Working in partnership with the Indiana University Press, the Polish Studies Center brought ten publishers from Poland to IU-Bloomington in February to attend a professional workshop devoted to issues of the small press. The trip was part of the Polish Small Press Development Program (PSPDP), supported by a grant of $90,000 from the United States Information Agency (USIA).

The program grew out of concerns that since the fall of communism and the end of censorship, several hundred new small publishing houses have started up, but most of them are severely under-financed, lack professional management (particularly in the finance and marketing areas), and need access to electronic technology. Indeed, hundreds of presses have emerged in Poland in the 1990s, but scores of them have also gone out of business.

Jointly with the IU Press, the grant is being used to inform Polish publishers about economic survival measures for the small press sector, with activities conducted in both countries. Following the success of the recent workshop and study tour, Polish Studies Center director Timothy Wiles will bring a team of book publishing specialists from several American university press and research venues to Warsaw for a capstone conference in May.

A challenge for the Polish Studies Center (PSC) was to link the Polish publishers with national organizations, to maintain some lasting institutional ties, as well as expose them to good information sources in the book business. In order to do this effectively, the PSC cooperated with both the Association of American University Presses (AAUP) and the Polish Chamber of Books.

Janet Rabinowitch, IU Press senior sponsoring editor and long-time Russian and East European Institute affiliate, and John Gallman, director of the press, organized a day-long tour of all the divisions of the IU Press for the Polish publishers. They also provided contacts to other publishers and sites to visit for the study tour.

The eight visitors were publishers from the small press book industry in Poland who had won competitive grants to go on this tour. Some were young people new to the book business. Some moved into private publishing from established houses or university presses. Two individuals represented the publishing division of regional cultural organizations, “Borussia” and “Pogranicza” (representing German- and Lithuanian-speaking minorities, respectively).

The eight publishers, escorted by two USIA interpreters, toured from March 4 until their departure from Detroit March 17. En route, they visited several independent publishing houses with specializations similar to the Poles’ own book lines (Guild Press, Indianapolis; Ivan R. Dee, Chicago; and the Independent Publishers Group, an innovative Chicago distribution company). They also had extensive tours of the presses of the University of Chicago, Northwestern, and Michigan Universities, two printing facilities, and the Borders Bookstore home office in Ann Arbor.

At the end of the trip, each of the publishers presented several books to Polish Studies and IU libraries. This team will form a nucleus for the concluding PSPDP activity, the country-wide conference for Polish book publishers in Warsaw this May.

— Timothy Wiles
Polish Studies Center

Polish publishers at the small press workshop held at Indiana University--Bloomington in February, standing with Janet Rabinowitch (front and center) and Timothy Wiles (far right).