

NILE MILLER: The University of Texas at Austin

As paradoxical as it may seem given the city's titanic size, Moscow is, in many ways, a hidden gem. The city doesn't figure into the travel, professional or academic plans of most Americans, who stick to more popular destinations such as London, Paris and Rome. What they don't realize is that Moscow is one of the world's most important centers of economic and intellectual activity—a city where ancient, modern and future converge to provide foreigners with a dynamic mosaic of experiences that would be all but impossible to obtain in any other city. One of Russia's most progressive and well-endowed universities, the Higher School of Economics is the perfect place to get access to everything that Moscow has to offer.

This is not my first time in Moscow—I had come here before to study the Russian language—but coming to HSE has given me my first real opportunity to participate in Russian academic life. At HSE, I wear a few different hats: in addition to taking a social anthropology course, I am interning in HSE's Academic Writing Center as a proofreader and as a writing consultant in the Merrill Lynch Writing and Communication Center, which is available to students of the joint bachelor's program between HSE and the New Economic School.

This means that I work directly with both students and faculty of HSE. I have found them all to be exceptionally ambitious and motivated. HSE students have a very clear idea of what they want to after they complete their undergraduate careers, something that is uncharacteristic of their American characteristics. The level of discussion and student engagement in my social anthropology course (whose attendees are mostly underclassmen whose primary academic interest is economics) is simply higher than in any course I have ever attended. It is very evident to me that a student with a degree from HSE would be well prepared to work or study in just about any company or university. HSE students strive to get involved in all aspects of student life and have packed schedules. They're also very open-minded and outward-looking; they are eager to learn about the way people live outside of Russia, and most of them have excellent command of the English language.



Photo credit: Cyril Nizart

I live in the HSE dormitory located a stone's throw from Studencheskaya metro station. I can look out my dorm window and see the flashing lights and blinking marquees of the Moscow City business center. I can hear the hustle and bustle of trains arriving at Kievskiy Railway Station. In a 15-minute trip on the metro, I can be on Red Square. It never takes longer than 25 or 30 minutes to reach the HSE campuses where I work and study. The dorm itself is inhabited by students from virtually every region of the planet; I can step into the hall and hear people interacting in Serbian, Spanish, Russian, French, English or German. International students at HSE are very closely knit and many participate in events organized by HSE's International Office, which is staffed by English speakers whose sole responsibility is helping foreigners adapt to life in Moscow. At the same time, there are ample opportunities for international students to get involved in activities with Russian students. Finally, HSE offers its students many ways to spend their free time – from sports to lecture series to film societies to travel clubs – and international students are encouraged to make the most of these opportunities.

Life in Moscow is unlike life in any other city on Earth, and I know that the experiences I have had at HSE will benefit me throughout my academic and professional careers.

