

Initiative Report on Russian and East European Studies Seminar

In total, we had four seminars on the last Wednesday of the month, from January to April 2017.

In terms of funding, £96 of the £500 budget was used for a wine (Majestic Wines) and drinks reception after each seminar. The remaining funding has been ring-fenced for the talk which Dr Luke March of Edinburgh University will be giving to SALC invitees in December 2017. In my initial application, I stated that we would be having 6 seminars, but this was reduced to 4 as the Russian Studies Symposium took place in May 2017 and Luke March's talk, originally scheduled for June, was postponed to enable a higher audience turn-out.

The first seminar was on the topic of 'Sport and Youth Culture'. I sent emails via the SALC mailing list, to the REES cohort and made posters to attract an audience for this seminar. This seminar involved a presentation from a 3rd year researcher, Alex Jackson and 2nd year researcher, Vitaly Kazakov, who presented on two diverse topics from the Soviet and contemporary periods respectively. Questions from the group followed. Feedback from the presenters was that it was a very useful exercise for public speaking ahead of a larger, more formal conference that they'd be giving a paper at. They found the audience questions useful and it helped them consider their research from other important angles. This seminar had 10 attendees, including one member of the academic staff.

The second seminar was on the topic of 'Nationhood and identity'. I used a similar approach to attract students. This seminar was slightly better attended, with 12 attendees including students outside of REES and 2 members of REES academic staff. I myself gave a presentation on contemporary Russian film and Dominika Cholewinska gave a presentation on Jewish-Polish relations after the 2nd World War. As my first presentation in a post-graduate researcher academic environment, I found it very useful and gave me invaluable skills in public speaking and engaging with questions asked by specialists in the audience. Two of the questions prompted me to formulate new ideas for a section of the chapter I was writing.

The third seminar was on the topic of 'Post-colonialism and Empire' with one presentation by 1st year REES PhD student Mollie Arbuthnot on Soviet propaganda posters in ex-Soviet countries and one from 2nd year REES PhD, Batir Xasanov on Hegelian philosophy in Uzbek intellectual thought. This seminar was slightly less well attended as the Easter holidays had officially begun, but the students presenting said they found it useful for consolidating their research and having practice at engaging with a specialist, interested audience.

The fourth seminar was on the topic of 'Right wing politics in Ukraine and Russia', with presentations from Craig Proctor, a first year PhD at Manchester, and Nathan Brand, a first year PhD from The University of Leeds. This seminar was the worst attended with only 4 attendees, since it was right before the Easter weekend and not many staff and students were on campus. Discussion was nonetheless engaged and lively among the students and the presenters.

I surveyed all of the REES students who had attended one or more of the seminars, as well as SALC attendees. All have expressed lively enthusiasm for this seminar series continuing, and several research students have already come up with ideas for new themes for new seminars. On

reflection, it would perhaps be a good idea not to organise any seminars during holiday periods as not as many students and staff are on campus, but the REES and SALC presenters and attendees all stated that they found the seminars stimulating, useful to their research and valuable for gaining core presentation skills.