As never before in our area studies program, conditions are ripe for interdisciplinary research and teaching. In particular, it is time for those of us in history and the social sciences to draw on the knowledge of our colleagues in literature, film studies, and the arts. Though at the core of the area studies program, departments of languages and literature have been thought of by the rest of us primarily as language training centers for our students. We have seldom brought literary and arts scholars into our work as research collaborators and instructors in jointly taught interdisciplinary courses.

Altered political and intellectual conditions are now pushing us to such cooperation, and we should be grateful for these changes, which promises lively new possibilities for teaching and research. The collapse of communism and changes in the intellectual environment in the West, especially the growing influence of cultural studies, has made collaboration between literature scholars and the rest of us not only possible, but imperative, as a recent article by Michael Holquist points out (New Formations, Spring 1994).

Holquist begins his article with a quote by James Billington, a pioneer of Russian cultural history and current Librarian of Congress, to the effect that we are passing through momentous historical events that we did not anticipate and cannot even find a name for.

Billington is right. What we are observing in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is certainly not a revolution in any normally understood sense. Nor is it the kind of rebuilding of countries that occurs following a major war. Reform seems too pale a name for what some countries are undergoing, since the changes are having powerful and unintended effects. As Holquist remarks, no metaphor so far proposed adequately communicates what is happening.

The word "metaphor" gets us closer to the issue of collaboration between literary and social science specialists. The crux of the matter for the peoples of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in a

Continued on next page
very practical sense, and for us specialists in another way, is the construction of a new narrative of the nations residing there. But what narrative can lend a sense of cohesion to polities that have been wrenched unpredictably and unceremoniously from one shape into another? The attempt on the part of some countries to deny 50 years of history and restart the story as if nothing had happened since 1940 is as impossible as the pretense (shared by many in Russia) that the current changes are an aberration soon to be replaced by a resumption of the Brezhnevian era of sovetskoe blagodenstvo “era of Soviet prosperity.

Only a new imagining of the nation, a combination of selective remembering and forgetting, can create a story that bestows dignity on the members of a nation’s major social and cultural groups, validates their past commitments and sacrifices, and offers them a coherent picture of themselves as a people. This is as much a study in cultural creation as a project of the usual social science or even historical research. We need to know what a culture is, how it is formed and articulated, how narratives are constructed, and how they function in their cultural contexts. In other words, we need the skills of literature specialists to understand one of the most critical aspects of what is now occurring in the region.

Here at the institute, we are very interested in facilitating efforts by our faculty and students to mount research and teaching ventures that bring together historians, social scientists, and scholars from literature and the arts. Some of this has been done, of course, not least by Michael Holquist himself when he served as chair of our Slavic Language and Literature department a few years ago. But we would hope to build a continuing effort on these lines, and we welcome proposals of this kind for workshops, courses, and research collaboration. — David Ransel

IPFW’s Diversity Week

The Fort Wayne campus held several international events as part of the range of activities for Diversity Week March 18-23.

Activities included an international food bazaar and craft fair, a panel discussion of “Views of the Third World: India and Pakistan,” and a screening of Métisse by the French Club.

Diversity Week was conceived by the IPFW Diversity Council to acknowledge the unique contributions of all peoples around the world.

Appointed by Chancellor Michael A. Wartell in November 1994, the Diversity Council seeks to (1) demonstrate through curriculum, support systems, and policies that IPFW values diversity, (2) maintain a campus environment that welcomes people of diverse backgrounds, and (3) identify diversity as a vital source of intellectual, social, and personal growth essential to university education.

Nawrez Celebrated by Central Asian Students

New Year’s was in January, right? Not for students from Central Asia who celebrated Nawrez in the Ashton Center Dining Hall on March 23.

The celebration was highlighted by traditional Central Asian music, food, and dancing, as well as cultural exhibits from Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Eastern Turkestan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran.

“IU is the only university with a Central Asian Studies program,” said Kazakhstan Student Association President Talant Mawkhanuli, a graduate student. “We want to share our culture with the local community and students.”

Nawrez, which means “new day” in Persian, is a celebration of the vernal equinox. Though Nawrez is celebrated mainly by Islamic peoples, the festival is not religious in nature.

Central Eurasian Studies professor Nazif Shahrani explained that spring was a time when the shepherding nomads of Central Asia came together to celebrate the end of winter and the birth of new animals.

According to professor William Fierman, the celebration of Nawrez was prohibited in Communist-dominated Central Asia from the 1930s to the 1970s and then again in the 1980s.

“Nawrez is not only a celebration of our culture but also a celebration of our independence,” said Azamat Abdimomun, vice president of the Kazakhstan Student Association, which was the primary sponsor of the festival.

Beth Spangle
Indiana Daily Student