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**Twenty Questions on  
Russian Language and  
Literature**

**at the  
University of Michigan**

All you ever wanted to know about **concentrating in Russian**, **minoring in Russian**, **studying Russian language**, **taking courses on Russian literature and culture**, **going to Russia**.

# Russian Language and Literature at Michigan

## Twenty frequently asked questions

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# Russian Language and Literature at Michigan

## Twenty Questions

### 1) Why should I study Russian?

- If you ask most Russianists (people who study the language and culture of Russia), they will tell you that they became **fascinated with Russia, intrigued by the Russian language, and that they fell in love with Russia's great literature**, and that these are good enough reasons on their own to study Russian. And they are. But there are lots of other reasons, too. Russian is the **primary language of the approximately 150 million citizens** of the Russian Federation, as the Russian state calls itself, and is the native language of approximately **30 million** people living in the other states which were formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In many if not all of those states (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirgystan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) Russian is widely spoken by people who are not themselves ethnic Russians, and it is also spoken – if sometimes reluctantly – by many people in the other countries of the former “Warsaw Pact”. In other words, **it offers a key to the parts of Europe which will be most changed by economic development in the coming century**. And while Russia itself may not always look like a very wealthy, or even economically healthy, country, it has **enormous reserves of valuable natural resources and an extremely well-educated populace** – in other words, it has great potential for **economic growth**.
- Moreover, the last few years have seen a great improvement in the Russian business climate, and current indications are that it is becoming increasingly easy and more profitable for western companies to do business in Russia. Given these circumstances, **knowing the country's language and culture will certainly give graduates looking to work in international business a very important line in their résumé**. Moreover, knowing *any other country's language and culture* is both very useful and very appealing to employers and to professional schools, while knowing the language and culture of a major and very remarkable European country indicates that a person can handle all kinds of different and even difficult challenges (although the Russian language is really nowhere near as hard as people who have never learned it tend to think) and can acquire useful knowledge on a very significant part of the world. With the **globalization** of business, employers are often very interested in hiring people who show that they are familiar with a culture well beyond their own, and are comfortable handling the differences and even difficulties that working in a different culture brings. As Sally Adamson Taylor, in her book *Culture Shock*, puts it, “assigning home office personnel abroad is an expensive and complex proposition”. She cites the authors of *Leaders Sans Frontiers*, who assert that when staff assigned abroad return home early “they cost their company between \$25,000

and \$125,000 in wasted capital, not to mention the hard feelings left with clients they were unable to deal with successfully” (and those costs were estimated almost fifteen years ago!). She concludes, “**multinational companies need leaders who are internationally adept**” (Sally Adamson Taylor, *Culture Shock! France*, revised edition, Portland, Oregon, 1999, p. 211 – incidentally, although she writes about France, her chapters on general “culture shock” will help anyone traveling overseas). So, yes, learning Russian could make a big difference to your career. And if you learn Russian, **why not concentrate in Russian** (see next question)?

- By the way, the information at the following web site, put together by teachers of Russian, will give you lots more information on the benefits of learning Russian:

<http://www.russnet.org/why/index.html>.

## 2) Why should I concentrate in Russian?

- The **Russian concentration** enables you to gain a very solid grounding in the language (most concentrators take the equivalent of at least **four years of Russian**), and an equally good introduction to the **literature and culture of Russia**. By the time you have finished your concentration, you will speak and read Russian with good fluency, understand spoken Russian well, and write well enough for most everyday forms of communication.
- You will know quite a lot about one of the **world’s undoubted great literatures**, and understand why it has had such enormous impact on other world cultures. You will have read authors such as **Tolstoy** (*War and Peace*), **Dostoevsky** (*Crime and Punishment*), **Chekhov** (*The Cherry Orchard*), **Bulgakov** (*Master and Margarita*). You might well have studied some of the most famous films and film-makers in the world (**Eisenstein’s** *Battleship Potemkin*, for example, was once voted the greatest film ever made). You will have completed a liberal-arts degree which will show that you can: **learn a language well; analyze complex materials** (literary texts, films, etc); write **analytical and discursive prose; enter into a foreign culture and understand it** (see question one). You will quite probably have lived and studied, perhaps even worked in **Russia**. This will certainly make you stand out when you **apply to graduate and professional schools**, or look for employment, and the skills you have learned will serve you well. Our graduates are, without doubt, very competitive in applications to law schools and to business schools, and seem in general to appeal to employers. In recent years, a lot of Michigan Russianists have also been concentrating in a social-sciences subject (history, psychology, economics, for example), or have even been completing joint undergraduate degrees, for example with the Engineering School. The **academic and professional profile of such double-concentrators and dual-degree students has been especially strong**.
- And, by the way, our concentration program is such that Michigan Russianists form a tight-knit and **friendly community** (it’s not too big), and take classes in small and medium-sized classes. Our faculty and our GSIs are very accessible, and love to

answer questions from undergraduates. You can check out some details about the faculty at: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/slavic/facstaff/>. Office hours of faculty and GSIs are posted in the Department's main office (3040 MLB), where Gretchen Andrews (<[andrewsg@umich.edu](mailto:andrewsg@umich.edu)>), the Student Services Assistant, is a mine of information.

- Need more information? Our concentration program is described at: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/cg/bulletin/chap6/slavic/>. And the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages and the American Council of Teachers of Russian have that site on Russian at: <http://www.russnet.org/why/index.html>.
- Keep watching this space! There are plans for developing more tracks to help students fulfill the Russian concentration in a variety of different ways. News coming soon!

### 3) I have come to Russian studies late in my undergraduate career – is there any way I can still do a degree in Russian?

- Of course! Even though you need a minimum of three years of Russian language, or the equivalent (and most students do four), as well as two courses in Russian language and culture in Russian, three in English, and another Russian-language course in the Department, plus a cognate – wow! -- don't despair. First of all, check the details out here: [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/detail/0,2034,2966\\_article\\_1574,00.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/detail/0,2034,2966_article_1574,00.html). Then, think about the following: the **Intensive Program in Russian Language**, based in the Residential College, offers **the equivalent of two years of Russian over a year of study** in two eight-credit courses (details at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~resco/> contact the director, Alina Makin at <[resco@umich.edu](mailto:resco@umich.edu)>); the University of Michigan's **Summer Language Institute** regularly offers intensive courses at all four levels of Russian (details at <http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/sli/>, or call the Slavic Department at 734-764-5355); there are lots of other summer-study programs in the US, and great opportunities for study in Russia (see one of the questions below). So, if you are determined, **you can complete the equivalent of three years of Russian in one calendar year**, and the odds are that you will be a pretty good Russianist at the end of that year. If you push it, you can complete *all the other requirements* in one more year. Questions – talk to any of the Michigan Russianists, and write to the concentration adviser (<[mlmakin@umich.edu](mailto:mlmakin@umich.edu)>).

### 4) Should I choose Russian or Russian and East European Studies as my concentration?

- Of course, in addition to Russian language and culture, Michigan offers another concentration for the student interested in Eastern Europe – **Russian and East European Studies (REES)**. It is administered by our friends and colleagues at the Center for Russian and East European Studies. REES gives the student the

opportunity to **learn one of the Slavic languages while also taking a broad range of courses relating to Eastern Europe from across the humanities and the social sciences**. Whether you choose REES or Russian for your degree really depends on where your interests lie, and on your feelings about the benefits respectively of the sort of core-oriented liberal-arts degree offered by the Slavic Department and of the area-oriented diversity of study offered by REES. Both are good choices, and the overlap between them means that you might even be able to move from one to the other if you change your mind, but it is a good idea to talk to both advisers if you are not sure, before you elect one or the other. Both these degrees – Russian and REES – are, as noted, **excellent** (of course!), and they have many points of contact. Needless to say, the Slavic Department and CREES work together on many projects, and all Michigan Russianists are encouraged to follow the excellent and varied range of events at CREES. For more information about REES and the Center, follow this link: <http://www.umich.edu/%7Eiinet/crees/>.

### 5) What are the employment prospects of Russianists?

- That question has been addressed in part in the answers to questions one and two above. Our graduates are very competitive in applications to professional schools, are appealing to employers within the government, and, increasingly, in the corporate world.

Snejana Tempest, who used to direct the Department's Russian language program, recommends that students considering **Law School** study Russian. She writes: "The Association of American Law Schools recommends courses that stress reading, writing, speaking, critical and logical thinking. Law schools report that their top students come from math, the classics, and literature--with political science and economics ranking lower. Research has shown that math and verbal SAT scores climb higher with each additional year of foreign language study." Information on employment prospects can be obtained at: <http://www.russnet.org/why/p5.html>.

### 6) Never mind what the professors say, what do people with degrees in Russian have to say?

- A student who graduated with a degree in Russian about a decade ago, entered the "world of work", then went on to complete an MBA and have a very successful career in the business world, was kind enough to write at length about her experiences. Here is what she had to say:

*It took me a while to be able to stress the value of a liberal arts education: analytical thinking, the ability to synthesize information and form rational conclusions, creative problem-solving, and of course, the ability to speak and write at a level befitting someone who calls him/herself "professional." I finally landed a business manager job at a small software development company.*

Once I had the "hard skills" on my résumé, I went to business school to get the credentials to back up the skills .I was treated as something of a pariah in b-school at first ("what, you didn't study BUSINESS as an undergraduate? What did you think you were going to do with RUSSIAN?!"); then, with the considerable vision of a new dean, the b-school began to recruit liberal arts students actively because **hiring managers were complaining about the woeful lack of skills (see liberal arts paragraph) in new MBA's**. Upon graduation, I found **my liberal arts/MBA combination to be extremely powerful, and the Russian degree added a bit of exotic cachet to my résumé** that kept me in the "for further consideration" pile. (By the way, in a former job I managed a newly-minted MBA who had a business undergraduate degree rather than a liberal arts degree, and I found that his performance was severely compromised by **skills I took for granted -- the ability to look at lots of data and draw intelligent conclusions rather than just spitting it back in raw form, the ability to come up with creative suggestions for problems, the ability to write and speak cogently and to persuade others** about his opinions, etc.)

I recently **landed a consulting job \*because\* of my Russian degree**. First, I had to explain the connections between my current work (organizational development) and my illustrious educational and career trajectories. What seems non-linear and perhaps nonsensical to some is eminently clear to me: I studied language/literature because I am interested in the human condition and the profound, multi-hued expressions of human experience; I chose organizational development/management consulting because I am interested in the human condition **\*at work\***. As I explained to this client, business is driven by analysis and planning, but people are the wild cards in the game, and therefore people are the most interesting elements to me. The reason I landed the job is because they loved my explanation (very liberal arts view), they loved my business knowledge/training, **and they loved the fact that I understood and valued other cultures** because they had a Ukrainian and a Rumanian on staff who were having difficulties understanding what all this organizational development stuff was all about.

Why study Russian? Because you love it and because it teaches you about the human condition... not because Russian study leads to x, y, or z career choices, because the trajectory is not that clear. **What helps? Talking about the value of a liberal arts education, connecting liberal arts to the career you desire, and supplementing the "soft" (but incredibly valuable) skills you get in Russian studies with the "hard" skills you get through internships and the like**. Being a project assistant or research assistant for consulting groups would be an ideal short-term job to get the more recognizable skills on one's résumé; **consulting firms love liberal arts majors!** Also, tech writing jobs (if one is inclined toward technology) are good jobs for liberal arts majors because techies very often can't write in "English."

- A more recent graduate (double concentration in Russian and English) writes as follows:

*I am and always have been possessed by a fascination with language, and was predisposed to take Russian. That said, I do not think there is any language quite so beautiful as Russian.*

*Grammar has largely disappeared in US education. There are rudimentary brushes with the stuff, how to discern a pronoun, what's a verb, can you find any adjectives here, fifteen minutes a day devoted to it for perhaps a week of the third grade. The result is a student body that is, on the whole, unaware of the workings of their own language. Taking Russian forces the student to learn not only the grammar of the foreign language, but also to learn, or rediscover, the grammar of English. I had little grammar in elementary school; mostly I learnt it at home, talking with my parents and older siblings. Even so, I hadn't nearly the sort of exposure to it I now wish I had. Fortunately, studying foreign languages have helped me to make up, in large part, my grammatical deficiencies. Spanish introduced me to the subject, middle, predicate idea (not entirely applicable to Russian word order); Russian taught me what should be the very basics of English grammar. The rules of Russian grammar, in short, forced me to locate the English equivalents (or approximate equivalents). It was never any problem for me to listen to a sentence in either English or Russian, and know how it should sound; but **having endured rigorous training in Russian grammar, I began to understand the whys and wherefores.***

*Having been introduced to the fundamentals of grammar, I explored its more advanced elements, a path which has led me to explore, most recently, the ins and outs of rhetoric (that is, rhetorical terms and methods). An acquaintance of mine, listening to me wax poetic about Russian grammar, rudely interrupted me and asked, a bit sourly, why it was that Russian majors talked about grammar all the time. That proves it to me. Grammar is so out of place in American primary and secondary schools that it is unusual to hear it discussed at all.*

***Studying Russian will make you into a better student.** The schedule demands you employ a system of study that quickly becomes a habit. I cannot say that I saw a dramatic improvement in my grades, as I received high marks even before I began Russian. I do believe, however, that in the process of learning Russian, I became more adept at studying English: I began to see into, as it were, the language of the varied texts I studied, noting the reuse of words containing certain roots, roots which related directly to certain themes; I understood patterns and rhythm better. **Russian enhanced my ability to read and to communicate.***

And this is what another recent graduate, who was working for a publishing house but about to enter a top graduate program in comparative literature, had to say:

*I guess I have a few things to say in favor of Russian Studies. **The job I have right now, for example, is one which both indirectly and directly capitalizes on skills I gained in the Russian program, in language and literature.** I happen to be lucky, because I work for a press that has an entire academic series devoted to Russian studies and also publishes many burgeoning authors from other Eastern European countries, but I think that, in general, **university presses (and probably publishing houses at large) favor applicants with foreign language skills,** because it usually indicates that they know something about English grammar as well, something that often immediately separates one from the average American college graduate. In my case, knowing other languages (Russian, Italian, and some French) helps me catch mistakes in manuscripts that others are missing, and once in a while, this helps to avoid embarrassing errors on both the author's and the publisher's part. And I don't think I'm suffering from delusions of grandeur. The mistakes I catch are usually so minute that they would escape most readers' attention, and in publishing, we devote ourselves (somewhat irrationally, it seems at times) almost exclusively to these details. But they are gratifying to detect, and if for this small reason alone, I am valued here, mostly due to my language skills. That is my experience in publishing anyway.*

*Otherwise, I think **extensive experience studying another language and culture make one more attractive to various government employers,** but to that (as well as in the business world) I can't speak directly. In general, however, **my praise for the program in Russian at U of M, goes to its rigorous structure, its small class sizes, and its dedicated professors.** Although I am obviously biased in this, **I feel that devoting much time as an undergraduate to studying foreign languages was one of the most worthwhile decisions I made at Michigan,** if only because it gave me concrete skills. I've been accepted to the Ph.D. program at University of Chicago in comparative literature and plan to start my work there in the fall. I'm not sure which direction I will take there (the freedom is significant), but I hope to continue my study of Russian literature and American literature.*

**7) I am a “native speaker” / I am a “heritage-speaker” (one or both of my parents are native-speakers of Russian, I understand Russian well and speak it, but do not consider myself a native-speaker), what courses could I take in the Department?**

- First of all, congratulations on having special access to one of the **world's great cultures.** You may well be one of approximately one million people born in the former Soviet Union, and now living in the United States. We warmly welcome students from Russian-speaking backgrounds, and offer many courses which help them deepen their understanding of their own roots. Moreover, we have just begun to offer a **language course specially designed for people who know some Russian**

**from childhood**, but would like to improve their general language skills (Russian 225 – Russian for Heritage Speakers). In general, such “**heritage speakers**” form a special category of student, and before they enroll in pure language courses (ie, Russian 101-402), they should talk to the interim director of our Russian language program, Svitlana Rogovyk (<[srogovyk@umich.edu](mailto:srogovyk@umich.edu)>), who will be able to help place them in the right course. They are, of course, very welcome in all of the literature and culture courses, whether taught in Russian (Russian 451, 499, and so on), or English (Russian 347, 348, 449, 450, and so on), and such students often choose to complete a concentration in Russian, usually in combination with another concentration, either in the social or the natural sciences. If they are interested in the concentration, they should talk both to Professor Tempest and to Professor Makin, the undergraduate adviser (<[mlmakin@umich.edu](mailto:mlmakin@umich.edu)>).

### 8) Can I get credit by examination or credit for courses I have placed out of in Russian?

- This is where you can find out the official details on credit by examination or retrospective credit: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/cg/bulletin/chap4/special/>. However, currently the Slavic Department does *not* offer retroactive credit or credit by examination for its courses.

### 9) How can I transfer credit for Russian courses I have done elsewhere?

- Credit transfer is administered by the University **Office of Admissions**, *not by the Slavic Department*, whether the courses you have taken or are planning to take are at an American institution or abroad. Of course, feel free to seek advice or suggestions from the concentration adviser, or other faculty members. This is what the Office of International Programs says about courses taken by direct enrollment at a foreign institution:

“Information on how certain classes taken abroad may be accepted for transfer credit can be found at:

[www.lsa.umich.edu/saa/transfer/admissions](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/saa/transfer/admissions). This information is provided by Undergraduate Admissions and is not a guarantee of credit transfer, only a guideline. When you get to this link, scroll to the alphabet at the bottom and select the first letter of the name of the Foreign School or the first letter of the US School hosting the program (for non-UM study abroad).”

- But – this is important to remember – it is generally up to the **concentration adviser** to decide what role in fulfilling concentration requirements will be played by courses taken elsewhere, especially in Russia (*this is not the same thing as transferring credit – the concentration adviser may waive certain concentration requirements because of courses you have taken elsewhere, but this does not mean that the Admissions Office will give you UM credit for those courses equivalent to the requirements waived*). Overall, the Department tries to be **flexible** with students who have completed study-

abroad programs, because we firmly believe that **students benefit enormously, both as Russianists and in broader terms of personal development, by studying in Russia.**

- And if the courses you have taken are on a study-abroad program to which Michigan is affiliated, your credit will be **transferred automatically.**

**10) I am transferring to Michigan from another school, and want to complete the concentration in Russian. What should I do?**

- Talk to the **concentration adviser** as soon as possible (<[mlmakin@umich.edu](mailto:mlmakin@umich.edu)>)! And look at the answer to question nine above, about transfer credit.

**11) How do I declare a concentration, or complete my concentration release?**

- That's the easiest question to answer – contact the Slavic Department's **Student Services Assistant, Gretchen Andrews** (<[andrewsg@umich.edu](mailto:andrewsg@umich.edu)>), who will make an appointment with the concentration adviser. Before you meet the adviser, don't forget to look at the details of the concentration at [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/detail/0,2034,2966\\_article\\_1574,00.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/detail/0,2034,2966_article_1574,00.html). And, if you are completing a concentration audit prior to graduation, don't forget that you will need to check general requirements with a general adviser too. If you want to substitute courses, use transfer credit, or do anything else beyond the basic pattern of the concentration, *talk to the adviser well in advance of graduation!* Of course, you can always drop by the adviser's office during his office hours, or even try to catch him at another time – and if you need to go over your transcript with him there and then, you can print up an unofficial copy from Wolverine Access, on his computer – so don't hesitate to come to see him whenever you need to.

**12) What opportunities for study in Russia are there?**

- There are many **study programs in Russia**, from summer programs to semester- and year-long programs. Michigan is directly affiliated to a number, and our faculty and graduate students can provide useful, often current information on many programs. But the first place to contact is our excellent **Office of International Programs**, where **Leslie Dorfman Davis** (who herself wrote a doctoral dissertation on Russian poetry) can provide lots of material and advice – write to her at <[serapion@umich.edu](mailto:serapion@umich.edu)>. Look at the OIP web site at <http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/oip/> -- it not only tells you about the programs Michigan is affiliated to, but also gives you advice on other programs, and on direct enrollment at foreign institutions. If you plan to use study abroad to complete parts of your concentration, don't forget to talk to the **concentration adviser** both before you leave and after you get back, and keep a careful record of all the courses you do and the work you complete.
- The Slavic Department thinks that **study abroad is an excellent way to broaden your education**, whether you are a Slavist or not. If you are a concentrator, we will

make every effort to ensure that your studies in Russia help you to graduate on time (that's why you should talk to the adviser *before* and *after*). When choosing a program, bear in mind that the more established may well be better organized, even if more expensive, while the newer ones may offer all sorts of interesting innovations, but may require more input and more patience from the participants. For example, some programs now offer internships, but these are still somewhat “experimental” in shape (so expect the unexpected). In general, don't forget, that you are going to Russia to speak Russian and learn about Russia – go there with an open mind, be willing to tolerate and understand what is different from home, and try not to spend your whole time speaking English with other students from America! Books such as *Culture Shock* – see question one – may help prepare students for study abroad, especially those who have not previously lived overseas. Look at the answer to question twenty on travel to and within Russia too.

### 13) Is Russia safe?

- We have all heard a lot about crime in Russia in the last decade. It is certainly true that some aspects of modern Russian life reflect a striking disregard for what we regard as elementary legal culture (look at the stories of naïve businessmen buying into Russian companies, without understanding how different the business culture of Russia is from Western Europe and the United States – another reason why **learning Russian and understanding Russia will be very useful in the future**). Moreover, Russians, especially older Russians, most of whom grew up in a society where the streets were very safe indeed, are themselves often shocked and horrified by visible crime directed at individuals in Russian cities, and can give you the impression that street crime is ubiquitous. However, the truth is that, in pure statistical terms, Russia is a much “safer” country than the US for the individual, and that the vast majority of foreign visitors, even though they may seem more of a target than the natives, come and go with complete security. But, just as in America, you have to be **sensible** – don't leave your lap-top in an unlocked room; don't walk around city streets alone late at night; if the deal you are being offered seems too good to be true, then conclude that it probably is; and, if you know full well that the activities you are engaging in are what most of us would call “risky”, or even downright criminal, and you still cannot resist the allure and excitement of them, then be prepared for the consequences – in other words, however appealing and thrilling this vast new country is to you, don't forget the elementary things you have to bear in mind back home.
- **14) Where may I find tutors and/or conversation partners?**
- The Slavic Department itself keeps a list of **tutors** – contact Student Services Administrator, Gretchen Andrews ([andrewsg@umich.edu](mailto:andrewsg@umich.edu)), but don't forget that the Department does not itself endorse or recommend particular tutors. If you are looking for conversation partners, you might consider volunteering to work in the resettlement project of **Jewish Family Services** (tel. 734-971-3280), or contacting **St Vladimir's Russian Orthodox Church** (tel. 734-475-4590; <http://www.stvladimiraami.org/>)

**15) What organizations and events at UM facilitate Russian conversation, meeting other Russianists, and native russophones?**

- The Intensive Russian-language Program at the Residential College holds a **Russian Tea** from 3 pm to 5 pm every Tuesday of Fall and Winter Terms (Greene Lounge, East Quad). The program also holds a **Russian Lunch Table** in East Quad at 1 pm every week day except Wednesdays. All are welcome at both the Tea and the Table, which are attended by students of every level, and also by others interested in speaking Russian. For information, contact the program director, Alina Makin (<[resco@umich.edu](mailto:resco@umich.edu)>; <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~resco/>). There is also a **Russian Student Association** (<http://www.umich.edu/~rusassoc/>). For information on the undergraduate Russian Club in the Slavic Department, please call the Department at 764-5355.

**16) I don't want to complete a concentration, but I want to do more than the language requirement. Is there a way of gaining official recognition for my work in Russian?**

- The Slavic Department offers a **minor in Russian** (and minors in **Czech** and **Polish**). These minors require some courses in the language, and some courses in literature and culture, but far less than the concentration. Details are at [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/detail/0,2034,2967\\_article\\_1572,00.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/detail/0,2034,2967_article_1572,00.html). Note that **you cannot complete one of these minors if you are also concentrating in Russian or REES**, that you can only complete *one* of the Slavic Department's minors, but **you can complete both the minor in REES and one of the minors in the Slavic Department**, although with certain restrictions (these are College rules, not CREES or Slavic Department rules). If you want to declare a minor, or confirm the completion of one for your official UM record, contact the Slavic Department's Student Services Assistant, Gretchen Andrews (<[andrewsg@umich.edu](mailto:andrewsg@umich.edu)>), who will make an appointment with the appropriate adviser. You can always drop in on the concentration adviser for informal advice, of course, and you can even print up an unofficial copy of your transcript in his office, if you need to go over with him the course work you have already completed.

**17) Where could I find russophone communities and resources locally, outside of the University?**

- South-east Michigan is now home to many people who speak Russian as their native language, and you hear lots of Russian on the streets of Ann Arbor. In Winter 2001 and again in Winter 2002 one of the Slavic Department's faculty members even taught a one-credit course on "**Russia on the Great Lakes**"! In the Ann Arbor area, two community organizations are particularly prominent – **Jewish Family Services** (telephone 734-971-3280) and **St Vladimir's Russian Orthodox Church** (tel. 734-475-4590; <http://www.stvladimiraami.org/>). Both are places that newly-arrived

immigrants and visitors may turn to, and both serve as centers to the Russian-speaking communities of the area. In Metropolitan **Detroit**, the largest concentration of russophone businesses (grocery shops; a book-, CD-, and video-store; a furniture store; a restaurant, and so on) may be found in the **Oak Park/Southfield** area (mostly on and around Greenfield Road, within a block north and south of I 696, at exit 13), and in **Farmington Hills** and **West Bloomfield** (Northwestern Highway and Orchard Lake Road). There is also a Russian store in Ann Arbor – Euro Market, 3108 Packard Road (734-975-4326). It sells a good range of Russian foodstuffs, and has a smaller selection of publications and other Russia-related items. A faculty member in the Slavic Department has compiled some information about these communities – write to <[mlmakin@umuch.edu](mailto:mlmakin@umuch.edu)>.

**18) How can I “russify” my computer?**

- It is now very easy to make your computer suitable for reading Russian texts and web pages, and for word processing in Russian. If you are using Windows, setting up the “multi-lingual” components may well be enough. Bear in mind, when web browsing, that sites in the Cyrillic alphabet may use one of a number of different **encodings** – so you may have to change the encoding setting of your browser several times, until you get it right. If you are using Windows XE, go to “Regional and Language Options” in the control panel to install what you need (that is, so long as your version of Windows has the international packages). The computers in the LRC are fully equipped for word-processing in Russian, and they have checkers for spelling, grammar, and punctuation installed, so run your Russian papers through them before you submit them to your instructors, if you don’t have full Russian-language support on your own computer. The Russian Internet is rich, varied, and sometimes eccentric. Start with a good such engine, such as yandex (<http://www.yandex.ru/>), and surf away – you’ll be amazed at how much there is.

**19) Where can I buy Russian books and videos, listen to the radio in Russian, watch Russian TV, read Russian newspapers?**

- General Russian **books, videos, and CDs** can be bought locally at the **Russian stores** in **Oak Park** and **Southfield**. The main bookshop is Panorama, (Unit 6, 15600 West Ten Mile Road, Southfield, Michigan 48076; telephone 248-424-9062). Russianists can also buy books and videos through the **web sites of major book suppliers**, such as Eastview, Panorama of Russia, kniga.com, and so on ([www.eastview.com/](http://www.eastview.com/); <http://www.panrus.com/>; <http://www.kniga.com/store/>). Online bookstores in Russia often have more for less (but delivery time may make you hesitate) – for example, <http://www.ozon.ru/>. DVDs and VHS tapes can also be bought online. One good source for Russian films is <http://www.russiandvd.com/store/>. Of course, a cheap way to buy books and films is just to go to Russia (see questions twelve above and twenty below). But, if you do go to Russia, don’t forget to leave yourself time at the Post Office to have all those books packed (they have do it for you); and don’t forget that the videos you buy will need to be converted to the US encoding system if you want to watch them on a normal American VCR and TV (and even DVDs are encoded for

different regions of the world)! It is quite easy to buy a multi-system DVD player in the U.S., or software to enable your DVD drive to show Russian-region DVDs; VHS tapes are a bit more complicated.

- Some **Russian radio stations** are now available through **web casts** – if you search using the Real Audio player tuner or similar, you should be able to find something to listen to in Russian (<http://realguide.real.com/tuner/> -- try a key word like “Russia”).
- **Russian TV** is available in America from NTV International, the overseas branch of one of the big Russian networks. If you have “broadband” cable service you can usually subscribe to it, and Dish Network satellite systems offer a Russian subscription (but note that you need a different dish and receiver from the one used for English-language stations). Information at <http://www.allied-media.com/RussianMarket/ntv.htm>. This link should provide you with a good general guide to Russian TV and Radio available in the United States: [Russian Seattle. Russian Radio and TV on the Internet](#). You can buy a weekly Russian TV guide at most of the Russian shops in Metro Detroit (see the answer to question 17).
- The Harlan Hatcher graduate library subscribes to many Russian-language **newspapers**, and through its web site you can also gain access to many electronic versions of Russian publications (sign-up may be required: <http://dlib.eastview.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/newsearch/basic.jsp>). Major newspapers and magazines can be purchased in quite recent editions in Metro Detroit’s Russian stores. And many, many newspapers have good web sites, as do non-print media organizations. Most student-oriented web sites will also have some links to newspapers and other media – try the Bucknell site ([http://www.bucknell.edu/Academics/Colleges\\_Departments/Academic\\_Departments/Foreign\\_Language\\_Programs/Russian/Resources.html](http://www.bucknell.edu/Academics/Colleges_Departments/Academic_Departments/Foreign_Language_Programs/Russian/Resources.html)), the RC Intensive Program site (<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~resco/>), or the very extensive Pitt “REESWeb” site (<http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/reesweb/>)

## 20) Can I travel to Russia independently, can I travel within Russia independently?

- Travel to and within Russia is much easier and more practical than it used to be, although it certainly demands more of you than travel within the United States or in Western Europe (yet another good reason to work on that Russian...). Although you still require a **visa**, it is now much easier to get one. You can apply directly to the Russian embassy, but you might want to pay extra and go to a **visa service**, such as that provided by Unisel Travel and Visa Service, 25 West 45<sup>th</sup> St, Suite 1202, New York, N.Y. 10036; tel. 212-921-2900, 800-531-2060.) – you pay for the service, as well as for the visa itself, but then the whole business is usually pretty painless, and you should get your visa in good time.
- Several major airlines fly from Detroit to Moscow, and flying from the US to other big cities in Russia is pretty easy. If you like to travel, you won’t need any advice

here on how to find the cheapest fares – the web is full of useful sites – and fares to Russia can be very low, especially outside of the peak-travel summer months. If you do use Unisel for your visa, ask them about their travel services – they can sometimes find a cheaper ticket than anything the web has to offer.

- International chain hotels in the big Russian cities are expensive, sometimes very expensive, as are the best restaurants, but Russia is also full of **cheap places to stay and to eat**, and most are perfectly acceptable. One Slavic Faculty member traveling widely in provincial Russia in the last few years, has stayed at local, small hotels, mostly serving traveling civil servants and the like, and paid less than **\$20 a night** in quite big cities such as Tomsk and Petrozavodsk, and about \$10 a night in a tiny town near Lake Onega. The hotels were pretty simple, but clean, and the cost covered twenty-four hours in a room with its own bathroom, a TV, and a telephone in each case. Such places are best booked ahead – a **good travel agent within Russia** will do it for a small commission, or, if you are confident in your Russian, you can call the hotel yourself and ask to book a room. If you are planning to have any kind of official contact (for example, you want to visit a library or a museum and do some research there), ask the institutions you are visiting to help you – they should be able to find you accommodation, book a hotel room for you, and so on quite easily. One faculty member traveling in 2003 was very satisfied with the services of Avantix in Moscow <http://www.avantix.ru/>. Better guide books (for example, the “Lonely Planet” and “Rough Guide” series) often have useful information on hotels in the provinces, as well as the big cities, and lots of general information.
- Russian **trains** are very good, and relatively cheap (although the Moscow-St Petersburg route is an expensive exception nowadays, at least if you want to travel on the best trains). A good travel agent in Russia should be able to get you tickets in first class (ie, *spal'nyi vagon* -- a two-berth compartment) for travel to most cities, although tickets to popular resort destinations may be hard to come by in the summer. First-class carriages in the better trains mostly carry business people (although you might have to share a compartment with a member of the opposite sex – that is the Russian way), and many trains have acceptable food service, although most travelers also take their own supplies. Some long-distance trains, however, carry large numbers of private traders (so-called *chelnoki*, or “shuttles”) and their purchases, especially between European Russia and the Russian Far East, China, and Mongolia. Traveling on these trains is said to be sometimes stressful and unpleasant. So, if you are traveling all the way across the country by train, plan carefully and ask for lots of advice (in general, try to travel on the so-called *firmennye poezda* – they are usually clean, pleasant, and safe). Abundant information on trains is available on the web, including detailed time tables – you can start at: <http://parovoz.com/> (the massive Parovoz railway site, where you can find more than you care to know about trains, from their history to their timetables). Another useful site for those planning rail travel is: <http://www.express-3.ru/>. Finding out about inter-city bus travel can be more difficult, but most Russian towns of any size now have some sort of web site, and if you negotiate the links carefully, you can often find out about bus services (essential information if you are heading to really small places).

- **Flights** between cities with thriving business communities are frequent and, in tourist class, generally cheap. In the summer of 2000 a flight in tourist class from Moscow to Tomsk (in central Siberia, four hours time difference with Moscow), cost about \$150 one-way. Since then, prices have gone up, but not astronomically. Again, Moscow-St Petersburg is the best-served, but also the most expensive route. However, if a city does not have a strong new-business base (often from oil, gas, other natural resources, and the like) it may not be well served by airlines, although it will almost certainly have air service with the resort cities of the south in the summer. Information on airlines and on schedules can be found on the web. You could start at: [www.polets.ru/](http://www.polets.ru/).
- **Driving** in Russia is not for the fainthearted, and renting a car to drive yourself is very expensive. You are much better off **hiring a car and driver**. In the provinces that can be quite cheap (and a good way to learn about the area), and even in Moscow a reasonably new German car with a good driver may cost as little as \$60 per day. One of the biggest taxi firms offering good service in and around Moscow is: Taksi Prestizh (+7-095-915-4376). If you call them from the States, they will have a driver to meet you at the airport when you arrive (if you wait until you arrive and try to negotiate with the cabs waiting outside the terminal, you will almost certainly end up paying more).
- In Moscow, you can also rent a **mobile phone** quite inexpensively by the day (very useful in a country where “land lines” leave much to be desired – every prosperous Russian has a cell phone). One company which has at times rented phones by the day is Moskovskaya sotovaya svyaz’ (<http://www.mcc.ru/>). Don’t forget that, as everywhere in Europe, you need a **GSM phone** in Russia. If you buy or rent one here, the cost of calls in Russia is likely to be very high, however. If you can get a Russian citizen to help you (you need a Russian passport to buy a phone or a SIM chip), you can always put a new chip in your GSM phone when you get to Russia, or you can buy a phone for less than \$100. Take care when choosing your contract (and watch for incoming calls from abroad being very expensive). And check out the coverage carefully. In Moscow MTS and BeeLain seem to be the best providers, but in northern Russia, including St Petersburg, you may find that Megafon is better. It is not at all unusual for there to be no service at all once you are out in the country, or for one phone company’s service to work, but not another’s. So, if you plan to travel, do your research carefully before committing to any particular phone or company.
- If you have a **laptop** with a standard transformer, it should work without any problems in Russia, so long as you have the right plugs (but do check that you do have the **right transformer** – that’s the box on the power cord between your laptop and the mains). Travel plugs are easily purchased in the U.S. – for example, at Radio Shack. Most other electrical devices will need a transformer which allow them to run on 220 V. Check carefully first – blowing an appliance can be dangerous, as well as costly. You can buy prepaid internet cards in most kiosks in most big cities. They usually come with all the instructions you need, and, at least in Moscow and St Petersburg, you should get a decent dial-up speed. Many better apartment buildings

now have fast connections available. Hotels are less predictable – you may have to pay to use a hotel office if you want to check your email. Even some of Moscow’s luxury hotels only provide dial-up access in their (very expensive) rooms. Internet cafés are widespread in the big cities, and not unheard of in smaller cities. Often the main post office also offers internet services. In Moscow, many coffee shops also offer access to the Internet. Don’t expect to find special camera and similar batteries in every electrical shop – take plenty of supplies with you if you travel, and consider taking more than one rechargeable battery, plus a charger and transformer, as necessary, if you’re going to be on the road for long.

- The biggest cities have plenty of businesses that take **credit cards** (and charge lots of money for their goods and services), but, in general, and universally for the average Russian, **cash is king**. Most larger cities have at least some **ATMs** (and Western Union affiliates in case you need emergency funds wired to you), but it is unwise to bank on always being able to get more cash. At the same time, you would be ill advised to carry large amounts of cash with you and even more ill advised to advertise the fact.
- Traveling within Russia is not like traveling within the US or in Western Europe – it **costs less**, but requires more of you. But it is **fun**, and, if you are careful, it is generally perfectly safe. If you are prepared to “rough it” a little bit, and do without some of the home comforts, you can live very inexpensively in Russia, and still enjoy yourself enormously. However, as everywhere, the naïve traveler is likely to pay more than he or she should, and be less well served – prepare properly by reading, ask widely for advice, and make sure that you keep your eyes and ears open as you travel. You should also be sensitive to the fact that, although the big Russian cities, especially Moscow, have plenty of very prosperous citizens (living in expensive new apartments, vacationing in Paris, on tropical islands, and so on, driving brand-new luxury cars and making use of every electronic aid to life known to humanity), most Russians are not particularly well-off right now. Indeed, \$200 may be a decent monthly salary in a provincial city. So bear in mind that the “impoverished student” from the West is a rather privileged person in Russia, and try to take this into account in your everyday encounters with “ordinary people”. Russians remain very **hospitable** and, for the most part, very sympathetic to the foreign traveler (indeed, it can be hard to be a constant object of enthusiastic interest when you travel even a little bit off the beaten track), but, as in any new culture, the first-time traveler to Russia should be **sensible** and should also be **respectful** of his or her hosts and their notions of what is acceptable behavior. Last, but by no means least, remember that Russian hospitality can involve invitations to drink a lot of alcohol. You will be happier, healthier, and safer if you learn to say “no”, and if you remember that *almost no foreigner* can cope with that aspect of the Russian table like a native.
- Of course, you should do your own research carefully and cautiously, as with any planned trip, and the suggestions above should *in no way be seen as official endorsements from the Slavic Department of the University of Michigan*. They are simply records of individual experience, and that, as we all know, varies greatly.

- **Questions, comments, corrections to** <[mlmakin@umich.edu](mailto:mlmakin@umich.edu)>.