From the Director

BRIAN PORTER-SZŰCS

We have particularly exciting news this year: starting in the fall, the University of Michigan will offer a bachelor’s degree in Polish through our Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures.

The program, one of only a tiny handful in North America, will include 27 hours of coursework in Polish language, culture, history, and society. With distinguished faculty members like Bogdana Carpenter, Benjamin Paloff, Ewa Malachowska-Pasek, and Piotr Westawańcowicz, the U-M Slavic Department has long enjoyed a reputation as one of the best Polish language programs in the country. When set alongside our broader offerings, including courses by 15 faculty members in seven different departments, this new BA degree provides further evidence that the University of Michigan is America’s premier site for the study of Poland.

In addition to our regular courses and programs, we featured two special guests during the past academic year. In December, Agnieszka Graff visited Ann Arbor to lecture and participate in a symposium. In addition to her academic work in the field of cultural studies, Graff is a prominent journalist and one of the leaders of the women’s rights movement in Poland today. She exemplifies the combination of activist, scholar, and public intellectual that remains characteristic of Poland, even as the country confronts new debates and challenges for the 21st century. In January we were honored to feature Neal Ascherson as the 2007–2008 Copernicus Lecturer. For decades Ascherson provided readers in Great Britain and the United States with news and analysis about Poland, publishing cogent and penetrating articles in a wide variety of newspapers and magazines. His 1988 book, The Struggles for Poland, remains one of the best short histories of that country available in English, and his reporting on the Solidarity movement throughout the 1980s was without equal. Two decades later, he continues to offer insightful analysis of Polish and European affairs, as he demonstrated in his well-received lecture at U-M.

Looking forward to the coming academic year, we are thrilled that the world-famous graphic artist Stasys Eidrigevičius will be delivering the 2008–2009 Copernicus Lecture and staging an exhibition of his work entitled The Earth of Lithuania with the Wind of Warsaw. Though born in Mediniskiai, Lithuania, in 1949, after earning degrees from the Kaunas College of Fine Arts and Crafts and the Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, he relocated to Warsaw, Poland, where he established his reputation as a world-renowned artist. A master of many techniques as an illustrator, book cover designer, sculptor, painter, and photographer, Stasys is perhaps best known for his graphics and poster art. The unmistakable Stasys style, characterized by pierced bodies, grotesque demons, and mailed faces, was shaped by a communist world in which people learned to hide who they really were and seek new, private identities. In the words of Ryszard Kapuściński, Stasys portrays seemingly demonic figures that “confirm the meaning of the world and look upon us with benevolence.” Stasys’s art conveys a full-range of human emotion even while focusing on ordinary objects—his photography, in particular, elaborates on the loss and preservation of everyday life by depicting common items in new ways.

Stasys has had over 60 solo exhibitions in 20 countries. His numerous awards include the Gold Plaque for children’s book illustration at the Biennial of Book Art in Brno, Czechoslovakia (1979); the Gold Medal at the International Biennial of Exhibits in Malbork (1980); the Grand Prix for book illustration in Barcelona, Spain (1986); the Grand Prix at the International Biennial of Posters in Lahti, Finland (1989); 3rd Prize at the International Biennial of Posters in Warsaw (1990); the Gold Medal at Toyama, Japan (1994); 1st Prize at the Biennial of Polish Poster in Katowice (1999); and the National Award in Arts, the most prestigious award offered by the Lithuanian Government (2001).

Stasys’s visit to the University of Michigan is a collaborative project of the Copernicus Endowment of the Center for Russian and East European Studies, the Institute for the Humanities, and the School of Art & Design.
Scottish journalist and author Neal Ascherson delivered this year’s EUC Annual Distinguished Lecture on Europe with a lyrical, wide-ranging talk entitled “Europe: Heir to the Ages or Pregnant Widow.” The acclaimed writer-historian has written exhaustively about Polish and Eastern European affairs, including The Polish August: The Self-Limiting Revolution and The Struggles for Poland, which many consider the definitive primer on modern Polish history.

In his lecture, Ascherson talked about the evolution of Europe as a political entity, describing the European Union as “chaotic in purpose, confident in behavior.” He said that the tragic flaw of reforms instituted since 1989 was “that they were not steered by democratic governments, but rather by market forces. Politicians don’t feel like agents of change, and they are commonly identified as (parts of) dishonest cliques out to line their own pockets.”

He said some newly democratized nations “plunged into the free market like going over Niagara in a barrel, Poland being a prime example. Some developed corrupt hybrids made up of grimy survivors of the nomenklatura, unreformed state sectors, and the secret police.”

He finished his lecture by asking those in attendance to imagine Europe as a “gigantic, golden, beautiful sponge, inviting every creature to enter with each inhalation and exhalation... existing as a colony without frontier fences or tanks on the pavement.”

February 11, 2008

Michał Markowski

Michał Markowski, professor and chair, Department of International Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University, visited U-M and lectured on “Aesthetics and Existence: The Case of Bruno Schulz.” His host was Benjamin Paloff.
Faculty News

Bogdana Carpenter Retires

On March 15, 2008, a special symposium was held in honor of Professor Bogdana Carpenter, who retired this spring from the U-M Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. A native of the Silesian region of Poland, Carpenter received an M.A. in Romance Philology from the University of Warsaw and a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. She taught briefly at the University of Washington before coming to U-M in 1983. In her 25 years in Ann Arbor she taught classes on Polish literature from the middle ages to the present day, and helped turn the Slavic Department into a national center of innovative, interdisciplinary scholarship. Together with her husband, John Carpenter, she translated some of the greatest poets of modern Poland. Their work ranges from Selected Poems of Zbigniew Herbert (Oxford, 1977), to Julia Hartwig’s In Praise of the Unfinished (Knopf, 2008). Her translations have appeared in The New York Times, The Paris Review, The New Yorker, The Manhattan Review, The Chicago Review, and The New York Review of Books.

New Faculty: Benjamin Paloff

Added to the list of unique course offerings in Polish Studies was “Polish Literature in English: 1890 to the Present: No Other End of the World.” The course was taught by Benjamin Paloff, a new U-M faculty member who completed his doctoral dissertation, a comparison of Polish, Czech, and Russian literatures, at Harvard in 2007.

Paloff, an accomplished poet, received an M.F.A. in poetry at U-M before returning to Harvard, where he did his undergraduate work. He received two Hopwood Awards for his writing and recently held a Fulbright-Hays Fellowship in Russia and Poland. He is a poetry editor for Boston Review, and his poems have appeared in The New Republic, Paris Review, A Public Space, Diagram, Gulf Coast, The Modern Review, and other publications.

Last fall, Paloff, who is originally from Atlantic City, New Jersey, began an assistant professorship at U-M in Slavic Languages and Literatures and Comparative Literature. He is also a postdoctoral fellow of the Michigan Society of Fellows.

New Undergraduate Concentration in Polish

Starting in fall 2008, undergraduate students at the University of Michigan will be able to pursue bachelor’s degrees in Polish in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. One of few such programs in the U.S., the new major requires two years of the Polish language to enter the program and completion of 27 hours of additional course work focused on Polish language, literature, culture, and history. U-M has one of the finest Polish language programs in the U.S., teaching four levels of Polish every year. Initiated by Bogdana Carpenter, professor of Polish at U-M from 1983–2008, the program gives students a unique opportunity to specialize and major in Polish. The Polish language and literature faculty currently includes Benjamin Paloff, assistant professor and postdoctoral scholar in the Michigan Society of Fellows, and lecturers Ewa Malschowska-Pasek and Piotr Westawlewicz. For more information about the new B.A. in Polish language and literature visit www.lsa.umich.edu/slavic or www.ii.umich.edu/crees/events/regionalprog/polish.

Chopin Project Reaches Global Community

As the world’s attention begins to focus on the Chopin Bicentennial in 2010, we are pleased to announce the launch of The Chopin Project, an online resource dedicated to promoting the discovery, research, and pure enjoyment of Fryderyk Chopin’s keyboard works. Initiated by Arthur Greene, a professor of piano at the School of Music, Theater, and Dance, this project grew out of the enthusiastic response to last year’s marathon series of recitals of Chopin’s complete piano works by U-M students. Recordings of those performances are featured on the Chopin Project website, along with detailed entries about Chopin’s solo keyboard works; notable quotations by and about Chopin; on-demand video performances; access to sheet music; further research and resources; performers’ biographies and photos; the “Chopin Currency” (Chopin in the news); and much more. For more information, visit www.chopinproject.com.
Obituary

Professor Andrew Ehrenkreutz (1921–2008)

Professor Andrew Ehrenkreutz, University of Michigan professor emeritus, scholar, historian, political activist, and U-M football fan, passed away on April 6 in Melbourne, Australia. Born in 1921 in Warsaw, Poland, Ehrenkreutz was one of the last survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 and a dedicated advocate for human rights and the defense of democratic institutions.

In 1953 Ehrenkreutz accepted a post-doctoral fellowship at Yale University, and in the summer of 1954 he moved to Ann Arbor as a visiting lecturer in Islamic History at the University of Michigan. There he joined the history department and remained in Ann Arbor until his retirement in 1983. In 1970, Ehrenkreutz became a member of the Polish-American Congress and its efforts on behalf of an independent Poland. In the 1970s, he was the co-founder of STUDIUM: The North American Studies Center for Polish Affairs, which became a leading source of information and support for the democratic opposition in Poland, and later, the newly-established Solidarity trade union. As President of STUDIUM, Ehrenkreutz carried the message of support for Polish dissidents and trade unionists to the State Department and the United Nations. In 1992, he was elected president of the Polish Republic.

In addition to pursuing his academic interests and responsibilities, Ehrenkreutz was an accomplished musician, a composer, and a conductor. He was a key figure in the Polish-Jewish dialogue and was active in the establishment of the Polish Institute of Jewish Affairs in London. He was also a member of the Polish Institute of Historical Studies and the Polish Institute of Historical Research.

In memory of Professor Andrew Ehrenkreutz, contributions may be made to the University of Michigan’s cottage, a recognized leader in Polish studies, or to the University’s Copernicus Endowment, a fund established to support Polish studies.

Student News

The recipient of the John J. Świderski award for graduate research in Polish Studies is Alexandra Gerber, a sociologist, working on Poland’s accession to the European Union and how ideas about national sovereignty and Polish national identity are changing at a critical time in European integration.

Copernicus Endowment summer research fellowships for 2008 were awarded to Jessica Zychowicz (Slavic languages and literatures) and Iza Yue Ding (junior, REES/Political Science). Thomas Frank Michniacki, a recipient of the Annual Excellence in Polish Language Award, received the award for his exceptional work in Polish Studies and his dedication to the study of Polish literature and culture.

Wojciech Beltkiewicz (history), who received a Swiderski award last summer, is preparing his dissertation on the history of Orthodoxy and Greek-Rite Catholicism in Kalisz, Poland, and is a key figure in the Polish-German relations. Paul Bryczynski (history) is preparing a dissertation on Polish-German relations, while Alicja Kusiak-Brownstein (history) is beginning her dissertation research on images of femininity in 19th-century Polish culture.

Jessica Robbins (anthropology) begins a research year in Wrocław and Poznań investigating changing national and state formations through the study of contemporary practices of memory. Lenny Urena (history) received a fellowship from the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies and is putting the final touches on a dissertation that re-interprets 19th-century Polish-German relations in the light of European colonial doctrines.
The Nicolaus Copernicus Endowment

The Nicolaus Copernicus Endowment was established in 1973 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the great Polish astronomer’s multifaceted genius. Initially created with the cooperation of students, faculty, and the Polish-Americans of Michigan, the Copernicus Endowment is sustained today by the energy and financial assistance of hundreds of individual supporters. The principal goal of the Endowment is to enable faculty appointments, programming, and student fellowships in Polish studies. Income from the Endowment makes the Annual Copernicus Lecture possible, and ensures the continued scheduling of public events dedicated to advancing a deeper understanding of the people, culture, and politics of Poland.

The Amelia Kulesa Konopka Endowment

This fund was established in 2001 by the family of Amelia Kulesa Konopka to improve knowledge of Poland’s culture and history among undergraduates, graduates, and professional school students at the University of Michigan. In 1993, Mrs. Konopka came to the U.S. where she studied her new language and culture. These fellowships memorialize her quest for knowledge and her Polish heritage.

The John J. Świderski Fund

This fund was established in 1997 for the support of student research and travel abroad. We are grateful to Suzanne Swiderski for her generous gift in honor of her father in support of this important fellowship program; we hope to make many John J. Świderski awards available to worthy students in the coming years.

The Annual Copernicus Lectures

Since 1980, the University of Michigan has hosted prominent political, cultural, and academic figures from Poland as part of the Annual Copernicus Lecture series. Prominent presenters in this series include Leszek Kolakowski, Grzegorz Milosz, Stanislaw Baraцz, Timothy Garton Ash, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Adam Michnik, Iancu Darie, Krzysztof Penderecki, Henryk Gό́rnicki, Krzysztof Zanussi, Ryszard Kapuscinski, President Aleksander Kwasniewski, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Kora Jadowska, Adam Zagajewski, Zbigniew Libera, Krzysztof Czyżewski, and many more. A complete list is available on the Copernicus website.

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Annual Copernicus Lecture
Stasys Eidrigevičius
Sept 8–Oct 17, 2008
See inside for details.