

Dear Colleague:

Thank you for your interest in the 2009 Summer Seminar “The History and Philosophy of the Peaceful Revolution in East-Central Europe.” 2009 marks the twentieth anniversary of the peaceful revolution that led to the fall of communism in Europe, a perfect milestone at which to reflect on the themes of this four-week seminar in Berlin and Leipzig, Germany.

Imagine spending three weeks in Berlin, a city that was at the very center of political oppositionist activities both before and during the peaceful revolution! Imagine meeting with former dissidents and exploring museums devoted to the history of communism, dissident activities under communism, and the peaceful revolution! Imagine having access to over 170 museums, eight major symphony orchestras and three major opera houses, not to mention world renowned architecture, historical and political sites of great significance, and a cutting edge cosmopolitan lifestyle! Imagine taking in the quaint city of Leipzig for five days, filled with the history of dissidence before and during the peaceful revolution and top-notch museums, theater, architecture and music!

In these exciting settings, which will give us insight into the life and work of dissidents from the former communist regimes of East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, we will explore three main questions: What were the philosophical ideas developed by dissidents under totalitarian rule? What impact did dissident groups have on the fall of communism? And, what is the ongoing significance of the philosophies developed by East-Central European dissidents?

This letter explains many details—including the basic themes and approach of the seminar, how to obtain university credit, housing, application procedures and the stipend—of what promises to be a thought-provoking, intensive intellectual journey.

Seminar Themes and Approach

In the autumn of 1989 dramatic pictures of mass demonstrations against the communist regimes of East-Central Europe were broadcast around the world. Millions watched previously unimaginable scenes of East and West Germans chipping away pieces of the Berlin Wall, which for nearly 30 years had been the most powerful symbol of communism and the cold war. Many scholars point to democratic opposition movements, beginning with Solidarity in Poland in the late 1970s, as instrumental in expediting the fall of communism in 1989. While twenty years later the peaceful revolution is generally regarded as one of the most important events of the twentieth century, the significance of the philosophical ideas of East-Central European dissidents is often overlooked and their exact role in bringing down communism is still in dispute. In understanding why communism fell, it is important not only to study large-scale political and economic developments, but also the role of ordinary people in combating total state control over society. The study of dissidence in East-Central Europe provides insight into the reasons that communism ultimately fell and the “power of the powerless” to undermine totalitarian rule.

Dissidents in these movements created an independent civil society as an alternative to the communist system, one that embodied a unique way of “living in truth,” a phrase coined by leading Czech dissident Vaclav Havel. Their writings offer a distinct philosophy of democracy and of a way of life; and, their oppositionist activities—such as an uncensored information system, independent art exhibitions, popular music, underground lecture series and libraries, and even privately organized video “stores” on the black market—threatened the totalitarian control of the communist regime.

The power of the powerless came from creating spheres of authentic activity beyond state control. Dissidents acted as if they *already* enjoyed rights of free expression and association. They thus created among themselves a smaller version of the kind of society they hoped for. In the countries of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany, individuals were simultaneously theorizing about an alternative way of life beyond the communist system and acting on those theories. Dissidents believed that it was the internal condition of individuals that determined being, not the external conditions of states. Although oppositionists hoped for democratic changes in their countries, the creation of independent spaces was viewed most importantly as an end in itself, and the focus of dissident activity was society, not the state. “Living in truth” was truly a way of life for dissidents. They strove to create a meaningful life for themselves and for those around them. By living in truth, activists created a democratic culture in which plurality, discussion and a free public domain were central values. Moreover, this way of life was an affirmation of one’s dignity and an attempt to regain control over one’s own sense of social responsibility. Havel theorized in his seminal 1978 essay, “The Power of the Powerless,” that the communist system was built on an ideological lie; thus, the fundamental threat to the system was living in truth. In the fall of 1989 the world witnessed the power of the powerless.

Some scholars argue that the political philosophies of dissidents have no relevance beyond the particular circumstances of Soviet totalitarianism. In contrast to this prevailing interpretation, other scholars (including myself) have argued that the concept of civil society was a forward-looking political idea that could enhance our realization of democratic ideals in the West. Dissidents articulated a conception of democracy that goes beyond state institutions, one that emphasizes citizens taking part in public deliberation and decision making, in the hopes of strengthening a democratic ethos. It stresses self-organization from below and the creation of public forums in which citizens of all political, social and economic stripes could come together to discuss issues of mutual concern. The problems facing modern large-scale liberal democracy may be mitigated by more democratization in civil society. From the discourse of dissident movements in East-Central Europe, we learn that real change must come from below, in the values and actions of individual citizens.

In light of these issues, the seminar will address three key questions: What role did democratic opposition movements play in the fall of communism? What were the philosophical ideas developed by dissidents in the civil societies of these communist countries? And, what is the ongoing significance of these political philosophies?

To set the foundation for understanding events leading to the peaceful revolution, we will begin with a brief history of communism in East-Central Europe. We will then examine early examples of dissent: the 1953 uprising in East Germany, the 1956 Hungarian revolution, and the Prague Spring in 1968. After these introductory topics, we will begin our exploration of writings by well-known dissidents. We will concentrate on the philosophical writings of Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, Adam Michnik of Poland and George Konrad of Hungary. At the same time we will read other first-hand accounts of and documents from the dissident movements in these countries as well as in Eastern Germany. These primary sources will be supplemented by secondary analyses of the civil society discourse in East-Central Europe. By Week Three of the seminar, we will turn to the fall of communism and the role of dissent in the peaceful revolutions of 1989. Week Four will focus on the history of political opposition in Leipzig as well as conclude the seminar with considerations of the continuing significance of East-Central European dissidence and their ideas about civil society. Our study of these topics will include meeting with two prominent former dissidents from East Berlin. (Please see the link for the detailed schedule for more specific information on assigned readings, museum visits and city tours.)

Seminar Schedule and Assignments

The seminar will be organized in a true seminar format, which I interpret to mean that each participant is responsible for the learning of every other participant in the group. Its success depends in large part on meticulous preparation by seminar participants. To foster a seminar atmosphere, all participants will be expected to write their responses to the reading in a journal kept daily, specifically thinking about the main arguments, significant ideas, questions, and critical evaluation, and come to class prepared to discuss their reflections. Each day three participants will be responsible for prompting class discussion by presenting important passages from the text(s) and relating them to key themes in the reading. Seminar participants will thus be able to take responsibility for their own learning and that of their colleagues. Working in the same groups of three, participants will complete a final assignment integrating seminar themes and materials into a lesson plan. These ideas will be shared at the concluding seminar meeting.

We will spend the first three weeks of the seminar in Berlin and the last in Leipzig. Participants will meet in Berlin on Sunday, June 28, 2009 for a welcome and informational gathering. The first seminar meeting will be on Monday, June 29, and we will stay in Berlin until Sunday July 19, when we will travel by train to Leipzig and stay until the morning of Friday, July 24. The last seminar meeting will take place in the afternoon of Friday, July 24. Participants may depart on Saturday, July 25. Formal seminar meetings will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday (except for the final seminar meeting, which will be held on Friday, July 24 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.). We will also meet outside of the formal seminar hours for city tours and museum visits. In addition, I will set up two individual meetings with seminar participants, the first of which will take place during the first week of the seminar, in the afternoons and on Fridays.

Location and Housing

Berlin is an exciting setting for the greater part of the seminar. The city was a center of dissident activities during the 1980s and still offers many artifacts of the dissident movements and life under communism. For example, we will visit the Stasi Museum, the Checkpoint Charlie Museum, the Ecological Library (an underground library and gathering place during the 1980s in East Berlin), the GDR (German Democratic Republic) Museum, and take a city tour of “Hidden East Berlin.” Many prominent former dissidents live in Berlin. And the eastern part of the city, where participants will be housed in apartments, maintains a character distinct from that of the western part of the city.

Leipzig, a university town one hour by train from Berlin, was also a center of dissident activities in the 1980s. Dissident groups grew under the protection of the Nikolai Church, which we will visit on the city tour called “On the Trail of the Peaceful Revolution.” The “Monday Demonstrations,” which were led by activists within the Nikolai Church, took place in the Leipzig city center and were the first indications that the former East German communist regime would not take up arms against demonstrators. We will visit the “Citizen Movement Archive,” devoted to the history of opposition, and hear a lecture on political opposition in Leipzig. In addition, Leipzig offers a wealth of cultural activities and historical landmarks. Our stay in Leipzig will give participants further insight into the culture of eastern Germany, as it was a city less influenced by the west than East Berlin.

In Berlin seminar meetings will take place at the “House of Democracy and Human Rights,” a symbolic setting as this was the center of political activities in Berlin during the peaceful revolution. The original House of Democracy was given to the citizen movements in the fall of 1989 by the East German government as a gathering place. While the House has since moved from its original location, it maintains its historical significance and now houses 70 small associations, many with roots going back to the peaceful revolution. Seminar participants will enjoy public access to many libraries in Berlin, such as that of the Humboldt University and the Social Science Research Center (this access, however, would mostly appeal to those participants who read German).

In Berlin participants will be housed in studio apartments, which (at today’s exchange rate (October 2008)) will cost approximately \$850 per person for the 21 consecutive nights we will be in Berlin. (The exact cost of housing will depend on the exchange rate, which has improved recently but is hard to predict for next summer.) Two participants will share a studio apartment ranging in size from about 350 to 400 square feet. The apartments are located in the heart of the eastern part of the city about 15 minutes by public transportation to the House of Democracy and Human Rights, where seminar meetings will be held. They are nice accommodations with fully equipped kitchens, cable television and wireless internet, and just a few minutes’ walk from the subway station and a ten minutes’ walk to Alexanderplatz, the center of East Berlin. Participants will also be in walking distance to Prenzlauer Berg, an artists’ district under communism that was the center of dissident activity and is now one of the most beloved districts in Berlin, filled with cafes, restaurants, pubs, boutiques and galleries. The apartments are in the

same building, which will help to foster the collegial atmosphere of the seminar. Our last night in Berlin will be spent in a budget hotel for approximately \$50 for one night. For our five nights in Leipzig, we will stay at Pension Plagwitz, located 15 minutes by tram from the city center. Plagwitz is a former industrial area of the city, which, like most of Leipzig's outer districts, is still undergoing renovations. Pension Plagwitz offers moderate, clean accommodations, and participants will be housed in a double or triple room with a private bath and including breakfast for approximately \$35.00 per night for a total of \$175. Thus, total housing costs for the four week seminar will be approximately \$1075.

Project Faculty

My dissertation and subsequent book, *Creating a Democratic Civil Society in Eastern Germany: The Case of the Citizen Movements and Alliance 90* (Palgrave, 2001), examined in detail the development of democratic opposition in the former East Germany. My research, in 1994 and 1998, included reading and translating hundreds of documents from dissidents before and during the peaceful revolution and conducting 38 qualitative interviews with former dissidents from East Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Halle, Dessau, Magdeburg, and Guestrow. In tracing the history and philosophy of East German civil rights activists, I placed the East German case within the broader framework of dissidence in East-Central Europe, thus I am very familiar with dissidence in East-Central Europe as a whole. The main focus of my research was the philosophical ideas of East German dissidents before, during and after the fall of communism. In the summer of 2008 I returned to Berlin and Leipzig to conduct research on the continuing legacy of East German dissident movements.

The seminar will include visiting scholars from the Frankfurt Institute for Transformation Studies at the Europa University Viadrina and the Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research in Leipzig. Dr. Jan Wielgoch of the Frankfurt Institute for Transformation Studies has done extensive research on the fall of communism in East-Central Europe and the various citizen groups that formed during the peaceful revolution. He will lecture on the reasons for the fall of communism and the role of opposition groups. Professor Dieter Rink of the Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research in Leipzig has also done extensive research on the peaceful revolution and its aftermath; recently his work has traced the remnants of the East German citizen movements in alternative voluntary associations that have emerged since 1989. Professor Rink will lecture on the legacy of dissident groups in Eastern Germany.

We will also meet with two prominent former dissidents from East Germany. Baerbel Bohley is perhaps the best-known dissident from East Germany, having been involved with many oppositionist activities starting in the early 1980s and as a co-founder of "New Forum," the largest citizen movement that formed in the fall of 1989 whose initial declaration for democratic changes in East Germany drew 250,000 signatures. She will discuss events leading up to and during the peaceful revolution. Wolfgang Templin was a co-founder in the mid-1980s of the "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights," the first openly oppositionist group in the former East Germany. This

group was also one of the first to make contact with dissident movements in other East-Central European countries and to consciously place itself within the civil society discourse more broadly. Mr. Templin will discuss his experiences as a dissident in the 1980s and the connections between East-Central European dissident groups

Professional Development for Participants

Credit for participation in the seminar is completely optional. For teachers who would like to receive continuing education units or professional development credit, I will provide a full syllabus and a letter explaining the work they have completed for the seminar, which can be taken to the appropriate administrators in charge of awarding CEUs.

Seminar participants also have the option of earning 3-4 graduate-level credits through the University of Northern Colorado's Extended Studies Program. Three credits will be awarded for the completion of all requirements of the in-class seminar meetings. An extra credit can be earned through participation in the out-of-class activities, including visits to museums and city tours, if participants write a short (3-5-page essay) connecting out-of-class activities to the seminar topics. Each credit costs \$100, for a total of \$300 or \$400, depending on the number of credits participants would like to receive.

Stipend

The stipend for each participant is \$3200; however, I will deduct from that amount the cost of housing in both Berlin and Leipzig as it must be reserved and paid in advance. Thus, participants will receive approximately \$2125 before leaving for Germany. Public transportation passes in Berlin and Leipzig, roundtrip train fare from Berlin to Leipzig, all museum visits, and city tours will be included in the program. Participants will be responsible for airfare, food and incidentals, books, and spending money. At this writing (October 2008) roundtrip airfare from New York City to Berlin is about \$1100, from Los Angeles \$1300, from Chicago \$1100, and from Denver \$1250. Given the falling oil prices, flights may be less expensive by spring 2009, although we will be traveling during high tourist season. The cost of food in Berlin will be much less if participants choose to limit eating out and use the apartment kitchens. As we will be staying in hotels for the last six days of the trip, we will have to eat out lunch and dinner; participants should budget about \$20 per day for eating in inexpensive restaurants. In planning a budget, participants should also consider how much they will want to take in cultural activities, such as concerts, theater, opera, etc. Whether the stipend will cover all costs of this trip depends very much on the exchange rate and what extra activities participants plan to undertake. But I suggest budgeting at a minimum an extra \$500 to supplement the stipend and at the high end an extra \$1000 (these are very rough estimates).

While the stipend may not cover the entire trip, it is important to keep in mind that paying \$500-\$1000 for a four-week trip to Europe is extremely inexpensive. I believe that our seminar will be a wonderful intellectual experience and living in two cities that were at

the center of this important historical moment will be invaluable, both on a personal and scholarly level.

Participant Selection

This seminar is expected to appeal to teachers of world history, comparative government, civics, German studies, and philosophy; however, I welcome applications from all disciplines and hope to create a seminar that reflects a diversity of perspectives. There is no language requirement for the seminar as all readings and seminar meetings will be in English. Participants will be selected based on the extent to which they will benefit professionally and personally as described in their application materials. Applicants who have not participated in an NEH seminar during the past three years will be given preference over those who have recently participated. When choices must be made between equally qualified applicants, other criteria that will be considered are choosing teachers from a variety of backgrounds, in order to create a more diverse seminar atmosphere and cross-pollination of ideas in various disciplines; and choosing teachers who have never traveled to Europe or who have only limited experience in Europe, specifically in Germany.

Application information is included on the website. Your completed application should be postmarked no later than March 2, 2009, and should be addressed as follows:

Christiane Olivo
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Campus Box 130
Greeley, CO 80639

Perhaps the most important part of the application is the essay that must be submitted as part of the complete application. This essay should include any personal and academic information that is relevant; reasons for applying to the particular project; your interest, both intellectual and personal, in the topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation, including any individual research and writing projects; and the relation of the study to your teaching.