Student: David Perry
Dissertation title: Strangers in a Strange Land: American Lives Under the Soviet Gaze

Knowledge
Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.

Analysis & Interpretation
Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.

Structure & Argument
Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an arguments limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.

Presentation & Documentation
Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.

ECTS Mark: 62
UCL Mark: 62
Marker: Sergei Bogatyrev

Deducted for late submission: 
Signed: Sergei Bogatyrev

Deducted for inadequate referencing: 
Date: 10 June 2018

MARKING GUIDELINES
A (UCL mark 70+): Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.
Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

B/C (UCL mark 60-69):
A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research. 65 or over equates to a B grade.

D/E (UCL mark 50-59):
Demonstration of a critical use of sources and ability to engage in systematic inquiry. An ability to engage in sustained research work, demonstrating methodological awareness. 55 or over equates to a D grade.

F (UCL mark less than 50):
Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

CONTINUES OVERLEAF
Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (at least 300 words):

This is a solid dissertation which, however, does not deliver what it promises, a better understanding of American lives in the USSR (p6). The subject is undoubtedly very important, as apparent from the introduction, which correctly links emigration not only with economic and ideological issues, but also with feminism and racism (pp 3, 24, 25). The conclusion also mentions American institutions created by US emigrants in the Soviet Union, including schools, sports, leagues and clubs (p63).

It is a shame that the dissertation says nothing about these fascinating topics. Instead, the candidate offers an analysis of one source, the newspaper Moscow News. The dissertation contains a number of valid comments about the role of the paper, which was the longest running English-language newspaper in the USSR, in shaping the American community in the Soviet Union. The author convincingly demonstrates how the paper provided an ideological framework for the community, how it addressed the dilemma of individualism and collectivism from a socialist perspective and how it introduced US immigrants to the Soviet version of rationalization and planned economy. The paper also legitimized the great terror by presenting it as defense of the revolution. At the same time, the paper sought to create a positive image of the US community by emphasizing its contribution to the socialist project. The dissertation is well organised. The author is obviously engaged with the subject. The illustrative material in the appendix contains interesting images of American immigrants, though these pictures could have been integrated in the dissertation’s narrative more efficiently.

At the same time, the author’s argument is not supported with specialist history literature. It remains a mystery to me why the author limited himself to just a couple of studies of Soviet history. It is perverse not to use the seminal book of Kotkin on Magnitogorsk, which discusses, among other themes, US contribution to the project. The discussion of Moscow News would have benefitted from Kenez’s work on the Soviet propaganda state. The complex relationship between Soviet ideology and American technology has been studied by Bailes and other authors. Without these works the dissertation failed to achieve one of its main tasks, to create a profile of ‘the population including information on who comprised the community’s members and how the transition to life in the Soviet Union affected them differently’ (p6). It is a pity that the author has not demonstrated the diversity of the community which ranged from engineers working at Magnitogorsk to US and Canadian lumberjacks cutting trees in Karelia (here one may note that the author’s approach is US-centric as he does not distinguish between US and American). No study of the American community is possible without studying the reception of Moscow News publications by US immigrants. Here the author could have used the diaries of Americans, which he briefly mentions, much more efficiently.

Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (at least 2 questions):

How did the American community in the USSR respond to publications in Moscow News?
To what extent did this response differ from the community’s response to Soviet Russian-language propaganda?