

Outreach effort brings Russian language to N.C. middle schools

Sixth-graders throughout North Carolina study Russia as part of the world history curriculum, but few have any first-hand knowledge of the Russian culture or language.

Slavic languages such as Russian aren't common in the far reaches of the state, so there are very few opportunities to pick up the sounds and syntax of the language. And Russian, with its Cyrillic alphabet, has a reputation for being difficult to learn.

That's why, when the opportunity presented itself this summer to give middle-school students across the state a way to listen to the Russian language, Jacqueline Olich, associate director of the Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies (CSEEEES), capitalized on it.

The most recent edition of "Usborne's First Thousand Words in Russian" included an Internet pronunciation guide to enable readers to hear the words. With funding from the U.S. Department of Education, and in partnership with the Bull's Head Bookshop, Duke University's CSEEEES and World View, an international program for educators based at Carolina, Olich spearheaded the UNC center's effort to send copies of the book to all public and federally funded middle schools in North Carolina — 698 schools in all.

"The old version of the book — my personal copy — lay on my FedEx Global Education Center office bookshelf," Olich said. "When I saw that there was a zippy purple, Internet-linked updated version, I was excited. We had some outreach funding, and I thought this would be a way to have Russian represented in every North Carolina county."

The effort was a true collaboration.

Erica Eisdorfer, manager of the Bull's Head, negotiated a significant discount with the book's publisher on the center's behalf, shaving one-third off the list price.

Karla Nagy, CSEEEES department manager, culled through the list of North Carolina schools that World View provided and secured the materials to be included in the mailing.

When the books arrived, they were stored on the Bull's Head loading dock, and bookshop staff members added the CSEEEES bookplate, a letter to the school principals and a Slavic Collection bookmark before mailing the books statewide.

While the shipment was on the loading dock, the project's unofficial middle school focus group — consisting of Olich's son, Jackson Kennedy, and Olivia Jenkins, the daughter of CSEEEES director Robert Jenkins — inspected it and gave it the green light.

"This was a unique opportunity to have an immediate and long-term impact on a grand scale," Olich said. "I believe that people should engage with a variety of perspectives, ideas and languages — the earlier in life, the better — and I am very grateful to everyone involved for their enthusiasm and generosity of time."


From start to finish, the project took about two months and cost around \$14,000, she said, and the U.S. Department of Education plans to use it as a model of best practices for international education activities.

Around the state, feedback has been positive.



Bull's Head Bookshop Manager Erica Eisdorfer, left, and Jacqueline Olich, associate director of the Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies, review the latest edition of "Usborne's First Thousand Words in Russian" at the Bull's Head.

Natalie Gilliam, media coordinator at East Forsyth Middle School, said foreign language books, particularly those in the Usborne thousand-word format, were very popular at her school.

"I am confident that students at EFMS will adore this book and check it out many times!" she said. "I agree with you in hopes that it will inspire students to further their bounds outside of our state and our country." 

Kilar and Tygart honored by alumni association

The General Alumni Association has honored young leaders of a pioneering online TV show distributor and the agency that polices doping by Olympic athletes.

Jason Kilar, left, CEO of Hulu.com, and Travis Tygart, right, CEO of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, received the association's 2010 Distinguished Young Alumni Awards earlier this month in honor of their achievements.

After graduating from Carolina in 1993 with a double major in business administration and journalism and mass communication, Kilar began his career with the Walt Disney Co., where he worked for Disney Design & Development.

He earned a master's in business administration from Harvard Business School, then spent nearly a decade at Amazon.com, serving in a variety of key leadership roles. As vice president and general manager of Amazon's North American media businesses, he oversaw its books, music, video and DVD categories. He later became senior vice president for Amazon's worldwide application software.

Kilar helped lead the creation of Hulu in 2007. The Los Angeles-based website — a joint venture of News Corp., NBC Universal, the Walt Disney Co. and Providence Equity Partners — offers thousands of TV shows and movies for free.

Fortune and Rolling Stone magazines have included Kilar on their "40 Under 40" lists of top young business and media leaders. In its October issue, Vanity Fair placed him among the top 100 of what it calls

"The New Establishment."


Tygart oversees the nonprofit organization in Colorado Springs, Colo., that investigates Olympic athletes suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. The agency also reaches out to young athletes and elite amateurs to educate them on making healthy, ethical choices and funds research related to deterring drug use in sports.

Also a 1993 graduate, Tygart earned a philosophy degree at Carolina, then a law degree in 1999 at Southern Methodist University. He became outside counsel to the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency when it was formed in 2000, shortly after the Sydney Olympics. He became its director of legal affairs in 2002 and CEO in 2007.

Tygart has testified before Congress several times about issues related to illegal use of performance-enhancing drugs and the pressures on those who want to compete fairly without jeopardizing their health or compromising their integrity.

His testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2008 helped achieve Senate ratification of the UNESCO anti-doping convention, an international treaty.

Tygart returns to the University at least once a year to speak to journalism, law and philosophy students about ethics.

Since 1989, the General Alumni Association's Distinguished Young Alumni Awards have recognized alumni aged 40 or younger whose accomplishments have brought credit to the University. Refer to alumni.unc.edu/awards for additional information. 



CAROLINA ALUMNI REVIEW