Need to Know: Russia

Objective of the “Need to Know” Document
The Need to Know document is an advising tool written by a Berkeley Study Abroad adviser to review program specific details that may impact a student’s decision to apply for an EAP program. The document is not a summary of eligibility requirements, academic, housing, application and other logistical details freely available to students on the UCEAP and BSA website, and reviewed by a student in the Program Self-Assessment.

The best sources of detailed program information are the UCEAP webpages for each Russia option http://eap.ucop.edu/OurPrograms/russia/Pages/default.aspx and the Program Guide from the prior academic cycle http://eap.ucop.edu/guides/Pages/default.aspx. See also the CIEE newsletters and blogs at bottom.

If any concerns you have are not addressed on the UCEAP website or this Need to Know document, please contact the BSA Russia adviser who visited the program in St. Petersburg briefly in October 2012.

Adviser Contact Information
For BSA Adviser name, phone, email and drop-in advising hours, visit http://studyabroad.berkeley.edu/contact/advising

Note about UCEAP’s Programs in Russia:
This UCEAP program is affiliated with the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE.) You will be required to submit a language evaluation form completed by a professor of Russian to CIEE at a later date. Students must be matriculated at the University of California for at least one semester before being eligible to apply.

Financial Aid and Scholarships for Study Abroad
- View UCB financial aid details and many scholarship opportunities on our webpage: http://studyabroad.berkeley.edu/finances
- Deadlines to apply for scholarships are earlier than you may think, so do your research now!
- Some scholarships that are good for students going to Russia are:
  - **Boren Scholarships** exist for Russia (among many other countries): Boren Scholarships offer generous financial assistance to US undergraduates who are US citizens in exchange for a substantial service commitment with the federal government upon completion. http://www.borenawards.org/boren_scholarship/basics.html
  - **Gilman Scholarship** (must receive Pell Grants.) In addition to the usual $5,000 for a semester program, students participating in programs in Russia can be considered for an extra $3,000 in “Critical Need Language” funds.: http://www.iie.org/en/Programs/Gilman-Scholarship-Program
  - UC Berkeley’s **Institute of International Studies Merit Scholarships** - non-need-based scholarships of up to $2000 each to support undergraduate research (can be done abroad) in any area of international studies (deadline is in November) - http://iis.berkeley.edu/content/undergraduate-merit-scholarships
  - CIEE, UCEAP’s partner in Russia, offers scholarships based on merit and financial need. An application for CIEE scholarships is available at http://www.ciee.org/study/scholarships/. The CIEE scholarships application must be sent directly to CIEE and is a separate document from the CIEE Study Center Program Application.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** There are no regular language courses in the Summer Russian Area Studies option, only a 2-unit optional survival Russian course so if you want to study Russian in-depth, you’ll need to choose a semester option.

**Taking Russian Language Classes P/NP**
Russian classes you take at Cal may be taken P/NP, but with your application you must provide a written note from your instructor or the Slavic Department stating what your letter grade would have been. It is your responsibility to make arrangements for this without prompting from the Russia adviser or BSA office. This is required even for the Area Studies programs though there is no minimum language requirement or minimum Language GPA. A Language GPA must still be calculated and provided to UCEAP by our office.

**Competitiveness of the Programs**
Students who meet the minimum eligibility requirements and submit a well-prepared application with an articulate Statement of Purpose will have a good chance of being selected.
Grad Students
Please read the “Graduate Students” link on our website at http://eap.ucop.edu/OurPrograms/Pages/GraduateStudents.aspx in order to know what you need to do right away to find out if EAP can work for you, i.e., complete and submit to our office the “Graduate Preliminary Inquiry Form” (GPIF) or the “Graduate Student Agreement” (GSAG). The GSAG is different from the GPIF. The GSAG is specifically for summer language & culture programs, and it basically confirms that the graduate students and their departments are aware that the courses offered on the program are only at the undergraduate level. The GPIF is an academic planning form that graduate students fill out for semester and year programs to confirm with the study center that the EAP program offers graduate courses they will be able to use towards their degree.

Selection Interviews
If you need to be interviewed, you will be notified by the Russia adviser after your application has been reviewed.

Passport, Visa Application, and International Travel Prior To The Program
Your passport must be valid for 6 months beyond the end date of the EAP program in Russia --- check the EAP Russia webpages to see the tentative end dates.

Also, your EAP application name and your passport name must be identical (not similar!) If there is a discrepancy of even one letter, hyphen, etc, the Russian consulate will not issue you a visa. Please check your passport name and use precisely that name on your EAP on-line application, even if it doesn’t match the name you use at UC Berkeley. If your passport name has an error, either get your passport fixed before you apply for EAP, or simply use the incorrect name on your EAP application in order to avoid a crisis later on.

FYI – international travel just prior to the program: The student visa application process for Russia is quite bureaucratic and time-consuming. Therefore, do not make any international travel plans for the months before the program starts until you receive all the details about arrival and visa application requirements that will arrive from UCEAP and CIEE via e-mail a few months prior to departure. Unless the Russian consulate changes its procedures (which is unlikely), you will have to relinquish your actual passport for 60 days or longer while the consulate processes your student visa. That means you can’t leave the country during that period. It may be possible to apply for a duplicate US passport, so if you must travel outside of the US during the few months prior to the official start date of the program, you should contact the National Passport Agency immediately to find out how long it will take to get a second passport and how to apply for it.

Male Russian Citizens or Dual Citizens – Military Service Requirement
Male students who have Russian or both Russian and American citizenship or who were born in Russia and did not formally renounce their Russian citizenship can be conscripted into the Russian military if they are 18-27 years old and have not satisfied their Russian military service requirement. Please check with the US State Dept or the Russian Embassy in Moscow for more information on this issue.

IMPORTANT NOTE re: Visa for Russia:
Students (male and female) who have both Russian and American citizenship, or who have American citizenship but were born in Russia, should also contact the State Department or the Russian Embassy in Moscow regarding their ability to obtain a Russian visa with an American passport. Students who fall into any of these categories should also notify their campus EAP adviser immediately in order to obtain further guidance from the UCEAP systemwide office.

Additional Application Materials for CIEE
Students must complete CIEE and host university application materials after their selection to the program. Students should note that the CIEE and host university application will require items that may take additional time to prepare, including, but not limited to, letters of recommendation, official transcript, and passport-size photos. Please do not take action until you have been given detailed instructions for these items.

HIV Test
The Russian consulate will require a negative HIV test result with your name on it in order to grant a student visa. More details after selection. If you have any reason to suspect that you might be HIV+, you might want to get tested anonymously first to avoid having this information become part of your permanent medical record.

Hepatitis A & B Vaccines
If you have not been vaccinated against Hepatitis A & B, you should investigate the vaccines and consider getting them, as these diseases are more prevalent in Russia than in the US. It’s best if you can spread the shots out over a period of 6 months, so don’t wait until after you have been selected to make a decision about these vaccinations. See http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/ for further information. The Tang Center has the vaccines.

Harassment and Discrimination Directed at Racial and Ethnic Minorities
The US Department of State website http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/russia.html (see “Safety and Security”, then “Crime”) states:
“Incidents of unprovoked, violent harassment against racial and ethnic minorities regularly occur throughout the Russian Federation. Travelers should exercise caution wherever large crowds have gathered. U.S. citizens most at risk are those of African, South Asian, or East Asian descent, or those who, because of their complexion, are perceived to be from the Caucasus region or the Middle East. These U.S. citizens are also at risk for harassment by police authorities.”

Recent students have told us that they did not experience such harassment, but it may be a possibility in small towns or rural areas of Russia. Saint Petersburg and Moscow are major tourist destinations and as such attract a diversity of visitors. If you have concerns about this information, please discuss them with the EAP Russia adviser.

**Harassment and Discrimination Directed at Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) Persons**

The US Department of State website [http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/russia.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/russia.html) (see “Local Laws and Special Circumstances” then “LGBT Rights”) states:

“Discrimination based on sexual orientation is widespread in Russia. Harassment, threats, and acts of violence targeting LGBTQ individuals have occurred. Government officials have been known to make derogatory comments about LGBTQ persons. In June 2013, the State Duma passed a law banning “the propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” to minors. Russian citizens found guilty of violating the law could face a fine of up to 100,000 rubles. Foreign citizens face similar fines, up to 15 days in jail, and deportation. The law is vague as to what Russia considers propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations. As a result, commentators have suggested the law makes it a crime to promote LGBTQ equality in public. Violence against the LGBT community has increased sharply since the law was passed, including entrapment and torture of young gay men by neo-Nazi gangs and the murder of multiple individuals due to their sexual orientation. Many view this legislation as encouraging such violence, with the majority of attacks against members of the LGBT community going unreported.”

LGBT students should review the U.S. Department of State [LGBT Travel Information page](http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/russia.html), the US Department of State webpage for Russian Federation [http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/russia.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/russia.html), the UCEAP Guide to Study Abroad, [Student Life](http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/country/russia.html) chapter, and UCEAP’s webpage on LGBT issues abroad: [http://eap.ucop.edu/Diversity/Pages/LGBTQ.aspx](http://eap.ucop.edu/Diversity/Pages/LGBTQ.aspx) These webpages contain many further resources for personal research.

A recent gay student on the program told us that he chose to keep a low profile about his sexual orientation and thus did not experience such harassment. While LGBTQ students should exercise caution in discussing their sexual orientation or gender identity with people they do not know well, students on the program report feeling safe and comfortable, and there are openly gay bars and clubs in St. Petersburg. As a tourist destination, St. Petersburg attracts a diversity of visitors.

If you have concerns about this information, please discuss them with the EAP Russia adviser. He might be able to get you in touch with the recent Russia alum.

**Study Abroad Alumni/ae**

Students who have studied in Russia are some of your best resources for information about Russia. If you would like to be put in touch with such students, simply send the Russia EAP Adviser an email addressed to the alums (e.g., “Dear alums, I have some questions about studying in Russia …”) and the message will be forwarded to them.

**CIEE Newsletters and Blogs from Russia**

There are UC students featured in many of these.

- [http://study-abroad-blog-st-petersburg.ciee.org/2015/08/index.html](http://study-abroad-blog-st-petersburg.ciee.org/2015/08/index.html) = newsletters (see Archives for more editions)
- [http://study-abroad-blog-st-petersburg.ciee.org/weblogs/](http://study-abroad-blog-st-petersburg.ciee.org/weblogs/) = blogs (see Archives for earlier blogs)