

STEPS Students Report

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At first, I want to say that I'm writing this not only as a program report, but also as an introductory paper for prospective program participants. Therefore, even if you feel the description is unnecessarily detailed, please be understanding.

To begin with, I would like to briefly introduce the reason why I applied for this program. When I was a sophomore, I was wondering which to major Civil Engineering (CE) or International Relations (IRs), and finally, I chose the former because I realized that I was not such a clever person as could achieve something in the field of peace building, where I want to be involved in the future, without any specific background. Of course, even if I'm in CE department, I can study theoretical things about IRs through reading textbooks and articles. However, here I have few opportunities to discuss specific topics from an academic point of view, which I believe are the most important parts of the IRs study. Therefore, this joint program between IRs department of Saint-Petersburg University and our department was really attractive for me. Moreover, Russia seemed to be just a right place for that purpose because it has a lot of differences from my own country in many ways, which may result in the difference in the way of thinking.

Basically, I had two main activities during my visit to Saint-Petersburg State University. One was daily attendance at ordinary classes, and another was writing a short report on one specific topic.

In regard to the classes, I could choose any from both those for exchange students and those for master students. Almost all classes are divided into the lecture part, where teachers give lectures, and the seminar part, where students make discussions based on these lectures. The topics were, for example, EU-Russia relations, US-Russia relations, Theories of International Relations, Color Revolutions, Russian foreign policy, etc. Most of them were placing the country Russia at the center, and I strongly realized that in Japan, I had seldom been exposed to Russian viewpoint of the world, which seemed to be sometimes closer to but sometimes farther from ours than I had expected. We also have a lot of homework such as reading articles and preparing for presentations. In my case, not being majoring International Relations in Japan, I bought and read some online books dealing with related topics, in addition.

While attending the classes, I also made a research on Russia's International Development Assistance Policy. The reason why I chose this topic was as follows. Although the Soviet Union was once one of the largest donors of international development assistance, after its collapse, Russia had to spend not a short time as a recipient. That's why recently she has been defining herself as a "Re-emerging" donor. What is important is that as everybody knows, Russia's foreign policy has also shifted from ideological to pragmatic through the same period. When we talk about development assistance of one country, we cannot ignore its diplomacy. In that sense, I thought Russia was a good subject to promote better understanding about the relationship between development assistance and diplomacy. Actually, my great regret is that I should have chosen a topic that is more relevant to the professor's research so that I could make the best of this opportunity with his academic advice. Since I had only 5 weeks in Saint Petersburg, I didn't apply the hypothesis testing approach, so my work was an overview of Russia's development assistance as a diplomatic tool, especially focusing on legacy of the Soviet era, sector and regional priority, form of assistance, public attitude toward assistance and Inter-ministerial conflict (I think the last one is the most important factor affecting Russia's development assistance policy).

To be honest, I'm not so sure that what I did in this program is what I cannot do here in Japan. However, at least I can say definitively that that is what I wouldn't try without this opportunity. Pausing my research in CE department, I could reconsider my future from a more long-term viewpoint than usual through putting myself in the totally different field which is also my great concern. I hope this experience can be a guidepost for me somewhere in the future, whatever I will be doing.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to the staffs of STEPS office for coordinating this program. Without your help, I couldn't have gotten such a valuable experience.