

## Three Months at Embassy Moscow

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Dickey Center International Internship

In the spring of 2007, I traveled to Russia on a Dickey Center International Internship to work at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Serving as the cultural affairs intern at one of the largest U.S. Embassies in the world was a fascinating and challenging experience. The internship was very well organized and everyone at the embassy, from the ambassador down, went out of their way to speak to me about their work and life in the Foreign Service. Even in ten weeks, I got a taste of whether a diplomatic career and lifestyle would be a good fit for me and honed several skills which will help me regardless of where I ultimately work after college.

Having also interned on Capitol Hill where I vied with a thousand other overachieving interns for the honor of answering phones and opening mail, I had decidedly low expectations for this internship. A month before the internship started, however, my work sponsor emailed to ask me what sort of work I envisaged doing in Moscow. As I quickly realized, the State Department considers the student internship program an excellent opportunity to recruit potential new Foreign Service officers and rolls out the red carpet accordingly.

Robin Solomon, my work sponsor and a Foreign Service officer at her first post, met me at the airport and showed me my apartment on Kutuzovsky Prospekt. While the internship is unpaid, the State Department does its utmost to secure free housing for interns. In my case, this was a beautiful apartment in the posh Kievskaya neighborhood just across the river from the Embassy. I started work the day after I arrived, and Robin

introduced me to the entire public affairs office, comprising of about fifty Russian and American employees.

From the first day, I was included in every important section meeting and was frequently offered the chance to attend receptions, conferences, and meetings with Russian officials. At the embassy, I worked mainly with the cultural affairs attaché, the academic and exchange coordinator, and Robin, whose portfolio included assisting with exchanges and maintaining the network of over ten thousand active Russian alumni of embassy exchange programs. While I was also able to see how other sections in the embassy functioned, I regret that I did not have more exposure to other parts of the embassy and would encourage anyone on a similar internship to ask from the beginning about opportunities to meet officers in other sections.

As 2007 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of U.S.-Russian diplomatic relations, I spent most of the internship working on projects related to the bicentennial celebrations. This included making a bilingual PowerPoint on U.S.-Russian relations for embassy-wide use, assisting with special visits – including a visit from Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez, and working on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary website. Other duties included drafting, editing, and translating letters from the ambassador, completing grant requests for State Department administered cultural funds, designing an intranet page for the Public Affairs Section, coordinating briefing sessions for American students visiting at the embassy, and monitoring the progress of art restitution cases in Russia.

Two of the most engaging projects I worked on were assisting the chief editor of National Geographic online news during his weeklong trip to Moscow and writing a cable, or official report, for Washington on student perspectives of the university system

in Russia. I went with David Braun, the Geographic news editor, to several Moscow universities where he gave lectures, toured the campuses and met with Russian students and professors. The cable to Washington required meeting and interviewing Russian students, sometimes in Russian, about student life and analyzing their responses in a five-page report.

Work frequently stretched beyond six p.m. and mixed with pleasure, because as the cultural affairs intern I received tickets to receptions and cultural events in Moscow. During the internship, I went to a Julliard string quartet concert and a reception for the American national hockey team at the ambassador's residence, a jubilee piano concert inside the Kremlin treasury, three World Hockey Championship games, an art opening, and a poetry recital among other events. As well as representing the embassy at these cultural events, I also held a roundtable discussion with Russians at the American Center in Moscow on the importance of immigration in American history and culture.

Like other jobs abroad, the Foreign Service is both a career and a lifestyle, with Foreign Service officers switching jobs, neighbors and continents every two or three years. The internship was therefore doubly valuable as it exposed me to both the work and life I would experience if I joined the State Department. All three of the Americans I worked closely with in Public Affairs invited me to diner at their house, while neighbors in the apartment building invited me to parties and loaned me anything I needed.

Based on my experience, I highly recommend a State Department internship to anyone with an interest in international affairs, business, or politics. The application process is competitive and requires advance planning, with applications due approximately 9 months before the internship begins. Interns must also receive a security

clearance which can take up to 6 months. The lengthy application process will pay-off, however, if you are selected.

The State Department has a wide range of positions for undergraduate interns. In addition to the posting in Moscow, I was offered posts at embassy Kiev and the mission to the IAEA in Vienna. Interns can work in a variety of embassy offices, including political, economic, cultural affairs, executive and EST (Environment, Science and Technology). The State Department also offers a large number of positions in Washington, although I'd recommend an internship abroad if possible. Internships abroad offer students the chance to travel around the world, experience a different culture from a unique perspective, and improve language skills.

Working at the embassy in Moscow was a particular pleasure – the embassy has over a thousand employees, the majority of whom are Russian, and is always busy. In just ten weeks, Secretary Gutierrez, Secretary Gates, Secretary Rice, Senator Frist, and former Presidents Bush and Clinton visited Moscow and the embassy. I worked on Secretary Gutierrez's visit and met Secretary Rice, while the Executive office intern met Presidents Clinton and Bush, and the EST intern worked on Secretary Gates's visit and met Senator Frist.

As exciting as it was to work on these visits, however, what made the internship most valuable was the fact that my portfolio at the embassy as an intern was similar to that of a junior Foreign Service officer. It was a rare opportunity, therefore, for me as an undergraduate to participate meaningfully at a major government institution, and for this reason was far more enjoyable and enriching than the Senate internship I had the year before. Overall, I feel I accomplished what I had hoped to in the course of the internship,

both exploring the Foreign Service as a possible career and gaining overseas and government work experience. The same opportunity is open to most Dartmouth students, and I highly encourage anyone interested to seize it.