

Where Are They Now?
UF Russian Studies Alumni Profile

Alumnus: James M. Slater (*class of '07*)

Concentration(s) at UF: (major) *Russian*; (minor) *History*

Current occupation: Attorney and Co-Project Director of the Homeless Legal Advocacy Project at Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.

Looking back, what aspects of your UF Russian studies proved particularly useful? *I acquired a strong fluency in Russian language, passion for literature, and developed a high level of intercultural understanding. All of these aspects helped me immediately in graduate school as a student of Russian literature; then in my career in international education focused on the post-Soviet space; and now in my legal career as I use my Russian on a frequent basis and interact with clients with vast backgrounds and perspectives.*

With regard to your pursuit of Russian at UF, is there anything you didn't take or get that would have been useful? *I wish I had taken linguistics courses in addition to my language courses.*

What did you do after you graduated? *I went to graduate school focused on Russian literature and language. I then participated in the Russian Overseas Flagship Program. After that I worked for American Councils for International Education focusing on immersion programs in Russia. Later, I worked with Russian-speaking clients as a law clerk whilst attending law school. Now I engage with Russian indigent clients in Miami-Dade County. I couldn't have done any of these things without my UF Russian studies.*

Are you still using your Russian? *Yes.*

What advice might you have for Russian studies students considering Russian as a major? *Learning a new language—which invariably is to learn a new culture—broadens your perspective in so many ways that it is almost life malpractice not to study a foreign language. You will think differently; interact with others differently; and see the world in such a different way. Russian isn't easy, however. I remember having to think through a simple sentence before opening my mouth to expel it even in third year Russian. The declension, pronunciation, clusters of consonants—all of it is so hard to grasp at first.*

Yet, after a while, you're speaking it, and you stop thinking about cases, and you are off to the races. Don't give up.

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

There are so many avenues to use Russian beyond humanities and governmental work. Think broadly about your path, and know that even if Russian isn't your focus, it will resurface and set you apart from the crowd. I recommend going to a Russian-speaking country for at least a summer if you have time. If you have questions, you can always feel free to ask one of the professors to give you my contact information.

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

Studying Russian took me on such a meandering path through life, and yet without all of those experiences and detours I wouldn't be the person I am today; I wouldn't have had the opportunities I was afforded in my post-graduate life.

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