



It is fair to say that my study abroad experience in St. Petersburg was the most important academic term in my college career, and it would certainly have been impossible for me to participate without the generosity of all of the donors to the Dobro Slovo Scholarship. For that I am extremely thankful to everyone who donated. I benefited from the program in St. Petersburg more than I possibly thought I could and in ways that I did not foresee before I left the United States last June. Driving through the city I was struck by the glowing neon signs displaying the names of familiar American chains transcribed into Cyrillic letters and somber war memorials recalling the city's heroic role in the Soviet struggle against Nazi Germany. I remember the contrast between the beautiful golden dome of St. Isaac's and the painted green walls of the Winter Palace and the towering, concrete Khrushchev-era apartment complexes on Vasilevsky Island. I remember walking along the Neva and watching the bridges open at night. The city itself is an experience, but the St. Petersburg program is certainly much more than a sightseeing tour of Russia.

Academically, my Russian improved dramatically in the six short weeks I was in St. Petersburg, from a panic-stricken flutter of words when I was first asked a question in line at the grocery store to holding prolonged conversations with visitors from Kursk, the distant Komi Republic, and St. Petersburg locals. Through these conversations I overcame any misconceptions I had about the Russian people and Russia in general and I hope I made a favorable impression of my own country in the process. I miss the White Nights, the wide Neva River, and the long vistas unlike anything I have seen in any other city and I hope to return sooner rather than later. Until then, my love of Russian culture and confidence in my chosen major has grown exponentially.

In my opinion studying abroad in Russia is the only way to truly understand everything that we study about it in the United States. It allows you to move beyond third-party stories, stereotypes, and Cold War bias to interact with the magnificent country on a personal level. It provides context in which to place your studies and provides more than its fair share of surprises. It is also an invaluable experience in language acquisition. Hearing Russians speak among themselves and immersing yourself in the language, both on the street and in the classroom is undeniably the best way to learn it. Russian is by no means an easy language to learn and an even harder one to master, but without going to Russia neither is possible.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone who donated to the Dobro Slovo Scholarship and hope that you will continue to do so to provide another equally deserving student with the opportunity to experience Russia firsthand.

Sincerely,
William Sinnott