

Newsletter

School of Modern Languages

Message from the Head of School

The School of Modern Languages has gone through a lot of changes in the last couple of years, but has adapted well to the rapidly changing circumstances in Higher Education. Despite the threat to Modern Languages in some parts of the sector, Bristol is in a very strong position, and we are looking confidently to the future.

Perhaps the greatest change over the past year has been the merger with the foreign language teaching operation of the University Language Centre, so that all modern-language teaching across the University is now delivered within the School. Bristol languages continue to recruit very well, with over 1000 undergraduates on our degree programmes, and another 90 taking our MA in Translation. This year we have also offered language modules to over 700 students from other Faculties, and plan next year to offer additional languages, such as Brazilian Portuguese. It is increasingly possible for students to add an additional language, and we have been building links between programmes through a series of very popular optional cross-departmental units on topics such as World Cinema, Political Systems of Europe, Women and Nation, Linguistics, or theatre and Performance.

Inevitably, several members of academic staff have left or retired over the last two years, but despite the economic climate, the University has supported Modern Languages to ensure that we have a professor to lead each department, and we have appointed some excellent new staff. We are profiling here some of those who joined us at the start of the current session; several other new colleagues will be working in the School from September 2012.

The School has also begun to establish a thriving community of post-doctoral researchers, and we have worked hard over the last year to enhance the already wide range of destinations and support we offer our students abroad. A priority for the coming session will be to find ways to extend work-placement opportunities (now more challenging than before within the eurozone!) and to do (even) more to develop our postgraduate provision.

This is the first of what we intend as brief annual updates to alumni on some of our main activities. Please do get in touch with news of your own or suggestions for further bulletins.

Professor Michael Basker

Developments for the Year Abroad

It became clear at a recent UK conference that Bristol is leading the way in enabling Modern Languages students to make the most of the Year Abroad. With the help of the International Office's newly-established SWAP Team (Study and Work Abroad Placements), our students are better prepared and supported than ever before through a series of regular briefings and interactive online facilities (including a timeline map for planning that is reminiscent of the *Indiana Jones* movies!).

The willingness of our students to support one another throughout the Year Abroad remains strong. With the rise of social networking, student societies are coming together to offer practical support with planning, accommodation, and general questions around living abroad. One of our alumni has even helped launch a successful website (thirdyearabroad.com) that now helps students across the UK. The School is also about to launch an all-new online resource to complement these activities, through which students will be able to upload written testimonials and video blogs about their experiences.

There are some other key new features as well. Not only do the Year Abroad essays now count for 10% of the degree, but assessments focus on a particular aspect of a student's personal experience whilst abroad, such as issues in their workplace or stories that are making the news. Alongside the essays, we run an annual Photography Competition so as to encourage students to think in other creative ways about their placements. This competition has proven hugely popular, and many of the winning entries – including a haunting image of two Haitian children after the 2010 earthquake and a snapshot of sheep climbing a slope in the Ecuadorian Andes – have become part of the University's publicity. From brides on the ice in Saint Petersburg to balloons on the beach in Rio, our students are bringing back scenes that are truly capturing the University's imagination.



Technology Enhanced Learning

Gloria Visintini was appointed Language Director, Technology Enhanced Learning, in 2011. Responsible for the coordination and development of the School's technology enhanced pedagogy, over the past few months Gloria has encouraged colleagues to engage more widely with recent ideas and developments in teaching practice. In doing so, online activities (to complement face-to-face seminars) have increased, reflecting the School's commitment to providing students with the most comprehensive and up to date learning experience possible. Two such activities were awarded the 2012 UoB e-Learning Prize. In her additional role as Faculty advisor on technology enhanced learning, Gloria is also involved in the development of educational strategies/policies at the Faculty and University level, providing space for colleagues to discuss opportunities and supporting initiatives that seek to explore and exploit cutting edge advances in e-Learning. Gloria first joined the University of Bristol as Language Tutor in 2006. She has taught Italian across levels in undergraduate and adult learning programmes.

MA Programmes

The Graduate School of Arts and Humanities, opened on Woodland Road in 2009, has enabled Modern Languages to launch a new set of MA degrees with an emphasis on intercultural, interdisciplinary learning as well as linguistic expertise and individual research. The **MA in Translation** has been a particular success in the short time since its launch in 2009. Taught entirely online, it is designed to prepare graduates for entry into the translating profession, and is also suitable for practising translators who do not have, but wish to gain, formal qualifications. All the MAs function both as stand-alone degrees and as preparation for academic research. They consist of a series of taught courses and a supervised dissertation, and are studied full-time for twelve months or part-time for twenty-four.

- The **MA in Modern Languages** covers a range of political, theoretical and cultural options, emphasising expertise in language, whether at post-BA level or in learning a new language from scratch. The degree is aimed in particular at graduates who use languages in their careers, and whose interests are broadly cultural rather than strictly literary.
- The **MA in European Literatures** has core units on the novel in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Optional modules – including courses in English Literature – complement this broad approach with the chance to work on texts in depth. From 2013, this MA will be replaced by the new **MA in Comparative Literature**, with units dedicated to a grounding in comparative theories and methods as well as to reading literature across traditional boundaries.
- The online **MA in Translation** develops theoretical knowledge and practical translation skills, including an option in computer-aided translation. Teaching is interactive, creating an active online community. It allows students to work in up to three languages (out of nine: Czech, French, German, Italian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish) as well as English. On-line working prepares for, and models, the practice of professional translators, and means that there is no requirement to live in Bristol. You can ask current and past students about their experience by joining the Bristol, MA in Translation community on Facebook.
- Specialised **MAs in Russian History and Latin American History** reflect the School's research and teaching expertise in these fields.

MA students' reasons for entering further study vary: from seeking an edge in the job market by enhancing linguistic and critical skills, to plans to research for a PhD, to sheer interest in the subject. They benefit from, and themselves greatly enrich, the vibrant School and departmental research communities, as well as benefiting from the 'home from home' and intellectual centre that the Graduate School offers all postgraduate students in Arts.

We are always delighted to hear from alumni who might be interested in postgraduate study, whether on a taught MA course, or for a research degree (MPhil, MLitt, PhD). Fees for 2012-13 have not risen in line with undergraduate tuition fees: the full-time home/EU student rate for MAs is £5,950, and all Bristol graduates are currently offered an Alumni scholarship, valued at a proportion of the course fee. You will find further detail of our degrees online: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/sml/courses/postgraduate/> and <http://www.bris.ac.uk/arts/gradschool/>

New staff

Dr Rowan Tomlinson
Lecturer in French



I would describe myself as a cultural historian of the Renaissance. I work on sixteenth-century French literature, but the inherently interdisciplinary nature of writing from this period means that the prose and poetry I explore take me into domains beyond the literary understood in its narrow (and post-Renaissance) sense. My first monograph is a study of the relationship between poetics and natural history in writers including François Rabelais and Michel de Montaigne, while my new project is investigating the poetics and politics of artisanship. I'm trying to discern how and why the figure of the artisan came to new prominence in literature of the sixteenth century and what was at stake in the promotion (in writing both by artisans and non-artisans) of the practical forms of knowledge in which craftsmen and women specialize. In terms of methodology, my aim is to attend to the complexity and particularity of the past and I resist the application of particular bodies of theory, which I think can risk strait-jacketing and distorting the object under scrutiny, especially with a culture so far removed in time from our own. This approach is something I also encourage through my teaching, where I help students to engage with past cultures through careful, contextually sensitive close reading. One of my goals is to challenge the assumption that young people today are only interested in studying literatures or cultures that have obvious 'relevance' to them and to their experiences. In my first year at Bristol, I've found quite the contrary: students have been really engaged by satiric fiction from the 1540s, love poetry of the 1550s, and political poetry produced during the ferocious civil wars that began in the mid-century.

Dr Claire Shaw
Lecturer in Russian



I joined the Bristol Russian Department in September 2011, following two years as a Research Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research in London. I completed my first degree in Russian and French at the University of Cambridge in 2005, before moving to the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, to pursue postgraduate research in Russian history. My PhD thesis examined the history of the Soviet deaf community, focusing in particular on how disabled individuals engaged with the Soviet revolutionary 'project' to create a superior society. I argued that, far from being excluded from this utopian vision, disabled individuals actively engaged with the Soviet revolutionary project, seeking to overcome their disability and become full and active members of Soviet society. I am currently working to publish this thesis as a book and a series of articles.

Beyond my research into disability and marginal identity, I am also interested in the history of Soviet leisure, particularly in the construction of leisure spaces (my article on Gorky Park was published in *Urban History* in 2011), and the role played by fashion in shaping countercultural identities in present-day Russia. At Bristol, I am currently teaching courses on identity politics under Stalin, and Soviet culture and society during the Cold War. From September 2012, I will be co-teaching two new courses on the MA in Russian History; the first focusing on Russian culture and society during the Revolutionary period, and the second exploring new cultural and historical approaches to the Stalin era. As well as researching and teaching Russian and Soviet history, I have also enjoyed returning to my roots as a linguist, teaching Russian grammar and translation to the undergraduates at Bristol.