

Alumni & Postdoc Notes



Jennifer Ginsburg

Before graduate school, I served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kosovo (2015–17) and taught English in a rural Serbian village. It was an incredible opportunity to be at the center of regional politics, and I became familiar with the difficult realities of life for minority communities in the region. The value of regional and linguistic knowledge, so important to my success in the Peace Corps, drew me to the Harriman Institute’s master’s program. At Columbia, I focused on nationalism and ethnic politics in the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia and took courses that provided an intellectual foundation to my time in the Peace Corps. My master’s thesis examined how Russian and Serbian politicians strategically use nationalist rhetoric and evoke the myths surrounding Crimea and Kosovo. I received fellowships to conduct field research for my thesis and interviewed scholars, analysts, and ordinary people in Moscow, Banja Luka, Belgrade, and northern Kosovo.

After graduation, I began working with the National Endowment for Democracy as a program officer on the Russia and Eurasia team. The knowledge I gained from the Harriman comes into play every day as I work with grantees to develop their projects and monitor existing programs. I am so pleased to have the opportunity to work with the people on the ground in the region who continue to fight the good fight, and I will always be appreciative of the many opportunities Columbia gave me.

—Jennifer Ginsburg (MARS-REERS, 2019)



Gazmend Haxhia

I graduated from Tirana University, Faculty of Foreign Languages, and earned my master’s in international affairs at Columbia University. I further educated myself at INSEAD Fontainebleau and the Harvard Business School. My early career path included serving as an aide in the Albanian prime minister’s office within the Department of Public Administration in Tirana. I also interned at the Currency Trade Department and Middle Markets at Merrill Lynch on Wall Street and have been an external adviser to the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Albania.

Currently I own and operate the Albanian franchises for AVIS and Budget Rent a Car leasing and associated services. I founded and operate the Albania Experience Travel Company, which is the leading event and travel company in Albania, and am cofounder and shareowner of the POLIS University in Tirana offering degrees in architecture, urban planning, and art and design. I used to be the license proprietor of the *In Your Pocket* guidebooks of Tirana, Skopje, Pristine, and Podgorica.

Most recently I became the land and port handling agent for MSC Cruises, which regularly dock at Sarande in Albania as part of their Mediterranean season. I have also established the Albanian Driver Trainer Centre, ensuring a higher class of safety awareness and driving skills for many major fleets traveling within Albania and internationally.

I have been an associate faculty member (since 2006) for Entrepreneurship and Practicing Management at IEDC-Bled School of Management. In 2018 I was awarded the title Professor of Management Practice. I am a lecturer in Leadership, Marketing Services, and “The Responsible Administrator” (a course in ethics) at Tirana University and Nebraska University MBA/MPA Program. I was nominated to the Forum of Young Global Leaders at the DAVOS World Economic Forum in 2008.

I am married to Anila and we have two children, travel extensively, and work internationally, though Tirana, Albania, is home.

—**Gazmend Haxhia** (M.I.A., SIPA, 1994)



William Persing

I arrived at the Harriman Institute in the fall of 2016, after spending a year teaching English in Vladimir and traveling around Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia. The time abroad coupled with my strong interest in economics drove me to focus my studies on energy-related economic and political issues—specifically pipeline politics—in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. Following graduation in 2018, I accepted a five-month research opportunity with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (PA) in Brussels. Among my responsibilities at the NATO PA, I researched and wrote reports on energy security and Eastern Deterrence against military threats toward Eastern NATO members. The highlight of my time at the NATO PA was attending the Plenary Session in Halifax, Canada, where I met parliamentarians from across the Alliance and listened to them debate the reports I had helped to write.

Since February of this year, I have been working as an analyst at the international management consulting firm Elixirr. Working there I have traveled across the United States and the United Kingdom. My degree from the Harriman Institute has sharpened my research skills and helped me tackle tough client challenges.

—**William Persing** (MARS-REERS, 2018)



Cynthia Roberts

In 2019, with support from a Council on Foreign Relations fellowship, I worked as a policy adviser for the Joint Staff (J-5) at the Department of Defense. Embedded in a team of extraordinary civilian and military specialists in the Directorate of Strategic Stability, Strategic Deterrence, and Nuclear Policy Division, our work involved strategy, plans, and policy, representing the Joint Staff in the interagency policy-making process, and supporting the chairman’s “military advice” to senior leaders.

My commitments at J-5 included off-site activities, and I was invited to speak at the 2019 NATO nuclear symposium in Riga and give a briefing at NATO headquarters in Brussels. I also carved out time for academic work (on sabbatical as a professor at Hunter College, CUNY) to participate in Track 1.5 talks and a forum on European security in Moscow and



Peter Zalmayev

follow-up research in Russian archives for a book on disconnects between Stalin and the military leadership before 1941.

The year 2019 also turned out to be a critical year to observe from inside the government how attitudes were hardening on China and to engage with officials focused on great power competition, while Russia and China found more opportunities to collaborate. This was the subject of the 2019 Annual Saltzman Forum at Columbia, where I was a panelist with Eugene Rumer and Peter Clement. A related offshoot of my book on *BRICS and Collective Financial Statecraft* (Oxford, 2018) led me to examine blowback and escalation risks from the U.S. weaponization of finance. I published two papers on how aggressive use of financial coercion and punishment is incentivizing opponents, such as China, Russia, and even U.S. allies, to create alternative instruments to the dollar and how the use of financial swords creates under-explored risks of escalation.

—**Cynthia Roberts** (Harriman Certificate and Ph.D., Political Science, 1992)

Professor of Political Science, Hunter College, CUNY; and Senior Research Scholar and Adjunct Professor of International Affairs, Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, Columbia University

I just celebrated the two-year anniversary of my international talk show, *The Week*, which I cohost on the Ukrainian TV channel Pryamy. The program covers important international developments while tackling issues of global import, such as global warming, racism, and realities of the emerging post-truth world. I regularly visit major international conferences, such as the World Economic Forum in Davos and the Munich Security Conference, from where I file special reports for the program.

In August, during a one-on-one interview, my partner and I were among the first Ukrainian journalists to ask U.S. Special Representative to Ukraine Kurt Volker about Rudy Giuliani's "shadow diplomacy" in Ukraine. The interview was shared widely locally, and an excerpt was shown on MSNBC's *Rachel Maddow Show*.

I continue to provide commentary on Ukraine's politics, both for local and international media. During both rounds of Ukraine's presidential elections, I gave interviews to BBC World News, Al Jazeera/English, EuroNews, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

In 2019, I published a dual-language (Ukrainian/English) book for both children and adults, *Manual of a Not-so-Young Father*, which I presented at several literary festivals in Ukraine. I continue to divide my time between New York and Kyiv, where I have two sons: Yakov (3 years old) and Peter Jr. (3 months old).

—**Peter Zalmayev** (M.I.A., SIPA, 2008)