

Note: English Department Chair Peter Parolin kindly agreed to say a few words at the retirement of Joseph Krafczik on April 26, 2017. The following are his speech notes, not edited.

I didn't know Joe K when I was first a faculty member at UW, but I did come to know his family because I rented a little house on north 11th street one year from his mother and father. They were wonderful landlords, Christine especially liked to come by and chat every so often and she told me about her son who taught Russian in the same building where I taught English. So I kept my eyes out for Joe, and when I met him, he struck me as I think he strikes everybody as a kind, generous, a gentle human being who sees, respects, and treats ethically all those he interacts with. As the years went on, I recognized that Joe is also one of the hardest working teachers I've ever known – I would pass by his office or pass him in the hallway and he'd be in there with students and this semester especially it seems every time I walk by a classroom in Hoyt, Joe is in there teaching one class or another – it might just be our schedules are linked in a particular way, but I think it is that Joe works incredibly hard as a teacher of Russian.

Here's a bit of biography on Joe and his career, so we can all appreciate his accomplishments and the difference he has made. Joe graduated from the U of Michigan in 1986 with his Master's in Russian; came back to Laramie broke, but not to teach here; he worked instead in antique restoration; and he played guitar in a band on the side. However, the ever-on-the-lookout Lew Bagby caught wind of him and sought him out. Talent will out, Joe. Joe joined UW in 1988 as a part time faculty member in Russian; he came on full-time the next year.

Joe has taught a wide range of courses in the Russian curriculum: he taught Russian language from the introductory to the upper levels; with his main passion being Russian folklore. Joe says he especially looked forward to teaching the pre-Christian deities and the house spirits; he loved tracking the connections to paganism that filtered into Christianity and provided a living link between modernity and the distant past. With Joe teaching folklore, Lew teaching 19th c lit; Pavel Sigalov teaching 20th century lit and linguistics. we had an excellent triad of faculty who made the Russian section a real showpiece for years in MCL.

The strength of Russian at UW led to a vibrant study abroad program in Russia, and this abroad program became the main other part of Joe's career. The program started in 1991 in Moscow right before the Soviet

Union dissolved; the political instability in 1992 put the program on hold; and then Lew started looking further afield to provincial destinations, that might be less subject to political upheaval and he settled on Saratov, if a city of million people can be considered provincial. Joe went to Saratov in the summer of 93 and worked for many years on the organization and administration of the program. Saratov had been a closed city so UW students and faculty were among the first westerners to go there. The first UW group in Russia included 10 students; the next year it was 24; most of the groups ranged from 7-10 students. This summer will be the 25th year of our program in Saratov with Joe having gone 21 times.

I asked Joe about the value of Russian studies at UW: It's an important subject, he said; especially given recent global political developments, it behooves us to pay attention to what's going on in Russia. As he likes to say, You can't ignore 11 time zones forever. He is proud of the fact that UEW's involvement with Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union has made us in our way a part of a major effort to create the soft landing that Americans experienced at the end of the Cold War. Russian is a critical strategic language in Joe's estimation and now is not a wise time to be cutting back on Russian studies. Considerations of financial expediency may be leading to some unwise decisions at UW, and in this he shares the same concerns that Phil and Hannelore raised when they looked back at UW in their last weeks here.

So as not to focus on our current worries, I asked Joe what were the most satisfying parts of his career at UW: as a great colleague and teacher, he said the first highlight is the rich connections he has made with people, with colleagues and students; as the stalwart of the Russian study abroad program, he also mentioned the contacts with Russian colleagues who now seem like friends after all these years. He's very proud of having helped so many students go to Russia, meet people there, and learn from their perspectives. He told me that the Russians loved to share their perspectives with him and that they treated him, now this is going to be my broken Russian, as Nash cheleviek: one of our people. I know that as we celebrate Joe's career, we all agree that not just in Russia but also at UW and in the halls of this building, our caring colleague will remain Nash cheleviek. Please let's have a toast to Joe.