

Where Are They Now?

UF Russian Studies Alumni Profile

Alumnus: *Zach Wilkins (class of '12)*

Concentration(s) at UF: (majors) *Russian & Statistics*

Current occupation:

1. *Tableau Manager, Analyst at Communicus – Communicus is an advertising research company. We work with roughly a dozen clients and several spend +\$100 million on their ads per year (including the world's second largest advertiser).*
2. *Master's candidate in Predictive Analytics at Northwestern University*

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

1. *My Russian courses provided the most tight-knit environment that I experienced in my entire college career. I shared 1 or 2 courses with many of several dozen other students each semester for 2 years.*
2. *I became a much more well-rounded individual through the Russian program. Since there are many literature, art (film in my case), business, and history classes to take, you become very intricate with the Russian culture. It's also like having two or three minors combined into one major, which was ideal for me.*
3. *Being able to study abroad with some Russian-speaking skills was the best thing I've ever done. It was the most soulful experience I've ever had. Proving yourself day in and day out broadened my skills. I have a million resplendent things to say about the value of living in a foreign environment. Seeing the Amber Room, going to Tolstoy's estate, seeing where Pushkin's last days were spent, and watching ballets inside the Kremlin? All of those can be done with some people that you'll love forever, who shared this grand experience with you.*

With regard to your pursuit of Russian at UF, is there anything you didn't take or get that would have been useful? *I think a business-environment class for speaking would have been great. I didn't get to take one. I also recommend having one more speaking class for the end of the degree, as I front-loaded all of mine. My skills did take off when I was taking two speaking classes at once, though. So maybe some thought can go into the course order.*

What did you do after you graduated?

1. *I work at an advertising research firm called Communicus in Tucson, AZ. I built the reporting process and manage the software for making these reports. I also double as an analyst and find stories in our data through statistical analyses. I'm currently enrolled in Northwestern University's Master's in Predictive Analytics program and I will finish my degree at the end of March 2017.*
2. *I have published several books. Many of the themes come from my Russian experiences. There are many references and parallels to Nabokov, who is my favorite author. Mainly, this degree helped me as a person. I find myself talking about the experience of cultural immersion, understanding other points of view, and thinking critically / inventively with words (mostly because of the grammatical structure of the Russian language). I find it to be a superb supplement to my life.*

Are you still using your Russian? *The first couple of years after graduation, I was practicing at least once a week. I'd listen to БуБу Сера from the BBC every Sunday night. I would read gazeta.ru a bit most mornings. Now, I just sing Камюша and sort of talk to myself far less frequently. I am in school now, so Russian is one of the first sacrifices, but I plan on getting myself back on track in the spring because I do miss it.*

What advice might you have for Russian studies students considering Russian as a major?

1. *I believe most majors should be paired with another. Try to get two degrees if possible.*
2. *This degree puts out as much as you put in. You can have a very satisfying skillset by graduation or you can barely get by and waste your time.*
3. *If you're a Russian major, try to go to Moscow after your second year. It's one of the best things you can do for your personal development. Aim for taking the Level I Russian as a Foreign Language exam while you're there.*

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

1. *My friends who got Master's degrees in Russian have struggled to find jobs. However, those who are in Ph.D. programs are doing fine. I think you need to go all in if you want a career in Russian in the US. Otherwise, consider teaching in Russia. I found it difficult to locate any decent jobs to get me abroad, but I know it can be done.*
2. *There are freelance translation jobs out there, which are ideal for practice, resume building, and a few bucks. Also, there are niche services that you can get*

- into. I know of someone who translates legal documents as his primary source of income. His uniqueness come from the fact that he is available 24 hours per day and translates a specific type of legal form.*
- 3. I know another student who just graduated from law school. She is very interested in becoming a diplomat with Russia and had job interviews while we were in Moscow. This is another available route.*
 - 4. If the Russian faculty can help find a job for you, I'd highly recommend giving it a shot. All of the people I know who work abroad have happiness spilling out of them.*

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

- 1. I stayed an extra semester to finish my Russian degree. I do believe it was worth it. I'm a much more rounded individual. I know a foreign language, I've read 20+ of its most famous written works, I have a good knowledge of the culture's history, and I got to experience the life of a Russian college student.*
- 2. I left with a degree and a certification to speak Russian as Foreign Language from the Russian government, but I know I'm still far away from the skill level I desire, but this is also the best way to learn a language. You won't leave the program with fluency, because that should take many years, but you can leave the program with a skillset that permits you to grow on your own. I feel comfortable reading and translating on my own, and I have no problem working new words into my lexicon.*
- 3. About half of the friends I made in college came out of this program. You can see the same people for 2-4 years, nearly every day. You practice with them, grow with them, and eventually, it gets real. This program was definitely my most memorable part of my academic career.*

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.