

**ACTR OLYMPIADA OF SPOKEN RUSSIAN
REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIADA
FOR ACTR BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
WASHINGTON, DC
APRIL 13, 2019**

The International Olympiada of Spoken Russian took place at the Pushkin Institute in Moscow, Russia in the first week of December 2018. This was the 3rd year of the competition at the Pushkin Institute in its current format. This past December four students were chosen to compete at the International Olympiada based on the selection process which is outlined below. The process involves many steps. Since 2016 when this competition started, Benjamin Gaylord and American Councils have assisted in coordinating the selection process, arranging travel for the group and providing visa support. Participating in the International Olympiada would not be possible without their support. There are several issues involved in the International Olympiada that are also outlined below. One issue in particular that has been challenging is the timeframe for selection and preparation of the finalists for the competition. Notification and dates are not usually available until the summer and then the process does not start until the fall. The competition has so far taken place at the beginning of December leaving a short window of time for selection and then preparation of the group including flights and visa support. In addition, this past year, we were not informed exactly which week the competition would take place until late September, adding to the challenging nature of selecting participants and preparing for the trip. Below is listed the selection process with criteria and also issues that have been encountered while planning and preparing for this yearly event.

Selection Process:

National Olympiada co-chairs send a call for nominees to the regional chairs with required criteria and due dates. In 2016 and 2017 this was done in late August once information about the International Olympiada was received. In 2018, assuming a competition would take place, an initial email was sent in the spring with follow-up emails/reminders in late August and early September.

Criteria for 2018 included:

- Hold a US Passport that is at minimum valid until 6/15/2020
- NOT a holder of a Russian passport, not eligible to apply for a Russian passport, NOT a Russian citizen;
- Enrolled in US high school through at least December, 2018; will not have graduated from US high school by end of December, 2018;
- Competed in a regional ACTR Olympiada of Spoken Russian in 2018 as a Regular (not Heritage, not Native Speaker) contestant at **Level 2 or higher** and nominated to contend for a spot at the International Olympiada by the chair of nominee's regional Olympiada;
- Will be taking a Russian language class during the fall of 2018;
- Are available and willing to travel to Moscow for approximately seven days at the beginning of December 2018

- Are motivated to continue their study of Russian language and culture;
- Would be good ambassadors to represent the U.S.;
- Understand that they will have to pay some portion of this trip. The cost is \$1300/student.

Regional chairs are given a due date to nominate possible candidates. Once nominees have been gathered, this list is submitted to Benjamin Gaylord. Nominees must then complete an initial application that is sent to Benjamin Gaylord. The application includes questions to assess that applicants meet all of the basic requirements stated above before beginning the selection process. Below are listed the steps the candidates must follow. At each stage of the selection process, Benjamin Gaylord contacts the nominees with detailed information on how to proceed to the next step. He guides them through the complex process. There are very precise deadlines that must be followed and it is necessary to follow these steps and deadlines in order to continue with the process.

1. Registration and Practice Test on the Pushkin Institute website
2. Online Test and Written Essay – **Done by the Pushkin Institute**
3. Interview – **These are conducted by Benjamin Gaylord and AC**
4. Pushkin Institute notifies applicants who passed the test round
5. AC notifies final team representatives (we have maximum up to 6 slots)
6. Visa and travel arrangements are made
7. Travel likely late November-mid-December

Issues: There are several issues that have come up over the past three years. These are listed below.

- First and foremost is the date of the International competition. Many years ago the International Olympiada took place over the summer and thus allowed graduated seniors. The competition now takes place in December which means that the seniors and often most advanced Russian students that competed in the regional Olympiadas in the spring cannot participate. Winter is also a difficult time for students to go to Moscow for a week and miss school.
- Cost: There is a cost involved. This past year it was \$1300 per student. We have been fortunate in the past to have some assistance from SLAVA, but that may not be possible on a yearly basis. The cost was higher this year due to the selection of only four participants by Pushkin Institute. There was an expectation that six would be selected.
- Notification and deadlines: Information about the competition and selection process including deadlines is often not sent out until the summer when it is more difficult to contact regional chairs and for them to contact possible candidates. We endeavor to send out information as soon as possible to offer the regional chairs enough time to contact candidates and submit nominations.

- The timeframe for this process is short which means that there is not much time between notification of selection and travel to Moscow in order for the students to prepare for the competition. There are tasks that the students should complete and it can be challenging for the students to find the time to complete these tasks.

Questions to consider for the future:

- How can we expand the pool of applicants and get nominees from various regions considering all the factors involved?
- How can we help prepare the students once selection of the delegation has taken place?

Selecting the most qualified candidates that also reflect a diversity of participants is the goal, but can be constrained by the lengthy process that must be followed as set out by the Pushkin Institute and the timeframe that is involved. In 2018, we had nine candidates from a variety of regions and four were selected to participate. In addition, regional Olympiadas vary greatly in terms of the level of the participants and thus the availability of a qualified candidate that meets the established criteria. We strive to encourage as many nominees as possible to participate in the process and are always looking for ways to try to make the process as accessible and easy to navigate as possible.

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