

Where Are They Now? UF Russian Studies Alumni Profile

Alumna: *Liza Shurik (class of '05)*

Concentration(s) at UF: *Russian Studies & Photojournalism*

Current occupation: *Government Consultant*

Looking back, what aspects of your UF Russian studies proved particularly useful? *My translation courses with Dr. Burak were probably the most useful of all the classes I took as they forced me to look critically and closely at the text and gave me the distinction between literal vs contextual translations and the benefits of each. The other courses also helped me tremendously just in terms of forcing me to read complex texts and write in proper Russian, which I never did before (even though I am a native speaker and grew up speaking Russian at home). This program gave me the boost I needed to go from colloquial Russian, to allowing me to hold my own in a professional environment.*

With regard to your pursuit of Russian at UF, is there anything you didn't take or get that would have been useful? *Nothing that I can recall.*

What did you do after you graduated? How, if at all, did your UF Russian studies inform or influence these activities? *My first job out of college was as a translator from Russian into English at a Russian non-profit organization called AIDS Foundation East-West (AFEW). At the time, AFEW was the largest HIV prevention and treatment non-profit in the Former Soviet Union and its work spanned eight countries across the region. I started as a translator/editor and worked my way up to Senior Advisor on Proposal Development. The person previously in that role was American but did not speak much Russian. I know, without a doubt, that my Russian language skills tremendously impacted my ability to redefine and succeed in this role. Whereas the role had previously been limited to writing proposals based on conversations with HQ leadership, my ability to interact with regional leadership and other stakeholders (even going as far as talking to former injection drug users, street workers and persons living with HIV) allowed me to be intimately involved in actually formulating and planning public health interventions.*

While in Russia, I earned a name for myself in the region as an editor and translator (into English only). This led to translation/editing jobs from various UN agencies and national organizations. Upon leaving AFEW, they hired me back as an independent contractor the next year to write Tajikistan's national bid for HIV funding from the

Global Fund Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Again, my ability to communicate with local staff was a major plus in coordinating and writing a winning \$90 million proposal. Two years later, I went back to Tajikistan to write the next round of Global Fund proposals, but this time as a contractor directly for UNDP.

Are you still using your Russian? *I was until about 3 years ago. After completing my Masters in Public Health at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, I was hired at a big government consulting firm, Booz Allen to go back to Central Asia to train the Tajik, Kyrgyz and Kazakh Ministries of Health (MoH) on the Federal Regulations associated with managing US Federal grants (particularly with regard to HIV). I conducted trainings for each MoH in Russian and I had to work with local staff to ensure that we had an accurate Russian translation of all training documents. The following year I repeated the same training in the Republic of Georgia. Today, I work for Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) in Atlanta, supporting the National Immunization Program at CDC.*

What advice might you have for Russian studies students considering Russian as a major? *Think about the actual realistic applications of your choice to study Russian – it will help you extract more value in your day-to-day work in the program. I personally am a huge proponent of learning another language and I think Russian, albeit a difficult one, opens the doors to doing work in a large number of very interesting countries and a tremendous amount of culture. Also, you can travel to over a dozen countries and be able to get by knowing this one language – I'm in Bulgaria right now and knowing Russian has made this trip a breeze!*

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

- 1. Follow your instincts when making important life decisions – especially work. Sometimes we let social pressures and other conventions steal the show but our instincts are actually a very powerful albeit underdeveloped muscle.*
- 2. LEARN TO WRITE WELL! I cannot communicate this enough – no matter what industry you go into, if you write well you will distinguish yourself from the rest...100%.*
- 3. NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK. Keep up with people you meet everywhere. After I meet people at networking events, I write details I learned about them immediately on the back of their card. Then when I write them an email or enter them into my address book, I accumulate things about them that I learn. It will help you in reconnecting with people after time if you can make your interactions with them more personal. You never know who will be where in 5 years. Your network is one of the top determinants of your success.*

In a sentence or two, reflect on your experiences studying Russian at UF and its impact on you personally and/or professionally. *The Russian department at UF has affected my life until this day. As president of the Russian Club for 3 years, I was lucky enough to have an amazing group of people who were part of the club and now, ten years later, are still my closest friends.*

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.