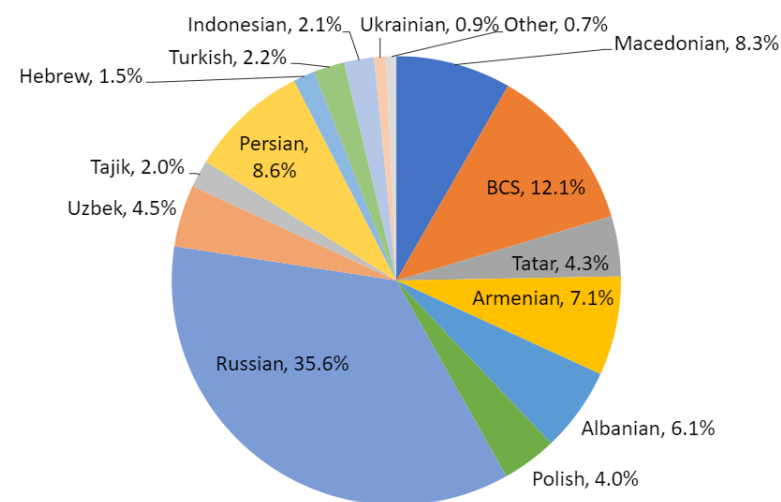
**Since 1991, the Critical Languages Institute has equipped hundreds of students with the skills and confidence to pursue study abroad and region-focused research.**

In 1991, ASU professors Stephen Batalden and Lee Croft launched a bold initiative. They offered ASU students the opportunity to take a full year's equivalent of foreign language credits in an intensive summer language program, held in the evenings on Tempe's campus. By offering less commonly taught languages, their hope was also to build a destination for graduate students from across the country, as well as members of heritage communities wishing to reconnect with their history and identity through language study. In that first summer, 21 students studied Macedonian with a visiting instructor from the University of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, Evica Konechni. The class included three out-of-state graduate students, and at least one Macedonian-American.

Thirty years on, the experiment continues. Over those three decades, the Critical Languages Institute has offered instruction in a total of fifteen less commonly taught languages, equipping students with the skills and the confidence to pursue study abroad and region-focused research, and to compete successfully for prestigious national fellowships like the Boren and Gilman scholarships and Fulbright awards. CLI advances Arizona State University's overall goals of excellence and inclusion,

as articulated in the University charter and its design aspirations. By keeping a low student to instructor ratio, recruiting and retaining outstanding teachers, and by collaborating with universities and schools across the region, CLI has achieved consistently high levels of proficiency gains, as well as student satisfaction.

As well as federal funding from Title VIII and Project GO, philanthropic giving from the Advisory Board, CLI alumni and other supporters of the program has supported merit- and need-based scholarships. Among the named scholarships available are the Elaine Berkowitz scholarship for the study of Albanian, and the Doris Hastings International Distinguished Engagement Award (IDEA), which has funded an international experience for fifteen students since its launch in 2011.



Breakdown by language of CLI's 2400 enrollments since 1991.

**Sarah Kotlar (BA Russian, 2012) was awarded a Hastings IDEA fellowship to study Armenian. She shared these reflections on her discovery of foreign languages, and the life-changing impact of study abroad.**

**Q: Where are you now, and what are you doing there?**

A: I'm currently in Georgia, which is where I am from originally, going to school for nursing at Kennesaw State University. I have been fortunate enough to get to use my language skills to converse with patients while they are in the hospital. Sometimes even just a few friendly words in your native language can help to comfort you in a time of need.

**Q: What got you interested in languages while you were at ASU, and what kept you coming back to CLI?**

A: My grandfather was a World War II veteran, and believed the best way to move forward and heal was through closer communication across national borders. He learned German, Japanese and Russian, and went on to do business with people from all over the world. I remember being fascinated by my grandfather's ability to have conversations and build authentic relationships in different languages, so when I saw that CLI had a Russian program I jumped at the opportunity. I'd always had an interest in languages: CLI is where I fell in love with learning them. After my first Russian CLI experience I switched my major to Russian at ASU, and later also studied BCS and Armenian. I kept coming back because of the passionate faculty, and the wonderful job they do sharing the languages, history, and cultures. It makes you want to immerse yourself as much as possible.

**Q: Which experience do you remember most strongly from CLI?**

A: I would have to go with my time in Yerevan, Armenia. Most of us traveled to Yerevan from the United States via London: this was 2012, the year of the Olympics in London, and so there were a lot of delays at Heathrow. I ended up arriving late at night in Yerevan, without my luggage, but ahead of everyone else, including my professor, Siranush Khandanyan.



Sarah Kotlar (Hastings fellow for Armenian, 2012) on her first day in Yerevan with Armenian students and hosts (l-r) Veronika, Armenuhi, Sarah Kotlar, Greta.

She arranged for her family to pick me up and take me to our housing; then the next day, her English students came to show me around the city and help me exchange money and buy some essentials. They showed me their favorite places in the city and bought me all of their favorite foods to try. They taught me new words for the things we encountered throughout the evening and tested their English skills with me. The exchange of language and culture with new friends is always an exciting experience, but the hospitality and kindness they showed me was something I will never forget. I treasure the lasting friendships that began that day.

**Q: What's something you learned while at ASU or CLI that surprised you or changed your perspective?**

A: I learned about the Armenian Genocide at CLI. It was not something I had learned about during my years in school. I remember feeling shocked that something so horrific could occur to an entire culture, and so many people were unaware of it ever having happened. I was heartbroken to see the recent attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh and the devastation it brought to my friends, and so many Armenians. The wounds of genocide still run deep and were brought to new light with these recent attacks.

## For many years, the Critical Languages Institute has served to prepare ASU students for national fellowships.

Maria Santiago started her ASU career as a Russian major with dreams of becoming a writer. That changed, she recalls, when she took Economics 101 with Melikian faculty affiliate Professor Nancy Roberts. She was captivated by the real-world relevance of Professor Roberts' focus on commerce and entrepreneurship. She was also intrigued to learn about Roberts' work in the Balkans, teaching students and faculty about the economics of small business start-ups,

and putting great ideas into practice. This was a field, she realized, where she could exercise her creativity, and combine her passions. She studied BCS at the Critical Languages Institute in Summer 2003 and went on to win an NSEP/Boren fellowship to spend her junior year abroad in Novi Sad in Serbia.

It was Fall 2004, just five years after NATO's air campaign had attacked Serbia's infrastructure, and civilians had been killed. Anti-American sentiments were still strong, and Maria recalls one episode when someone in a tall apartment building dropped a carton on eggs on a group of American students, and yelled out "how do YOU like being bombed?" One of Novi Sad's two bridges had still not been repaired, which served as a daily reminder to the city's residents, as they struggled through rush hour, of the damage done to the country.

What especially surprised Maria, though, was the content of economics classes at the Univer-

sity. She remembers early on going to a class and seeing a complex, bewildering set of equations on a chalkboard which aimed to calculate the state subsidies and wage rates necessary for an average worker to maintain a minimal standard of living. The focus was still on old-school labor economics—over a decade after the great socialist experiment of Yugoslavia had ended in widespread unemployment and shrinking productivity. The math involved was very high level; but where, she wondered, was the basic introduction to market economics that young Serbs would need to succeed in a changing world?

On her return to ASU, Maria found new channels for her creativity. She wrote a business plan to launch her own line of denim jeans as her senior project. She then went on to teach AP economics to 11th and 12th graders at one of the very first BASIS charter schools. Maria was also tasked with preparing 8th graders to take AP economics in 9th grade. There was no middle school textbook, so she wrote one. Large portions of Maria's textbook are still in use in BASIS schools across the country.

Starting a business needs capital, which Maria didn't have. So she took a job in the retail clothing industry, where her talent and drive were quickly recognized and rewarded. But



*Novi Sad, showing one of the bridges across the Danube destroyed in NATO's 1999 bombing campaign, still unrepaired during Maria's time in Novi Sad.*

after a decade, she sensed she'd lost connection with her creative side, and switched tracks. Because the year in Serbia had been so transformative, she chose to travel again—this time to Indonesia, where she established contacts with a national network of journalists, and spent a year conducting interviews on the theme of state violence, and its toxic effects on religious beliefs and practices. This was her first extended encounter with the methods of oral history, and she loved it.

She returned to the United States to take a masters degree in library science, which then led to her current position as an oral history archivist for StoryCorps, the non-profit that launched in 2003 with a single recording booth in Grand Central Station, and has now allowed

## 30 years by the numbers

In CLI's 30-year history, participants have completed over 2400 class enrollments in less commonly taught languages. A majority of these have been in languages of Russia, Eurasia and East Europe. All told, almost 2000 individual students have attended at least one summer of CLI to complete the equivalent of a full year of university-level language study (eight or ten credits). Of those students, more than 10% (241) have returned at least twice: in most cases for additional study in their primary foreign language and in some cases to explore a second. Those students have come to CLI from states all across the U.S, as well as other countries. The map on pages 18-19 provides a snapshot of the Critical Languages Institute's reach, attracting committed students for whom ASU's programs offer the only viable opportunity to pursue their passion project or their career goals.

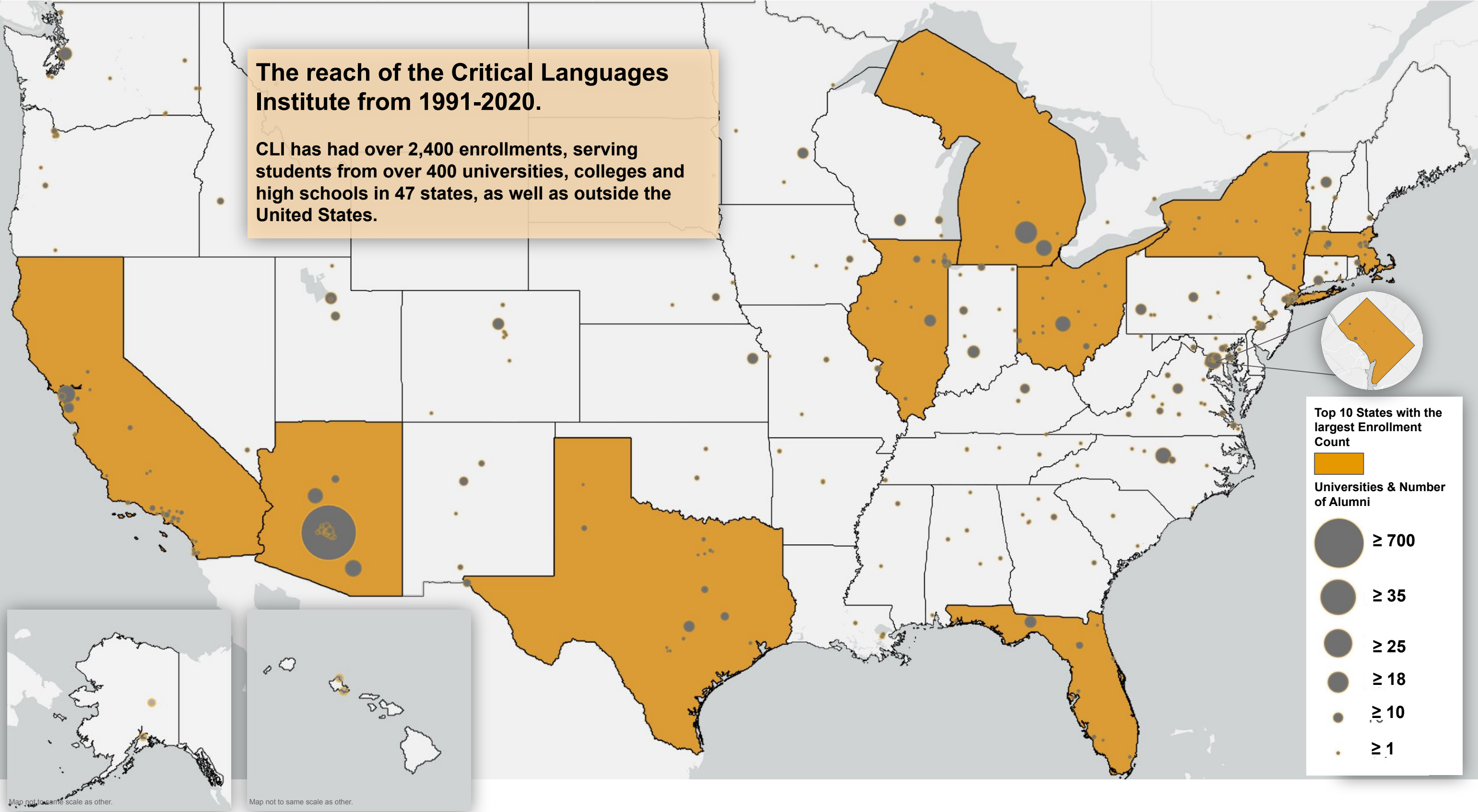
The Critical Languages Institute's design has always been driven by best practices in language pedagogy. Experts agree that target

over 650,000 Americans to record their stories, which are preserved at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. StoryCorps' mission is "to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world." That goal, together with the continuously innovating business model it demands, gives Maria the opportunity to give full rein to the passions and talents that have sustained her since walking into Nancy Roberts' classroom at ASU.

language immersion accelerates learning: accordingly, CLI has prioritized building programs in host countries to allow students to put their classroom learning to use.

Over 40% of CLI students studied abroad during their program. A plurality of those students have taken advanced Russian, requiring ingenuity and flexibility from CLI leadership as security issues—including war in Ukraine, and Department of Defense restrictions on travel—have demanded establishing programs in countries outside the Russian federation. The map on pages 20-21 shows the locations and years of operation of CLI's overseas programs. Because of Covid-19, CLI's 2020 overseas programs operated remotely, with no in-person travel.

These maps were prepared by Nicholas Gayer, who received his Masters in Geographic Information Systems from ASU in Spring 2020. They draw from his ongoing work to build a StoryMaps site to combine qualitative and quantitative data on CLI's history.





## The CLI and REES Experience

During 2020, the Melikian Center launched an effort to contact alumni from the Critical Languages Institute and ASU's Russian and East European Studies (REES) Certificate program, to see where their foreign language and area studies had taken them. We were curious to hear from alumni who attended other institutions, or who went on to work in other professions where the benefits of intensive language study or time abroad were less intuitive. As well as Sarah Kotlar's and Maria Santiago's stories, we include here three further alumni stories. More will be featured on the Melikian Center website during 2021, and all will be available through our planned StoryMaps site.

Evan Tieslink studied Uzbek at CLI in 2010 and 2013. Although he switched from a focus on the region to explore data science, the cross-cultural skills he gained through language study have proved invaluable in his career.

**Q: Where are you now, and what are you doing there?**

I am a data analyst, currently working back at ASU. I am in the research office (Knowledge Enterprise) on the team that publishes monthly reports on sponsored research data.

**Q: How did you get there from CLI?**

During my undergraduate ASU experience, I took two years of Uzbek at CLI and one year of Arabic. That language experience led to a State Department internship offer in Uzbekistan. However at this crossroads I opted instead to take an internship in Washington DC at the McCain Institute for International Leadership. This exposed me to other ASU initiatives like the Decision Theater and the idea of using data to help policymakers drive decisions. This was formative in choosing

ASU for my graduate studies in Science and Technology Policy, to explore the relationship between people and data. I then worked for three years in Washington DC as a systems analyst contractor for the Department of Justice, before moving back to Arizona and my current job at ASU.

**Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at CLI?**

Both of my Uzbek teachers at CLI were amazing people. I still have Uzbek music on my iPod from my first summer when our teacher would play us music, and for years after classes ended I communicated with my second teacher, Feruza Boymirzaeva. They felt more like peers or friends than a traditional professor.

**Q: What's something you learned while at CLI that surprised you or changed your perspective?**

Although I do not currently use Uzbek or Arabic in my career, I realize how much I learned from exposure to different cultures, mentalities, geographies, histories, foods, and people. While working in DC my data team was almost entirely composed of people from outside the USA (Sudan, Gambia, Vietnam, Wales, India, and Ethiopia, among others) and it was never a struggle for me to build friendships and understanding with them. Learning difficult languages at CLI rewired my brain a bit and made me more comfortable and accepting of people with different languages, religions, cultures, and ways of thinking than myself. No matter what you end up doing after your university experience, this is one of the most important skills you can have throughout your professional career.



Todd Katzner started working in Kazakhstan in 1997, in his first year of a PhD program at ASU, and won a Boren/NSEP scholarship there in 2000. He has returned to Kazakhstan every summer since, except for 2020, when Covid-19 ruled it out. He shared his journey with the Melikian Center.



Todd Katzner with adult female steppe eagle in Kazakhstan.

**Q: Where are you now, and what are you doing there?**

I am currently a research wildlife biologist for the US Geological Survey; providing critical information to the Department of Interior, the US Government and the American people. A large part of my research is focused on mitigating impacts on wildlife from renewable energy development. I have also maintained a long-term (23-year) research program in Central Asia, focused on ecology and wildlife conservation, especially birds of prey.

**Q: How did you get there from ASU?**

It has been a long and diverse route! After my language study and PhD at ASU, I received an NSF International Postdoctoral Fellowship. This included travel to two former Soviet countries, Georgia and Kazakhstan. After that, I worked for five years at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, building a Conservation and Field Research Program, then took a faculty position at West Virginia University before moving to USGS.

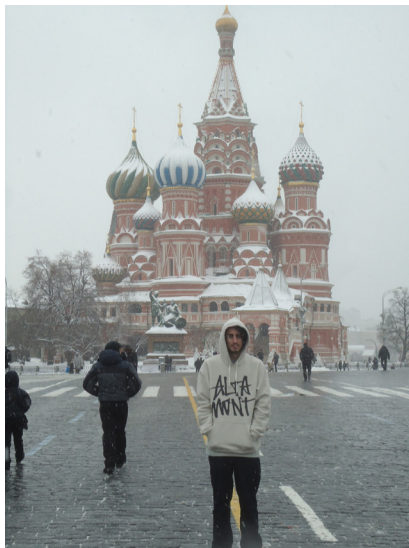
**Q: Which experience taught you the most important lesson while at ASU/CLI?**

Living in Kazakhstan for 4-5 months per year has been key for me. I learned a ton about biology and ecology. More importantly perhaps, I learned a great deal about working with people from other cultures; how different US society is from that in other parts of the planet; and how to accomplish research and personal goals in difficult settings. It was challenging both to comply with the standards and rules of the Kazakh system, and to meet the expectations and requirements of my US PhD program. That really changed my perspective and once I figured out how to operate in both worlds, I became a better person and a better scientist.

## Learning Russian, Speaking Skate

*For one CLI alumnus, a trip to Kursk made a deep impression*

Now an Assistant Professor of Sociology at SUNY Oneonta, Tyler Dupont is quick to emphasize that he was "not the best undergrad by any stretch." He graduated from ASU in Justice and Social Inquiry with a 2.67 GPA, having picked that major partially because it had no foreign language requirement. As an undergrad, he worked at a local skateboard shop, where he channeled his enthusiasm for and insider knowledge of skateboarding into managing the skate team and buying skate goods for the store. However, just prior to graduating, he recalls, "I realized the skateboard industry probably wasn't going to offer the opportunities I hoped for." From that point on, he resolved to get the most out of his time in college and began to invest his energy into his studies. He even made the Dean's List during his last year at ASU.



Tyler Dupont in Red Square, Moscow.

With a bit of luck and strong GRE score, he was probationally accepted into an MA program in sociology at the University of Buffalo. As a graduate student, he finally came to appreciate how learning a second language could open many opportunities in life and he committed to taking a foreign language, studying abroad, and doing an internship overseas. He audited Russian classes, took an opportunity to intern at the US Embassy in Azerbaijan, and then in summer 2010 came back to Arizona to take Russian at CLI. Language study did not come easily—after starting in the 200 level class, he was advised to take the introductory class. Despite this, he enjoyed the experience of being part of the CLI program and the camaraderie of studying in a small class. After making progress and enjoying his experience he returned to CLI for a second semester of Russian language study in 2011. After that second semester, the instructor suggested he continue studying Russian with her in Toronto at her home university. He jumped at the chance and moved to Toronto.

In 2013, he was awarded a Title VIII fellowship to study in Moscow. Prior to traveling to Russia, he reached out to acquaintances to try to connect with the Russian skateboarding community. They extended a warm welcome, and brought him into the local scene. Among many amazing experiences with the local skaters, Tyler recalls in particular one trip he took from Moscow to Kursk, with Gosha Koneyshev, Tolya Titaev, Kirill Korobkov and other acquaintances from Moscow. Having arrived at the train station late, he was unable to get a ticket on the same train as his friends, so Tyler had to travel alone and overnight by train. After arriving in Kursk in the early hours of the morning, he met up with the other skaters. He fondly remembers watching his friends skate in the demo and hanging out with the local skate kids. He recalls, “being a small part of that event and being able to watch Gosha and everyone skate the local park was amazing.” The next day, Tyler and the Russian skaters set out to explore the city: touring WWII monuments, the local open air-market, and various skate spots throughout the city. The thrill of using his Russian to make his way around the city was a highlight of his time in Russia.

As an assistant professor of sociology, he still regrets not embarking on foreign language studies earlier, or continuing them longer. Nevertheless, his Russian experiences have remained incredibly influential. He uses stories from his time in Russia to illustrate the concepts of deviance and how social norms differ across cultures and contexts. And as he continues to research and publish on the identities, hierarchies and media practices of “lifestyle sports,” he is looking forward to the chance to revisit the rich ethnographic material that Russian skateboarders offered him, and that his CLI training gave him the language skills to understand more fully.



Tyler's photo of skateboarder Tolya Titaev being interviewed by Russian media in Kursk.

## Faculty and Graduate Affiliate Activities

The Melikian Center continues to attract engagement from faculty, staff and students across all of ASU's campuses. In 2020, seven new affiliates joined the Center, bringing the research and teaching community to almost 100, including 10 graduate students as well as our 16 CLI 2020 instructors. The new faculty affiliates include faculty from diverse fields including communication, law, music and philosophy. Affiliates contribute to the Center's mission through individual and collaborative research. They also work with undergraduates and participate in Center projects.

Several faculty affiliates achieved national recognition this year. Many published articles based on their research in scholarly journals, and two also published books in their field.

*Psychomotor Aesthetics: Movement and Affect in Modern Literature and Film*, by **Ana Hedberg Olenina**, analyzed how early film directors, actors, and performance theorists used the psychological ideas of their time to conceptualize expressive movement and transference of emotion. The book was published by Oxford University Press.



**Lenka Bustikova** published *Extreme Reactions: Radical Right Mobilization in*



*Eastern Europe* with Cambridge University Press. The book analyzes how populism gains ground in response to movements for minority rights or open borders, drawing on several years of comparative research. In November 2020, *Extreme Reactions* won the Davis Center Book Prize from the Association for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies, for an outstanding monograph in Political and Social Studies. Lenka was also awarded tenure and promotion to associate professor in the School of Politics and Global Studies.

Historian **Hannah Barker** was awarded an ACLS fellowship for her newest project "Race, Slavery, and Law in Medieval Italy." In an ASU Now story on the award, Hannah discussed how the project comes out of her earlier work tracing the slave trade from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. The archives of notaries and merchants assign labels like Tatar, Bulgar, Greek or Turk that appear to identify slaves by race or ethnicity. And sometimes those labels get changed. Professor Barker's new research project will seek to discern how those labels were generated, what their significance was for a slave's status as person or as a commodity, and why they were sometimes questioned or amended.



In the domain of teaching, mentoring, and outreach, over half of the Melikian Center's affiliates advanced broader understanding of our critical world region through classes, workshops, talks, media interviews and other formats. In addition to key roles in undergraduate programs, affiliates are key contributors to new initiatives like the World War II online master's program. Several faculty also taught classes in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

PhD student in education **Garine Palandjian** was finishing up her field research in Armenia when the Covid-19 pandemic forced her evacuation. In Fall 2020 she designed and staged a museum exhibit on ASU's campus, drawing on her fieldwork experience and her research into how national values are represented in school curricula, and the impact on teachers' and students' opportunities to develop critical thinking and multiperspectival approaches to history.



**Laurie Stoff** continued in her role as faculty fellow in the Lorraine W. Frank Office of National Scholarship Advisement, providing support for ASU students applying for prestigious and potentially life-changing opportunities. 2020 marked considerable success for ASU students with CLI and Melikian Center backgrounds, with **Tatum James** (North Macedonia), **Madeline Stull** (Serbia) and **Erica Glenn** (Ukraine) all winning Fulbright awards for 2020-21.

The Melikian Center continues to support affiliates' work through the Melikian Center Research Fund; Olenina, Bustikova, Barker, Palandjian, and Stoff are all former recipients of seed grants through this program.

Melikian Center affiliates **Volker Benkert** and **Yan Mann** reflect on the significance of the Eastern Front in ASU's WWII MA program

In November 2018, ASU's School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies and the National World War II Museum in New Orleans launched a new online MA program in World War II Studies. In 2020—the 75th anniversary of the war's end—the first cohort of students graduated from the program.



Volker Benkert and Yan Mann in discussion with other program leadership in the Road to Tokyo gallery, National WWII Museum, New Orleans. Photograph courtesy of the National WWII Museum

They graduate not only with a thorough understanding of the Second World War's truly global dimensions and reach, but also with a more profound understanding of how we continue to remember and commemorate the war today. The program is built around a portfolio of transferable skills that prepare graduates for careers in curation, education, and research.

As historians of Soviet and German history, we see international perspectives on the war as a crucial component of the program. The Eastern Front—where, between 1941 and 1945 the Soviet Union halted and eventually defeated Hitler's previously dominant military machine—was crucial in the war's outcome. In the degree program, we emphasize the need to understand how the war is remembered as well as how it was experienced: mindful of both the enormous direct cost in human lives, and the powerful cultural and social legacies.

In particular, students examine the specific consequences of Hitler's obsession with racial purity, which made the German attack on the Soviet Union a war of annihilation. Whether they participated enthusiastically in the Nazi regime's crimes, or complied reluctantly, German soldiers



Russian boys march in the "Immortal Regiment" Parade to commemorate World War II, May 9 2017, in Lytkarino, Russia. Photograph by Vladimir Varfolomeev

were transformed by their grueling experiences. As a result, the Wehrmacht became so steeped in the Holocaust, genocide and war crimes that it continued fighting a lost war, resulting in countless casualties and inflicting further suffering until Germany's final defeat in Berlin. Soviet soldiers and civilians confronted with Nazi barbarism were motivated by patriotism, fear and anger, even when their equipment and leadership let them down. Over time, crude Stalinist rhetoric and propaganda evolved into a sophisticated collective memory enshrined in the idea of an exceptional Great Patriotic War experience. *Pobeda*, victory, was thus less Stalin's triumph, but more the success of diverse peoples of the Soviet Union and partisans all over Eastern Europe, which tragically started a new era of oppression.

From the carnage of the Eastern Front, MA students explore questions on Russian,

Eastern European and German memory of WWII. Students critically examined German attempts to work through the country's Nazi past, locating apologetic or self-serving undertones. Likewise, students discuss the Russian memory of WWII, which today is often instrumentalized by Vladimir Putin to advance a nationalist narrative and recent territorial expansions such as the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

2020 offered particularly fruitful material for study and reflection. In part due to Covid-19, but also as a result of mainstream views entrenched in xenophobia and jingoism, 2020's commemorations marking the 75th anniversary of the war's end were increasingly isolated and nationalist events. This stands in stark contrast to the commemorations in the 1990s and early 2000s that were frequently transnational and collaborative. Differences in understanding that for a time were acknowledged and respected now divide the world, with the potential to re-open wounds that many of those who fought and survived spent their lives seeking to heal.

Melikian Center affiliates **Volker Benkert** and **Yan Mann**.

# With funding from the Advisory Board, post-doctoral fellow joins the Center for 2020-21

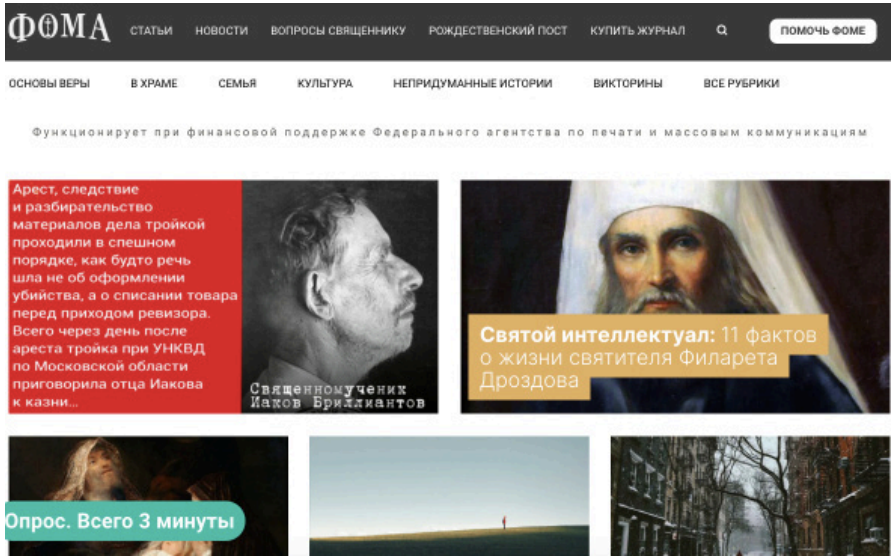
**Jacob Lassin received his PhD from Yale University, before spending 2019-2020 as a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University's Davis Center. Following a national search with over 40 applicants, he joined the Melikian Center in August 2020.**



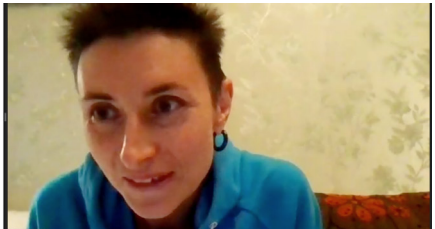
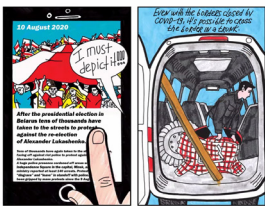
I am excited to join the Melikian Center this year. Over the course of this year I will be working on my book manuscript, *Sacred Sites: The Russian Orthodox Church and the Literary Canon Online*. In this project, based on interviews and digital media analysis, I explore how websites run by the Russian Orthodox Church and its allies engage with Russian literature. My study finds that the Church's online efforts seek to harness religion and Russian culture as a means of demobilizing potential secular, middle-class professional opposition. These Orthodox websites co-opt the respect and gravity afforded to Russia's literary heritage in the country and look to forge a virtual community of educated elites who will work to advance the Church's policy preferences in the years to come.

In addition to working on my research, I am excited to be teaching this year as well. Along with SILC professor and Melikian Center faculty affiliate Ana Hedberg Olenina, I am developing a new course titled "Russian Popular Culture: Protest and Propaganda," that we will teach in Spring 2021. This course introduces students to a wide swath of Russian culture today, covering topics such as patriotic cinema, oppositional, actionist protests, religious revival, and the impact of social media in Russia today. I will also teach "Democratic Erosion," offered simultaneously by a national consortium of universities bringing together students from a wide variety of backgrounds to consider the same topics. In this course, students will consider the various threats and challenges to democracy that have been growing in the past decade and the potential ways to confront these issues.

I am grateful for this opportunity to join the vibrant and dynamic community at the Melikian Center and ASU. I look forward to contributing to the life of the Melikian Center in research, teaching, and programming.



Screenshot of the homepage of Foma.ru, a site for religious "doubters."



Vika Lomasko's discussion of graphic reportage from Belarus during the protests.

**While 2020's headlines and attention spans were dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic, citizens and governments in Russia, Eurasia and East Europe contended with an array of challenges.**

In both Belarus and the Kyrgyz Republic, would-be "strongman" incumbents were defeated in democratic elections, and turned to repressive force to try to restore their control. Within the European Union, right-wing parties gained ground in Poland and Czechia, putting further strains on shared norms. In the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Armenia went to war over the still-disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, reaching a ceasefire in which Russia and Turkey solidified their regional influence. And in Russia, the adoption of a new constitution opened a path for President Putin to remain in power legally through to 2036.

All these threats to peace and democracy played out as U.S. attention turned inward, in an election year where the two presidential campaigns offered starkly different visions. Only in the Western Balkans, where Serbia and Kosovo continue toward normalizing their relations, and the Republic of North Macedonia joined NATO, was there evidence of significant Euro-Atlantic engagement.

The Melikian Center continues to offer insight and perspectives on culture and politics across the region. In 2020, the constraints of social distancing foregrounded opportunities to work more closely with colleagues across the US and abroad. We have added a new collaboration with Nazarbayev University, which will add Kazakh to our range of language offerings in CLI 2021. Early in the year, we welcomed a delegation from Yerevan State University as the first step in our joint work to launch American Studies in Armenia. Within the United States, the Center has partnered with Miami University in Ohio, and the University of South Florida, to co-host a digital series entitled "Creative Horizons" to support and showcase the work of visual artists who are engaging with pressing social issues across the region.

In the months and years ahead, public universities will continue to face operational challenges. Language and area studies will come under increased scrutiny and pressure to justify their value. The diverse career paths and accomplishments of ASU and CLI alumni, and the Center's growing network of partners and allies, serve as reminder of the impacts of ASU's global engagement.

We are so grateful to everyone who has supported the Center in the past and through the specific demands of 2020.



Yerevan State University Acting Rector Gegham Gevorgyan signs a General Collaboration Agreement with ASU's Senior Vice President of Global Academic Initiatives Stefanie Lindquist.

From the Advisory Board President

The past several months have been a challenging time for our community, nation and the world because of the Covid-19 pandemic. I hope that you and your loved ones are staying safe and healthy.

I have had the honor of serving as President of the Melikian Center Advisory Board for nearly one year. Last year, I shared with you my priorities to expand Board support and participation while increasing visibility for the Melikian Center’s numerous programs and activities. I want to thank ASU, the Melikian Center staff, our faculty affiliates, the Critical Languages Institute team, and members of the Board for your continued support and engagement as we have worked hard to deliver on these commitments over the past year.

A special thank you to Melikian Center Director Keith Brown, and Critical Languages Institute Director Irina Levin, for your unwavering energy and resilient leadership amidst continuous change. Many thanks to our Executive Board members Shahin Berisha, Stephen Ovanessoff and Keith Brown. And heartfelt gratitude to our Standing Committee Chairs Shelley Cutts, Shahin Berisha and Steve Batalden.

Most of all, as I look back at my first year of service, I thank YOU. As part of our Melikian Center family, your time, dedication, encouragement and ongoing contributions have been more important than ever before. As we continue to make major progress during these uncertain times, and with the support of our extensive Melikian Center family of all sectors of the local, national and international community, we will continue our efforts to offer life-changing experiences in international education for decades to come.

With appreciation,

Ramona L. Melikian  
President, Advisory Board



Donor Appreciation

Board and community support for passionate students, dedicated teachers, critical languages, and thought-provoking programming helps to make ASU a premier national research and training center for East European and Eurasian studies.

Thank you to all the friends of the Melikian Center for your generous contributions of funds and time to support the Center and CLI in 2020.



Gregory Melikian greeting CLI participants, 2018.

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