

Where Are They Now?

UF Russian Studies Alumni Profile

Alumna: *Olga Sinyavskaya (class of '15)*

Concentration(s) at UF: *BA in Russian Studies & BS in Biochemistry*

Current occupation: *Medical Student, University of Chicago*

Looking back, what aspects of your UF Russian studies proved particularly useful? *I strongly believe that studying abroad in Moscow at Moscow State University was an exceptional experience. The coursework fundamentally improved my Russian language skills and exposed me to Russian culture and politics, first hand. As my first extended trip abroad, I also learned important life skills that have helped me in future international experiences. I enjoyed my trip to Moscow so much that I returned there for part of the Summer.*

In addition, the required class for majors with Dr. Kleespies was significantly helpful in building my critical reasoning, research, and writing skills. The final paper was the perfect opportunity to pursue a research question unrelated to my interest in medicine. Learning how to write a strong paper has been incredibly helpful for my application to medical school, fellowships, and scholarships.

With regard to your pursuit of Russian at UF, is there anything you didn't take or get that would have been useful? *Although I did get a plentiful amount of writing experience with the Russian coursework, I believe that doing a thesis would have been especially useful.*

What did you do after you graduated? How, if at all, did your UF Russian studies inform or influence these activities? *After graduating, I spent my summer in Eastern Europe before beginning medical school at the University of Chicago. My Russian studies greatly impacted my search for the "perfect for me" medical school. In the process of selecting a medical school, I looked for opportunities to go to Eastern Europe as a medical student and to take coursework in other departments. My decision to attend UChicago was based on support for international experiences and coursework in the humanities. While I was unable to take Russian coursework, I took courses on human rights and social work which complemented and enhanced my education.*

I also specifically sought out a flexible internship and fellowship in order to travel to Kazakhstan and Russia over the Summer. My B.A in Russian helped me formulate a project that was informed by the cultural and political insight that I gained during classes and study abroad. In addition, my education gave me a broad baseline knowledge of grammar and work-related vocabulary which was indispensable for being able to work with NGO's in both countries.

What advice might you have for Russian studies students considering Russian as a major? *Completing a major might seem like a lot more work; however, in the short and long term having a full B.A in Russian Studies will be beneficial. You will have more substantial contact with amazing faculty, better speaking and writing abilities in Russian, and “soft” skills in reflection, communication, and critical observation.*

In the long term, a Russian major will improve your career prospects. From my experience applying to medical school, almost every single interviewer asked me about my decision to major in Russian, my study abroad experience, or how studying Russian has influenced my interest in medicine.

For me, the two interests are now heavily entwined. This merging of topics was gradual— it evolved because of significant Russian coursework and discussions with Russian faculty.

What advice might you have for Russian studies students on the verge of graduation? *You can never have enough practice during college writing papers— complete a thesis! Be sure to talk to all the Russian faculty you have gotten to know over the years. You never know when their contacts or advice will be necessary. They are the beginning of your professional network moving forward and can help you decide next steps in your education or career.*

In a sentence or two, reflect on your experiences studying Russian at UF and its impact on you personally and/or professionally. *A major highlight of my undergraduate education was studying Russian at UF. The opportunities I had during college, such as studying abroad and taking innovative coursework, have made it possible for me to pursue my dreams of studying medicine and focusing on infectious diseases in Eastern Europe.*

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, please email me with questions!*