

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
ITHACA, NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
BOARDMAN HALL

MAR 2 1942

October 15, 1941

Dr. David H. Stevens
The Rockefeller Foundation
49 West 49th Street
New York, N.Y.

Dear Dr. Stevens:

Thank you very much for your good letter of the 9th. I too was very glad to have an opportunity to talk over with you some of the long-run and short-run problems of developing the Slavic field in this country, and I am looking forward to similar and more frequent opportunities in the future.

Our main long-run problem is to secure a stronger representation of the teaching of Slavic history and literature in the principal universities, through showing the universities the importance of providing better equipped personnel in these fields, within their existing history and literature departments. We should look forward, for example, to having Russian history taught by men especially trained in that field and able to do useful research in it, rather than leaving it to men trained entirely in the Western European field.

Our principal short-range problem, it seems to me--and our talk of last week has greatly strengthened that impression--is to enable the Government to meet its rapidly expanding need for men able to use Russian. In accordance with our conversation I have now drawn up a statement of the need and of what seems to me the best way to meet it, and I enclose a brief memorandum outlining the way in which I feel the intensive Russian course could best be administered. I have shown this memorandum to Dr. Day, who has expressed agreement with it and an eagerness to put these facilities of the University to the service of the national emergency, provided the further details can be worked out. A definite instructional budget for this purpose is being worked out, and I expect to be able to send it to you on Saturday or Monday. In the meantime, I felt I should send you the general plan for the proposed set-up without delay.

The principal problem not treated in my brief statement is that of recruiting the fifteen members of the intensive course. In general I assume that they would be employees of the Government, detailed for this purpose, and that the selection would be made, if the plan as a whole is acceptable, by Dr. Graves and the government agencies with which he is in contact in Washington.

Very sincerely yours,
Philip E. Mosely

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Cornell University
Russian Studies

A Proposal For
An Intensive, Emergency Course in Russian
To be given at Cornell University
Winter, 1941-1942

Purpose

As the widening impact of the new World War on America's position has brought to the fore the need for increasing administrative use of some of the principal less-known languages, our authorities have been faced with the alternative of bringing into government service the scanty personnel already familiar with those languages and their countries, or of giving intensive instruction in these languages to their existing personnel. Drawing the available outside personnel into government service presents several dangers, and can be justified only on the doubtful assumption that the emergency will soon pass over. There is no assurance that such outside personnel, limited in number, is utilized to the full, since the government authorities usually lack a basis for judging the best ways to apply their special knowledge and individual capacities. The absorption of this specialized personnel into official service may deprive society at large of ~~the~~ persons who can interpret events and policies ^{can} and thus further the enlightenment of the public as an essential element in the formation of policy in a democracy. Finally, the depletion of training cadres in understaffed fields disrupts programs for training new personnel, both for continuing research responsibilities and for the immediate and longer-run needs of administration. While a part of this outside personnel must be drawn into government work, we should also consider more seriously the training of present administrative personnel in the techniques of these special fields, especially in languages.

The training of existing administrative personnel offers several important economies of effort. Government employees, familiar with the workings of administration and the making of policy, can apply their new language equipment at once to the task at hand, unlike the newly recruited outsider. In addition, the government should now bear, or should be assisted to bear, some responsibility for enlarging its personnel in fields of continuing, perhaps permanent, concern. Intensive training courses are already operating in respect to Chinese and Japanese, and the purpose of this note is to suggest the importance of setting them up for Russian and to outline a plan for meeting this need as quickly as possible. Fortunately, in the case of Russian the acquisition of a working knowledge is much easier than in the case of most non-European languages, and a considerable fund of experience is available as a guide, thanks to the establishment of intensive Russian courses with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, beginning in 1934.

Proposed Method of Work

An intensive course in Russian should be planned so as to equip students of average ability in languages to use accurately and with fair speed materials of the type of newspaper and periodical reading, and to assist them to begin the systematic acquisition of specialized vocabularies essential to work in their fields of interest. It is proposed, therefore, that the intensive course, reckoned on the basis of fifteen students, should last for twelve weeks, rather than for the more usual ten or six weeks. The rate of absorption depends as much on the time available ^{and} on the opportunity for constant ~~repetition~~ repetition and patient correction, as on the ability to master the essentials of grammar; the considered opinion of those who have taught or studied in the intensive Russian courses is that a too rapid pace is ~~too~~ fatiguing and does not produce the best long-run results. Under the schedule proposed the student would receive 120 hours of classroom work (grammar, reading, vocabulary-building), at the rate of two hours per day, five days a week, for twelve weeks (no allowance for vacations).

The proposed schedule of instruction is as follows:

First and second weeks: seven beginning lessons of grammar, exercises.
 Third through ninth weeks: twenty three lessons of grammar, completing basic grammar; reading in materials of graduated difficulty; vocabulary-building.
 Tenth through twelfth weeks: complete review of grammar; reading in specialized fields; further building of basic Russian vocabulary.

The books proposed are: Bondar's Russian Grammar (first nine weeks); Patrick's Russian Reader (throughout); Forbes' Russian Grammar (last three weeks; specialized material, in Russian newspapers and periodicals, used directly or in mimeographed form.

Supplementary Aids in the Intensive Study

Tutor. A native tutor, experienced in individual instruction, should be provided for afternoon work with individuals or with groups of two or three students. In the first weeks his function will be to clear up grammar difficulties, to drill individuals on weak points of grammar and construction, to assist in building vocabulary through explanation and repetition, and to begin the building of a hearing and speaking knowledge of the language through reading aloud, dictation, and elementary conversation. Work with the tutor would be concentrated on one or two afternoons, for any given student, thus leaving most afternoons for private study. In the latter part of the work the tutor would devote more of his time to building up specialized vocabularies, while continuing to work on any serious "kinks" in grammar and to improve pronunciation.

Background Lectures. Since exclusive concentration on the study of language over a period of twelve or even of six weeks is fatiguing in itself, the strain might be somewhat relieved by including in the schedule two, or maybe, three lectures a week in English on the background of modern Russia. These lectures would be pointed up to assist in ~~an~~ understanding ~~of~~ the problems with which the student should have some familiarity. For example,

one lecture a week, on recent Russian literature, might deal primarily with the analysis of Russian character types and social problems through analysis in class of recent Russian novels and plays. As an illustration, the presentation of the problem of the peasantry under collectivization in Afinogenov's Bread, or of the intelligentsia in his play, Fear, might be one topic; others, the role of the technician in Yasensky's Man Changes Skin, the problem of the Soviet bureaucrat in Kataev's novels, everyday problems of ordinary citizens in Zoshchenko's humorous stories, and so forth. Similarly, one lecture a week on the current problems of the Soviet Union might deal with such problems as the organization and working of the collective farms, labor discipline, changes in the content of intellectual life, the role of the Communist Party and of the bureaucracy, and so forth, and would, in part, be based on current materials, such as articles in newspapers and periodicals, brought into the classroom for analysis.

Since one of the main hurdles in learning a language is the difficulty of acquiring a "feel" for its connotations and overtones in living use, as distinct from the formal translating of non-equivalent terms from one language to another, these background lectures should be of use to the student in learning to interpret present-day Russian terminology. At the same time, they should help to keep the student's attention focussed on the purpose of his intensive work and thus assist him through the grind of straight language-study. Background lectures would be scheduled in the morning, to follow the classroom work in the language. They would not involve outside preparation or examinations; suggested readings and opportunities for consultation would be available to any students who might have some leisure time for background reading, at first in English, later in Russian.

Russian Luncheons. Under the proposed plan at least three Russian-speaking staff members would be available to speak Russian at luncheon with the members of the intensive course. Additional Russian-speaking persons could be invited from time to time, to provide variety of personality and accent. A special room could be set aside for the daily luncheons.

Proposed Staff

Three out of four members of the proposed staff are available at Cornell. The language instructor would be Dr. J. A. Posin, who, next to Professor George Patrick, has had the longest experience of anyone in the country in teaching intensive courses in Russian. Professor Ernest J. Simmons would be available for background lectures in Russian literature and ideas; Professor Philip E. Mosely, for background lectures on Russian social and political problems and Soviet diplomacy. A tutor would presumably be brought to Ithaca for the duration of the course.

Philip E. Mosely

October 13, 1941.