

Where Are They Now?

UF Russian Studies Alumni Profile

Alumnus: *Ian Somers (class of '12)*

Concentration(s) at UF: (majors) *History & East Asian Language and Culture*; (minor) *Russian*

Current occupation: *English-language Teacher, China*

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

While not the first language I studied, my UF Russian studies gave me a particularly deep look into Russian culture and values. It served to deepen interest in Russia and its place in the world. The UF Russian studies program also helped me find my calling: international relations. I'm applying to several Master's Degree programs to look deeper into this field. My love of Russia and its complicated relationship with the rest of the world and even itself is one area I hope to focus on.

With regard to your pursuit of Russian at UF, is there anything you didn't take or get that would have been useful? *Had I had more time, I would have continued my studies and taken Advanced Russian as well as Russian Phonetics. I feel both would have allowed me to learn more in depth about the language and discover new ways and methods to study.*

What did you do after you graduated? *After I graduated, I worked a job while I saved some money and handled some personal issues. In 2014, I moved to China to study more Chinese and teach English to children at a training school. Deciding which country to live in for an extended period of time was a challenge for me. My first non-family trip overseas for me was my participation in the UF in Moscow program back in 2010. Without spending extended time living abroad and thriving and on this trip visiting an elementary school and subsequently discovering young children actually are not scared of me, I don't know if I would have had the courage to put myself out there and take a stab at teaching them four years later!*

Are you still using your Russian? *I still do use Russian. Sadly, not as much as I would've liked and my knowledge of it has plateaued due to other forces in my life. However, I still keep up with what I do know and occasionally practice with a few friends and watch Russian films. My understanding is far stronger than my ability to speak it at the moment.*

What advice might you have for Russian studies students considering Russian as a major? *Maybe not advice so much as a statement of reassurance: Language and cultural studies require being patient. Learning a language takes years of intensive, daily studying; understanding that will make the journey far less stressful and more enjoyable. As for Russian itself, the language, current events, and culture are all fascinating and definitely worth pursuing.*

What advice might you have for Russian studies students on the verge of graduation? *A bit clichéd but don't be shy to put yourself out there. It really doesn't matter what you end up doing but people can increase your career prospects and experiences. As stated, learning a language is a challenge and not possible by pulling away from those who can help you. Russia is a continuously evolving country you'll have several great opportunities for employment within the Russian studies field in the US or elsewhere. Don't give up on it and take a few risks. If possible, spend some time working abroad and embrace the world we live in.*

In a sentence or two, reflect on your experiences studying Russian at UF and its impact on you personally and/or professionally. *Studying Russian helped me find my passion in life, learn more about a fascinating country and culture, and put me in touch with my own family background. Personally, it gave me some of my closest friends and several teachers I've come to admire beyond words.*

If their interests or trajectories correspond to yours, would you be willing to help individual students with career, post-graduate, and/or networking questions? *If there is anything I wrote here that someone found inspiring, then I'm happy if they want to contact me!*