

# Enriching Engineering Education with Cultural and Social Aspects in a Study Abroad Program.

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**Abstract** — For the past six years the Michigan State University College of Engineering has been sending students on a study abroad program to Russia. During this time we have achieved significant results not only in terms of education and research, but also in the development of successful models for incorporating cultural experiences into our academic exchange. The program started as a one-month stay in Volgograd, during which students took one engineering course from an American faculty member who taught using the facilities of the Volgograd State Architectural and Civil Engineering University. The number of participating students has almost doubled each year, with last year's total reaching 70 students in 17 classes taught by faculty from three different MSU colleges. The cultural part of the program has been facilitated by developing an innovative Integrated Arts and Humanities (IAH) course that combines Russian culture and language. Most students take this course in order to satisfy their general humanities requirements. In this course students receive language and cultural knowledge that provides them with a deeper understanding of Russian life and society. In addition to their stay in Volgograd, students visit Moscow and St. Petersburg. In all three cities students take multiple field trips to sites of cultural, historical and social importance. These visits are prepared by the culture lectures and find lively reflection in the papers that the students write for the class. The lectures are intended to make the students more knowledgeable about the Russian past and present and to view Russian culture within the context of key ideas and issues in human experience. As writing is fundamental to learning in the humanities the course is writing intensive, which means that ample opportunities for writing are provided that involve considerable student-instructor interaction. Students are asked to not only experience Russian culture, but to actively engage with it. Beginning language study helps the students to overcome the barrier of being linguistically isolated in a foreign culture, and also helps them develop their basic skills in the target language environment. The comments that we hear after the students return are quite powerful. For example, students say that this experience has changed their lives, helped them to develop a deeper appreciation for their own culture and society, or that the trip was "eye-opening" and "a once in a lifetime event". The experience is very beneficial when it comes to employment. A number of our students have told us that the Russian trip was the only thing discussed in their job interviews. The cultural and social experience gained through our Study Abroad program distinguishes our students on a personal and professional level. Overall, we are convinced that this program for engineers, who are frequently deprived of culture-related subjects in their curriculum, has been very successful and is a template well worth sharing. We are committed to growing all aspects of the program each year, including the development of new educational models that bring together the professional, cultural and social spheres.

**Index Terms** — Engineering Education, innovative Integrated Arts and Humanities (IAH) course, models for incorporating cultural experiences into academic exchange, Study Abroad Program.

## Introduction.

With the globalization of the engineering marketplace, it is becoming increasingly important for U.S. engineering students to have an understanding of foreign cultures and business practices. One approach by which this experience is imparted to student is through study-abroad programs. Although the number of U.S. college students studying abroad increased to a record of over 160,000 in 2001-2002, this number amounts to only approximately 1% of the nation's full or part-time

undergraduates. Moreover, over half of these students traditionally study in Great Britain, Italy, Spain, or France. College students' lack of cultural exposure is a serious liability in today's climate of growing globalization of business and technology. This problem is especially acute in engineering, which accounts for only 3% of all U.S. students who study abroad. In response to this problem, we present an innovative model of international engineering education that is novel in design, large in scope (68 students in Summer 2004), and non-traditional in location.

The purpose of this paper is mainly to describe our experience in the development of successful models for incorporating cultural experiences into academic exchange. These models include:

- designing a unique educational itinerary;
- development of special Integrated Arts and Humanities class that builds on cultural experiences of the students;
- and last but not least, creating an atmosphere where US and Russian leadership pay close attention to the process of student adjustment to and adequate perception of a different culture, as well as their behavior in it.

## General Description of the Program.

The Russian study abroad program started as a one-month stay in Volgograd, during which students took one engineering course from an American faculty member who taught using the facilities of the Volgograd State Architectural and Civil-Engineering University. Over the past six years the program has undergone striking positive growth. Indeed, growing from a department level program to a university level and beyond program, enrollment and course-offering benchmarks include:

- 1998 – 18 students taking courses in one engineering department (CEE).
- 1999 – 7 students taking courses in one engineering department (CEE).
- 2000 – 14 students taking courses in one engineering department (CEE).
- 2001 – 24 students from two universities (MSU & MTU) taking courses in one engineering department (CEE).
- 2002 – 42 students from two universities (MSU & MTU) taking courses from two different MSU colleges: engineering courses in CEE & ME and an IAH course in Russian language and culture offered by the Department of Linguistics.
- 2003 – 48 students from two universities taking courses from three MSU different colleges: engineering courses in BCM, CEE and ME, engineering statistics from the Department of Statistics, and Russian language and culture courses offered by the Department of Linguistics.
- 2004 - 68 students from two universities taking 14 classes from four MSU different colleges: engineering courses in BCM, CEE and ME, engineering statistics from the Department of Statistics, Russian language and culture courses offered by the Department of Linguistics, and a course from CEPSE department of College of Education.

Overall, we view this program to be in a state of *controlled growth*. Indeed, despite such unanticipated events as September 11, 2001 or the current conflict in Iraq, the program has continued to show positive growth. It is the expectation of all personnel involved in this program that this successful maturation will continue into the future provided the primary goals of quality international education and rich cultural experience are kept in sharp focus.

Today the MSU Volgograd study abroad program is a five week program that offers students the opportunity to take courses critical to their degree while traveling to and through Russia by air, train, and boat. For most courses, the program starts with a two-week on-campus coursework period followed by a plane flight from Michigan to either St. Petersburg or Moscow. While the order varies, all students spend three days of sightseeing in St. Petersburg, and the same amount of days in Moscow. During the St. Petersburg portion of the trip, students visit *Peterhof* (Peter the Great's summer palace on the Baltic Sea), attend a traditional Russian show of folk dancing, take a boat tour through the city canals, and visit *The Hermitage* (Catherine The Great's winter palace). In Moscow students have the opportunity to visit Red Square (including Lenin's Tomb), tour the Kremlin, see a traditional Russian ballet, and wander the Tretyakov Museum, one of the world's finest art museums. The majority of the academic program takes place in the city of Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) on the Volga River. Last year students had classes in three participating Russian universities: Volgograd Architectural and Engineering University, Volgograd State Technical University, and Volgograd State Pedagogical University. Volgograd State Architectural and Engineering University, as well as participating engineering departments from MSU, remain the center of the program. All students receive instruction primarily by English-speaking faculty from MSU, as well as guest-lectures from resident experts. Students are also provided with the opportunity to take part in a number of guided cultural excursions including visits to numerous World War II memorials, the Volgograd opera and symphony, and famous Russian circus.

In Volgograd, the students are quite independent, but while in Moscow and St. Petersburg, they sightsee in groups. They generally get around by using the subway and walking great distances. The line of students often stretches out to a distance equal to a couple of city blocks. We always have a faculty member and a Russian-speaking guide at the front of the line and

a faculty member and Russian-speaker at the back of the line. The same procedure is use for getting in and out of the subway.

While in Russia, students travel from city to city by train. Train travel is the preferred mode of travel for most Russians, and students usually find this trip to be a pleasant and unique experience. Once the program is completed, it is not uncommon for students to take advantage of their eastern European location and continue their travels to destinations such as the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Scandinavia, and Spain.

A crucial ingredient for successful delivery of quality instruction in this program is the combination of effective teaching, small class sizes, and unusually liberal access to faculty. Typical class sizes range from eight to twenty students (a fraction of the size of comparable courses offered on the MSU campus), thereby providing students with the kind of personal one-on-one educational experience usually only found at expensive private colleges. In addition, since students' live side-by-side with faculty in all hotels, unprecedented access to faculty is commonplace. Indeed, some professors hold office hours in the quiet hotel lounges while others are open to having students simply drop by their hotel room for questions – often until midnight or 1am in the morning! This unique opportunity for students and faculty to work together on technical problems and cultural challenges has a positive effect on student morale, education and their overall experience.

Another primary concern of this program (and all study-abroad programs) is student safety and security. At all times students stay in modern Russian hotels with twenty-four hour security, side-by-side with faculty members and Russian guides. Consequently, students have significant contact with faculty at all times, both inside and outside of the classroom. Moreover, for those times when students are off on their own, the program employs a number of bi-lingual Russian students to assist MSU students as they interact with the Universities, explore the cities, shop, go to restaurants, and experience the various nightlife opportunities. Finally, the participating Russian Universities themselves feature full-time security guards that tightly control access to and from the facility.

Considering the variety of cultural and academic opportunities available to participants in this program, the cost is relatively low. For summer 2004 the program fee was just under \$2000. This fee includes hotel accommodations for the entire trip, all internal travel fees, accident and sickness insurance, all excursion fees, and meals while in Volgograd. In addition to this fee and normal student tuition, students are also responsible for their airfare, passport fees, pre-departure doctor/immunization fees, and personal spending money. To offset these costs, participating students are eligible to apply for scholarships and grants through the Office of Study Abroad. Finally, due the strong buying power of the U.S. dollar in Russia, students find that spending money in excess of \$500 is more than sufficient to provide for a pleasurable experience for the entire trip.

## **Models for Incorporating Cultural Experiences in Student Education Abroad.**

The cultural experiences are a crucial part of MSU Volgograd Study Abroad Program. Without them, it simply would not make sense to take big groups of students to Russia in order to receive instruction similar to the one on campus. That is why the quality of these experiences, as well as students' perception of them, are some of the most important concerns of the program leadership.

We believe that there are two major parts of our students' cultural experiences in a foreign country: formal and informal, which could be related to the concepts known in the literature as Culture with a big "C" and culture with a small "c". The formal part consists of sightseeing tours, which are essential for historical and cultural education of our students. The informal part includes the process of getting acquainted with a different culture, adjusting to it, and developing an ability to function within it. Formal and informal cultural experiences are not isolated from each other, and in case of our program, we have done everything to make them as complimentary to each other as possible.

## **Itinerary of Cultural Exploration.**

It is not accidentally that we visit three cities while in Russia, and that these cities are Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Volgograd. There is a strong logic behind such composition, as we think that it allows our students to receive the richest and fullest impression of Russia, in the time allowed. Moscow is often called the heart of Russia: a cosmopolitan, modern administrative and business center, very international in its orientation, as well as a treasury of Russian history and Orthodox tradition with over 850 years of baggage. St. Petersburg fairly "young", the city celebrated its 300 anniversary in 2003 (with our group present just in time for the festivities), however, it witnessed a lot of important historical events, decisive for the Russian history and culture. Volgograd is crucial for learning the history of the World War II, and it also serves the purpose of getting outside the capitals and experiencing Russian life and culture in a smaller provincial city. The purpose of the next few paragraphs is to recreate students' experiences on the trip.

## **St. Petersburg.**

Walking down the Nevsky prospect, the main street of St. Petersburg, towards the Winter Palace (Hermitage Museum), the students keep stopping the tour guide in order to take pictures and have a closer look at the ornate architecture of the palaces that belonged in past centuries to the Russian nobility. St. Petersburg is a city of canals, the “Venice of the North,” and the bridges are a special treat for those who like intriguing sights and spectacular pictures. The drawbridges across the Neva River are a famous attraction and large numbers of people gather to watch them rise late at night, especially during the “white nights” in late June when it never really gets dark.

Our destination, the famous Winter Palace, always inspires awe in the group. The students stand in the huge palace square and are amazed at the size of the vast ensemble of buildings surrounding them, especially the palace itself with its statues and ornate golden decorations. Hopefully it is a sunny day, and students go through at least a roll of film in order to record all the monuments.

Many Americans are surprised to find out that the Winter Palace and the Hermitage Museum are in the same building. Inside, are hundreds of rooms and it would take several days to really get acquainted with them. Just the same, the several hours the students spend in the palace usually leave an unforgettable impression.

The next day we are on the Nevsky again, in a hurry to visit the Cathedral of the Savior on the Blood, which commemorates the spot on which Tsar Alexander II was assassinated. We can’t miss however, the Kazansky and St. Isaac Cathedrals, the latter with its magnificent golden dome and a wonderful panorama view of the city from the top. The third day is dedicated to visiting the famous Summer Palace in Peterhof, with its unique and beautiful cascade of fountains on the shore of the Gulf of Finland.

On one of the nights the group always visits the Russian Show, a professional entertainment program which consists of traditional Russian folk singing and dancing. The action on the stage really makes the travelers “feel like Russians” causing them to jump in their seats following the energetic rhythm of the music. During the intermission the “new-born Russians” have a chance to chase a shot of vodka with a black caviar sandwich.

After three days, we are leaving St. Petersburg with a soul enriched by history and art. We are now ready for our journey into the “heart” of Russia where many more impressions await. Dragging their suitcases along the marble hallways of the hotel, the students say “good-bye, thank you and see you again” in Russian to the hotel staff.

## **Moscow.**

One’s first trip on the Moscow metro (sub way) can be as impressive as a visit to a major museum. Every station is uniquely beautiful - replete with marble walls and floors, intricate mosaics and chandeliers. One highlights the republics of the Soviet Union, the next gives the history of the Komsomol and Communist party, another celebrates the heroism of Russian mariners during World War II, and yet another is a memorial to the famous Russian twentieth-century poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. Our group gets off at the Arbat Street station, a small Russian Broadway and walks past row upon row of souvenir shops, bears on chains (would you like to take a picture?), artists ready to create your portrait in a half an hour, and, at the end of the street, a Russian McDonalds.

Students walk a bit farther and find themselves on Red Square. The famous St. Basil’s Cathedral is right in front of them, the Lenin Mausoleum is on the right, and the Kremlin wall with the famous clock is right behind it. To the left is the biggest shopping mall in Russia, GUM (expensive!), and then, right next to it – the small church of the Kazanskaya Mother of God. Behind us is the Russian Historical Museum. “We didn’t know that all this is on Red Square!”

The next day we take a tour inside the Kremlin walls. The students see Cathedral Square with five cathedrals and the churches of the imperial family, and then go on a tour through the Treasury and Armory museums.

Our visit to Moscow is usually crowned with a ballet in the Kremlin Palace, and everybody leaves the performance impressed and satisfied. The group also visits the Tretyakov Art gallery, and we almost always have time for a walk in Gorky Park and a boat trip on the Moscow River. The students bring back lots of pictures, interesting stories and happy memories.

## **Volgograd.**

Volgograd is located in southern Russia on the Volga River. The city was founded in 1589 as a fortress to protect central Russia from nomadic tribes and was called Tsaritsyn until 1925. Renamed after Stalin, the city became world famous for the Stalingrad Battle of World War II in 1942-1943. In 1961, the city’s name was changed to Volgograd. The city stretches along the bank of the Volga for about 100 kilometers (70 miles) curving with the river. It is an easy place to find one’s way around. It feels comfortable to students and allows them to participate actively in local life almost from the beginning. The fact that there are still no American fast food franchises in Volgograd makes it more appealing for our purposes.

The highlight of the cultural program in Volgograd is a visit to the famous war memorials at Mamajev Hill and the Panorama Museum, which contains an amazing panoramic mural of the battle. The statue of Mother Russia stands on the pinnacle of the Mamajev hill memorial complex, and is the object of everyone's admiration. Talking walls, the hall of fame, the pond of tears, and statues of the defenders of the motherland and of the grieving mother cause one to reconstruct mentally the atmosphere of the war and the battle in particular. A visit to Volgograd enables the students to comprehend a very important period in Russian history, the Great Patriotic War (World War II), and to understand how and why it changed Russia and Russians. In addition, our students get an entirely different perspective of WW II in the world history. The battle of Stalingrad continues to have a profound effect on the city's inhabitants and although WW II is now a distant memory for most Americans, the students begin to see its importance and begin to recognize that some of their assumptions about events and battles might require some readjustment.

In addition to war monuments, the students visit such sights as the power plant on the Volga River, which provides energy for a considerable part of the country, the planetarium including a lecture, the museum of the history of the city and the region, etc. The entertainment part of the program includes visits to the circus, theatre, a soccer match and a variety of events that take place on the embankment – a beautiful place in the center of the city complete with steps leading right into the river, a fountain dedicated to “friendship among nations”, river-side cafés and bars, a stage and a concert hall.

## **Designing a course in Integrated Arts and Humanities.**

The cultural part of the program is facilitated by developing an innovative Integrated Arts and Humanities (IAH) course that combines Russian culture and language. Most students take this course in order to satisfy their general humanities requirements, which is always the case unless they have already completed their IAH requirements and/or must take more than two engineering classes that are crucial for their graduation.

In this course students receive language and cultural knowledge that provides them with a deeper understanding of Russian life and society. Most of the program tours and fieldtrips are prepared by the culture lectures and find lively reflection in the papers that the students write for the class. The lectures are intended to make the students more knowledgeable about the Russian past and present and to view Russian culture within the context of key ideas and issues in human experience. Students are asked to not only experience Russian culture, but to actively engage with it. Beginning language study helps the students to overcome the barrier of being linguistically isolated in a foreign culture, and also helps them develop their basic skills in the target language environment.

We begin our Russian Language and Culture class in March. Although it is technically a Summer semester course, we think that starting early serves to prepare students for more efficient cultural assimilation into Russian life. The purpose of the language portion of the class is to provide practical language skills that students can utilize during their time in Russia. Basic language skills, of course, will also enable them to better comprehend Russian culture. The cultural component is designed as a context through which students are able to understand and process new cultural information. The approach is interdisciplinary and includes units on history, music, art, film, architecture and literature.

In Russia the class includes both classroom work in Russian language and culture as well as excursions and cultural experiences in Russia. In each city, the lectures are closely linked to the excursions and readings. Before visiting St. Petersburg, for example, the students read a coursepack text called “The Facades of Power,” about the imperial architecture of the city, as well as Aleksandr Pushkin's narrative poem, “The Bronze Horseman,” and Nikolai Gogol's short story “The Overcoat.” The latter two works are credited with creating the “myth” of St. Petersburg as a beautiful city of grand buildings and wide canals that was built, however, at great human sacrifice, literally on the bones of its builders. We also see, however, that later, after Leningrad/St. Petersburg survived the Stalin purges in the thirties and the Nazi blockade in WWII, its image changes and it becomes the “hero city.” In Volgograd, the site of the “Battle of Stalingrad,” in which the German advance into the Soviet Union was decisively halted, we concentrate on World War II. Excursions to the numerous local museums and memorials are used illustrate the significant role that the city played in the Soviet mythology relating to World War II. The focus for Moscow is the role of Orthodoxy in Russian history, particularly as it is expressed in Russian iconography (the Tretyakov Gallery). We also concentrate on the radical differences in architecture between Moscow and St. Petersburg. As the former Soviet and current Russian Federation capital, Moscow is also examined in lectures, films and readings as a city which witnessed the horrors of the purges during Stalin's rule and the cultural stagnation of Brezhnev, but also as the center of perestroika and the recent attempts at building a new Russia.

As writing is fundamental to learning in the humanities the course is writing intensive, which means that ample opportunities for writing are provided that involve considerable student-instructor interaction. Some of the writing options include contemplations about the myth of St. Petersburg and its significance in Russian history and literature, discussing the role of the Battle of Stalingrad in shaping the city's contemporary self-image, contrasting the traditional Moscow image of the “city of churches,” with the contemporary dynamic and bustling capital.

We have now taught our IAH course five times. This past year, with thirty students, was the largest enrollment we have had. In 2001 and 2002 students from Michigan Technical University also took the IAH course, by distance learning through the MSU CODEC facilities. We used these facilities in 2003 with Northwestern College in Traverse City as well. Although we did not have a distance learning component in 2004, we intend to continue to recruit students from other universities and may very likely revive it. Some other plans include offering more than one section of the course on campus, in order to address our increasing enrollment and schedule conflicts that they students may have when we try to accommodate a large group. There are also thoughts of developing a second IAH course that will be devoted to studying World War II in Russia and comparing American and Russian perspectives on it.

Students who are enrolled in IAH class are guided through various historical sites with a mature context and an educational goal, thereby providing them with a rich cultural experience quite uncommon in comparable programs. Indeed, the existence of this course is a testament to the unique collaboration that exists between the technical and cultural aspects of this program.

## **Student Perception of a Different Culture – Guidance and Mentorship Approaches.**

Getting adjusted to a culture as different as Russian culture and learning how to function in it over only five weeks is not an easy task. Our goal is to provide our students with as much of adequate experience as it is only possible.

American students come to Russia with already developed stereotypical pictures of Russia created by the images of the cold war and inaccurate media representations. We also found that American tourists who go to Europe have a strong stereotype of themselves as sticking out of the crowd due to behavior and clothing, having poor manners and being culturally ignorant. It takes time to ruin these stereotypes and what is most important, not to let them get in the way of a healthy perception of Russia.

Besides existing stereotypes, there are also dangers of creating false ones on the spot. Due to the economic situation, some aspects of Russian life cause the students to form misconceptions, for example a trivial poor maintenance of public bathrooms due to the lack of money in the public sector makes Americans think that Russians don't pay much attention to hygiene.

Again, due to the economic situation the income levels and lifestyles of Russians differ greatly at the present moment of political transition. Russians are extremely hospitable, and they will completely go out of their way to accept and entertain their guests. It is important to us that our students can make fair judgments of how much an average Russian family can afford and what its lifestyle is. Otherwise, the students easily get under the impression that Russians are big spenders and partiers. It is crucial for the program that American students and faculty are good guests and honorable representatives of their own country.

In order to address the above and many other issues of students' socialization in Russian cultures, we developed several techniques and practices that are discussed below.

American and Russian faculty members involved in the program are expected to act as mentors and role models for the students throughout the duration of the program. Besides that, all student-faculty meetings that precede the trip and continue throughout it include conversations that set high expectations for student behavior and intend to give them as much information as possible about the norms of Russian society.

Even though most of the instruction that students receive comes from American faculty, being in the walls of Russian Universities makes our students constant observers and participants of many facets of the Russian educational system. We try to encourage and facilitate this experience, since it has been proven that the more contact American students have with Russian culture, the better it is for their perception and adjustment. Russian students from participating universities are always welcome to sit in MSU classes and collaborate with American students. We think it is very beneficial for engineering students to see what is expected of their counterparts in Russia and to learn about their system of education. Besides student interaction, it is our goal to train and include as many Russian instructors into our academic exchange as possible. We have now been able to prepare some excellent Volgograd faculty members to teach the engineering courses and this has been a great improvement.

Outside of their studies, American students are encouraged to invite their Russian friends to the events that are planned for the MSU groups, such as concerts, museum visits, sport events, etc., with the program being responsible for their accommodation, and whereas affordable, cost. There are special events that are planned by program leadership to connect Russian and American students, such as talent shows and sport competitions.

## **Student Reactions.**

The comments that we hear after the students return are quite powerful. For example, students say that this experience has changed their lives, helped them to develop a deeper appreciation for their own culture and society, or that the trip was “eye-opening” and “a once in a lifetime event”. We think that this is partially explained by the fact that Russia, in contrast to much of Western Europe, is very different from the US. On the other hand, despite the stereotypes, students don't physically stick out in Russia and are not immediately branded as foreigners. The gray area between the differences and the surface similarities enables them to experience life in Russia more than they would be able to in other countries. As it was already discussed, we are trying to facilitate our students’ cultural experiences in multiple ways. We hope that some quotes of their reactions that we included below will help the reader to evaluate the effectiveness of our efforts.

**Jennifer:** “Overall I liked the trip and learned a lot about Russian culture. In my opinion taking the IAH 221 course was essential to even start grasping the importance of the things that we saw while in Russia. In addition to giving us the historical framework to base things in, it gave us a chance to become familiar with a few of the things that we were going to see. Recognition and familiarity I believe are some of the keys to liking places”.

**Robert:** “One positive thing that I noticed was the amount of national pride that seemed to be shared by all of the residents of the city. I imagine that this is due to the great price paid in the Battle of Stalingrad during the Great Patriotic War. If only Americans were as patriotic about our country as Russia are about theirs. All in all it was a good experience, and one that I won't soon forget”.

**Andrew:** “It is really hard to explain the entire Volgograd experience in a few paragraphs. It was one of the, if not the, most amazing experiences in my life. In just a month and a half I created friendships and bonds with people half of the world away. The amount of culture experience I received was staggering”.

**Gregory:** “For me personally going to Russia and Volgograd has been one of the best things that I have ever pursued. The whole Russian atmosphere has an aura about it that I truly feel has changed not only me but my outlook on life in a positive way”.

**Richard:** “This is not an ordinary museum visit [Panorama]; this was a visit that I will remember for the rest of my life.”

**Drew:** “I even found a newfound respect for what happened, and while it [his knowledge of history] is still shortcoming next to Irene's, when I return to America the change will likely be much more visible.”

**Meagan:** “I thought it [Russia] is extremely different from America, but the experience was extremely worthwhile and I had a lot of fun, and this is the truth... I will forever remember these distinct cities of Russia and my perception of them. My Russian experience will never be forgotten”.

## **Conclusion.**

The cultural and social experience gained through our Study Abroad program distinguishes our students on both personal and professional levels. We often hear that when the future employers of our students see “Russia” on their resume, it becomes the only topic for discussion. Businesses in the United States respect one's international experience and value it as a potential capital. Interaction with different majors within the program also proves to be healthy and beneficial for engineering students, broadening their perspectives and circles of communication. Overall, we are convinced that this program for engineers, who are frequently deprived of culture-related subjects in their curriculum, has been very successful and is a template well worth sharing. We are committed to growing all aspects of the program each year, including the development of new educational models that bring together the professional, cultural and social spheres.