
FACULTY RESEARCH

Most students see their professors as teachers, whether in class, in office hours, or as academic advisors. However, this is only a part of their jobs. A large part of a professor's time is spent doing research in their field of study. During the fall 2005 semester, this is what Professor Ethan Pollock was doing. Professor Pollock, who teaches Russian and Soviet history, took a leave of absence during the semester to further his research, some of which was completed in Washington, DC at the Kennan Institute for Russian Studies, a part of the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Professor Pollock spent part of the semester finishing an ongoing project, a book titled *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars*, which will be published by Princeton University Press in fall 2006. After completing his book, the professor spent the month of October in Washington, D.C. to begin his new project, in which he will investigate the history of the Russian bathhouse, or *banya*. Russians have had a consistent bathing ritual since medieval times, explains Pollock, which combines aspects of saunas in Scandinavia and influences from Ancient Rome. In fact, bathing has commonly been a communal activity in much of human history.

Despite the changes in Russian history, the bathing ritual remains a constant in the culture. Although the activity has pagan roots, it has survived the conversion of the Russian people to Orthodox Christianity. Due to cultural interaction with the Middle East, Russian bathing has acquired aspects of Roman traditions. The meanings of practices may change, but the practices themselves stay the same. Bathing became a social, as well as a hygienic activity, as all classes have access to the city's bathhouse. Throughout history, the bathhouse has been a center of political intrigue. Coups and other resistance strategies take place in the bathhouses. They also became centers of prostitution, where Russians can pay for the services of both women and men.

Pollock started his research at both the Kennan Institute and the Library of Congress, focusing on the accounts of foreign visitors to the bathhouse in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, research can be difficult. One problem can be the researcher's own curiosity. As one idea or question develops, many others arise, making it easy to lose focus. It can also be difficult to find funding. The university does provide professors with research grants, but they may also have to seek external sources. Pollock secured his funding through the history department. He received a grant from the Appleby-Mosher Fund of The Maxwell School, which supports junior faculty research, and from the Kennan Institute. While research can be a difficult process, it is necessary for tenure. But this is not the only reason professors conduct research. Beyond being teachers, they are also "professional scholars", and their desire to seek answers to the mysteries of the past doesn't end when they accept an academic position.

Pollock conducted most of his research in libraries, scouring the archives of police reports and personal writings to learn about his topic. While he has used secondary sources, primary sources will be much more helpful in his project. Pollock has been pleasantly surprised with the amount of information available. Because he relies on personal accounts, information can be everywhere and nowhere, as there is no guarantee that someone wrote much about the bathhouses, if they wrote anything at all. Also, since the bathhouses were open to people of all classes, information about them could theoretically be in anyone's memoirs.

Pollock hopes to finish with a book on the subject, but he notes that it will be a long process, and could take six years or longer. He will be going to Russia in the summer to continue his research, but may need more time there to find the information he needs. We wish him the best of luck in his endeavors and look forward to the results.

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