Russian Studies Major: Learning Goals

Russian Studies is dedicated to understanding the language, culture and history of Russia and the former Soviet Union. The Russian language is spoken by almost 300 million people worldwide, is the most widely spoken native language of Europe, and is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Russia and the former Soviet Union have a fascinating, complex history. They have moreover made major contributions to world culture in literature, visual art, music, dance, theater, opera, film, philosophy, psychology, literary theory, and other areas. In *The Top Ten: Writers Pick Their Favorite Books* (Norton, 2007), four of the top ten books were written by Russians.

The Russian Studies major begins with the Russian language, which serves as the gateway to the study of Russian literature, culture and history. Beyond the language knowledge it offers, the major takes students on an intellectual journey into Russian literature, culture and history through courses taught in both English and Russian. Diverse course offerings across many disciplines allows students to choose their own path through a wide variety of cultural, literary, social and political aspects of Russia and other post-Soviet states. The major is based on a strong interdisciplinary approach which encourages students to become sophisticated analysts of Russian cultural traditions expressed through language, literature, film, theater, history and politics. Uniquely, it offers specialized instruction for heritage speakers of Russian. Students are encouraged to include study abroad in Russia as part of their major.

The Russian world is both like and unlike our own. To study it is to understand how deceptive both similarities and differences between cultures can be. “To know another language is to live another life,” wrote the great Czech statesman, Thomas Masaryk. And to live another life is see one’s own life more clearly.

**Knowledge**

Students completing the major in Russian Studies should:

- possess a substantial core of knowledge about the Russian language and modern Russian and Soviet history and culture;
- be familiar with the major Russian creative writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;
- understand the dynamic relations between various kinds of cultural texts and their historical contexts;
- understand the resources and methods of at least one of the disciplines included in Russian Studies;
- use their understanding of literary, linguistic and historical analysis to raise and explore new questions about Russia and the Russophone world;
- appreciate the diversity and complexity of human thought and experience, as expressed in the similarities and differences between Russian- and English-speaking cultures.

**Core Skills**

The Russian Studies major emphasizes Brandeis University’s core skills in critical thinking and communication. Students completing a degree in Russian Studies will acquire the ability and skills to:
• write and converse in Russian at least at the intermediate-low level as defined by the ACTFL guidelines;
• comprehend contemporary Russian, written and spoken, to a degree permitting basic understanding of texts and ideas relevant to disciplines beyond language study;
• analyze complex texts through critical close reading and respond to them in literate English;
• apply basic critical methodologies to the study of Russian literature, history, and culture;
• engage in research in the field using primary and secondary sources;
• generate original ideas and insights using knowledge of the Russian language and critical skills acquired through the study of Russian history and culture.

Social Justice
The Russian Studies curriculum prepares graduates to participate as informed citizens in a global society by exposing them to a different cultural tradition, the history of another complex civilization that combines both western and non-western aspects, and the diversity of language through which human experience is expressed and conveyed. The various components of the major strive to foster understanding of and respect for cultural traditions of Russia and other Newly Independent States. Language study and the practice of literary analysis foster self-reflection and inquiry, and prepare graduates to be life-long learners.

Upon Graduating: A Brandeis student with a Russian Studies major will be prepared to:
• pursue graduate study and a scholarly career in Russian, Russian literature, Second Language Acquisition, or any discipline focusing Russia and the Russophone world; or
• use the knowledge and perspectives gained from the sustained study of Russian language, history and literature to pursue professional training and a range of careers in any field dealing with Russia and the CIS including government, law, international business, journalism, education, and human rights.

Prepared by David Powelstock, Chair, Russian Studies Curriculum Committee
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