The Copernicus Endowment

The Copernicus Endowment was established at the University of Michigan in 1975 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the great Polish astronomer’s birth. Currently sustained by the cooperation of students, faculty, and the Polish-Americans of Michigan, the Copernicus Endowment is maintained today by the energy and financial assistance of hundreds of individual supporters. The principal goal of the Endowment is to enable leadership appointments, programming, and student fellowships at Polish studies. Income from the Endowment makes the Annual Copernicus Lecture possible, and sustains the continual scheduling of public events dedicated to advancing a deeper understanding of the people, culture, and politics of Poland.

The Annual Copernicus Lecture

The lecture has been awarded each spring for the decade. The lecture series is designed to improve knowledge of Polish culture and history among undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students. The speakers have included Polish literary scholars of the highest standing. The series is open to the U-M community and to the general public. The speaker in 2005 was Walentyna Czybiszewska, a graduate of the University of Warsaw, who taught at the University of Michigan for nearly two decades. The series is supported by the Copernicus Endowment, the John J. ´Swiderski Fund, and the Michigan State University Polish-American Studies Program.

2005 Donors to the Copernicus Endowment

The Endowment gratefully acknowledges the contributions of: office in the Department of History. Ray is studying the dichotomy of “resistance” and “compliance” under Polish communism. His dissertation, “The Lowlands: An Examination of Polish Civil Disobedience,” is currently being revised. Ray is planning to complete his dissertation in the fall of 2005.

Academic News

In May, the Center on Eastern Europe and Southeastern Europe (CESE) launched a new blog that features news and analysis on current events in the region. The blog is available at http://ceseperspectives.org. In August, the Center will launch a new series of workshops that focus on the role of the Internet in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These workshops are designed to provide a platform for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to exchange ideas and share best practices.

In addition to its ongoing research and outreach efforts, the Center is also involved in several projects that aim to improve understanding of the region. One such project is the “Polish Diaspora in the United States: A Case Study.” This project seeks to explore the experiences of Polish Americans and their descendants in the U.S. through interviews, oral history, and primary source research.

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Since 1980, the University of Michigan has hosted prominent political, cultural, and academic figures from Poland as part of the Annual Copernicus Lecture series. Prominent presenters in this series include Leszek Kolakowski, Czeslaw Milosz, Stanislaw Baranczak, Timothy Garton-Ash, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, Krzysztof Penderecki, Henryk Górecki, Krzysztof Zanussi, Ryszard Kapuściński, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Kora Jackowska, and many more. A complete list is available on the web.

Have you thought of making a gift to the Copernicus Endowment and receiving a lifetime income too? A life income plan provides immediate tax advantages and generates annual income streams for you or other named beneficiaries. The University of Michigan will help you select the plan that is best for you and your situation. Call toll-free 1-866-233-6661, e-mail giving2@umich.edu, or visit the website at www.giving.umich.edu and select the “Need Information for Planned Giving” option.

For more information about Polish studies at the University of Michigan, contact:

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Photography: Peter Smith
Design: Savitski Design

FROM THE DIRECTOR

I have just returned from taking a group of University of Michigan undergraduates on a month-long trip to Poland—a trip made possible by the generous support of the Copernicus Endowment. Our study-tour, “Many Poland,” focused on the rich legacy of cultural diversity in northeastern Europe. The students learned that Poland’s current religious, linguistic, and ethnic homogeneity is a relatively recent development, and that “multiculturalism” was an every-day reality in Poland centuries before it became a buzzword in the United States. In addition to the usual lineup of glorious Polish destinations (Kraków, Czestochowa, Lublin, Gdańsk, Warsaw), we visited some special out-of-the-way sites than exemplify Poland’s diversity: the village of Bohoniki, where Muslim Tatars have sustained their faith and community for more than 400 years; the Orthodox shrine of Grabarka, to which the faithful have made pilgrimages for centuries; the magnificent synagogue of Tykocin, long a spiritual and intellectual center of Polish Judaism, and the “Pogranicze” (Borderlands) Foundation in Sejny, which is working to develop and sustain Polish language and culture.

On April 2, the members of the University of Michigan Polish studies community joined the world in mourning the passing of one of the towering figures of the 20th century: Pope John Paul II. To mark this sad moment we quickly organized a public forum to discuss the Pope’s legacy, drawing a large crowd and the attention of the southeast Michigan media. Joining me at this forum were Gabriele Boccaccini (Near Eastern Studies), Anna Grzymala-Busse (Political Science), Michael D. Kennedy (Sociology), Father Tom McClain, SJ (the Pastor of St. Mary’s Student Parish), and Geneviève Zubrzycki (Sociology). A more joyous moment came on February 17, when Adam Zagajewski, one of Poland’s most innovative and eloquent poets presented the Copernicus Lecture. He joined Professor Linda Gregerson (English) in a literary discussion and gave a memorable reading of his work (in Polish and in English translation) to a standing-room-only audience at the Rackham Amphitheatre on February 18. Liking him and his person brought their imagery and beauty alive, and gave us a renewed appreciation for the mastery of the Polish language.

Next year we at the Copernicus Endowment will continue to study Poland’s culture, history, politics, and society, and organize events that spread public awareness and understanding of the country that we all hold so dear. Highlighting the 2005–2006 academic year will be a visit by the artist Zbigniew Libera and the first ever retrospective of his groundbreaking work. In September and October, our distinguished faculty will be helping Americans understand the implications of the upcoming Polish parliamentary and presidential elections and what is certain to be a fundamental shift in Polish politics. The Copernicus Endowment will continue to support students interested in Polish studies, and to offer classes related to Poland in the Departments of History, Political Science, Sociology, Slavic Languages and Literatures, and more. All ongoing efforts in Polish studies depend on your generous donations, particularly at a time when so many other funding sources for higher education are being cut. On behalf of all my colleagues, I thank you in advance for your kind support.

Brian Porter
Program Director

“Try to praise the mutilated world, remember June’s long days, and wild strawberries, drops of wine, the dew.”

— adam zagajewski