

Where Are They Now?
UF Russian Studies Alumni Profile

Alumnus: *Andres Fernandez (class of '14)*

Concentration(s) at UF: *(major) International Studies; (minors) Russian Studies, East-Central European Studies*

Current occupation: *Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Oryol, Russia*

Looking back, what aspects of your UF Russian studies proved particularly useful?

Aside from the thorough language instruction, I profoundly enjoyed the Russian Research Seminar course I took with Dr. Kleespies. This was one of the relatively few classes I found at UF that challenged me to think critically at every meeting and participate actively. Dr. Kleespies lead lively discussions and thoroughly encouraged me to pursue my interests in Russian Studies, while providing helpful constructive critique along the way. I later used the final paper I wrote for the class as a writing sample for various master's programs I applied for this year.

With regard to your pursuit of Russian at UF, is there anything you didn't take or get that would have been useful?

I began studying Russian as a sophomore, and was unable to schedule my courses in order to have been able to add the Russian major. In hindsight, I would have liked to double-major in Russian and consequently written an honors thesis for this major.

What did you do after you graduated? *Immediately after graduating, I worked as an English teacher for one semester in the Republic of Georgia. I was afterwards awarded a Fulbright grant, which brought me to where I am currently working in Oryol, Russia.*

Are you still using your Russian? *I fear I have no choice but to use Russian on a regular basis every single day!*

What advice might you have for Russian studies students considering Russian as a major? *If students are genuinely interested in the language, I highly encourage them to pursue these interests in depth. I would have liked to do this myself. Knowing any language extensively opens a world of new opportunities.*

What advice might you have for Russian studies students on the verge of graduation?

If their personal and financial situations allow it, I encourage them to travel in the region. There is a considerable amount of opportunities available to native English speakers in Russia and other former Soviet states. Though these jobs might not be the most financially rewarding, they allow new grads the opportunity to put their language abilities to the test and make meaningful connections with locals. There is perhaps no better point in one's life to see the world than as an informed and (reasonably) independent college grad.

In a sentence or two, reflect on your experiences studying Russian at UF and its impact on you personally and/or professionally.

Studying Russian at UF allowed me to apply for and receive a Critical Language Scholarship, which further motivated me to pursue Russian Studies for a post-graduate degree and consequently a potential career in diplomacy. Furthermore, I found in Dr. Kleespies a great mentor who has aided me with all sorts of applications and provided valuable advice.

If their interests or trajectories correspond to yours, would you be willing to help individual students with career, post-graduate, and/or networking questions?

Absolutely!