

# Isenberg School of Management hosts panel with Ukrainian exchange students

## Ukrainian Economics students are studying at UMass in hopes to return home and improve their country

By Daniella Pikman, Collegian Correspondent

On Thursday, Nov. 2, the Isenberg School of Management (ISOM) at the University of Massachusetts held a panel titled “Higher Education in the US and Ukraine: Meet the exchange students from the Kyiv School of Economics.” Four Ukrainian students, Asta Motrenko, Iryna Horobets, Khrystyna Buryhina and Marharyta Nechytailo, are attending UMass on a scholarship as exchange students for the 2023-24 academic year.

The Kyiv School of Economics was founded in 1996 by the Economics Education and Research Consortium and offers degrees in economics, business analytics, urban development and public policy.

Anna Nagurney, the Eugene M. Isenberg Chair in Integrative Studies at ISOM, was one of the people who brought this program to life. She is a member of the International Academic Board at KSE and an expert on Russia’s ongoing war with Ukraine.

In July 2022, UMass signed a series of memoranda of agreement with KSE to assist scholars and students affected by Russia’s war on Ukraine. The deans of the colleges were in support and provided funds towards an international and virtual scholar program. There are currently 15 virtual scholars working with UMass faculty, nine of whom are in ISOM. Such faculty and deans are emotionally and psychologically supporting Ukrainian scholars by publishing media papers and attending conferences.

KSE Rector and Vice President for International Relations Tymofii Brik thanked UMass and said, “You allow our students to have transcultural exchanges and experiences.” He is hopeful to have other opportunities for more virtual classes using facilities in Poland and welcoming new Ukrainian global scholars, including opening this program to other Ukrainian universities. The goal is to keep Ukrainian academia thriving and alive, while not draining Ukraine of its intellectuals at a time of war, he explained.

The Ukrainian exchange students said they are enjoying life at UMass, the number one dining in particular. They appreciate the diversity of food offered but still miss Ukrainian cuisine. They found it surprising to see steak and lobster served on Halloween.

“I don’t have a favorite food [at UMass] because the variety is really crazy, every day you can choose what you want,” Motrenko said.

At first, it was hard for them to adjust to dorm life.



Shilpa Sweth

“It was the most unusual thing for me,” Buryhina said.

The students shared stories of making American friends in unexpected places, like the dorm bathrooms, which is something that would not usually happen in Ukraine. Now, they have comfortably adjusted to campus life and are enjoying their time here.

There still are some things the Ukrainian students are not used to, like seeing squirrels across campus and writing on lined paper instead of graph paper, as they do in Ukraine. They miss the big city life in Kyiv and called it “the best place to live.”

The size of the University came as a great surprise as well; they said it was nothing compared to the pictures they saw online. The variety of clubs, activities and food on campus is not something they were expecting.

“Sometimes I feel like I’m in a movie, a really American movie,” Motrenko said.

The group explained that one of the main differences between studying at UMass and KSE is the teaching style of the professors. In Ukraine, professors often use examples from their personal lives while teaching, whereas in America, professors make presentations and assign readings or videos rather than sharing personal stories.

Despite the different teaching styles, “All the teachers here are passionate, they are open to [explaining] things [that] you don’t understand,” Nechytailo said. “I love that they are open to talking about differences.”

The exchange students are all majoring in economics and came to America to gain knowledge that can help improve their country.

“When the war started, I understood that I need to do something more for my country. I realized that economics will be the best way,” Motrenko said. “It’s an incredible thing, just getting an American degree and studying in America, it’s so different from Ukraine,” Buryhina added.

After Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February 2022, the country has been making concentrated efforts to reestablish themselves. Programs like the one at UMass make it possible for young Ukrainians to get a high-quality education that they can use to catalyze positive change and progress, explained the students.

“We are grateful to be here because it will help us in our career ... and improve our country. I feel the strong identity that I am Ukrainian, I am really proud to be [a part of] this nation. And I hope, and I believe, and I know, that Ukraine will win,” Nechytailo said.

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