Given the opportunity to visit the International Exposition in Astana before closing ceremonies on September 10, students mobilized quickly and, as the Russian saying goes, went directly from the “boat to the ball,” travelling to Astana for three days of cultural events and visits to the multi-national pavilions displaying unique approaches to the general theme of “Future Energy.” Students were treated to a personal tour of the American Pavilion by two of their own, Flagship alumni Vera S. and Grace G. both staying on in Kazakhstan after the successful completion of last year’s program in order to work for the American Pavilion. The American student ambassadors communicated with the crowds in Russian and Kazakh and delighted fairgoers with a special interactive exhibit and film devoted to America’s developing energy technology.

Students were also given the chance to recount some of the tragic moments in Kazakhstani history by visiting the ALZHIR (The Akmola Camp for the Wives of Traitors to the Fatherland), only twenty miles distant from Astana, but a world away from the shining cityscape and the international flare that the city has developed. The students were given a tour of the museum as well as a chance to visit the memorial plates commemorating those thousands of women who died while interred at the camp.
ROF Students Participate in Pre-Departure Orientation in Washington, DC

Before embarking on their Capstone experience in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the fourteen students of the 2017-2018 ROF cohort participated in a three-day pre-departure orientation at the American Councils office in Washington, DC.

The busy orientation schedule consisted of diagnostic testing, informational sessions on important topics such as health and safety, program policies, and host families, a cultural awareness and adaptability workshop led by Resident Director Dr. Alexander Groce, a presentation on self-managed learning by Dr. Dan Davidson, and an excellent alumni panel with Kyle F. (2014-2015) and Mikayla H. (2015-2016). Academic Director Dr. Maria Lekic also spoke at length about the academic program, including direct enrollments and internships.

Also, Almaty-based Academic Assistant Ulbossyn Parmanova traveled to Washington this year to help better prepare our students for their year in Almaty!

“...my Russian use that came to mind are that I already feel like my skills are improving. It feels good to be using Russian all day every day. I have also noticed that the one on one tutor sessions are extremely useful. I already find myself using phrases we have covered there in everyday speech.”

Student Quote
Direct Enrollments—Fall Semester

Below are the direct enrollment courses at KazNU currently attended by Russian Flagship students, who have already provided very positive feedback about their in-class experience and interactions with local students. In addition to attending class sessions once a week and completing assignments, all students will give formal presentations about their courses to their Flagship peers and instructors at the conclusion of Fall Semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number of Flagship Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro-sociolinguistics</td>
<td>Philology and World Languages</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology for Translation of Special Texts</td>
<td>Philology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurophysiology</td>
<td>Biology and Biotechnology</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Contemporary International Relations</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of World Culture</td>
<td>History, Archaeology, and Ethnology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Mechanics</td>
<td>Mechanics-Mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students Meet Language Partners

All Russian Flagship students participated in fast-paced, timed introductions with local language partners—after two minute conversations, students had to move on to speaking with a new partner, which fostered excellent conversation practice. Pictures from the session are below.

"In class we discussed major problems in modern society and how to combat them. I think that my contributions to this discussion probably represented the best command of Russian I was able to display this week. I talked about socio-economic issues while incorporating certain human behavior elements that eventually effect economic trends in my opinion."

Student Quote

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Excursion to Kolsay and Kaindy Lakes

As the Flagship students pensively encountered the first signs of Fall, the idea of travelling overland to one of the most pristine natural wonders of Kazakhstan while the mountain roads remained possible became more and more urgent. At the end of September, students were invited to travel to 11,000 feet above sea level to a string of mountain lakes in the Zhetysu region.

The lakes are scattered across high mountains and the students scrambled their way to the top to see the azure waters of Kolsay and Kaindy. Kaindy, in particular, is famous worldwide for the phenomenal concentration of petrified fir trees jutting from its icy waters. The students travelled with their Kazakhstani language partners and were happy to receive tips on how to properly enjoy the comforts of a Russian banya located at the guest houses where students stayed nearby the lakes.

“I met with my language partner for the first time and we talked for about an hour and a half without a break. Our conversation was equal in terms of how much each of us talked. It was the longest one-on-one conversation that I’ve ever had in Russian, and even though we didn’t talk about very difficult topics, I consider it a success.”
On a lovely September afternoon, Russian Flagship students took the short trip up to Almaty’s surrounding mountain range and ski resort Shymbulak—photos of the excursion are below.

Photo Highlights — Shymbulak

Group relaxing on top of Shymbulak

On a lovely September afternoon, Russian Flagship students took the short trip up to Almaty’s surrounding mountain range and ski resort Shymbulak—photos of the excursion are below.

Group at top of the sky lift at Shymbulak, in the mountains just outside of Almaty

Majestic mountain landscape accessible just an hour from Almaty’s city center

Samuel posing with ROF language partners

Thomas posing as if he is on top of the world

Students taking in the views from the top of the mountain

Alexandra showing no fear close to the edge

Stephany enjoying the ride up the ski lift
“Since arriving in Almaty at the end of August, the center of my universe has shifted to the kitchen table. It’s where I begin my day each morning, eating breakfast with my host mother, Elmira, and her twenty-one year old daughter, Kymbat. In the afternoons and evenings, I return to the kitchen table to do my homework, read, and help prepare for dinner. I sit and I drink tea, more tea than I thought a person could possibly drink in one sitting, and tell Elmira about my day, and listen as she gives me informal lessons in Kazakh history—her area of specialization at KazNU, where she is a professor. My homestay is undoubtedly one of the richest and most rewarding aspects of studying Russian in Almaty. Every day I am exposed to new topics of conversation, new vocabulary, and an endless supply of Russian idioms. One my favorite topics involves conversation surrounding food, and I can proudly say that I have helped Elmira prepare beshbarmak, a national delicacy. Needless to say, I am excited for what the next eight months have in store for me, as my proficiency in Russian continues to develop.”

- Sydney (pictured above with her host mother and food that they prepared together)

The new community of Russian Flagship students took a trip to the largest art museum in Kazakhstan for a detailed look at the history of traditional Kazakh textiles and leather-working with the museum’s docent Klara Kamilevna, and ended the tour on a literal high note thanks to the superior musical talents of the Almaty City Orchestra. The musical selection included romance and folk songs performed by some of the most widely-respected solo artists in Kazakhstan, as well as a rousing violin performance by one of Kazakhstan’s most widely-loved violinists Zhamilia Serkebaeva.
“Last week I joined a gym. It turns out that the membership includes work with a personal trainer. The first time I went, I spent over an hour with the trainer, who was the first person in Almaty to tell me he was impressed with how well I spoke Russian. The conversation included a lot of vocabulary I was only vaguely familiar with (muscle names, movements, exercise terms), but I navigated and actually learned a lot in terms of working out and language use!”

“On Saturday some local students and I went on a hike in the mountains and came across two other local hikers. They started speaking with us about if we were locals and if we had been on any other trails that day. I felt I handled this interaction well because although it was unexpected I was able to follow the conversation completely and the people we met were, supposedly, surprised to learn that I am a foreigner, even after I had already spoken with them for several minutes.”

“For some reason, this week I found myself making three separate phone calls to businesses because I needed information. Honestly, this was the first time I’ve had to speak on the phone with people other than host family members and friends, so I was pretty nervous. I made the calls, was intelligible to the people on the other end of the line, and got the information I needed. With the last call, I wanted to make a reservation at a restaurant, and the hostess was being quite testy, but I was able to navigate that and make a reservation. I’m glad that I’ve jumped over this hurdle, because it’s been something I’ve been avoiding for a long time, and now I feel confident that I can handle phone calls in the future.”

“This week we met with our language partners for the first time. Our first meeting was organized in a “speed dating” style, meaning that we met with all of the potential language partners for two minutes each. I had to introduce myself, ask and answer several different questions, and make a good first impression with at least 20 new people. Although we weren’t discussing linguistically or particularly deep topics, it was still a mentally exhausting challenge to do all of this in Russian, and I think I handled it well.”

“I gave a presentation in front of the class alongside the other two members in my group. I was slightly nervous since we did not have any multi-media to make the presentation more entertaining, but our skit ended up going really well. We made people laugh with our jokes, but I also feel that I very accurately and fluidly communicated everything that I was trying to say. I used some new constructions and some new words. This was our first day of presentations in front of each other and our instructors, and it turned out to be a huge confidence-booster for me. This was also a good day personally since I understood all of the other presentations and posed a couple decent questions and comments afterwards.”

Excerpts from Language Utilization Reports (LUR)

“This week I spoke with my host sister about her international relations coursework and we had a lovely chat about what we enjoyed about the discipline, what we looked for in teachers and how our courses are structured. I’m always happy when I’m able to carry out an intelligent conversation in Russian about a topic that I know I could speak about in English.”

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