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## **RUSSIA | FALL 2006 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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MAJOR1: English  
MAJOR2: Russian  
MAJOR3: Select third major--  
ABROAD: Fall 2006

PROGRAM: University of Arizona  
GRINT University in Moscow (at the Moscow Humanitarian University)

COURSES: Combo

COMBO\_EXPLAINED: All the programs were the equivalent of University of Arizona courses back in the States; however, I believe that they were different because they were done through a completely different program.

COURSE\_EVAL: Our week consisted of the five regular work days. We were in class for about 4-6 hours every day depending on what specifically we had that day. Tuesdays I had my personal lessons (an individual class with only me and my instructor) and Mondays and Fridays after our grammar lessons/main course work of the day we then had another teacher for a couple of hours teaching phonetics.

At first I was placed into one of the lower level classes, given the fact that at that point I had only logged 2 months (less than 2 months, though technically 2 full college semesters) of Russian language. I realized the class was too slow so I moved to a higher class. The class I ended up in had only 3 other people besides myself (like my first class) and they had all taken at least 2 years of Russian prior to the class. It was quite difficult at first but after a couple of weeks I was even with everyone else. We had a good portion of homework every night, a lot of writing in Russian, exercises, story reading. We essentially trained the entire time for the TORFL, which was to be essentially our final exam. I was told to take the "Basic" test, the middle level test, which I did very well on.

CLASS\_COMP: At GRINT there were actually 2 different study abroad programs, one through the University of Arizona, and one through Truman State University. Quite frankly the Truman kids were worthless and I really don't know where they came from. In my program everyone was American except for one girl from China. As it turned out her citizenship created quite a problem given legal work. Most of the kids hailed from Texas and Arizona.

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TEACHING\_EVAL: I unfortunately cannot comment specifically on the Amherst language program having never before taken a course here. However, I know Professor Taubman and Professor Rabinowitz quite well and I think incredibly highly of the two of them and would challenge someone to show me two more capable professors. My grammar teacher in Russia was incredible; she couldn't have been more accessible, she was a great teacher, and the fact that I loved my time in Russia must be in some way attributed to her.

ACADEMIC\_PREP: Once again, it is hard for me to comment about Amherst courses; however, this program was incredible because it took people of all levels, literal of all levels, they would find a teacher for anyone and make them comfortable.

HOUSING\_MEALS: This was the one area in which I had problems while I was abroad. I don't think that much could be done to change the way it was however, Russians need money and the screening process, while I am sure was quite meticulous was probably outsmarted. I was served breakfast at home, but had to get lunch at the cafeteria at school. GRINT promised to give 2 free meals and those were dinner, but I didn't enjoy them and they had to be skipped or found elsewhere. I lived with an old "babushka" and her daughter.

HOUSE\_HELP: GRINT arranged everything.

LIVING\_COSTS: Food was relatively inexpensive if one was shopping at a super market. However, at restaurants prices were exorbitant and prices were unduly inflated.

MEDICAL: I never needed them despite wrestling a lot and playing football.

PROG\_SERVICES: The head of the Russian department of the University of Arizona came to visit us at GRINT once, to check up on us and to go over our course loads as well as to sort out any problems.

LEARN\_HOST\_COUNTRY: Go there.

DISCRIMINATION: Of course. There was one African-American girl on my program who was literally stared at whenever she was in public. It is a very racist country these days.

TRAVEL: Planned excursions were a part of every week we were there. There was also a planned trip to St. Petersburg for a whole week which was actually quite amazing. Due to the amount of class hours we had there was no way to do one's own traveling unless one was willing to miss class, which I was not.

RECOMMENDATION: Definitely, I think this was a great way to learn the language. If one was keen on improving one's grasp of Russian this is a great option.

SUMMARY: This was an incredible experience that I am very grateful to have been a part of. I know that I want to go back, possibly this summer, my plans for the future are so mottled and varied that quite frankly I have no idea at all of what I want to do.

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**RUSSIA | FALL 2006 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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CLASS: 2008

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MAJOR1: Russian

ABROAD: Fall 2006

PROGRAM: Program Sponsored by Vassar College. Attended The European University at St. Petersburg, Russia.

COURSES: Program

COURSE\_EVAL:

**Hermitage Collection through History:**

This class was taught by a curator at the Hermitage Museum, Roman Grigoryev, and met once a week on Mondays at the museum. The professor also teaches regular classes at the European University. For some of the lectures, the class would simply meet in a room at the museum and discuss the collection history. Each class was 3 of 4 hours long with a break in between. For later classes, we visited a restorer's lab, the print and drawing rooms, and the collection itself. All of the students on the program were required to take this course and so the class size was 8 people. The class certainly was not difficult in terms of the work load, we had no outside reading and throughout the entire semester, each student only had to write one 6 to 8 page paper if he were going for 100 level credit, or one 10 page paper if he were going for 200 level credit. These were research papers due at the end of the semester and each student could write on any piece of art in the entire Hermitage Museum (which is enormous). There were no exams in this class. I cannot speak about the grading system because I have yet to receive a grade.

**Icons to Avant-Garde: Russian Art:**

This class was taught by a professor at the European University, Ilya Doronchenkov, and met twice a week, once at the University and once in the Russian Museum. Each class at the University was 1 hour long, and each class at the museum was 2 hours or more. For this class, each student had give an oral report on Russian icons after the first month of classes, and each had to write a research paper at the end of the semester, also 6 to 8 pages for 100 level credit and 10 pages for 200 level credit. During the segment on Russian Avant-Garde, a second professor named Elena Basner came and lectured our class. At the end of her series of lectures, she asked the students to give oral reports if they so desired. The program also required all of its students to take this class so the size was also 8. There were no written exams for this class. Throughout the semester, Professor Doronchenkov gave readings pertaining to the particular topics that we covered. The readings were interes!  
ting but never too long or difficult. Professor Basner also gave us some readings.

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**Aspects of Russian Culture:**

This class was a total bust. The professor, Boris Katz, never showed up for class for medical reasons, and as a result we had almost no meetings. The classes we did have were 1 hour and 15 minutes long. The University tried to get substitute teachers for the class, but many of the ended up being history professors. This turned the class mostly into a history class, and little Russian culture was ever discussed. Only one professor came at the end who gave a couple lectures about the current media situation. He assigned huge reading packets, but at that point the students had little interest left. Otherwise the various professors assigned several brief readings, none too interesting, and there was no final paper or exam.

**Advanced Russian:**

This class was taught by a Professor at the European University named Tatyana ( ) and met 3 times a week for 2 hours each class with a break in the middle for chai (tea). Besides me, there was only one other student in the class. Tatyana conducted the class entirely in Russian and we also had to speak completely in Russian. At the beginning of each class our Professor would ask us to talk about what we had done since the past class. She would then ask us questions pertaining to our responses. This discussion usually continued for the first hour. In the second our we would discuss readings that she had assigned and ask her questions about grammar homework. During the semester we read about 8 short stories, all by famous Russian authors, including several by Pushkin and Gogol's "The Nose". At the end of the semester we read the first chapter of The Master and Margarita. We had about 5 small tests and one final exam, but the professor did not assign any papers.

CLASS\_COMP: All of students except for me and for and one other student from Bowdoin were Vassar kids. Two of the Vassar students were non-US citizens, one was from Bulgaria, and the other, who now lives in the United States, was from Argentina originally. Another Vassar student was an American who's family lived in China.

TEACHING\_EVAL: Roman Grigoryev:

This professor, while obviously very knowledgeable about art history and the Hermitage collection, did not usually give very interesting or challenging lectures. I don't feel that I learned nearly as much as I would have from an Amherst professor. All of the classes were lectures, although he did answer questions. He often went on tirades that seemed to have little to do with the topic and they generally were not compelling enough to be worthwhile. Like all professors at European, Roman did have an email address, but he responded to emails slowly and never very thoroughly. He was really not accessible outside of class.

Ilya Doronchenkov: Professor Doronchenkov usually gave very interesting lectures. I felt that he really respected the students and their insights and enjoyed hearing their opinions, although he certainly would disagree when he felt that a student was incorrect. Like Professor Grigoryev, Doronchenkov was not great at responding to emails. For our research papers, he did help a little by referring us to certain sources. This professor also has a very nice sense of humor.

Tatyana: I really enjoyed Tatyana's class. She was always willing to listen to what the other student and I wanted to work on during and outside of class. I cannot say whether or not she was helpful outside of class, but I think that she definitely would have been willing to get together before or after class to discuss questions that we might have had. She challenged our speaking skills by refusing to let us speak in English (even a little bit), and she assigned great and varied literature. She was certainly as good a Russian teacher as I have had at Amherst.

ACADEMIC\_PREP: Because this program is geared towards Art History majors, the students did not have to have any knowledge of the Russian language to partake in this program. However, everyone did have to take a Russian course at his or her level. I was glad to have taken 2 years of

Russian simply so that I could get around the city etc. Certainly, the students who hadn't taken any Russian were fine because we had great trip leaders who helped us out, but i think that students applying for this program should have at least a strong interest in Russian language and culture because you are going to be there for 4 months!

#### HOUSING\_MEALS:

I lived with a woman of about 65 in an apartment with one other girl on the trip. Each of us had our own rooms, which were probably smaller than most Amherst dorm rooms. The apartment was right off of Nevsky Prospect, the main drag in St. Petersburg. This program is very good in terms of housing because in many abroad programs, students live far away from the center of the city in not-so-great areas. In general, the apartments in St. Petersburg are small, and mostly very soviet on the inside. The apartment had one bathroom where the bath and sink were located, and a smaller room that had a toilet (most apartments there have this setup due to old communal living arrangements). Sometimes there wasn't any hot water in the shower, this was usually in the mornings. Our host mother would serve us porridge, bread, cheese, sausage, and of course tea for breakfast, and she would serve us various combinations of chicken, rice, eggs, soup, and potatoes for dinner. After living at college, these portions seemed small, but usually the food was pretty decent. We would have to get lunch for ourselves. Our host mother let us use the refrigerator, but generally we didn't use the stove. We were allowed to come home at any time although it was obvious that our host mother was very worried about us.

#### HOUSE\_HELP:

The program took care of making the housing arrangements.

LIVING\_COSTS: Ten dollars a day is probably the cheapest you can live. Most of my money went to lunch, going out to bars and restaurants, and occasionally to shopping. Also, you may spend a thousand or so on travel depending were you go and how much tickets cost.

MEDICAL: Yes: Everyone on the program had to get HIV tests for registration in the country and we went to a very good facility where all of the doctors and staff spoke English very well and were they were very professional. This clinic is really only for tourists and rich Russian families.

PROG\_SERVICES: Vassar Program had two representatives working with our group. The head of the program in St. Petersburg, Tom Campbell, has been living in St. Petersburg for 7 years. The other head of the program in residence, was Brandon Schecter, was a Vassar graduate who had been living in Russia for 3 years studying and working. I loved both of these guys, they were both incredibly knowledgeable about Russia, its history, and its culture. They were always available for the students and they were extremely involved in both our academic and cultural experiences. Both of these guys lead us on excursions to surrounding suburbs of St. Petersburg to visit palaces, monestaries, and important historical sites. For our orientation, we had various meetings, and took a bus tour around the city to get acquainted with the sites, and we also took a fabulous boat tour on the canals. Tom and Brandon also accompanied us on our trip to Moscow. Usually once every two weeks they would take us out to dinner on Vassar's tab, very sweet.

LEARN\_HOST\_COUNTRY: I found the best way to get to know the culture of the country is to talk to and meet Russian people, to learn as much as you can about the country's history, to visit historical and cultural locations, and to watch TV (trust me!). I think that Russians are at their best and most candid when eating and drinking with friends, so try to get yourself invited to some dinners.

**DISCRIMINATION:** Unfortunately, in St. Petersburg and throughout Russia, a culture of neo-Nazism, and anti-Asian sentiment is growing rapidly. While we were in the city, two Indian students were killed on Nevsky in race related events. The violence is mostly targeted at Asian and darker skinned people and almost completely at men. The gangs target Central Asian workers who come to the cities to work low paying jobs. Also, anti-Semitic graffiti is prevalent in the city. However, all of the Russians I met were very receptive to other cultures. I never experienced any direct discrimination. Of course, as a woman, you have to be careful in any big city, and be aware that in Russia, the attitude towards women may seem a little dated to Americans.

**TRAVEL:** Yes, we had a week of for Thanksgiving break and I went to London to visit my sister. Some of my friends on the program visited Helsinki, Finland for this vacation. The group went on many excursions, usually one every weekend, and these by in large were great. We visited suburbs of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and a very important historical town called Novgorod. We also visited religious sites throughout the city and saw many museums.

**RECOMMENDATION:** I would recommend this program to other Amherst students. It is a great chance to visit Russia even if you have no previous language experience, and a chance to study at two world-class museums. Although the program is young (two years) it has a lot of potential to become a lasting program. The group is small, and so a student looking for a dorm experience may not be happy with this arrangement. But there certainly are advantages to a small group and to having trip leaders who are very involved. Although the classes were not what an Amherst student might be used to, I think that almost all abroad programs lack the intensity of great U.S. universities academically.

**SUMMARY:** I want to take this paragraph to say that I believe every college student must study abroad. This will be one of the best, most interesting, coolest experience of your college career and probably your life. Studying abroad has given me time to use the knowledge and skills that I have acquired at Amherst to analyze and understand a totally different culture, and to better understand my own culture, its positives and negatives. Traveling abroad this semester has fueled me with a desire to travel more, and to learn more about Russia, our world, and even America.