

I would not have thought at the start of my Bowdoin career that I would major in Russian or that it would turn into my professional path, but it has been a great journey so far. I am an international student from Bulgaria and, having never traveled outside of my country prior to Bowdoin, I was very excited to start my college experience on a different continent. I was looking forward to exploring new subjects, joining new clubs and developing new academic and extracurricular interests. Heavy emphasis on new... and different (the more, the better!).

I had never learned Russian in Bulgaria, still I was not planning on taking any classes that were somehow related to my cultural background. I did, however, take a fascinating class in the spring of my freshman year on Central Asian film and literature that focused on regions and cultures that used to be part of the Soviet Union. That, alongside the genuine enthusiasm and encouragement of Prof. Jane Knox, resulted in my taking up Russian language and, later on, Russian literature classes. A year later, I declared a double major in Russian and Psychology and currently (five years after Bowdoin), I am at the tail end of a Slavic Studies PhD program at Brown University. I am completing my dissertation on spatiality and exile in 20th century Russian poetry.

Being able to continue my studies and to now add teaching Russian to them has been a very rewarding experience. I have spent time in Russia and the Czech Republic and I look forward to soon pursuing a full-time teaching career in Slavic Studies. As I always tell my students, taking a new language is an immensely beneficial experience—not to mention that Russian, despite its linguistic complexities, is a lot of fun to learn! There is a different and deeper understanding of the target culture that comes through learning its language. Sometimes it also makes you reevaluate and appreciate your own culture from a different angle. So, if you're thinking about taking Russian (or if you—like me back then—are not), don't hesitate to give it a try.