



HERALD

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UNIVERSITY OF MARY HARDIN-BAYLOR

Humanities Dean Visits Russia for Tolstoy Discussions

Dr. Derek Davis, Dean of the College of Humanities, recently returned from a trip to Russia. What follows is an interview that probes the purpose of Dr. Davis's visit and elicits some interesting details about the current political developments in Russia.

Staff: We understand you visited Russia in September. How long were you there and what was the purpose of your visit?

Davis: I was there for six days. I was invited to speak at several universities in Moscow and surrounding communities about an American perspective on Leo Tolstoy, the great 19th-century Russian novelist. They celebrated his birthday on Sept. 9. I also visited Yasnaya Polyana, the estate of Leo Tolstoy located about 90 miles from Moscow, where Tolstoy lived most of his years before passing from this life in 1910.

Staff: How did you develop an interest in Tolstoy?

Davis: It has developed over the last 10 years or so. During that time, I have made about a dozen trips to Russia, working mostly on church-state relations and religious freedom issues in different parts of Russia. As I became increasingly curious about Russian history and culture, it became obvious that I needed to know more about Leo Tolstoy. I began doing some serious reading, and I now see how understanding Tolstoy is a window to understanding the Russian people. Tolstoy, of course, is an icon in Russia. He is best known as a novelist, writing such classics as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but he was also a remarkably brilliant philosopher and theologian who wrote many critical works on Russian political and religious life. His message was one of hope in the future of mankind, and while he broke from traditional Russian Orthodox beliefs, which led to his excommunication and got him into deep trouble with Russian authorities, his message was always clear: "The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity."

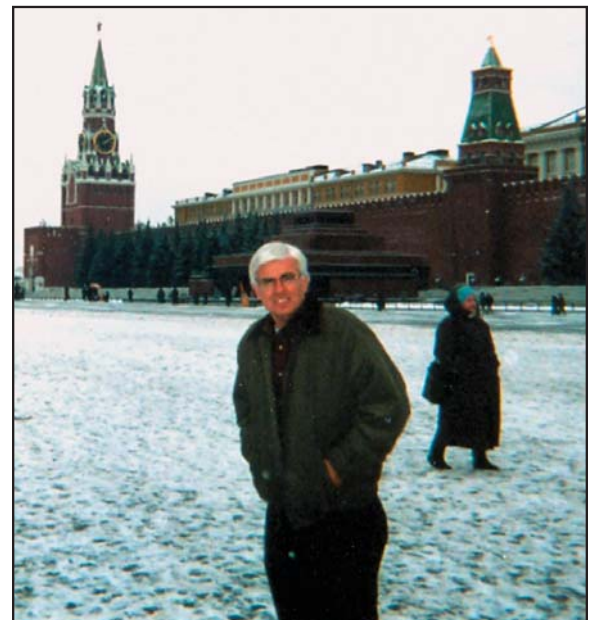
Staff: What was the subject of the presentations you made?

Davis: I am no expert on Tolstoy, but my friends who invited me know me as one who is interested in Russian religion and politics and about the future direction of Russia. They asked me to speak on the reception of Tolstoy in the United States. How well is he known? What do Americans think of him? Is he relevant to American society? Those kinds of questions. Basically, I said that while Tolstoy is known quite well in some academic circles, generally is he not well known and very few Americans read his literature. I think this has to do mainly with his rather unorthodox religious views and the negative bias toward Russia that most

Americans held during the Cold War. The combination is not friendly to a healthy reception of Tolstoy. I did promise to try to do more to introduce students to Tolstoy, which I had already done by teaching a course on Tolstoy at UMHB this summer. I must say, that made the Russians very proud—that an American professor was promoting Leo Tolstoy.

Staff: What can you say generally about the state of religious freedom in Russian today?

Davis: There is reason for concern. After the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Russia, in the name of a new era of democracy and freedom, turned religion loose, one might say. The Russians were not ready for what happened. Every conceivable religious group from all over the world entered Russia. Having been through a communist period that was hostile toward all religion, preceded by a millennium of experiencing almost nothing except the formal, ritualistic practices of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russians were startled by what they saw, especially from Western evangelists. Russia cracked down on the entry of most religious groups, and it has since settled into an easy, comfortable co-existence with an increasingly dominant Russian Orthodox Church. Russia's constitution embraces religious freedom and declares all religions equal before the law, but the reality is something different. The Orthodox Church is very powerful politically. The Church works with civil authorities in all regions



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Faculty Feature: Dr. Yolanda Forero-Villegas

When Dr. Yolanda Forero-Villegas began teaching Spanish at UMHB, she jumped head first into a curriculum she wasn't so sure about.

"When I came here, the schedule was already made and everything, so I had to teach classes I've never taught in my life, like Golden Age Spanish Drama," she said.

Her unsteadiness about some of the classes she taught that first semester certainly did not come from a lack of experience.

Originally from Bogota, Colombia, Forero-Villegas finished her undergraduate degree in French and English education in her home country.

She then traveled to France to earn her master's degree in French linguistics. After deciding to further her education, she chose to move to the United States to pursue a doctoral degree as well as job opportunities.

Her initial trip to America brought surprises, but she felt as though she was prepared for the challenge.

"I think the first experience abroad is more difficult and I lived in France for two years," she said. "Even though (France was) very different, being a foreigner is not that different. The culture is very different. There are things that

are the same. I don't remember a big culture shock."

After finishing her Ph.D., Forero-Villegas taught for 14 years at Coker College in Heartsville, S.C., before deciding to make the move to Belton.

"I was looking for a different job because I wanted to teach more upper level classes," she said. "I remember I looked at Mary Hardin-Baylor, and I said, 'I don't know what this is, but let's send the application.'"

Forero-Villegas was called in for an interview, visited the campus and decided UMHB was the place for her.

"I like Texas for the fact that there are so many Hispanics," she said. "I don't have to repeat what I say. I have an accent, but people understand what I'm saying. I feel more at home here."

Her travels and experience in languages as well as her publication of several professional journal articles give Forero-Villegas an interpretation of the material she teaches that enriches and enhances her classroom.

"She brings to UMHB an international experience and perspective that benefits not only students but the Modern Foreign Language department as well," Dr. Sue Pardue, the department chairperson, said. "She has a background that adds a broader dimension to UMHB through her publications and presentations... Her knowledge of literature ensures that our Spanish majors receive an in-depth understanding of Spanish writers and literary movements and trends."

Forero-Villegas uses her first-hand knowledge daily in the classroom.

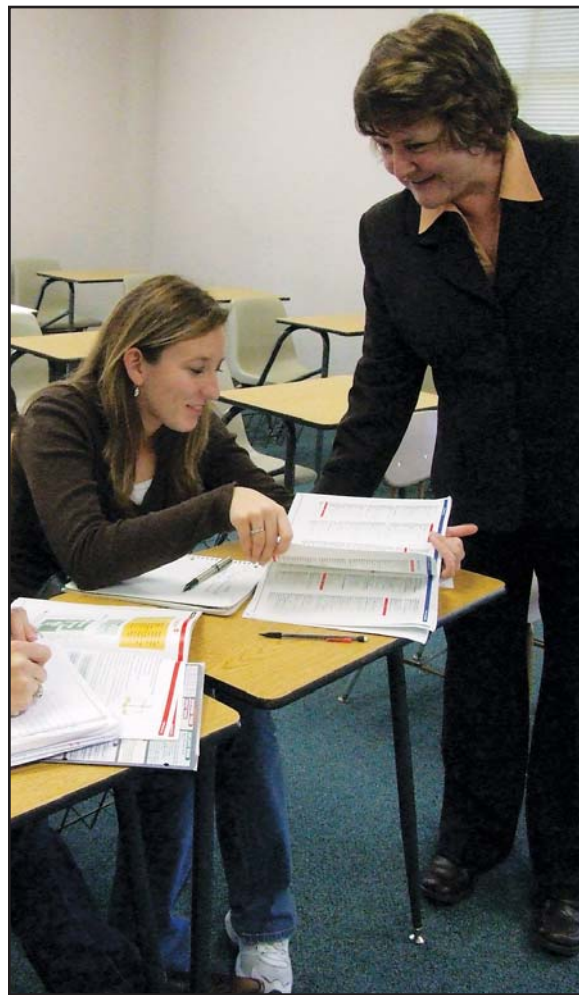
"If I have been to the places, I can tell the students, 'This is where I've been,'" she said. "(Recently) we were talking about the Incas, and last year, I was there."

Suellen Lumbreras is a senior Spanish major from Cameron, Texas, and is a student in one of the classes Dr. Forero-Villegas teaches.

"She always has interesting facts and details relating to the materials we are learning," Lumbreras said of her professor. "She has traveled all around the world and she is able to describe to us what it is like when we are studying different countries."

Forero-Villegas is making an impact throughout the department and in the lives of other faculty as well as students. Her extensive travels and life experience give her teaching credibility. Her works with literature and professional journals allow her to teach students to her highest ability. Students understand the privilege they have regarding the advanced education their teacher can provide.

Lumbreras said, "I am so glad I have been blessed to have such an excellent professor."



Jan. 7-10, 2009 Writer's Festival

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Jan. 26, 2009 Seventh-day Adventists: Beliefs and Controversies

Brindley Auditorium, York
Science Center @ 11 a.m.
Presenter:
Dr. William White

Feb. 9, 2009 The Future of Small Town Newspapers

Brindley Auditorium, York
Science Center @ 11 a.m.

March 9, 2009 An Introduction to Competitive Speech: The UMHB Forensics Program

Brindley Auditorium, York
Science Center @ 11 a.m.
Presenters:
Dr. Kerry Owens and
Professor Kathy Owens

April 13, 2009 Women's Changing Roles in Human History

Brindley Auditorium, York
Science Center @ 11 a.m.
Presenter:
Dr. Rebecca Peterson

Students Part of National Project

A group of UMHB history students and their professor recently had the opportunity to become involved in history.

Associate professor and chair of history and political science, Dr. David Chrisman, worked with library liaison and director of learning resources, Denise Karimkhani, on a project that will give the university recognition in the U.S. Library of Congress.

Karimkhani said she saw a special about the Veterans History Project on PBS and knew she wanted to become involved in it. With the resources available at the library and a group of students from Dr. Chrisman's Historical Inquiry and Research class, Karimkhani organized meetings between a group of veterans and students.

"We decided to concentrate on World War II veterans because they are dying rapidly," Karimkhani said. "The group of veterans selected varied. Several served in the South Pacific, one at the Battle of the Bulge, one at Normandy, one at Iwo Jima, several in Europe and one stateside."

Through various contacts, they were able to get in touch with veterans who were willing to be interviewed.

Some of the subjects had significant ties to Central Texas.

Kiefer Marshall, the former mayor of Temple; Will Long, a longtime dentist in the area; and Ted Edens, a campus boy at UMHB, were only a few of the veterans interviewed.

Two students were assigned one subject to interview. The students wrote papers on their experiences, and the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews were sent to the Library of Congress.

Teaven Barnum, a junior history major from Killeen, was one of the students who participated in the project and had the opportunity to interview two veterans.

"I gained the understanding that World War II really affected every aspect of life, even in the normal everyday citizen," he said.

Barnum thinks that by personally interviewing their subjects, the students had the opportunity to learn "the little details that you can only get from hearing the stories of the veterans, not from a textbook."

Chrisman believes the university has made an impact that stretches to only locally, but nationally and globally.

"It gave our department and our history students an opportunity to not only learn about actual war experience, but to interact with the Bell County community," he said. "We tend to forget that history is all around us."



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Creative Minds Encouraged on Campus



The English department has been busy at work already this year encouraging students to get involved in educational activities that expand their creative minds.

Dr. Audell Shelburne, chair of the department, has been largely instrumental in organizing the activities.

October brought a time for the English and art departments to combine their imaginations as the College of Visual and Performing Arts presented "Faraway Nearby," an evening of art and poetry from UMHB faculty Oct. 2.

Dr. Brady Peterson and Dr. Cleatus Rattan, as well as Shelburne, presented original poetry that accompanied artwork, musical selections and a presentation by Texas Poet Laureate Larry D. Thomas, who also read on Oct. 3.

Shelburne has also had a major part in encouraging students to get in touch with their creativity and share their poetry publicly.

He took two students to a monthly meeting of the Austin Poetry Society in September where they read original poetry.

Shelburne is the director of the Writer's Festival, an event featuring a principal speaker as well as workshops and a concert, which will be held Jan. 7-10.

Jeanne Murray Walker, author and poet, will be the keynote speaker at the festival. The award-winning writer will give a presentation on Thursday, Jan. 8.

Singing duo, Still on the Hill, will entertain audiences on Friday night, Jan. 9.

UMHB art professor Helen Kwiatkowski will offer an art workshop during the event as well, showcasing her unique style.

The festival is free for UMHB students, and other visitors can register at the door or contact Shelburne directly.

Shelburne is realizing his goals as more students interact with professional writers and artists, expanding their creativity and encouraging public performance of original pieces. He said his main ambition is "promoting a community of learners and writers who want to get better."



Teaching Couple Leads Students to Success

Professors Dr. Kerry and Mrs. Kathy Owens enjoy what they do for multiple reasons. As speech teachers and director and co-director of the forensics team, they have ample opportunities to spend time together.

“When a couple of super nerdy speech professors find each other and can earn a living doing something they both thoroughly enjoy, it gives us a sense of commitment and purpose that strengthens not only our ties to Mary Hardin-Baylor, but our ties to each other,” Kerry Owens said.

The couple has led the team, composed of students, to multiple victories around Texas as well as in surrounding states.

“UMHB is a recognized name on the speech circuit,” Kathy Owens said. “We are a part of the landscape in this highly specialized field.”

The couple gives much of the energy not spent in the classroom to the forensics team.

“We are providing an opportunity for students to network, build resumes and improve their speaking and presentation skills. We are improving students one individual at a time,” Kathy Owens said.

The opportunity to compete in speech tournaments augments both the lives of the professors as well as the students who participate.

Annie Wood, a junior chemistry pre-med major from Spicewood, Texas, is currently on the team. She enjoys the opportunity to “have a voice in things” she cares about, but mostly benefits from the interaction with the people she meets.

“The best thing about the speech team is the people,” she said. “We are a close group, and when we go on the road, it makes it fun to have a bunch of characters with you.”

The directors also realize the deeper impact they can have on students through building bonds.

“I am such a ‘mama’,” Kathy Owens said. “I love creating relationships with the team members and taking care of them I love the discussions we get into in the van at midnight driving back from Lubbock.”

The tight-knit group has made its way to many awards, placing at multiple competitions.

Since the competitions are not set up in divisions similar to athletics, the speakers get the opportunity to compete against team members from schools much larger than UMHB.

“It’s a huge thrill when one of our own wins first place,” Kathy Owens said. “We compete against ... big state schools with their big scholarships and big budgets. While we’ll never beat them in the sheer size of our team, our individuals can and do beat them one on one.”

The students who compete with the team have the advantage of being able to practice thought processes that will be helpful in their future lives and careers.

“It provides me the opportunity to watch students grow as speakers, performers and critical thinkers,” Kerry Owens said.

Beyond the awards and personal success they see the students achieve, the couple enjoys most the opportunity to build lifetime relationships with the team members.

“One of the biggest pluses (of the team) is the camaraderie that is built between students,” Kathy Owens said. “We become a family.”



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of Russia to suppress most of their competition. Russian authorities, for example, recently threatened to close 56 different religious organizations, including many Baptist and other Christian groups, for failure to file a mere annual report. Non-Orthodox believers experience constant pressure to limit if not end their worship.

Staff: Is there anything we can do for Protestant and Catholic Christians in Russia?

Davis: They need our prayers, of course. They also need support for the missionaries that are able to ob-

tain visas and enter the country. It is not easy to live in Russia as a foreign missionary. They are misunderstood and underappreciated by the people they serve. But I believe Russia has a bright future, economically and politically, and I think religious freedom will find a home in Russia one day. It is a beautiful country with wonderful people who are all hoping for a better future. The negative political developments I have described are not really the fault of the Russian people. Like us, they just want peace and a good life, so we should think of them as our friends and nothing less.

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