

Cross-Cultural Communication

This column deals with cross-cultural issues. Topics covered will include teaching culture through language, cross-cultural communication in business environment and cross-cultural communication in academic settings. Any suggestions are welcomed. Please contact Elena Denisova-Schmidt (elena.denisova-schmidt@unisg.ch)

Drinking culture

Russians have a different drinking culture: it is not about the quantity, but more about the quality. When socializing with Russians, it is very important to be able to make a toast – not just *на здоровье!* (cheers!), but really a short speech, at least. Sometimes I include additional exercises on toasting as well as avoiding drinking in my intercultural seminars. Two exercises are described below.

Exercise 1: Toasting

A. Imagine that you are in Russia; please propose a toast

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to a colleague's major birthday (30, 35, 40, etc.)

to New Year's Day (January 1)

to Defender's Day (February 23)

to Women's Day (March 8)

B. Professional holidays:

Please imagine that you are the General Manager of *Ford Russia*. Please make a toast to the Day of *Employees of Automobile Industry*.

(the last Sunday in October)

Please imagine that you are the General Manager of *Alcoa Russia*. Please make a toast to the Day of *Metallurgists*.

(the third Sunday in July)

Please imagine that you are the General Manager of *Zurich Russia*. Please make a toast to the Day of *Insurance Agents*.

(October 6)

Exercise 2: Strategies to avoid drinking

Task:

You are spending a week with your business partners. This company is extremely fond of the Russian form of 'Socializing', i.e., consuming a lot of food and a lot of alcoholic beverages, almost every evening. What would you like to do in order to avoid drinking too much?

After discussing students' possible answers, I present some of the 'best practices' I have observed in similar situations, such as:

Many western people 'invent' excuses:

I have a sick liver. (Warning! Vodka is considered to be a medicine in Russia)

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I take some medicine. I am not allowed to drink.

If alcohol is offered during breakfast or lunch, one can try to say:

I am still going to work later. (This excuse doesn't work in the evening, however.)

It is possible to make a joke:

Что русскому хорошо, то немцу/швейцарцу/американцу смерть!

One can try to change glasses of vodka for glasses of water.

One can try to pour out vodka secretly into flowers or plants on the floor.

Then I explain this Russian peculiarity:

It should be seen as a ritual. To force somebody to drink is an essential part of Russian hospitality. Not drinking is frowned upon, because drinking is considered a part of 1) social competence and 2) being a real man. Women usually have some advantages; they are seldom forced to drink.

I also point out that the drinking habits of the Russian business elite are changing.

Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian

Binghamton University (SUNY) - Binghamton, NY

The Department of German and Russian Studies at Binghamton University invites applications for a Visiting Assistant Professor of Russian beginning September 1, 2011. The initial appointment is for one year with the possibility of renewal.

Requirements: Specialization is open; applicants should demonstrate the ability to teach a broad range of courses in Russian language, literature and cultural studies and indicate how they can contribute to an interdisciplinary program in Russian and East European Studies in an active and collegial Department. A dynamic and engaged research program should support the mission of the Department and Binghamton University. Candidates for the position should have completed the Ph.D. by the time of appointment and will have demonstrated excellence in teaching. Native or near-native proficiency in Russian and English is required.

Application Instructions: Please submit electronically (binghamton.interviewexchange.com): a cover letter, curriculum vitae, a statement of teaching philosophy oriented toward an undergraduate Russian Studies program in a liberal arts atmosphere, and sample course syllabi. A writing sample may be requested later.

Also arrange for three letters of reference to be sent directly to: Chair, Russian Search Committee, Department of German and Russian Studies, Binghamton University, P.O. Box 6000, Binghamton, New York 13902-6000. Review of applications will begin in early December and will continue until the position has been filled. Please direct questions to Donald Loewen (djlloewen@binghamton.edu).