

RUSSIAN STUDIES

NEWEST GENERATION

Reading Dostoevsky sparked Madeline McCann's interest in Russia when she was in high school. For a long time, it was just peripheral. As an undergraduate, she majored in environmental studies at the University of Chicago but also took a few courses in Russian literature and history. "In my third year, I decided to add a second major in Russian and East European studies because I realized that I enjoyed environmental studies, but I was much more passionate about Russian studies."

Two reasons stand out in McCann's choice of IU for graduate school. "IU has been very willing to help me at where I am," she said. Most graduate programs reserve fellowship support for Ph.D. candidates, but IU extends support

to master's-level students. Among McCann's IU awards is the Robert F. Byrnes Fellowship. "IU's focus is not just on research production, but on training people who will be valuable in real jobs," she said. Second, she felt that IU's programs emphasize national diversity. "It's not just Russia, but there are very strong programs in the surrounding areas and the different nationalities. I studied abroad in Georgia. IU has a Georgia specialist whose work I read when I was an undergraduate, and now I am taking a course from her."

McCann has not settled on exactly where she wants to take her studies. She would like eventually to complete a Ph.D., but she doesn't feel that she wants to commit to a certain direction yet. "I'd

like to find a way to bridge the academic side. In environmental studies, there's very little discussion of Russia. It's thought of as a cold wasteland, already destroyed, but it covers so much of the world. There's a diverse biological landscape, many eco-zones. Some of the territories that broke apart after the fall of the Soviet Union share water basins and other resources. That causes interesting conflicts and also creates opportunities to collaborate among nations. My next step at IU is to learn the languages of more of these nations. I need more fluency and more experience."

Nikola Parlic came to the United States from Serbia when he was 14. He started high school in Miami with very little English and no prior experience of the United States. Being good at basketball helped to smooth the transition. He carried that athletic skill to Beloit College, where he played on Beloit's Division III team and majored in international political economy. His first introduction to Russian studies came when one of Beloit's two Russian scholars heard that there was a student from Serbia on campus. He started learning Russian in the second semester of his freshman year. "Before then, I was never even exposed to Russian language or Russian culture other than being aware that Serbs and Russians are both Orthodox Christians," he said.

Parlic continued, "I got really interested in Russian history and culture and comparing them to Serbia. There are many close similarities, but also many differences. Serbia right now is the main place in the region where Russia and the U.S. are competing for influence. The question is who will have more power in Serbia, Russia

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—Madeline McCann, Russian studies graduate student

or the United States. I think that by taking Russian studies, I can apply the knowledge that I have from being in the United States. Being Serbian and with everything I have learned in the United States, I'm sure I can be helpful to a lot of people."

The first recipient of the Erne Fellowship for Serbian Studies, Parlic too was impressed with IU's generous fellowship support for master's-degree students. "I was also attracted by the option of doing a dual-degree program with the Kelley School." He is not immediately interested in completing a Ph.D. "I would like that, but not right away because I think if I

want to do something with my majors I want to do it right now, build my career, get exposed to the business world or diplomatic work. Russia and the U.S. are competing for the heart of Serbia, but are they doing anything for Serbia? The U.S. gives Serbia more regular aid to meet humanitarian needs, but if there is a wildfire, then Russians come and help us. I would like to create certain business opportunities for all three places. Especially in Serbia and Russia, people are struggling economically, and they could do so much more if only the three countries could find a way to benefit instead of just trying to hurt each other." ■



REEL director Sarah Phillips with graduate students Madeline McCann and Nikola Parlic