

Faculty Report:

**XII Russian-American Scientific and Practical Conference
On Modern Concepts of University Education
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia**

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**Submitted by:
Victoria Pruin DeFrancisco
Professor
Department of Communication Studies**

My interest in an educational exchange in Russia began several years ago. I made an appointment with Dr. Tim O'Connor in the International Program office to discuss the possibilities of teaching there. His response was very gracious, but the basic message was that at that time, the Russian educational institutions wanted visiting faculty in more traditional disciplines such as math and science. He was not sure they would understand the value of teaching communication studies courses. When I inquired again a couple years ago his response was much more encouraging. Having now returned from the visit to St. Petersburg, I can tell you the faculty, administration, and students I met were very interested and engaged in the gender and intercultural communication courses I described. They understood the value of such course content for students in a variety of disciplines. As a result, I had an incredibly rewarding exchange with faculty and students. In what follows, I wish to briefly describe some of the highlights of this exchange.

The positive reception to my work began at the opening plenary session. I was honored to be selected as one of just four scholars (and the only non-Russian speaker) to address the entire conference membership of over 200 people. This spotlight created multiple opportunities to engage in more in-depth discussions and exchange resources with participants from not only St. Petersburg, but also Georgia, the Czech Republic, London, and more. I have since shared my lecture notes and PowerPoint slides, as well as syllabi for multiple courses with faculty at 5 different institutions in Europe.

The Dean of the College of Modern Languages at Herzen, Galina Elizarova, was particularly interested in the academic topic of intercultural communication, as was the Department Head of Translation and Interpretation, Tatiana Yudina. Professor Yudina teaches a course at Herzen by the same title. She spent a year here at UNI in the Department of Modern

Languages and has a very good understanding of the U.S. approach to coursework in intercultural communication. We met with some of her faculty and discussed developing a joint distance education course (via Internet video conferencing). This would be modeled after the video conference course Dr. Tom Connors in the History Department at UNI has been offering with Herzen and another institution, The Moscow State Institute of Steel and Alloys. My Herzen colleagues and I have begun to exchange teaching materials and course ideas and hope to confirm at least the technical feasibility of such courses this summer. If approved, we would like to offer the course in the semester of Spring 2010. Dr. Connors has already visited with faculty at MISiS in Moscow about my course. The professor who teaches intercultural communication, Olga Kladieva is very interested in developing an exchange course there, as well. I believe UNI students in my course would benefit greatly from the distance education exchange. As Sue Jordan in the International Program office said when I shared this news, "The course would provide a non-threatening way for students to experience another culture." In addition to building intercultural communication competence, my hope is it will help deepen students' awareness of their own cultural identities and their appreciation toward developing global perspectives.

As a researcher and teacher, I have and will continue to benefit from the exchange of ideas, as well. Given the course is taught at Herzen and MISiS in the School of Modern Languages, my eyes have been opened to a more interdisciplinary, discourse-based method for teaching the course. I plan to infuse more of such material as I plan the course for next spring.

While at Herzen, I also gave a 90 minute lecture/discussion for undergraduate students on the study of gender issues in communication. The talk included activities and demonstrated a model of teaching more common in the U.S. The professor, Natalia Sigareva told me afterward she was pleasantly surprised to see how responsive the students had been. She said Russian

students are usually more reserved in the classroom. I had a great time challenging common assumptions and exchanging theoretical approaches with the students. One of the best products of such a cross-cultural exchange is I have the opportunity to find out how culturally bound my knowledge and approach to a topic is and its degree of relevance to members of another culture. In both presentations I found the audiences were engaged with the topics and eager to learn more.

I also had the opportunity to see an alumnus of the MA program in Communication Studies, Mikhail Morozov (Misha). He currently teaches communication courses at The Higher School of Economics and Northwestern International University. I was honored to learn he has written a manuscript in Russian for use in his intercultural communication course based on the course he completed with me at UNI. He has since graduated his own students who are now instructors teaching the course there as well. Misha had also invited me to give a guest lecture at his institution and attend a Master's thesis defense, but this did not work out in his schedule. Misha would like to return to UNI to complete an Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and I have agreed to assist him in the application process. He will be an excellent addition at whatever institution he chooses.

The above report cannot begin to include the multiple individual interactions I had with faculty, students, and others, as well as the opportunities to visit the culturally rich museums that all greatly enriched my understanding of St. Petersburg's culture. For me it was the chance of a lifetime and I will continue to assess the ways in which it informs my teaching and scholarship. I know the experience will enrich my teaching and scholarship for years to come and am sincerely appreciative for the opportunity.