

Alumni Notes



Helen Dimos

I have changed careers several times since attending SIPA from 1966 to 1968. After observing the 1968 student protests at Columbia, I became fascinated by current political events, so I joined an all-news radio station, WCBS, for approximately two years. Then I became a freelance writer, and a writer in the National Affairs section of *Newsweek* magazine. After *Newsweek*, in an about-face and to earn a living, I became a commercial real estate broker for 10 years in Manhattan, eventually opening my own company with a partner (Hendler & Dimos Inc).

In 1990, tired of the shenanigans of real estate, my partner and I closed the company, and I enrolled at the City College of New York to earn a bachelor of science degree in landscape architecture. From 1993 to 1995, I worked as an assistant landscape architect for the Central Park Conservancy. Following that exciting job, I moved to Ridgefield, Connecticut, and embarked on a final and most fulfilling career—residential landscape design, which I have continued doing to the present day.

I am writing about my episodic career since 1968, because I would love to hear what other Harriman fellows have done since the turbulent '60s.

—**Helen Dimos** (M.I.A., SIPA, 1968)



Gerald Easter

I had the good fortune to be part of the 1980s cohort of Harriman Institute grad students, spending all my time on the 12th floor as a work study for the Institute and for Professor Leopold Haimson's Labor Project. I have just completed my 20th year as a professor of comparative politics at Boston College. Probably because I was trained in political science at Columbia in the 1980s, my most recent publication is a history book: *The Tsarina's Lost Treasure: Catherine the Great, a Golden Age Masterpiece, and a Legendary Shipwreck*. It is not typical academic fare. Back around 2013, I first heard the story of the *Vrouw Maria* shipwreck from excited news reports in Russia. The phantom wreck had at last been found off the coast of Finland, and would soon be raised and salvaged, revealing her amazing cargo to the world. *Vrouw Maria* was carrying a cache of Baroque masterpiece paintings to Empress Catherine II when lost at sea. The cargo included the most coveted piece of art produced during the Dutch Golden Age—*The Nursery*, an oak-paneled triptych painted by Rembrandt's student Gerrit Dou, who once surpassed his master in both praise and guilders. It seemed like a fun project to research, especially after working on the politics of taxation for ten years.

I dove into this Baltic mystery, along with my cowriter and wife, and we unraveled the story of Catherine's art wreck. The project also turned out to be a good form of couple's therapy after the birth of our twins! The book tells of the rise and fall of Gerrit Dou, the first international superstar of the Dutch Golden Age; the search for and discovery of *Vrouw Maria*; and, the inevitable battle over ownership of her prized cargo between the wreck hunter, the Finnish government, and a team of Russian oligarchs. Perhaps what was most interesting to learn were the many parallels between 18th-century Europe's geo-cultural politics and the persisting antagonisms between Russia and the West today,

especially as personified through archnemeses Empress Catherine and President Putin. My lessons in Russian politics and history, delivered by Professors Haimson, Bialer, Shulman, Rothschild, et al., served me well in this endeavor.

—**Gerald Easter** (Ph.D., Political Science, 1992)

I spent all of 2019 as the prime minister of Sarajevo Canton, one of the most challenging political executive posts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. My appointment represented a signal of change in Bosnian politics, which had been dominated by nationalism and populism since the U.S.-brokered peace agreement in 1995. The 14-month appointment was greeted with significant popular support and heavy backing of the international community, but ended in March 2020, after two coalition partners switched sides to join the nationalists. Right now I am working with my social-liberal party Naša stranka, preparing for the upcoming municipal elections in November 2020.

—**Edin Forto** (Harriman Institute East Central Europe Certificate, 2001; M.I.A., SIPA, 2001)

I started graduate work in the History Department and in the (then) Russian Institute in 1963. I was in Turkey, at the Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi, from January 1967 to January 1968 and then went to visit relatives in Russia. Upon my return to Columbia in the spring of 1968, I submitted my master's essay to the History Department and my certificate essay to the Russian Institute.

I taught at Rutgers University (Newark and New Brunswick campuses) from 1969 to 2012, attaining the rank of Professor II (Distinguished Professor in 1988), offering courses on the history of Central Asia, Islamic civilization, the Ottoman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the medieval Slavic world, and related subjects. I chaired the History Department (Newark) for eight years and was director of the Middle Eastern Studies Program (New Brunswick) during my later years. In 2019, I was elected as an Honorary Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the field of Oriental Studies. I am the author, editor, or coeditor of numerous books as well as articles in English, Russian, and Turkish.

—**Peter B. Golden** (Ph.D., History, 1970; Harriman Institute Certificate, 1968)



Edin Forto



Peter B. Golden



Laura Trimajova

I started my studies at the Harriman Institute—a small, tight-knit group of fellow classmates—as a Fulbright Fellow in 2012. During my time in the MARS-REERS program I focused on the Western Balkans. I wrote a thesis comparing the Serbian elections in 2008 and 2012 under the supervision of Professor Lincoln Mitchell. As a native Slovak, I was interested in the political developments across the entire post-Communist world. I found the Harriman Institute, Columbia University at large, and New York City to be the best places to be for gaining academic expertise in this field.

Since graduating in 2013, I have been working as a political adviser for the European Parliament in Brussels. I advise MPs on foreign affairs and specialize in EU enlargement with regard to the Balkans. I believe the time spent at the Harriman has given me a unique perspective on transatlantic relations. My degree has not only launched my career, but also it keeps me involved with the academic community—I try to come back every year and participate in the annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN) organized at the Harriman.

—[Laura Trimajova](#) (MARS-REERS, 2013)



Doug Wake

Almost 40 years after I got my Columbia master's degree with a Soviet/Russia regional concentration, my wife, Connie Philipot, and I continue to focus much of our personal and professional attention on the countries covered by the Harriman Institute. Since late 2018, I've been serving as a "senior expert" helping to start up a new Strategic Policy Support Unit in the Office of the Secretary General of the 57-member Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna, Austria. Previously I was a U.S. Foreign Service officer for 28 years, in postings that included Stockholm, Leningrad, Rangoon, Riga, Moscow, and Belgrade as well as Washington, the U.S. Mission to the UN, a midcareer fellowship back at SIPA, and a teaching stint at the U.S. Army War College. I left the State Department in 2009 to spend the next four years as First Deputy Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), a Warsaw-based institution of the OSCE perhaps best known for deploying election observation missions in Europe and Eurasia. In recent years I have also played various roles in several of those missions, including as the head of missions to observe 2016 presidential elections in Moldova and 2018 parliamentary elections in Hungary.

—[Doug Wake](#) (M.I.A., SIPA, 1980; Harriman Institute Certificate, 1998)

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