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Columbia University
Russian Institute

Grants from the Foundation:

\$362,000 to Columbia University

THE RUSSIAN INSTITUTE

Before the war, only a dozen universities in the United States offered instruction in the Russian language and literature. Today these subjects are being taught in about 150 American institutions, and the enrollment is approximately 30,000 students. In addition to undergraduate courses, there has been a substantial increase in facilities for graduate training and research in all phases of the Russian life and culture.

Prominent among these graduate facilities is the Russian Institute of Columbia University. Indeed, this new development on Morningside Heights may be described as unique, considering the scope and quality of its program and the response it has elicited from advanced students in many parts of the country.

The idea of the Russian Institute was first brought up for discussion at the University in October, 1943, by a member of the faculty then on leave for war duty. At the height of the war, in July of 1944, a group of Columbia social scientists met at lunch to consider what the University could do toward the training of specialists in foreign relations. Most of those present were then engaged in various wartime activities for the government, and this experience had impressed them with a realization of coming postwar trends. They foresaw that the United States would be called on to play an increasingly prominent role in world affairs, and the question was: What could Columbia do to help the nation prepare for this larger service?

It was decided to propose the establishment of a School of International Affairs with five related regional institutes for graduate study,

one each on Russia, Germany, France, the Far East, and Latin America. Since that meeting nearly four years ago, there have been many discussions of the proposed plan, and some changes have been made. It was realized that considerable funds would be required to launch so extensive a project, and the idea was to organize the institutes one by one, as resources became available. All agreed that the region warranting paramount attention was Russia. Accordingly, when the School of International Affairs opened its doors in the autumn of 1946, the Russian Institute was established as a coordinate and related agency for teaching and research, the first of the regional institutes.

Funds for establishing the Russian Institute were provided jointly by Columbia University and The Rockefeller Foundation, the Foundation's appropriation (of April, 1945) being \$250,000 to supply \$50,000 annually for five years toward the operating budget. In the spring of 1947 the Foundation voted an additional \$75,000 to finance senior fellowships over a four-year period, and in January of this year a further grant of \$37,000 was made to enable the Institute to purchase one Polish and two Russian collections of archives, books, periodicals, and other rare materials.

Geroid T. Robinson, professor of history at Columbia, had long been a student of Russian and Soviet history, and before the war spent about two and a half years in research work in Russia. During the war the Office of Strategic Services in Washington appointed Dr. Robinson chief of the U.S.S.R. Division of its Research and Analysis Branch, and in this capacity he was in close touch with research on Russian problems during the period when the two nations were allies.

Dr. Robinson's presence on the Columbia staff made him a natural choice for the directorship of the Russian Institute, and in addition to

this administrative post he took charge of the Institute's work in history. Newly appointed to work with him were Philip E. Mosely as professor of international relations, Abram Bergson as professor of economics, John N. Hazard as professor of public law, and Ernest J. Simmons as professor of Russian literature.

Each of these scholars has a rich background of study and observation of Russia, including periods of residence and research in that country. Professor Mosely, a former teacher at Princeton, Union, Cornell, and Hunter College, was an officer of the State Department during the war and served in advisory capacities on international relations, including membership in the Moscow and Berlin conferences. Professor Bergson, who in prewar days studied economics in Russia on a Sheldon fellowship, served our government in various research and advisory capacities during the war and was a member of the United States Reparations Delegation to the Moscow and Potsdam conferences. Professor Hazard is a noted specialist in Russian law which he studied at the Moscow Juridical Institute from 1935 to 1937. He is a member of the New York Bar and during the war the government appointed him to various missions in connection with his specialty. Professor Simmons formerly taught at Harvard, later at Cornell, and during the war directed two intensive training programs at Cornell: one in Russian language, the other in contemporary Russian civilization. Like Professor Bergson, he is a former Sheldon fellow who spent his fellowship year in Russia and made subsequent trips to the Soviet Union in pursuit of his research.

The Russian Institute thus offers five areas of study from which a student can select his field of concentration. Each of the five professors conducts, in the field of his specialty, a weekly seminar for his second-year

students; and since the seminar courses are limited to about fifteen students, this insures informal classes, close association between teacher and pupil, and a regimen of serious work. But no student is permitted to narrow his interest to a single field and ignore the other areas. For example, the man who elects to major in Russian international relations would do his seminar work under Professor Mosely, while in addition he would take general courses in Russian history, Russian economics, Russian government and law, and Russian literature, and at the same time would pursue studies in the University (outside the Institute) in the broad field of international relations and law.

Admission to the Institute is at the graduate level. Its two-year program of study is designed for students who wish to prepare for scholarly or professional careers in one of the five fields, and only those who have completed the requirements for a baccalaureate degree with high academic standing may enroll. Despite this high standard for admission, the Institute has received many more applications than it could accept, even by straining every resource. Its enrolment at present is 93 regular students, 10 of them women. They come from all parts of the country, from twenty-nine states in addition to the District of Columbia and Canada. Nearly half of the 93 are now in their second year and will complete the course in June. A considerable proportion of the students plan to continue their work beyond the two-year course, and to complete the doctorate. More than a third of the students are looking forward to a career of teaching and research; another large group is preparing for government service; and several students are training for careers in journalism. In addition to the 93 regular students, several Army officers, and several Foreign Service Officers assigned by the Department of State are studying here.

Knowledge of the Russian tongue is not necessary for admission, but all students who are without facility in the language must take an intensive course in it, ten hours weekly, the first year. This course is provided (outside the Institute) by the Department of Slavic Languages. Ability to use the language for research purposes is a prerequisite to admission to the second year's work. This second year requires systematic research leading to the production of a research essay on some problem in the field of the student's concentration, and that means delving into the literature, newspapers, and other publications in the Russian language.

Columbia has a rich collection of Russian books, periodicals, and documents in its University Library. This is the Institute's primary tool of research, and it is continually being strengthened by the addition of new material. Within the last few weeks the Bernstein collection of Russian newspapers and periodicals and the Perlstein collection of publications on Polish history, law, literature and science were added to the library. The Aleksinsky collection of archives bearing on the Bolshevist party activities from 1900 to 1917 is now being catalogued and annotated by M. Aleksinsky in Paris in preparation for delivery to Columbia this spring. It was to assist the purchase of these three collections that the Foundation made its grant of \$37,000 in January. In addition to the University Library, the exceptional Russian collection of the New York Public Library is open to students and staff members of the Institute and considerable use is made of this resource. Between them the Columbia and the New York Public Library collections provide one of the richest stores of Russian materials to be found outside the Soviet Union.

Considerable fellowship aid is available to students in the Russian Institute. Last year, when the Foundation provided \$75,000 for Senior Fellowships over a four-year period, the Carnegie Corporation made an appropriation of \$20,000 for junior awards during a two-year period. Twenty-seven Carnegie grantees are now active, in addition to one Social Science Research Council fellow, two fellows of the American Council of Learned Societies, three fellows of the Humanities division of The Rockefeller Foundation, and five holders of awards provided from the funds of the University. For the year 1948-1949, the University will provide from its own funds approximately eleven awards of various types for students of the Institute. The Carnegie and University awards are available to students in their first and second years, whereas the Rockefeller Senior Fellowships are intended for mature applicants - "scholars of outstanding ability and proven competence who desire to center their future careers in one or another field of Russian studies." It is expected that candidates for senior fellowships will already have the doctorate and will have published results of their researches. During 1947-1948, two advanced students of Russian problems hold Rockefeller Senior Fellowships, and seven applicants are now under consideration.

The prime purpose of the Institute is to provide for the training of a select group of advanced students, and, as was stated, 93 (in addition to officers of the Army and the Foreign Service) are now in attendance. But in addition the Institute opens its lecture classes to any qualified student in Columbia University, and at present the total registration in all lecture courses offered by the Institute is about 500. These lecture courses are given in classrooms on the Columbia campus. The seminars are held in the Institute building at 431 West 117th Street, a four-story dwelling house

which is owned by the University and has been turned over to the Institute. Here are the administrative headquarters, the offices of the staff members, and a large seminar room.

"In summing up our program," said Dr. Robinson, the director, "the plan is three-fold. First, to train experts for governmental, economic, journalistic, and academic service; second, to promote intensive research work on Russia; and third, through lecture courses and publication, to give a wider dissemination to knowledge of Russia." As to the spirit in which the Institute faces its task, it is, above everything else, a spirit of objective search for understanding, said Dr. Robinson. And for a motto to express that spirit, he suggested it would be appropriate to carve over the door of the Institute building this great phrase from Spinoza:

" . . . not to laugh at the actions of men, nor yet to deplore or detest them, but simply to understand them."

Meanwhile, plans are under discussion for establishing a Far Eastern Institute as the second of the regional agencies projected under the School of International Affairs. It would provide for study of the Asian scene, especially of China and Japan, an approach similar to that provided for the Russian scene by the staff of the Russian Institute.