

Building Research Management Capacity in Ukraine



UASP Success Stories: **Katerina Sirinyok-Dolgaryova**



When Katerina Sirinyok-Dolgaryova defended her doctoral-equivalent “Candidate of Science” dissertation in 2012, the Ukrainian higher education system was dramatically different. Classwork was not required; there was no specific training dedicated to research methods; the degree essentially consisted of dissertation writing with occasional exams and meetings with faculty. Three years ago, Ukraine introduced reforms for its universities to begin granting PhD degrees. The new structure aligns closely to American and European models, includes courses and electives, and requires students to publish in peer-reviewed journals in order to obtain their degrees. While these changes enable successful graduates to have their PhD degrees recognized anywhere, students, faculty, and administrators also face challenges in adapting to the new system.

Currently an Associate Professor and Vice Dean for International Affairs in the Journalism Department at Zaporizhzhya National University (ZNU), Katerina observes that “now that we have this requirement for publishing in peer review journals, it’s really important to know how to do that research, what methods people use, how they use it, [but] a lot of my colleagues don’t have any idea how to publish in these journals.” Accordingly, faculty may be ill equipped to advise their students. In her own academic field of journalism, Katerina says statistical methods are still rarely taught in Ukraine—at least not in detail—which she recognizes as a shortcoming, given the leading American and European research journals in the field all apply such methods: “That’s why our research is not so internationally represented and not so [high] quality...as we want it.” To keep pace with the changes Katerina believes “[it] is really important to start from the basic—from the ground—on how research is supposed to be done, and then how to promote and manage it.”

Katerina soon found an opportunity to be a catalyst for change at her university: in 2016 she participated in a research management fellowship under IREX’s University Administration Support Program (UASP). Following training on research management and leadership with other fellows in Washington, DC, IREX stationed Katerina at Utah State University (USU) where she could see a U.S. university’s research management operations in practice. Although focusing specifically on research methods and research integrity, Katerina also took away skills for grants management and grant writing and built relationships with peers in USU’s Department of Journalism and Communications. “My colleagues in Utah State University, they opened [for] me how they can work with grants...we didn’t do this grant management at all in our university...so that was really new for me.”



Katerina visiting Utah State University’s local radio station during her UASP placement

“Lots of people feel a lack of knowledge in this field and they wanted to learn.”

Upon return home, Katerina did not waste time to share her new knowledge. She won a UASP small grant to organize an expert-led intensive Training Institute in Research Methods, targeted to faculty of Katerina visiting Utah State University’s local radio station during her UASP placement. Social Sciences departments at ZNU and three other Ukrainian institutions. The 30-person event filled quickly and received positive feedback, testifying to Katerina’s colleagues’ hunger for professional development in this area. To conclude the months-long training, participant teams applied their learning by conducting research studies for a composite monograph, each using different research methods (e.g. content analysis, focus groups), and structuring their papers as one would for an international journal publication (“My idea was learning by doing”). Today, Katerina and her colleagues continue to use the institute’s training handbook as an advising tool when working with students.

Besides the institute, Katerina has also introduced two new courses at ZNU: The first is an elective undergraduate research methods course for journalism students and the second is a required research management module for all doctoral students which includes research methods but also aspects of responsible conduct of research, publishing in journals, and managing research grants. Katerina's course curriculum draws upon the UASP workshops and a faculty grant writing training she observed at Utah State University, adapting examples and other content for the Ukrainian context. Most students taking her classes have only been exposed to research methods in a lecture format, if at all, so Katerina prioritizes opportunities for them to practice and develop their skills. The university has welcomed both courses which are timely in fulfilling its needs to offer additional elective courses as well as more intentionally promote research skills among students.



And Katerina herself? She continues to put her learning into practice. In 2018, she won a 12-month grant from the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine called Media Literate and Smart: Cooperation of American and Ukrainian Youth. Under the program she invited her contacts at Utah State University to collaborate with ZNU. Together, their respective journalism departments produced a collaborative webinar series, a professional development course for teachers on media literacy, and a 14-episode radio show titled “UNconditional” which tells the stories of underrepresented people—those who “don’t have voices in mainstream media” in Ukraine. Katerina says, “UASP helped with everything in that grant!” She references the critical relationship built with USU and adds, “I did have experience in grant writing before [the fellowship], but UASP helped me structure my mind in writing a proposal in being specific about what you want and what you want to achieve... the grant writing seminar in Utah [State University] I took, it was really helpful too.”

And, Katerina continues her relationship with IREX in other ways. Thanks to her application, ZNU was selected to partner with IREX in the latest iteration of its Learn to Discern Media Literacy Training in Ukraine.

“Sometimes you have so much in your mind, but you don’t know how to structure it... UASP helped me structure my mind in writing a proposal.”