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Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students

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With financial support from the Mellon Recruitment Award as well as a Foreign Language Area Studies summer grant, I attended the Middlebury College Davis School of Russian eight-week summer program for the 2018 term. My goal for the program was to raise my spoken Russian proficiency to the ACTFL (American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages) level of advanced-low or above, as part of the requirements at the UW-Madison Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic Ph.D. program to qualify for preliminary exams. I knew already that the complete immersion Russian school at Middlebury would be ideal for accomplishing this goal both because of the program's international reputation as a top language institute and because I studied abroad in Moscow through the Middlebury College School in Russia (also a complete immersion program) for the academic year of 2011-12.

At the Middlebury College summer 2018 program, I spent two weeks in the level 7 language class (the highest level of Russian language instruction), after which it was determined that my language proficiency development would be better suited in the program designed for graduate students. For the rest of the summer term, I took three graduate-level courses in Russian: Russian nonverbal communication, regional variations of Russian language, and Russian history post-1917. I also participated in extracurricular activities such as the Russian folk choir organized by Zolotoy Ples, Russian folk painting, and informal discussion meetings for LGBT+ students. At the culmination of the program, I wrote and presented my first conference paper in Russian for the graduate students' symposium, "Invalidnost' i vremia v tsikle Tsvetaevoi 'Podruga'" ("Disability and Time in Tsvetaeva's 'Podruga' Cycle") – a conference paper I later adapted into English to present at the 2018 Wisconsin Slavic Conference and (further revised) at the 2018 national Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies conference.

Through the long-term, strict immersion environment at Middlebury College and with help from highly skilled and motivated instructors and peer students, I succeeded in reaching my target language level. Since then, I have passed all the preliminary requirements and am now a doctoral candidate in Slavic Languages and Literatures. I am grateful to IRIS for all the support they have provided, without which I would not have been able to attend the Middlebury College summer program.