

K. Edwards

Mellon Foundation and International Studies Fellowship for Incoming Graduate Students

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The financial support of the Mellon Foundation and International Studies Fellowship went toward an intensive summer Russian language program at the Learn Russian in the EU project, in participation with the Department of Russian and Slavic Linguistics at Daugavpils University. It helped to further my academic and career goals in two main ways. First, and most importantly, the intensive language study that I was able to undertake helped to solidify the Russian language groundwork that is the foundation for all of my academic and career endeavors. One-on-one instruction specifically tailored to my own language needs rapidly accelerated my ability to work with Russian texts in the original, thereby setting me on the path to dissertation research and writing in Russian literature. Secondly, this intensive and tailored language study helped me to pinpoint and polish weak points in my command of Russian, allowing for a more precise knowledge in the classroom as a future teacher of Russian. Immersion in the Russian-language speaking environment also enhanced my ability to include culturally relevant materials in daily instruction and will even allow me to encourage students' own participation in similar study abroad programs.

For seven weeks, I met individually with university professors for an average of five hours per day. They assisted me in cooperatively devoting this time to the finer points of Russian grammar and writing. As an aspiring scholar of Russian literature, it is essential that all future research, starting with my dissertation, be rooted in a nuanced understanding of Russian language texts. I have heretofore had much opportunity in my previous professional and academic undertakings to develop my speaking and listening abilities well into an advanced level. This program, however, helped to alleviate some of the strain that I had felt previously when working with literary texts that contain difficult vocabulary and syntax. I was also able to greatly improve my Russian writing ability, which I hope to eventually use to share research with Russian language audiences, whether in scholarly journals or at various conferences.

Having also been an instructor of Russian at UW-Madison, I have learned the importance of the accuracy of my own Russian in the classroom. In the communicative teaching environment where Russian is spoken almost exclusively, as an instructor I need to make sure that my own Russian is without mistakes. There are several areas where I was able to focus my intensive study, including more complicated vocabulary and constructions, such as participles, advanced aspect usage, and problematic nuances of meaning. The improvements that I made in these areas will be valuable in order to teach higher level Russian courses both at UW-Madison in coming semesters and in my future career as a professor of Russian. In addition to improving my fluency in Russian, studying at Daugavpils University provided me with a basis of knowledge for assisting future students in their own learning. In my capacity as a language instructor, I may eventually recommend to students, or even accompany them, on overseas exchange programs. Learning more about the processes of study abroad and different prospects for locations of that study was also valuable for my future effectiveness as an instructor overall. The opportunity provided by the Mellon Award was a unique opportunity for my growth as both a scholar and instructor, and I am very grateful for the support it provided.