Academia during the wartime: the experience of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

Lecturer presented by Prof. Lilia Miroshnychenko
Academia during the wartime: the experience of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

Presented by Prof. Lilia Miroshnychenko
(Department of Foreign Literature, Institute of Philology)
at Maison des Sciences de l’Homme de Bordeaux, 22 March 2023

Prof. Lilia Miroshnychenko talks about the experience of Ukraine’s leading university, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, during the ongoing war.
She is head of the Department of Foreign Literature at the Institute of Philology.

Electronic reference
Lilia Miroshnychenko, “Academia during the wartime: the experience of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv”, mshbordeaux.hypotheses, online on 09 May 2023.
URL: https://mshbordeaux.hypotheses.org/1891
Bonjour à tous.

Thank you, dear Nathalie, for this kind presentation. Thank you all for having me, – it is both an honour and a pleasure to be here. I remember my first visit to Bordeaux Montaigne five years ago – wonderful people and great professionals I met here and who became my friends. However, the story of this academic friendship is even longer than that; it had begun when I first met Professor Nathalie Jaëck at an international conference on friendship held in Krakow...

When here, you find yourself in the university which is indeed one of the fortresses of humanist thought and has been so since at least the time of the great humanist Michel de Montaigne. Interaction in academia mingles the Renaissance spirit of humanism and universalism with modern-day multiculturalism and diversity, and discussions are held on preserving cultural identity in the contemporaneous globalised world.

I wish I could talk about literature and philosophy today, but I will talk about the war. It is my moral obligation to do so and I am grateful to Bordeaux Montaigne for this opportunity to share with you all, in the spirit of freedom, my experience of this dreadful war, an unprovoked war which the Russian Federation began against its peaceful, friendly neighbour – against us, in Ukraine, nine years ago, when in March 2014 it occupied Crimea in the south, then the same year – the region of Donbas in the east, and on 24 February 2022, it attacked the country in full scale from north, east and south. By so doing, it provoked the most serious military conflict in Europe since 1945.

The picture of Taras Shevchenko University (KNU) that you have seen on the screen was taken before 24 February; the photos you see now were made after that day.
Today, I will be talking about the experience of my University, my alma mater, in the time of the ongoing war, but there are many higher education institutions in Ukraine that were ruined by russian forces during these almost thirteen months. I will give names and show photos – some of them were taken by my colleagues, some were retrieved from mass media, yet most of them are from my personal archive.

**Ukrainian universities are among russian targets in this war**

They were targeted in all regions of Ukraine. Kharkiv was heavily bombed and the buildings of Karazin University were demolished in the early spring. In Mykolaiv, bombings never stopped. You can see some of the devastations of Petro Mohyla University in that city.
Heavy shelling, ruinous to Taras Shevchenko University, occurred three times: during the initial period of the war; then in October, and the last one – on the 31st of December. As a result of these attacks, over ten of the University’s buildings were destroyed.

I mentioned universities, however kindergartens, elementary schools, and secondary schools have suffered no less. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, by mid-March 2023, 3,145 educational institutions all over the country were damaged by bombings and shelling. 415 of them were completely destroyed. To compare, in mid-January, this number was 3,031. The Ministry provides an update on the number of destructions caused to Ukrainian educational institutions at https://saveschools.in.ua/en/

You can see photos of the damaged schools in Mykolaiv in the South. Chernihiv Colehium’s one of the early targets of this war. It has experienced a blockade nearby for several weeks and heavy bombing which resulted in a loss of water, electricity, and heat.

The pictures you see provide visual manifestations of destruction, – it is dreadful, and it is appalling. One can see the wrecked buildings, facades, furniture and equipment inside; however, schools, and universities, are not about architecture. They are about teachers and students in the first place. There are, of course, other things – books in the libraries, and archives, but people come first. The key issue of resilience in this war is to save people. Buildings can be restored, or rebuilt. And they will be restored and rebuilt after our victory.
My talk has a rather broad title *Academia during the Wartime: the experience of Taras Shevchenko University*, but I will focus on particular issues which, to my mind, are the most important ones.

I will start – and I thought it would be logical – with a story of how this war began for me, with my recollections of the first days of this full-scale invasion. I will then use this individual story as a background to the major story of KNU at war.

### 24 February: from shock, loss of confidence to resilience. Country’s rapid turn to a new ‘normality’

24 February, the day when Russian forces launched full-scale invasion of Ukraine, was a day which divided the lives of all Ukrainians, the lives of over 40 million people, into two lives – before and after. With all the evident symbolism of the day – a military attack against an independent nation, sovereign state, the largest country within the continent of Europe – I will always remember it, first and foremost, through my physical/sensual experience and less through intellectual/rational constructs.

First, it was sonorous. That day, my husband and I woke up at 4.45 as we had an early train to Lviv. Bags packed, after breakfast we were to leave for the central train station. Ordinary life on an ordinary day... But in just a few minutes we suddenly heard a series of very loud sounds, and they were so strong that we were first confused – what might that be? At that point, one simply could not imagine any possible rational explanation for these sounds. As they went on, I realised that
something horrible might had happened. However, the word ‘war’ did not visit me then. I grabbed my phone to check the news – no official information yet. It soon arrived... After that day, so many times, I’ve heard these personal stories of Ukrainians about their first few hours of the war and practically in each of these stories, nobody could imagine that russians would ever start bombarding our cities, that they would ever come to occupy our country. It is not only because of the narrative of a ‘younger brother,’ so deeply imprinted in the minds of many by their propaganda – but it is also that the very idea of a war over land in the 21st century would have sounded at least senseless – countries compete economically, politically, technologically...

Yet, since 24 February 2022, we all had to become quick learners – and we did as we soon learned about the violence and cruelty of russians on the occupied territories. How they kill civilians in their homes, in the streets, how they torture, how they rape women, how they steal children, how they loot the houses of Ukrainians – Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, Izyum and many, many other places where they came to – big cities, towns and small villages. In all these places, they commit atrocities which are incomprehensible for someone who considers himself, or herself a human being. I stop here... I know that you are well informed about these shocking acts of the invaders as there are so many journalists from all over the world, including France, who are now working in Ukraine, reporting live from the field.

I wonder, does anyone here have a plan in case of the country’s invasion? The obvious answer would be ‘no.’ It is so human not to be prepared for a war. In our regular lives, we get prepared for many things – private, and professional – and war is never on the agenda.

Back to my morning of the 24th. As the explosions did not cease, my husband and I made a quick decision to leave Kyiv by car and head for Lviv. We considered western Ukraine to be a safer place anyway. Passports, credit cards, some cash, and of course our pet – a 12-year-old budgie called Kesha. Another thing we did immediately was to call our parents – my husband’s mother, a widow, was told to get ready for an immediate departure, her cat, the British shorthair called Messi, with her. As for my father and mom, they made a decision to drive their own car.

One hour later, at about 6 o’clock, we were already approaching a city boundary – nobody in front of us. “Strange and very uncomfortable,” we thought. Yet we were following our plan, and the plan was to meet with my parents right after the city boundary and then go together. But it did not work out. My parents left home thirty minutes later than we did, and for that reason, they were stuck in Kyiv for many hours. Our journey to Lviv, a city around 600 km away from Kyiv, took us seven hours while my parents’ journey lasted thirty hours. A long-lasting immobility has affected my mom’s health causing the formation of blood clots. Weeks after, in Lviv she had to have an urgent surgery... Those thirty minutes made a horrible difference.

On that morning, according to the plan, we were going to have a short-term journey and be back in just two days, on Saturday, but that was our guess. Now, as I look back, I have to admit that our spontaneous plan worked out as a strategy for survival.
On the highway, connecting Kyiv and Lviv, this expectation of a quick return was soon shaken by what we saw through the window of our car – it was a tank, and then another tank, many tanks... A striking image of a huge military war machine passing by is still capturing my mind. This visual was soon enhanced by the olfactory – a smell from the opened window was heavy and unusual. At that moment, we did not know the tanks were heading for Kyiv to defend our capital city from the invaders who were already on its outskirts. Neither did we know that Russian military helicopters by then had approached Hostomel near Bucha in order to land there and begin a ‘special operation,’ the way Russians name this war up until now.

As we were getting further West, in the opposite direction to the tanks’ division, we were gradually regaining our confidence. And then there came news on the radio and we learned about blasts in Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk – both cities in the Western part of Ukraine. The war... Since then the whole country has been a territory of constant danger. No matter where you are – South, East, West, North and Centre, a Russian bomb may take your life in any place in the country and at any moment.

**Transforming cityscape of Lviv in the first days of Russian invasion**

When we arrived in Lviv the city was already undergoing metamorphoses. In regular life, it is packed with tourists, numerous little restaurants are full of people, music is heard everywhere, and many cultural sites are overcrowded.

Not that afternoon. Restaurants closed, and people from different cities flooded the streets, but this time there was no place for joy, instead you could read anxiety in the eyes and gestures of everyone around - and silence instead of lively music, from time to time interrupted by powerful
penetrating sounds of air alarm sirens. We arrived in a city which was not safe – that day blasts were heard here as well.

The city was transforming from a peaceful tourist mecca to a hub for internally displaced people like me and my family members. Soon millions of Ukrainians who fled their homes, seeking escape from russian occupation, russian bombs, would use Lviv either as a place of residence or as a gateway to the safer West. In fact, up until now, it remains a major gate for Ukrainians to the West.

It is amazing how those Ukrainians who decided to stay would help those who decided to leave – bringing sandwiches, coffee and tea, and clothes to the newly arrived at the Central train and bus stations as well as to those who were standing in long queues near the country’s border.

As the city of Lviv was preparing for the war, the cityscape was changing. Ordinary citizens and museum officials worked together to save historic statues and cultural treasures. They were wrapping monuments in an effort to save them ahead of possible russian attacks – you can see a wrapped statue of Neptune in Market Square near the City Council the way it looked like in the first days. Old stained glass windows in churches and cathedrals were soon covered with chipboard slabs.
In the first days, I went to visit one of my favourite places in Lviv, the 18th-century Dominican Church, and this is what I saw – sandbags installed to protect window panes. The Cathedral was closed.

It was not just monuments in the streets—museums in Lviv were working to protect their artwork, in anticipation of possible russian shelling. The Lviv National Museum is home to Ukraine’s collection of sacred medieval art and rare religious manuscripts. So volunteers rushed to pack art and manuscripts into hastily constructed crates. “We are protecting world heritage, not just Lviv heritage” – they said.

In fact, volunteering was definitely one of the immediate responses of Ukrainians to the russian invasion. It means doing what you can to defend your country; support those in need, and care about animals. Volunteering is also about weaving camouflage nets in many places, including Universities...

On that first day of the war, as we were approaching Lviv, we found out that hotels were fully booked. So when the family of my father’s friend called me to offer their apartment as our shelter, we immediately accepted this very kind proposal. It was positive news amidst the horror of the disappearing normal world.
On that first day of the war, it was like a dream. And when you are dreaming, your capability to properly respond to new situations is restricted. We are human beings, and, in fact, there is very little you can rely on under such extraordinary circumstances. My generation and the generation of my parents had no knowledge to refer to when it came to surviving in wartime.
That day we made a decision to stay in Ukraine.

...The horrible day was not over yet. My colleague and dear friend Professor Tetiana Mykhed called me to inform me that she had to cancel her today’s lecture on the responses to WWII in American literature because the real war had begun in Ukraine. She was among those first who learned what had happened. Why? Because she called me from Bucha... A great number of russian helicopters were approaching Hostomel, she said. She saw them with her own eyes. This is the view from Tetiana’s window. So she could even count the helicopters. A close-up at the bottom provides a better picture.

From the news we learned that our President Volodymyr Zelenskiy signed Decree No. 64/2022 on the introduction of martial law in Ukraine at 9.00 am, but for me it was the photo of Professor Mykhed that provided the evidence of why. I received it in the evening, and on that day it was my second very powerful visual image of the war. Now, a year after, I can say that this image of Hostomel in flames can be regarded as one of the key images of this war.

Messages sent on 24 February

Talking about messages... The whole day I was in touch with my other colleagues. The top priority issue was security and communicating security measures to both our colleagues and students. One of the first messages disseminated that day read,

“Dear colleagues. Please turn off geolocation on your smartphones. Close the windows. In case of shelling, immediately proceed to a shelter. If there is none near you, please go to the bathroom. If you are in the street, lie on the ground, hands behind the head. Open your mouth so as to avoid contusion. Please share this message with your students...”
Academia during the wartime: the experience of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

It was not an official message; it was one of those picks from the internet sent by one of my colleagues in the chat. I should say that during the COVID pandemic, we had set up a very good network of communication among our colleagues – so we had one group chat for the department, and one for the chairs at the Institute of Philology. That helped a lot on the first day of the war and through all these months. In fact, one of the messages that day was about the safe use of communication channels, as there were and still are those which are associated with the country of the enemy.

We also received messages from the country’s authorities with the request to avoid taking photos of our armed forces and sharing them in public media. Our response to these requests, and our solidarity, became one of the key practices of our united resistance to the enemy from the very first day of the war.

Back to the messages of the first day. Another one came late in the evening at 11 pm from my dear colleague in Bucha,

“The airport [in Hostomel] was recaptured, they [russian army] pounded hard, the windows were shaking, the hangar [with AN-225 Mriya, the world’s largest airplane] was on fire, now it became quiet. I doubt it is for a long time.”

That day the world’s largest airplane was destroyed by russian forces. The plane’s named Mriya which is Ukrainian for a dream. How did we respond to that? I remember very clearly what we said that day, “they destroyed our plane Mriya, but they did not destroy our Mriya, our Dream to be free”.

Professor Mykhed, a witness of the plane’s destruction, refused to leave Bucha to which she had moved half a year ago with the intention to live in a nice cosy suburb, close to her son’s family. The new bourgeoisie and intellectuals would prefer this place as well. However, they were not the first ones. Among the pioneers of living in this picturesque suburb were Ukrainian intellectuals of the early 20th century.

Russian occupants deprived Bucha of these initial connotations and turned it into a symbol of inhuman behaviour.

Professor Mykhed and her husband, also a Professor of literature, were under occupation for weeks, hiding in cellars, their dear cat with them.

Cultural responses to the war (1)

It was just the first day. We did not know what was ahead of us. I clearly remember I could not find proper words, proper language to communicate my new experience. Words betrayed. The moment I thought the words were found, the very intention to speak would dissolve them, they would disappear. It was even difficult to pronounce words. What do you want to express? Language could bring sense to the new reality, but because, at that moment, it was deprived of senses, the language failed.
It was then that we all got a habit or rather an obsession of non-stop news checking – the frequency varies and depends on the level of danger. Why? We were waiting for good news. And they did not arrive.

Meanwhile, cultural responses to this war came and by now they are numerous. What I find remarkable is that they were very meaningful from the beginning. I have got here two posters from the early days of our resistance that I would like to share with you now. I found them in Lviv's streets.

The first one – a poster from Shevchenkivskiy Hai (Ukrainian for ‘park’) – has a very direct message as it says: “We all dream of one thing: how we burn the empire of evil”. Of course, it was not about dreams as by then it was our reality: we defend our sovereignty, our independence in the fight with an enemy which is the empire that is trying to reincarnate itself by occupying our land.

The second poster is allusive to religious icon imagery – a Madonna with Child, protected by surrounding warriors who are fighting against horrible creatures. These creatures – and you can discern faces of human beings – are presented in red colour. In the cultural memory of at least three generations of Ukrainians, the red colour on both posters transparently refers to the colour of the Soviet empire; likewise this colour is associated with the Communist ideology.
Cultural responses to the war (2)

The blue shields that the soldiers are carrying in their hands have the image of a trident on them. This image is transparently related to the history of independent Ukraine. In 1992, one year after Ukraine gained its independence, the image of a blue shield with a gold trident was adopted as the coat of arms of Ukraine. However, the history of this emblem goes back as far as the tenth and eleventh centuries. Its official name is ‘the Emblem of the Royal State of Volodymyr the Great’ who was the first grand prince of Kyiv. Already in modern history, hundred years ago, when the Ukraine People’s Republic was established, its parliament, the Central Rada, chose the trident as its coat of arms. When in 1920 the Republic ceased to exist it was then used by all those who fought for Ukrainian independence, so in the 20th century the centuries-old image of the trident transformed into a symbol of Ukrainian resistance. And you can guess why it was prohibited by the totalitarian regime in the Soviet Union.

Cultural responses to the war (3)

As we talk about state symbols in their relation to this war, I would like to once again draw your attention to the first poster. In the eyes of a human face, epitomising russian imperialism, you can see one of the main state emblems of the Soviet Union – the hammer and sickle. However, here it is presented mirrored. I personally have got two explanations for why it is presented mirrored.
The first one is political. You probably know that Ukraine is among those countries where communism is banned by law so the display of the communist symbols is prohibited as part of the so-called decommunisation policies introduced within this law. The Soviet empire with its communist ideology is remembered by many generations of Ukrainians as the time associated with the man-made famine known as the Great Famine or the Holodomor of 1932-1933, and as the time of Stalinist repressions and other state policies that badly affected millions of ethnic Ukrainians. In fact, the Holodomor has been recognised by the European Parliament as a genocide against the Ukrainian people carried out by the Soviet regime. We do not know exactly how many Ukrainians died. Some scholars say, up to 10 million, others – from 6 to 8.

The second explanation why the image of the hammer and sickle is presented mirrored is that when transformed it becomes allusive to the Nazi swastika, equalizing the ruinous effects of both ideologies, Communism and Nazism.

**Cultural responses to the war (4)**

One more important detail on the second poster. In the bottom left corner, you can see a hashtag followed by ‘noivanmade.' This requires an explanation. Ivan is a popular russian name but here it is used as a slang term for russians collectively. So ‘noivanmade’or ‘not made by russians’may be
regarded as irony or a gesture of Ukraine's emancipation from what in the view of many Russian people their empire is.

Before I go to my next slide, I would like to emphasise the fact that cultural responses to this war have been remarkably numerous. Responses to the war, from almost the first days of the full-scale invasion, through various forms and genres in visual arts, music, literature etc., invoking sacred and profane language, have been critically important for Ukrainians. I am sure there will be many more responses after our victory. Numerous cultural artefacts are currently on display in Kyiv, Lviv and other cities.

**Remain or leave?**

Each of us sooner or later was confronted with this question. Depending on the answer, you identified yourself with one of the three categories: civilians who remained in place, those who were relocated inside Ukraine and those who moved to another country.

With this new status, I had to register at the nearest local authorities' office. I was one of about 8 million Ukrainians who, by mid-May, have been relocated inside the country (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022). About 6.5 million people became refugees outside the country (UN Refugee Agency, 2022).

You see a photo made at the Central train station in Kharkiv. I should say that central train stations in many cities, including my native Kyiv, looked alike in February and March.
Country’s new reality after 24 February has changed the conditions of work

The first weeks of the war were the most difficult ones for me. The new reality was establishing itself at a very high speed. It was truly a combination of both personal and collective actions. And in this new reality, there were new words and new rules.

The martial law was declared on 24 February. Ever since it means you always carry your ID card with you. Alternatively, if asked for one, you can present a digital document generated by Diya (Eng. Action), an application created by our IT specialists a few years ago, which most of us then and probably all of us now have on our smartphones. Martial law also means that all men aged from 18 to 60 are not allowed to leave the country unless they have a special permit.

Curfew was introduced in all cities, towns and villages on 24 February. It imposes restrictions in terms of moving: being outside is prohibited from 11 or 12 pm (depending on the city) to 5 am. If an air alarm siren sounds – you go down to a shelter (for many in Kyiv and Kharkiv this shelter is at one of the city’s underground stations).
Air alarms – it is obligatory to proceed to the shelter; no online communication with students/colleagues. Also, restrictions are imposed on the use of public transport. Shops closed, and petrol stations also closed.

Academia responds

- Questions asked: What do we do with that now? Does it make sense to study amidst the war?
- Growing awareness that teaching and learning is yet another front of this war.
- Volunteering.

How did we respond in academia to these new conditions? Trying to give an answer, I will rely on my own experience and that of my fellow colleagues at the Department of Foreign Literature.

First of all, since the very first days of the war, I was fully conscious of the fact that no matter how difficult it was in Lviv, Zhytomyr, Kyiv or Chernivtsi it was always worse in the places which were under constant shelling, like Kharkiv or Mykolaiv and now Kherson and Dnipro, not to mention the occupied territories.

Only after overcoming the effects of psychological fatigue caused by the radical changes in the habitual pre-war lifestyle, we were back to work. It was at the beginning of April when we resumed the educational process. Fortunately, all of our colleagues in the department were in the free territories.

However, that was not true about our students. Some were in the occupied cities of Irpin, Melitopol, Kherson and others. Some were able to join online, others not, as constant bombing and missile attacks ruined communication infrastructure in their places. Also, there were students who moved to European countries. There is no point in specifying which these countries are because I think our students were everywhere, including France.

That was pretty much the situation by the end of March – we were together but scattered around the world.

Intense communication practically with each student was rewarding – in April, after a short spring vacation, we resumed the learning and teaching process, and most of the students were back to studying. The format of teaching was fully online and it remains so until now. Thanks to the experience of remote teaching during the previous two years of the COVID pandemic it was not difficult to organise online studying again.

The war affected our professional activity for obvious reasons but it has also strengthened our confidence in the importance of our job. Yes, the emotional and mental overload was and is with us.

If you ask, what encouraged many of us to keep teaching, I will tell you: it was and it is the awareness that learning and teaching is yet another front of the russian-Ukrainian war. In fact, that was clearly the message with which we came back to classes in April.
What about the students? They had different responses. Some said: “What do we do with that now”? “Does it make sense to study amidst the war”? And that was true as well as the reality in which knowledge has been compromised.

Most, however, were ready to study; also there were those who studied with passion. I do remember very vividly my first seminar with the first-year students on Tuesday. It was amazing – everyone in the group was fully prepared and highly motivated to contribute...

I have to tell you that all students, regardless of their circumstances and settings, succeeded in completing the academic year, especially the students in their final year of studies.

Apart from studying, our students have been helping our army, which is bravely fighting the invaders, and have been supporting people around them, particularly old people who are alone and need food and medicine. In some cases, it is even about saving the lives of those who are in the occupied territories.

I knew we became united as never before, I also knew that it was our part in the struggle against the enemy. We are supporting each other and this unity works very well.

I should emphasise that resistance to the enemy goes both directions, but mostly from the bottom up as volunteering in Ukraine has been enormous.

**Studying and teaching back?**

What was the immediate impact of war on the psycho-emotional condition of Ukrainian students and faculty members?

I would like to refer to the results of what claims to be the first study analysis of this problem (Anton Kurapov et al. (2022) Toward an Understanding of the Russian-Ukrainian War Impact on University Students and Personnel, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*). The data was collected from the online survey conducted in May. A total of 589 university students (69.2%) and faculty/staff (personnel) (30.8%) who remained in Ukraine responded. Survey respondents were from 4 universities including students of Taras Shevchenko and Karazin University in Kharkiv. Education at all these institutions continued online under adverse conditions.

As you can see, most respondents (97.8%) reported deterioration of their psycho-emotional status including depression (84.3%), exhaustion (86.7%), loneliness (51.8%), nervousness (84.4%), and anger (76.9%) — students more than personnel, females more than males.

The authors acknowledge the fact that the study findings are preliminary and limited. Data collected at one point of time in the war and at just four locations are not sufficient for substantial inquiry into the impact of the war. The authors also admit other phenomena – war-caused fear, stress, and loneliness associated with disruption of daily routines as well as lost connection with family members and friends.

But, in my opinion, it is enough to get a sense of the moment when the world suddenly changed for the worse and the disastrous impact it has had on all of us.

However, this study does not mention fury which, in fact, grows with each massive attack on Ukrainian cities and towns. From the very beginning, this fury gradually replaced fear.

Challenges in the educational process: asynchrony and more

Now back to the challenges we had to take on resuming the educational process in early April. Among them were the following:

- constant air raid sirens disturbed the online teaching;
- access to educational resources was dramatically limited;
- the situation in students’ families also affected studies: psychological problems, displacement, one or both parents fighting the invaders in the frontline, parents under occupation etc.

There is one more very important issue that I would like to draw your attention to in my talk. All of us in academia – students and teaching staff – have been experiencing injury and destruction of different scales. In the language of war that we have developed through these months, we refer to the idea of ‘asynchrony of experiences’ as it allows us to recognise the variety and the degree of the personal exposure of each of us to the war. It was first used at our meeting of the department by Professor Tetiana Mykhed, a Bucha survivor.

We got started and that was very important. How did we address the problems?

- Constant air raid sirens disturbed the online teaching? We introduce an asynchronous and individual approach to each and every student;
- limited access to educational resources? We prepare and circulate all the needed educational materials;
- the situation in families, loss of confidence, and demotivation? We stay in touch with students and never stop communicating with them.

It was necessary to adapt the curriculum and system of academic achievement recording as well as the process of graduation and final exams. The assessment requirements were somewhat simplified and students could choose their mode of study – synchronous, asynchronous, individual.

Kesha and Messi are fine

In a few weeks our little bird, very nervous on the first days, got accustomed to the new place and felt quite comfortable there, as you can see for yourself. Kesha was happy to talk and share his love with us. Our cat – relaxed and no more stressed, as you can see in the photo. What a relief for us!

Since 24 February, Lviv was bombarded a few times, and explosions never ceased.
Back to Kyiv, mid May

When the Kyiv region was liberated we returned home. As a matter of fact, the end of May is the best time to be there.
This May, Kyiv was different. The Statue of the first grand prince of Kyiv, Volodymyr the Great, on the hills overlooking the Dnipro River and Princess Olha on the Mykhailivska Square looked different, for now they were protected from being damaged by a possible Russian attack.
In May-June, many of us from the Department of Foreign Literature returned to Kyiv. Out of twelve staff members, four had fled the country in early March – one of them was back in late April, another one in July, right now only one of our colleagues, together with her 12-year-old daughter, remains in a
small city in Spain. One of our colleagues decided to quit and moved to Germany. Professor Mykhed, together with her husband, are not yet considering coming back to Bucha as explosions, and attacks from the terrorist country do not stop.

So this would be approximately a variety of scenarios which is typical for our new reality.

Soon after our arrival in Kyiv our little bird died. As the vet said, it was too big a stress for him. The cat of Tetiana Mykhed also died. The two little creatures who survived the first weeks of the war could not make it in the longer run.

I could never think in my life that my native city would ever look like this. I am going to show you my neighbourhood. The images are from 26 June. That day we were planning to prepare a small familial birthday celebration. I woke up very early disturbed by a whooshing sound, soon followed by the sound of an explosion. I rushed to the window and what I saw there I will remember for the rest of my life; it was a rocket flying in the direction of my house. I saw it very vividly. And then again this whooshing sound – I recognised it because it was the one I had heard some time before. The rocket flew over my house towards the Dnipro river and in a few seconds – or even less – there was another explosion...

Central Kyiv, 6.25 am, 26 June 2022
The building you see is less than 1 km away from the place where I live in central Kyiv...

On 17 October, another missile attack and another building; this time 1 km to the east from my house. People died... As you can see, these are the densely populated parts of Kyiv, but this does not stop the russian army. In fact, the second building was built 120 years ago. It survived the Nazis' attack on the city during WWII but it has not survived russians in 2022.

I mentioned just two attacks. There were many, they do not stop now. It is very painful to see your city suffering.

KNU campus

During all this time Taras Shevchenko University of Kyiv has been functioning every single day. The key administration's priority has been supporting students and providing them with an opportunity to continue their studying. KNU's Rector, Professor Volodymyr Bugrov together with his team has always been in the office managing the University through the harsh times. One of the challenges was to adjust the legal framework and finances to martial law without violence to teachers’ and students’ rights. The University's administration enhances the bottom-up decision-making process so each department can be more efficient.
Big respect to the administration of the University for being extremely efficient – security issues resolved, salaries paid on time, organisational problems solved with great speed; a reduction of paperwork, and non-stop communication of the strategies of work and new practices.

These pictures were taken before the war on a nice sunny peaceful day. It is our central building erected in the 19th century by the Italian architect Vincenzo Beretti. It is flanked by two symmetrical buildings, home to two libraries – the one on the right is the Maksymovych Library named after the University’s first rector, and the other one – the so-called Parliamentary Library.

The so-named Yellow building is home to the Institute of Philology. A relatively new building of the Faculty of Physics was erected in the 1960s, I assume it is contemporaneous with the Bordeaux Montaigne University.

**KNU students during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014**

It would be untrue to say that the history of our resilience began on the first day of Russia’s full-scale invasion. Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity in 2014 was a strong public response to those
politicians in power – Viktor Yanukovych with his corrupted party – who sought a closer alliance with Russia. Our civil society stood up against this unexpected as well as unexplained turn taken by the pro-Russian authorities in Kyiv. Ukrainians protested against the autocratic regime.

The students of KNU were among the activists in the Revolution of Dignity, regarded by many as one of the most important events in the Ukrainian state-building process and shaping of national identity.

**Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861): “Fight and you will win”**

KNU is named after Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861) – a poet, painter, philosopher, and an influential public figure of his time and what's more one of the three major minds behind Ukraine's national idea. He called for a fight, for resistance in the 19th century. It is no surprise that Taras Shevchenko’s
name became also associated with the Revolution of Dignity. As a personification of changes in the country, Shevchenko inspired many artists to modernise his image.

“Fight and you will win!” This is a line from the poet's famous verse of 1845.

“Як умру, то поховайте…” / “When I am dead, bury me...”

When I am dead, bury me
In my beloved Ukraine,
My tomb upon a grave mound high
Amid the spreading plain,
So that the fields, the boundless steppes,
The Dnieper’s plunging shore
My eyes could see, my ears could hear
The mighty river roar.

This translation was made by John Weir. In 2013, Peter Fedynsky published a first-ever English translation of the complete volume of poetry called *Kobzar* (Ukrainian for ‘bard’).

In this fairly recent edition, Fedynsky has also supplied additional footnotes on important historical characters and significant geographical names and on the turning points in Ukraine’s history which were once forbidden to be mentioned by Moscow authorities.
Kobzar is a part of Ukraine’s cultural heritage as well as one of the key texts which played an important role in shaping the Ukrainian identity. I was happy to give as a gift a copy of Kobzar to Professor Olga Gille-Belova who is a Chair of the Department of Slavic Studies.

Many generations of Ukrainians know Shevchenko’s verses by heart. We have a tradition of celebrating the poet’s birthday on 9 March by reading out his poems. I would like to use this opportunity to invite students who began learning the Ukrainian language here at Bordeaux Montaigne – and I know many of you are here today – to join our students at KNU next March with this beautiful tradition.

Monument to Taras Shevchenko in front of the KNU Central Building. Before and after 24 February 24

There is a monument to Taras Shevchenko in front of the University’s central building, referred to as Red building. With the war, the statue was also wrapped.

Our new “routine” and everyday rituals

In our new routine, every morning at 9.00 am, we observe a one-minute silence to remember those who have died as a result of the armed russian aggression – to honour the bright memory,
civic courage and self-sacrifice, strength of spirit, resilience and heroic deed of the soldiers who sacrificed their lives in combat missions to protect the state sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and civilians who died as a result of the armed aggression. This ritual of national scale was initiated on 16 March 2022 by our President Volodymyr Zelenskiy who issued a special Decree (No. 143/2022).

At the end of each day, the country’s President addresses the nation, briefing on the current situation and always saying very inspiring words to the nation.

A non-stop condition of indeterminacy brings new challenges in autumn as the autumn semester begins, on 1 September.

Learning and teaching is back – students’ response

During the winter semester of 2021-2022 one could hear from students: “What do we do with that now”? “Does it make sense to study amidst the war”? In the autumn semester of 2022-2023 many of them would address us with a brief letter: “Power is down. I cannot be present at the lecture now. Excuse me”.

Power outages...blackouts

This is a screenshot of a table that every Ukrainian knows. It informs about power supply day by day.

You’ve got to know the semantics of the colours. White is excellent – you have power, black is bad news, grey – can be both. These 2 hours in white colour are the resource for work online - but not really. Why not? Because every city has got its own schedule. What’s more, there are 3 or 4 groups in each city, and town, so you have 3, or 4 different tables. Asynchrony is the challenge to face here as well.

Talking about learning and teaching. Professors and students have to make sure they have access to the internet - if not at home then in some other place, a café, for example. This solution works but it demands effort from each participant in the process. I should say that almost all of the students managed to adjust to power restrictions in the autumn semester.

This scheme worked until October. Since then Russia has been repeatedly targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure with missiles and drones, damaging energy facilities. And now it continues its energy terror against our country with the regular waves of drone attacks - the last one was yesterday evening.
Since October, we have had everyday power outages. Quite often they cut power during air alarms in order to protect the power system. 3, 4, 5, 6 hours without electricity, central heating, with no possibility to cook or make a cup of tea. The temperature at night could be -9. So when the temperature went up, it was a relief.

With the help of our magicians – the armed forces of Ukraine who masterfully shoot drones, our engineers who repair the power system, and thanks to our friends – the European community, the United States and Great Britain – we have had power for three weeks already.

**Librarians together with students are saving the KNU library’s collection of old prints**

As mentioned earlier, one of the massive missile attacks on the Kyiv centre occurred on 10 October. As a result, the buildings of the Institute of Philology and the Maksymovich Library were destroyed. Numerous windows of the Red building were also damaged. These buildings are monuments of historical importance, therefore in order to preserve them it was absolutely critical to carry out all the required conservation work as soon as possible.

The employees of the University, sparing no effort and time, cleaned the premises in a short period of time and closed all the window openings with plywood and plastic wrap. Experts say, more than 3,000 square meters of windows were damaged in these four buildings of the University.

The Library’s collection of Old Prints, which has almost 7,000 copies, was temporarily moved to a safer basement space within just three days. In order to do that, the library staff together with...
the students created a kind of a conveyor to pass carefully, from hand to hand, one by one, each of these precious tomes.

**Department of Foreign Literature after a massive rocket attack on the Kyiv centre on 10 October**

These pictures were taken inside the building of the Institute of Philology. You can see the aftermath of the massive rocket attack at my Department of Foreign Literature: the windows were completely broken, and the interior was damaged by metal profile fragments and numerous shrapnel. Two portraits of the Department’s prominent professors – Tetyana Yakymovych and Kira Shakhova, which hung near the windows, remained intact. I see a certain symbolism in this – the resilience of the University community. No matter how powerful the enemy’s weapons are, we continue to work, teach and learn.

**Universities – they are about people**

Professor Tetiana Mykhed and her husband Pavlo, after their escape from the occupied Bucha, never stopped doing their job – teaching and carrying out research. A form of resistance these
academics adopted after Bucha has become the consensus, unifying strategy to resist within the whole of the Ukrainian university community.

...The major part of the stories we tell to each other are the stories of strength and resilience. There are over 40 millions of us, so can you imagine how many stories still need to be heard?

With great pride, we tell stories about our heroes, those who are defending the country, those who are on the side of the free world - because the frontline in this war is a dividing line between two civilisations: the free world and the totalitarian, autocratic one.

Let me tell you that one of the lines of our national anthem prioritises the value we all share as it goes as follows: “We’ll not spare either our souls or bodies to get freedom”.

> We are very proud of our **heroes**
> - those who are defending the country, those who are on the side of the **free world** as the frontline
> in this war is a dividing line between two civilisations -
> the free world and the totalitarian, autocratic one.
> ‘We’ll not spare either our souls or bodies to get freedom’
> (Ukraine’s national anthem)

### Academia in the wartime Keywords

- **Humanism**
- **Indeterminacy**
- **Resilience**
- **Asynchrony of experience**
- **United**
- **Flexibility in revision of academic curriculum etc.**
- **Volunteering, no fear**
- **New ways of communication, new language of communication**
- **Freedom**
- **Growing awareness of belonging to one nation**
- **Victory**

We are confident about our Victory – we will save our people, and our land, we will protect freedom, and we will protect humanism.

And when this happens, it will a very happy day of Victory, of liberation, but it will also be a very sad day of recognising the price we had to pay to conquer the great evil. On that day, we will stand together with all those who sacrificed their lives on the battlefield and those who were killed in the streets of the Ukrainian cities and towns, in their own houses, in their cars trying to escape with their families and pets from the enemy, those who were tortured to death by russian soldiers.
We will be all together, united as we have been for all these days of the war. We will commemorate our heroes.

We will feel pity for 3, 4 generations of Ukrainians injured by the russian war, in Ukraine and beyond.

But right now we just do our job, united and with the support of the free world. Slava Ukraini!

Thank you! Дякую!