Penn State Behrend Lilley Library exhibit shares stories of lives lost in Ukraine

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Madison Meeks is the current Editor-in-Chief of the Behrend Beacon and on the Research and News Committee for the Penn State Libraries’ Magazine. She has written many articles in her time, and is looking to go into the journalism field after graduation.

Penn State Behrend’s Lilley Library has launched an exhibit that shares stories of lives that were lost in Ukraine. The display is one of dozens that have been launched at colleges worldwide to remind people of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the fight that people in Ukraine are going through for their freedom. It was launched on February 24 on the second anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which has resulted in 70,000 Ukrainian deaths.

While about 40 Ukrainian students are highlighted in the exhibit, which is titled “Unissued Diplomas,” which honors the students that never got to graduate from college in Ukraine due to being killed in the war, three students were featured by PSU News: Ivanna Obodzinska, Serhii Molcanov, and Olesandra Borivska.

Ivanna Obodzinska was a 19-year-old student at Polissia National University. She was majoring in garden design and had planned to become a landscape designer after graduation. She was also a mother of twins. Both Obodzinska and her twins did not survive the war against Russian troops.

Serhii Molcanov was also a 19-year-old student who was a student at the Ukrainian Leadership Academy. He had volunteered to fight for his country in the war against Russia. He had collected stories and photos while he was serving in the hope of writing a book one day. He died fighting for his country.

Oleksandra Borivska was 18 years old when she died in the war. She was studying international relations at Vasyl’s Stus Donetsk National University. She had a dream of traveling the world and visiting the Grand Canyon.

None of these students were able to follow their dreams and achieve their goals. Dr. Melanie Hetzel-Riggin, the director of the School of Humanities and Social Science and professor of psychology, spoke about the display. She said she saw the display as a chance to put lessons into practice and have her class visit the exhibit.

“We talk a lot about how important it is for those who study trauma to bear witness to horrible events. Hearing and seeing the impact, elevating victim voices, and keeping space for those people affected by it is at the core of what trauma-informed work is,” she discussed while explaining why it was important for her class to visit the display. She also...
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said that the fact that the students on display might have more of an effect on the students because they might have the same goals as the victims.

Lena Surzhko-Harned, an associate professor of political science and associate director of The Public Policy Initiative at the Penn State Behrend campus, had worked with the library to bring the display to campus. She said, “The Russian full-scale invasion is also a war on Ukraine’s future. The lives of the young Ukrainians, their future, their hopes and dreams—all were turned upside down on February 24, 2022. Many young people are losing their lives on the front lines, and many more are dying as civilians targeted by artillery and drone strikes. With this exhibit, I hope we can honor this brave generation and remember to live our own lives to the fullest, because your entire world can change in a moment.”

According to Penn State Behrend Lilley Library, the exhibit is on the first floor and can be accessed during library hours. It will remain open until the end of May.