

Every summer, Middlebury College hosts over 1,500 students on their quaint liberal arts campus in rural Vermont to offer a unique immersive language experience. Thanks to the financial support of Middlebury and Bowdoin's Summer Language Study Program award, I was one of over a hundred students to attend Middlebury's 8-Week Russian Language School.

When I tell people I study Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies (REEES) I am often asked a simple but incredibly perplexed, "Why?" I was accustomed to jokingly telling people that I had been lured into the REEES department by the amazing faculty with promises of future job security without realizing the cost of that would be cramming grammatical case endings for a morning exam or quiz every Friday. However, my summer at Middlebury affirmed what I already knew about myself but found difficult to express to people unfamiliar with REEES. That is, I love the beauty of the Russian language, the people who speak it, and the talented professionals who work tirelessly to show a side of the world that can often be nearly inaccessible. Even when I found myself struggling over the summer, whether it was yet again cramming declensions and new vocabulary for Friday exams or learning how to form all varieties of participles, I still found a lot of enjoyment in learning and improving.

While improving my language skills in the classroom, I also found joy in the assignments and extracurriculars Middlebury organized outside of the classroom. I worked with my classmates to write, direct, and film a short film entirely in Russian. I saw my friends play "buffoons" in Russian choir and White Army Soldiers in Russian theater directed by Soviet playwright Sergei Kokovkin. I was there to cheer on the Russian School when we defeated our biggest rivals, the German School, in a nail-biter soccer match for final bragging rights. And, of course, we were all enthralled by the 2024 Olympics and Copa America, even if we did not always understand the excited Russian commentators.