

## **Where Are They Now?**

### **UF Russian Studies Alumni Profile**

**Alumnus:** *CJ Wahl (class of '09)*

**Concentration(s) at UF:** (majors) *Russian & Spanish*; (minor) *East-Central European Area Studies*

**Current occupation:** *Attorney. Next month I'm starting a one-year clerkship with Judge Robin Rosenbaum of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.*

**Looking back, what aspects of your UF Russian studies proved particularly useful?** *Dr. Burak's courses in grammar and translation and Dr. Rylkova's poetry course proved particularly useful to my work as a lawyer because every day on the job I must closely and rigorously read texts—whether cases, statutes, or regulations—to interpret their meaning.*

**With regard to your pursuit of Russian at UF, is there anything you didn't take or get that would have been useful?** *I don't think so, but I went to law school, so for me, anything missing in my education gets attributed to deficiencies there.*

**What did you do after you graduated?** *I applied to law schools with the idea of continuing my Russian studies via some kind of joint JD/MA degree. I ended up going to Penn Law, where, to do that kind of program, you applied only towards the end of your first year of law school. By then, I had changed my mind and did not want to pursue further Russian studies because the areas of the law I was more interested in did not really have anything to do with Russia. So, my Russian studies led me to my legal studies, but once there, I ended up setting aside Russian as a professional pursuit.*

**Are you still using your Russian?** *Unfortunately, very rarely. When I worked for a big firm in New York City, I did have a pro bono client from the Republic of Georgia—he was a gay man and I helped him obtain asylum here. Working on his case, I had to use some Russian because, although he mainly spoke Georgian, he had some relevant documents in Russian. Also, a couple weeks ago, in Miami, where I now live, I volunteered at a small claims clinic, and one of the people who came in for help was an old man from the Baltic who could barely speak English but did speak some Russian, so I communicated with him in Russian. Other than that, I haven't had to use Russian, but I've kept all of my books from college, because who knows, maybe one day it will come back into my life.*

**What advice might you have for Russian studies students considering Russian as a major?** *You'll be getting a degree in the humanities with all the concomitant pros and cons. There's been a good amount of press over the past couple of years about the value of a humanities degree, so read those articles (NYTimes, Wall Street Journal, for example) and give them thought. If you're looking for the straight and narrow path that will give you readily transferable work skills, this isn't for you—choose accounting or journalism or education or nursing or something like that instead. But if you want an intellectual journey and you have the guts to chart your own path, then choose Russian.*

**What advice might you have for Russian studies students on the verge of graduation?** *You're at a crossroads right now. If you want to build a career around Russian, you need to dive in head-first. Move to Russia for a year or so, or go to graduate school for Russian studies. Meet as many people as you can who have careers built around Russian—learn what they do and find out what they had to do to get where they are. If, on the other hand, you realize that you don't want that, it's time to start looking elsewhere for a career. Your Russian studies have taught you a lot, but they were not intended to limit you, and you can find satisfaction doing completely different things. And yet, if you find yourself on the fence, I would recommend finding a simple, non-Russian-related job (or part-time jobs) and giving yourself a year or two to think about your future instead of right away committing to something serious like graduate school or moving abroad for a year. It's okay to have doubt, and it's okay to step off the achievement merry-go-round and take a breather.*

**In a sentence or two, reflect on your experiences studying Russian at UF and its impact on you personally and/or professionally.** *As I mentioned above, my Russian studies helped me develop skills that are very relevant to my professional work as a lawyer. My Russian studies also helped me develop intellectually and personally the way that most humanities programs do: you learn to view the world critically, you appreciate different points of view, you read literature that changes you in lasting ways, you learn how to research and write, etc. I look back very fondly on my time studying Russian at UF—it was an unforgettable experience that changed me for the better.*

**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. I'm happy to talk with students interested in law, but I can also talk with students interested in academia and in government service, since I gave serious consideration to those paths as well but ultimately did not choose them.*