

Russian Podcast script

Alex:

Hello again, and welcome to Iowa State University's podcast program on languages and cultures. My name is Alex Ely and I will be your host for today's show about the Russian program at ISU. During today's show I will be talking about what Iowa State has to offer, in terms of the curriculum, activities, and study abroad opportunities as well as provide you with various interviews with faculty members and students from the Russian program.

Have you ever thought about taken Russian? Did you know that Russian is the fourth most widely spoken language in the world or that Russian is spoken by over 150 million people in just the Russian federation alone?

Russian is part of the Indo-European language family and it is spoken primarily in Russia and the former Soviet nations but since the break-up of the USSR many nations have gone back to using their former languages, although still using Russian. The Russian language uses the Cyrillic alphabet, consisting of 33 letters. There are 5 vowels and the 28 consonants can either be hard or soft in terms of paletization. The standard form of Russian, originating from Moscow, has moderate variations in pitch.

There are a number of Russian dialects and they are generally split into two types: northern and southern dialects, while sometimes there is an additional branch, central, where Moscow lies. The variations between the official Russian language and the other dialects lie in differences in vocabulary, grammar, intonation, and pronunciation. Did you know that Russian is one of the six official languages of the United Nations?

We interviewed professor Olga Mesropova to talk to us about the importance of learning Russian.

Olga:

Russia, first of all, is a huge country. It's about twice the size of the US. It's just an enormous country. There are about 150 million people living in

Russia, itself, and apart from those speakers of Russian, there are the entire former Soviet Union, all of those republics like Ukraine, and Belarus and you know all of the stans: the Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. I mean, it's still the language that they know and understand. And I'm not even talking about the huge Russian population in the US -- the immigrant communities in this country - and Israel and Germany. Russian is a, you know, really widespread language and it's one of the nations of the United Nations. It's just a very prominent language that in recent years has been gaining even more and more popularity with the government sector. And, you know, if you think about the FBI, the CIA, all of the government organizations like NASA, for all of them Russian is becoming one of the most strategic languages, and you know students who speak that language have a lot more opportunities of being hired and finding a job with all those places. And, again, I'm not even talking about such employers as, you know, Hewlett-Packard and Reebok and Microsoft. And such companies as Ford or Exxon Mobile who are all opening companies in Russia - - in Moscow, in St Petersburg - they are really branching out to the former Soviet Union a lot in recent years, so I think Russian really does give students a lot of opportunities for finding jobs.

Alex:

Did you know, three of the main Slavic groups part of the former Soviet Union --the Ukrainians, Russians, and the Belorussians-- make up approximately 70% of Russia's total population? Perhaps you didn't know that Russia is the largest country on Earth which spans 11 time zones and two continents, or that St Petersburg is known to many as the cultural capital. One of the biggest art collections of all time is located in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg with nearly 3 million works on exhibit. When learning a foreign language, it is also important to learn about the country's culture. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has become an undiscovered land where people will have a wide variety of places to visit in order to learn about its culture and its magnificent architecture. Among the first things that come to mind to many people in the Western hemisphere when you ask them about Russia and its culture are its most European cities such as Moscow, St Petersburg and

Murmansk. Although these cities are the heartland of Imperial Russia, there is much more to Russia than what these three cities have to offer. The Russian culture is going through a reawakening of its traditions from a century ago by rebuilding and restoring ancient cathedrals, street markets hum with activity again, as well as literature and the arts, enjoying the renowned inventiveness from decades ago. Another important aspect of Russian culture is its hospitality. Hospitality is a huge part of Russian culture: inviting guests over to your home, helping friends and family is another way of life for Russians, and again, part of the communal sense of family. We interviewed professor Olga Mesropova on Russian culture.

Olga:

I think culture is a very important part of learning a language; I'll never view a language as this completely separated from the culture phenomenon. Right, it's not just, you know, a language for itself; it's always a part of culture. So if you have an opportunity to go to the country of that culture and experience it, that's a great way of enhancing your language and learning the language.

Alex:

Iowa State offers a Bachelor's in Russian Studies which covers a variety of topics ranging from the study of Russian language, history, culture, and literature, to religion, political science and economics. The courses also review subjects from even the former Soviet nations. The Russian Studies major requires that you take at least 30 credits beyond the intermediate level courses and you can choose from a wide range of courses, like a composition course, civilization, politics, you name it! Iowa State University also offers a Minor in Russian Studies. We also interviewed professor Olga Mesropova about the Russian program at ISU.

Olga:

Again, Russian is such an important language and it covers such a broad geographical area that I think finding a job would be very easy. And also now that Iowa State offers the option of merging a foreign language, say Russian, with such opportunities as

business, or engineering. This is where the students can really, you know, apply their language immediately [] to their practical career. Just to give you an example, we have this one student that is majoring in Russian and computer sciences, well she is going to Russia with us this year in the summer to study Russian even more and then she's staying longer in Moscow where she's going to be working with the Russian education system. They are revising their textbooks for math for high schools and she's going to be working with them, actually helping them revise the textbooks, which, you know, is a unique opportunity for her. It's very helpful to the Russian educators to bring in some American perspective. But for her it's a firsthand experience which is wonderful and unique.

Alex:

Are you interested in studying abroad in Russia? Iowa State offers several programs in Russia available for students who wish to study a broad spectrum of subjects, from economics, law, chemistry, to Sport Sciences and of course the Russian language. For information about Study Abroad or internship opportunities abroad, you can check out our website at www.language.iastate.edu to get the links and contacts mentioned through this show. We interviewed Ashley Twait on the Russian program.

Ashley:

My name is Ashley Twait, I'm a fourth year senior and I'm majoring in psychology and Russian studies.

Mehmet:

When did you visit Russia?

Ashley:

This past June in 2005 we went to St Petersburg to study at the Nevsky Institute in Russia. We were there for there for a little over 3 weeks living with host families in St Petersburg. There were six of us total that went and while we were there we usually studied for about three hours in the morning, went to classes, and then during the day we would just go around the city and visit the different things. We saw Nevsky prospect, St Isaac's Cathedral and Sposnikrovi(sp) and while we were there we also took a trip to Moscow one weekend to see Red Square and other famous things

around the city and took in a couple of performances. We went to see a ballet and a jazz show one night.

I had a great time with my host family. There was a mom and a son that I stayed with, and actually I still email them sometimes. I had a lot of fun staying there. Every place we went to -- restaurants, and stores -- we would have a chance to practice speaking Russian with just common people and speaking with the host family and trying to get along with them, so it really helped, I think. I think any experience with foreign language is just helpful to be more aware of what's out there beyond just here in America.

Mehmet:

Are you planning to visit Russia again?

Ashley:

I would definitely like to. I love the city of St Petersburg, and so I'd really like to go back some day.

Mehmet:

Spacibo balshoye.

Alex:

Iowa State has a lot to offer for students who are studying Russian or who are interested in the language and cultures. Two of the main groups pertaining to the Russian Studies program, or to the Russian culture, are the Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies Club and the Russian Speaking Students Association. The Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies Club meets every Monday evening at 7:30 at the Stomping Grounds Café located on Welch Ave [just across the parking lot/side street from the Golden Wok] for Slavic sips, discussions, guest speakers, games, and a whole lot of fun.

Olga:

We have a club for students, it's Russian, Eurasian and East European Studies Club that sort of welcomes all the students with an interest, not only in Russia, but in Eastern Europe and Eurasia and any part of the former Soviet Union. And that club always organizes pot lucks and dinners. We usually have a Christmas Dinner and an Easter gathering with lots of food, and

you know, painting Easter eggs, just those sorts of exciting activities for the students.

Alex:

Another great way to get involved on campus with the Russian speaking community is joining the Russian Speaking Students Association. As its name suggests, this organization is not intended for Russians only. It is open to all students at ISU that are able to communicate in Russian. Among the activities of RSSA are organizations of meetings and get-togethers, organizing trips to different culture venues of the US with the purpose of introducing the United States culture to our members.

Diliara:

My name is Diliara Sonovan. I am from Russia. my home city is Kazan. It's a big city, 1000 year[s] old. [It's] very famous; it's in America it's [like] Detroit.

It's defined like it's a Russian speaking association and we mostly speak Russian at our meetings, but we have a lot of American people, and actually from other countries. ... the members who have at least eight different countries besides countries from [the] former Soviet Union. So they [are] usually spouses half Russian, half American, half Russian, half Puerto Rican, something like this.

We celebrate most prominent holidays and events such as happy new year. We combine it with Christmas, but for the last eight years, happy new year was the most popular. Holidays in Russia: Woman's Day is March of eight, and we also celebrate, sometimes, Easter, not every year, and we also have a welcome picnic and final picnic in May.

We meet every three months for big events. We also have small events like movies, or we have events for children, for example Pushkin Fairytale and we have that event in [the] public library, or some other small events which happen maybe once or twice between big events.

Alex:

Although Iowa State University's Russian program has a lot to offer, it is up to you to explore the many opportunities that lie ahead for you. Please make sure to check out their website listed on our website www.language.iastate.edu. I hope you've learned many things about the program and activities. Thanks for joining me, and I hope you'll join me next week for another exciting podcast on languages and cultures from Iowa State University.

If you would like to send us feedback, you can write us an email to podcast@iastate.edu. This project is an initiative of the ISU Foreign Language Learning Resource Center and was funded in part by a recruitment and retention grant from the Professional and Scientific Council and the ISU Department of Foreign Language and Literatures. Laura Sentino Diaz is our show coordinator, Daniel Francis is our sound editor, Mehmet Sahin is our interviewer, and advisor. Keith Swanson is our technical support; Julio Rodriguez is our advisor, and, myself, Alex Ely, your mere host.