

# *Why study Russian?*

## *Interviews with former UI Russian majors*

Frank Swoboda B.A. 2003  
(former Peace Corps volunteer in Uzbekistan)

Casey Gilbert B.A. 2004  
(manager of new US-owned coffee house in St.  
Petersburg)

Stacey Meyer B.A. 2005  
(UI 2<sup>nd</sup>-year law student)

## **What has been the most satisfying part of being involved in the Russian Department at Iowa?**

The Russian department is a very small department at the University of Iowa, but the only department that provided me with a sense of purpose. Every year we involved ourselves with the community by volunteering our time and a small donation to *Run for the Schools* which raises money for surrounding area schools. It is a great opportunity to give something back to the community and get to know your teachers, their families, and your fellow students better. - Casey Gilbert

A truly gifted faculty that is able and willing to get to know students as people over the course of several years and teach you how to effectively communicate in a fairly complicated language over that same period of time. - Frank Swoboda

The best part is the faculty. Since the dept is rather small, the faculty is more easily accessible and you get to know them better. You may have the same teacher for several of your Russian classes, which forges a nice bond. When you have issues, you feel comfortable approaching them to ask for help. - Stacey Meyer

## **What is something everyone should know about the Russian Department?**

The most important thing to know about the Russian Department is that we are like family. Not only did my teachers know my name, but they really cared about me as an individual. In addition, I still keep in contact with many of my fellow students in the Russian Department, as well as some professors.

On another note, Russian isn't an easy language and the first month of your Russian class is going to be full of lots of new information: a new alphabet that you are not familiar with and homework that makes no sense, but trust that it WILL get easier. All the students I studied with grew to love the language, the culture, their professors, and it became a part of their lives. The memories that my classmates and I have about our time spent in the Russian Department at the University of Iowa is looked back on fondly.  
- Casey Gilbert

The department has that small-college feel that is often difficult to find at a large institution like Iowa. Classes are small, and instructors and students are very dedicated. It's an excellent place to meet great classmates and mentors - but that can be said of most courses and departments at Iowa. What makes the Russian department unique is that you'll be able to continue working and studying with those people in following semesters. - Frank Swoboda

## **What kind of doors have opened for you because of experience gained with the Russian Department?**

My experience with the Russian Department resulted in the job that I currently have. I am now living in St. Petersburg, Russia and have a senior management position with an American company opening coffee shops in the St. Petersburg area. If I wouldn't have had my language ability I wouldn't have been able to get this job. - Casey Gilbert

Between the strong language base I got from the faculty and the experiences I gained by traveling and studying overseas, I was well prepared to live and work in the former Soviet Union for two years following graduation, and then, upon my return, to translate that experience into a job with an international non-profit organization.  
- Frank Swoboda

Wow, there are so many...because I majored in Russian, I was exposed to not only topics of Russian culture, but also ones involving politics and social issues (especially in Peggy's "Russia Today" class.) This class was a key impetus to my decision to attend law school. Peggy had outside lecturers teach some of those classes and one of them was a law professor, speaking about legal reform of the former Soviet Union. This sparked my desire to go to law school and specialize in international law.  
- Stacey Meyer

## **How has the Russian Department helped inform or assist you in attaining your career goals?**

I would also like to mention that I believe the study abroad program can be very helpful in aiding in career goals. It allows you the opportunity to enhance your language ability a great deal while living in a beautiful country with a vast history. During your stay you may begin networking and searching for future jobs or internships. Networking is one of your biggest advantages in this country. I highly recommend a year long study abroad. I only completed the summer program and this wasn't enough, but was the cheapest option and I now regret that. I highly recommend spending twice as much money and staying for one year. I continue to have relationships with the students currently studying in the ACTR program now that I live here in St. Pete.

- Casey Gilbert

My resume lists several years of work overseas; proficiency in two foreign languages; experience working with, studying with, and teaching multicultural and diverse groups; and excellent communication skills - all because of the Russian department and the doors it opened for me. Russian has helped me make myself much more attractive to employers, and also helped me clarify what sort of work I want to do.

- Frank Swoboda

I just had a discussion yesterday with my law advisor about this. We were talking about the upcoming interviews that I will have in August (in law school you start interviewing for jobs very early.) He pointed out that with my Russian language skills, I will really stand out as someone with skill that is not just unique, but useful. Although I don't have a career in law yet, I did work at Primus, the international long distance phone company in Coralville, taking customer service calls in Russian. I wouldn't have been able to do that without the training given me by the Russian Department. - Stacey Meyer

## **Why would you encourage a new student at Iowa to major in Russian?**

You should major in Russian if you are interested in working in one of the largest developing economies in the world. I can tell you that 50 years from now when Russia is developed I will look back and be able to say, "I had a part in that!" How many people have that kind of opportunity? You should major in Russian if you like a challenge and if you love adventure. Everything about Russia and Russian is interesting, challenging, and adventurous. It is also extremely rewarding to know that you aren't like everyone else...in the Spanish department. In the Russian Department you are a name, a friendly face, and not a number (like in micro 101). - Casey Gilbert

A Russian major will allow a student to experience and learn about a part of the globe that is fascinating and relevant, to be exposed to one of the richest languages and culture, and to be challenged and ultimately rewarded. - Frank Swoboda

The ability to speak Russian tags someone as smart, hard-working and diligent, since it is not the easiest language to learn. If you really want people who meet you to say "Wow!" when you tell them you majored in Russian, this is the major to choose. Of course, learning Russia shouldn't be about getting accolades - it truly is a skill that is needed in today's evolving world. Don't let people convince you that Russian skills are obsolete just because the Cold War is over. Russia is still a major world power, it comprises a HUGE area of the world's land mass, and its culture and language are vast in this world. With Russian skills, you can work in virtually any area you want and apply those skills to it. - Stacey Meyer