

Developing Global Collaborations: *One Visit at a Time*

By Tony Ventimiglia



The Research Administration Initiative (RAI) is a joint initiative between the Eurasia Foundation (EF) and the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) with the goal of strengthening the potential for sustainable, long-term research collaboration between Russian and U.S. institutions of higher education in the area of university research administration. One of the initial goals of this initiative was the assignment of Russian fellows in several institutions across the United States following the NCURA annual meeting in August 2016.

From August 11-15, 2016, Auburn University hosted Dr. Irina Karapetyants, Vice-Rector for International Educational Programs and Director of the Institute for International Transport Communications (IITC) at the Moscow State University of Railway Engineering (MIIT). Founded in 1896, MIIT is the oldest institution of higher technical education in Russia. Today, MIIT is the largest scientific and academic complex in Russia and is a leader in the field of training and retraining of specialists and scientific personnel for transport and transport construction.

During her visit, Dr. Karapetyants met with key stakeholders within the Auburn research enterprise: the Vice President for Research and Economic Development; Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for Research; Assistant Vice President for Research; Directors of Sponsored Programs, Research Compliance, Innovation Advancement and Commercialization, and Contracts and Grants Accounting; and Associate Deans for Research from two colleges (Business and Engineering) for which there is a potential for future collaboration. Dr. Karapetyants was also afforded the opportunity to share information about IITC and MIIT at a brown bag luncheon. Of course, no visit to the South would be complete without an introduction to Southern barbecue (and Waffle House)!

Following Dr. Karapetyants' visit, we agreed to work toward future collaboration and communication, but we did not expect that a reciprocal

visit would follow so soon. In late September 2016, I was invited to participate in a delegation to Moscow, Russia slated for the second week of November which enabled me to visit Dr. Karapetyants' institution.



On my first day, I was provided a tour of IITC. The tour included a number of facilities for outreach, research, and instruction. Following the tour, I provided a presentation about Auburn University and its research capabilities and also led an open discussion on the possibilities of future collaborations. Speaker engagements, intellectual exchange, and research collaborations were among ideas discussed to bring together Auburn University and MIIT/IITC faculty and students. Three students of IITC volunteered to take me on a tour of the City of Moscow. The tour, which lasted almost four hours, covered a large area of Moscow and included a number of landmarks. I was truly impressed with both the historical knowledge and exuberance expressed by the students in sharing information about their city.

Following a busy day, my host (Dr. Karapetyants) and her husband Valery treated me to a Georgian dinner at Café Tchaikovsky, followed by a concert at the Moscow Philharmonic. Interestingly enough, the concert was a jazz quintet from New York (Нью-Йорк).

My second day started with a tour of the MIIT campus, including their historical museum. This was followed by a working lunch in which I met with Dr. Alexey Davydov, MIIT's Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation to discuss Auburn

University's research administration structure. The day concluded with a presentation to MIIT researchers and administrators on Research Administration – what it is and how it is managed at a U.S. organization.

Following my two days spent at MIIT, I met up with representatives from the NCURA National Office (Kathleen Larmett, Jesse Szeto); a number of colleagues from U.S. universities (Bob Andresen, Tricia Callahan, Panda Powell, Robin Riglin, Shandra White); new colleagues from Russian universities; and representatives of the Eurasia Foundation to take part in an RAI workshop, held at the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, and a roundtable discussion (held at MIIT). On our final day in Russia, we were hosted at the New Economic School for a roundtable discussion on the American and Russian Experience of University Research Administration.

Both the experience of hosting a fellow and traveling abroad has increased my understanding of the importance of global collaborations and the impacts they can have on our institutions. I am also very pleased to be able to share that, following these visits, Auburn and MIIT are working toward execution of a Memorandum of Understanding to “develop cooperation relations on the basis of established contacts and mutual understandings, especially to develop academic and cultural interchange through mutual assistance in the areas of education and research.” ■



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