**AN INCLUSIVE RUSSIAN AREA STUDIES CURRICULUM: HOWARD UNIVERSITY**

**INTELLECTUAL RATIONALE**

The academic year 2020-2021 marks the sixtieth year that Howard University will be teaching Russian language, literature and culture. As the only Historically Black University that teaches Russian, we contribute to the growth of Russian Area Studies through our students, our methodologies, and our materials. We provide a diverse student body in a field that is known for its predominant whiteness. Through diverse methodologies we study alternative reactions to Russian language, literature, and culture, such as African Americans’ reactions to Soviet cultural diplomacy. The Moorland-Springarn Research Center holds a trove of primary materials of African Americans who interacted with the Russian sphere that are still to be studied in a comprehensive manner.

We would like to engage in a comprehensive redesign of the Russian program at Howard University to ensure we have a program that advances twenty-first century methodologies and topics and diversity, equity, and inclusion in the field. Our current curriculum was inherited from the end of the 1990s. While some of the courses allow for easy integration of post-Soviet materials – “Russian Short Stories,” for example – we are in need of rethinking and redesigning of our core classes to integrate contemporary material that reflects the current status of post-Soviet Russian language, literature, and culture. We would like to do it in a way that reflects the contribution of populations of color to the field as a whole. The goal: provide Howard University students with a Russian Area Studies program that reflects the contribution of People of Color to the field, proves attractive to increased student enrollment, and better engages the humanities across disciplines.

**CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES**

The program redesign will consist of three distinct parts:

**1. Curricular planning through the reevaluation and redesign of current course offerings**. Consultant Dr. Benjamin Rifkin, Ph. D., Professor of Russian and Dean, Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Hofstra University, will help us review existing courses to bring them into compliance with Howard University’s College of Arts and Sciences initiative to redesign curricular offerings to enhance the development of cultural competency skills and expand the linguistic and cultural analysis skills of its undergraduates. The redesign will align Howard University’s Russian offerings with two nationally validated curricular frameworks: The Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) program of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and The ACTFL World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning. The redesign will emphasize two tracks to the Russian offerings – Russian-language and English-language cultural-content courses. The language offerings will benefit from the integration of materials that build in the Language Learning for Business and Professions. This method will allow the Russian curriculum to attract students beyond the traditional areas of liberal arts and expose students from 1) the business and engineering schools to the cultural implications of Russian global cultural outreach, and 2) comparative studies to examine and consider Russian/Soviet policies and practices related to issues of race and ethnicity (both propagandistically and real) with race and ethnicity in North America and throughout the post-colonial world. The English-language cultural-content courses will be redesigned to integrate twenty-first century critical methodologies and curricular materials that reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students at Howard University.

**2. Creation of digital humanities resources for teaching and student-faculty research.** Dr. Lopez D. Matthews, Ph. D., Digital Production Librarian, will help us create a digital, open-access handbook to Russian area studies materials that integrate critical race study discourse and theories. The handbook will include a bibliography of secondary materials, such as: Joy Gleason Carew’s *Blacks, Reds, and Russians Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), Allison Blakely’s *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* (Washington, D. C.: Howard University Press, 1986), and Tobias Rupprecht’s *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). It will also list primary sources “hiding in plain sight,” which have been significantly ignored in scholarship, historically dominated by Cold War political priorities. Howard University has a large collection of these primary documents, such as George Murphy’s *A Journey to the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1974) and rich archival materials like the collection of fan letters from Soviet citizens to Paul Robeson (https://dh.howard.edu/probeson\_russia/). This digital repository will offer guidelines on how to use these humanities resources for educators at the secondary and undergraduate levels.

**3. Integration of a new and enhanced humanities program: medical humanities**. The proposed project includes the development of a proposed course titled *The Medical Humanities: From Chekhov to Beyoncé*, which has the potential to facilitate Russian Area Studies at Howard University to integrate a new disciplinary track to its offerings: medical humanities. The project advances humanities education by connecting the texts and contexts of authors and artists at the intersection of literature and medicine to gain cultural competencies in care provision and an understanding of the social determinants of health. Students and faculty will participate in this reflective discourse and engage the tools and vocabularies of multiple disciplines. The project will develop a multilingual (at least Russian, English, and Spanish), open access digital humanities portal which will include teaching materials, student-faculty research, and syllabi templates for medical humanities courses writ large. By developing this resource, it will provide a foundation for potential future collaborations at Howard University and in the Russian Area Studies field. The project aligns with Howard’s values of excellence in truth and service and will empower students and faculty to explore and express the human condition.

The project is founded on the humanitas ideal—"a personal integration of knowledge, compassion, and action in the world.” In an unprecedented time of pandemic, cultural competency in care provision and a keen understanding of the social determinants of health are not only important for direct healthcare providers, but for all Americans. In the words of Stanford’s Department of Emergency Medicine, their medical humanities specialization “strives to understand what it means to be human, and to explore how we experience health, illness, and healthcare.” The medical humanities is a global dialogue about the nontechnical aspects of medicine, medical knowledge and education, medical diplomacy, health policy, the patient and caregiver experience, empathy, equity, access to care, and basic human needs. The medical humanities is a conversation about agency, identity, memory, and--as the ravages of COVID-19 become a dire reality--age, race, economics, geopolitics, and gender. The medical humanities has been defined as “an inter- and multidisciplinary field that explores contexts, experiences, and critical and conceptual issues in medicine and health care, while supporting professional identity formation”; it is a field that brings “humanity to students but also evokes the humanity of students.”

The medical humanities teaches that narrators of and narratives about illness play a role in literature and art, ethics, law, medicine, economics, scientific discourse, theology, and the histories we write and that such narratives are key pieces in the process of self-definition and our ideas about culture(s) as a whole. Arthur Frank notes, for example, that “the figure of the wounded storyteller is ancient: Tiresias, the seer who reveals to Oedipus the true story of whose son he is, has been blinded by the gods. His wound gives him narrative power.”

*The Medical Humanities: From Chekhov to Beyoncé* will facilitate students, faculty, and their community to innovatively engage multiple disciplines: the humanistic traditions (art, literature, history, philosophy, and bioethics); social and behavioral sciences; anthropology; political science; journalism; cultural, media, performance, women’s, African American, and other critical studies; and, of course, medicine. The course will preview what a medical humanities specialization or major could look like at Howard University, additional HBCU campuses, and beyond, to include 11th-12th grade students interested in pursuing a career in healthcare.

This course has three goals: 1) to stimulate a cross-disciplinary conversation about illness, narrative, the social determinants of health, trauma, the body, madness, care provision, and other medical issues as they relate to questions of agency, race, gender, and memory in literature, art, and society; 2) to develop publishable research and open access teaching materials and resources; and 3) to inspire Howard University students and faculty to engage with one another across world languages, disciplines, and schools.

The course textbook will be *Medical Humanities: An Introduction* by Thomas Cole, Nathan Carlin, and Ronald Carson (Cambridge University Press, 2015). Each chapter contains a case study/primary resource; a visual image with commentary, questions, and references; critical thinking, writing, discussion, and differentiated-learning exercises; and further resources (reading, related organizations, etc.). Various media and excerpts drawn from diverse cultures, communities, and narratorial perspectives will complement the textbook: Russian, African American, Hmong, (auto)biographers, historians, journalists, direct healthcare providers, and musicians, artists, and performers. Examples include: Dr. Anton Chekhov, “Ward Number 6”; Dr. Mikhail Bulgakov, *A Young Doctor’s Notebook* (excerpt); Meri Nana-Ama Danquah, *Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman’s Journey Through Depression, A Memoir*; Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (excerpt); Dr. Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (excerpt); Ann Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (excerpt); Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (excerpt); *Amy*, directed by Asif Kapadia and produced by James Gay-Rees (documentary about singer and song-writer Amy Winehouse); Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*; and Beyoncé, *Lemonade*.

Over the duration of two years, the research and teaching materials produced will be used to develop an open access digital humanities resource that could facilitate a medical humanities course at Howard and beyond. The proposed course fits well in the curriculum redesign as it affords opportunities for creative expression, performance studies, public speaking, and so forth. Such performative components will prepare students for performances of spoken discourse in both English and Russian. Additionally, capturing these moments digitally will enhance the open access resources and reflect the sum goal of the course, facilitating a record of memory, personal and shared narratives, and stories of hope and healing alongside those of illness and loss that enhance medical knowledge. Building the foundational material and digital portal will allow future students and faculty to share the how and why cultural competency in care provision and an understanding of the social determinants of health are so important to the Black community, the United States, and globally.

**PROJECT PERSONNEL**

**Brunilda Amarilis Lugo de Fabritz**, **Ph. D. Project Director.**  Master Instructor, Russian, Howard University, Department of World Languages and Cultures. Dr. Lugo de Fabritz has taught Russian language, literature, culture, and social sciences courses at Howard University since 2008. She has a Master’s in International Studies in Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies from the University of Washington and a Doctorate from the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of Washington. Her Master's thesis, *Encrucijada: the Partido Comunista de España and the Comintern in 1930's Spain*, focused on the interaction among Spanish intellectuals and the Comintern activists in Spain. Her dissertation, *The Absent Father, the Permanent Son and the Paternal State: Patterns of National Narrative in the Post-Totalitarian Films of Russia, Czech Republic, Poland, Spain and Cuba*, developed a comparative framework to analyzing the intersection of cinematographic art and ideology in Russian, Czech, Polish, Spanish, and Cuban cinema. She has been active in the field promoting disciplinary diversity in the field of Russian studies by: 1) directing the U. S. – Russia Foundation funded project *Building a More Inclusive Future: Diversifying the Field of Russian and Slavic Studies,* which included a workshop for undergraduate Students of Color to explore different dimensions in Russian Area Studies, and 2) *Building a More Inclusive Future: Diversifying the Field of Russian and Slavic Studies: Best Faculty Practices,* where faculty members from across the United States discussed ways to overcome institutional obstacles to students and faculty of color in the field. She will coordinate the revision of course curricula and the publication of online materials.

**Kelly Knickmeier Cummings, Ph. D., Assistant Director,** is an adjunct lecturer in Russian language, literature, and culture at Howard University and a prospect researcher for the Phoenix Art Museum. She has a PhD in Slavic Languages and Literatures from the University of Kansas (2017). Her dissertation, *Diagnosing the Demonic: Reading Valerii Briusov’s Novel Fiery Angel as Pathography*, is an interdisciplinary exploration of pathography, bipolar illness, and the crisis of culture and consciousness of the Russian Symbolist milieu at the *fin de siècle*. She will develop and coordinate the construction and dissemination of digital teaching guides and materials in Medical Humanities.

**Lopez D. Matthews, Ph. D., Digital Librarian.** Dr. Matthews has served as an Archives Technician at the National Archives. Presently, he is the Digital Production Librarian and Manager of the Digital Production Center, for the Howard University Libraries and the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. He is also an adjunct professor in the Department of Humanities at Coppin State University, on the Board of Directors of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, and a Commissioner on the Maryland State Commission on African American History and Culture. Dr. Matthews will assist in the process of preparing digital materials for the digital handbook for Russian Area Studies dealing with texts from diverse authors, as well as helping put together a multi-lingual, digital humanities portal which will include teaching materials, student projects, faculty research, and syllabi templates for high school, community college, college, and university medical humanities courses and for the Digital Humanities symposium.

**Professor Benjamin Rifkin, Ph.D., Consultant.** Professor of Russian and Dean, Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Hofstra University. Dean Rifkin will provide consulting services for the revision of existing Russian Area Studies courses, as well as assist in designing the first cycle of Medical Humanities. He serves as an accreditation evaluator (in the pool) of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, has performed external evaluations of language departments and programs, and one of his research interests focuses on the assessment of learning outcomes for liberal arts departments. Dean Rifkin will be contracted for a one-week intensive workshop with Dr. Lugo de Fabritz, Dr. Knickmeier-Cummings, and Dr. Matthews.

**INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT**

Howard University is the only HBCU that teaches Russian (“Internationalization and Foreign Language Course Offerings at Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” UNCF Special Programs Corporation Institute for International Public Policy: 2005) and it is located in an area rich in Russian Area Studies resources. At the Washington Research Library Consortium and the Library of Congress, students have regular interaction with Russian area professionals at local think tanks like the Kennan Institute and internship opportunities at government organizations such as the State Department and the World Bank. Students also interact with students in the field who study at Georgetown University, George Washington University, American University, and University of Maryland. Howard University stands out among them due to its diverse student population. It has served as a center for the study of the involvement of African American intellectuals in Russia. The Moorland Springarn Research Center houses underutilized archives of leading intellectuals that spent significant time in Russian, such as Paul Robeson and Alain Locke. The combination of documents at Moorland Spring Research Center and Library of Congress can serve to create a comprehensive illustration of the relationship between communities of color and Russia (pre, during, and post-Soviet periods).

**FOLLOW UP AND DISSEMINATION**

First, the revision of our program will allow us to appeal to a broader spectrum of students at Howard University and at the national level via digital handbooks and open access materials. Second, because one of the biggest challenges facing instructors nationwide who try to include the perspectives of people of color into their Russian Area Studies courses is that they do not know what materials to include. The digital resources can become the seed for national transformation of Russian Area Studies curricula. The handbook designed for Medical Humanities can advance the intersection of humanities and the medical field and will provide scholars with an entryway into the possibilities of comparative approaches.

**EVALUATION**

To evaluate the project’s design quality, we will provide the following quantitative measures: 1) a peer-review of our digital materials; 2) feedback from students and faculty at Howard University and members of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages; and 3) the evaluation devices based on the best current pedagogical practices moving forward that will be drawn up with the help of our consult Dr. Benjamin Rifkin and Howard University administration.