



SIUE's Bezhanova Awarded Medal from Ukrainian Academy of Literature and Art

by Doug Mcillaga

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Department of Foreign Languages and Literature's Olga Bezhanova, PhD, associate professor of Spanish, has been awarded the Medal for the Contribution to Ukrainian Art and Scholarship from the Ukrainian Academy of Literature and Art. She was recognized for teaching an interdisciplinary course on totalitarianism and Ukrainian art, along with her outstanding promotion of Ukrainian art throughout Hispanic countries.

“I was very excited to receive this award, not only because it serves as a recognition of my own work, but also because of what it says about Ukraine,” said Bezhanova. “For the longest time, Ukraine has been in the grip of extreme corruption that has infected every area of life. However, since 2014, great efforts have been made to battle corruption.”

A Ukraine native, Bezhanova has taught courses on Hispanic culture, literature and history at SIUE for the past decade. Along with promoting Hispanic literature and culture, she has been an active participant in the literary scene of her native country by publishing English translations of contemporary Ukrainian prose and serving on the juries of several literary contests in Ukraine.

“As a Ukrainian residing in the United States, I believe it is my duty to share my knowledge about this complex, yet fascinating country with the community,” said Bezhanova.

Last spring, Bezhanova teamed with fellow Ukrainian Sophia Wilson, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Political Science, to co-teach the interdisciplinary course recognized by the Ukrainian academy. Together, the duo designed the course to highlight the contrast of the totalitarian regimes that existed during the 20th-century in Ukraine and Spain, and the ways in which those regimes impacted the artistic production of both countries.

As part of the course, Bezhanova invited noted Ukrainian writer Mykhaylo Blekhman to guest lecture in class. Such an experience provided students with a rare opportunity to personally meet a leading Ukrainian author whose work they had studied throughout the course.

In addition to her promotion of Ukrainian art and culture at SIUE, Bezhanova has made great strides in representing art from Ukraine throughout Hispanic countries. This year, she translated a collection of poetry by leading Ukrainian poets Tetiana Dziuba and Serhii Dziuba into Spanish. Along with editing the translation, she wrote a preface for the works, explaining the relevance of contemporary Ukrainian poetry to Spanish-speaking readers. The collection was published in Bolivia and Spain, and constitutes one of the rare forays by Ukrainian poets into the Hispanic literary market.

“I haven’t returned to Ukraine in 21 years and no longer have any personal connections in the country,” noted Bezhanova. “Still, I was awarded this medal, which demonstrates that Ukraine is no longer a country about knowing the right people and having the right connections. This gives me a lot of hope for the future of my country of origin.”

In her continuing endeavor to promote Ukrainian art throughout the world, Bezhanova will be presenting “The Revolution of Dignity and Birth of Democracy in Ukraine” at the Edwardsville Public Library on Wednesday, Nov. 6. During her presentation, she will discuss the numerous achievements and failures throughout the country’s journey to democracy and explain their ongoing relevance.

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