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Borscht, Bliny, and Burritos: 
The Benefits of Peer-to-Peer Experiential Learning through Food

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1. Introduction

Like other disciplines in the humanities, Russian Studies faces an ongoing crisis of recruiting and retaining majors and minors for the longevity of undergraduate programs (Looney and Lusin 2018). Shrinking budgets and limited resources compound the problem as language and culture departments across the United States are asked to do more with fewer resources (Gerber 2015). In the context of an increasingly corporatized academy where language and cultural studies are marginalized, faculty in Russian Studies have a powerful means at their disposal to attract new students and build cross-campus alliances: the common language of food. Courses on foodways can reinvigorate programs in Russian Studies and related disciplines by building collaborations between departments and attracting new students not typically drawn to the study of foreign languages and cultures.

The topic of FOODWAYS, broadly defined by Elizabeth Engelhardt as “the study of what we eat, how we eat, and what it means” (2013, 1), draws together many different fields of inquiry in the humanities and social sciences. Inherently interactive and hands-on, foodways courses can provide learners with opportunities to put their newly acquired knowledge into practice through experiential learning projects involving recipes, campus and community gardens, farms, environmental organizations, and a variety of culinary establishments. The topic of foodways naturally aligns with Russian Studies and related disciplines, since the region’s cuisine provides a compelling entry point to its culture, history, and languages. Given that food-related classes and degree programs are becoming increasingly widespread in higher education—for example, the University of Arizona launched a Center for Regional Food Studies in 2015—Russian programs can contribute to this exciting...
development by offering innovative courses that draw upon cross-cultural exchange through peer-to-peer (P2P) experiential learning projects. Food can help to bridge the cultural divide between learners from vastly different backgrounds; moreover, since urban farming and community gardening have witnessed significant expansion in both the United States and Russia, issues surrounding food production and consumption resonate with diverse student populations from these countries. Cities in both contexts are likewise experiencing an expansion of “locavore” movements—the practice of consuming food that is locally produced and sustainably grown. Thus, Russian and American students’ mutual interest in foodways can serve as a powerful tool for cross-cultural discussion and collaboration, as well as an opportunity to forge ongoing institutional connections between the two countries.

In this article, we provide a theoretical framework for the development of P2P experiential learning projects on the topic of foodways in Russian Studies and related curricula. We describe the conceptual basis for P2P projects and the benefits of experiential learning for students, faculty, institutions, and partner organizations. We then outline the stages of a grant-funded project that brought together undergraduates from the University of Arizona (UA) and the Moscow University for the Humanities (MUH) in a co-convened course on Russian and Sonoran foodways, which included short-term study abroad trips for both groups of participants. Finally, we describe the means by which similar foodways projects can be replicated at other institutions in order to spark interest in Russian language and culture, boost enrollments, and encourage interdisciplinary and international collaboration.

2. Experiential learning: From theory to practice
First outlined by John Dewey in the 1920s, the concept of experiential learning has informed higher education and professional degree programs for nearly a century (Dewey 1933, 1938). Subsequent models have drawn from Dewey’s theories and added conceptual components that consider the importance of different learning styles (Kolb 1981; Spencer 1985; Hickcox 2002; Wurdinger 2005). Relatedly, MUTUAL PEER LEARNING, defined as “situations in which students are encouraged to work together in small teams on academic tasks in order to achieve a common goal and to develop mutual knowledge and skills,” has long
been considered an effective classroom strategy (Topping et al. 2017, 2). When implemented with theoretical frameworks in mind, P2P projects can successfully combine experiential learning with mutual peer learning, offering students enhanced opportunities for communicative and intercultural exchange.

The work of David Kolb provides a theoretical and practical guide to implementing experiential learning in contemporary contexts. Kolb provided a detailed outline for a four-stage cycle of learning that describes both the process of learning and the different perspectives of learners (Kolb 2014). This framework includes a four-part learning continuum: obtaining concrete experience, reflecting on these experiences, conceptualizing what has been experienced, and experimenting with what has been learned through active application of knowledge. Often, Kolb’s cycle is represented visually, as shown in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Kolb’s learning cycle*

As the diagram suggests, the processes of learning constitute a cycle of integrated growth. Since the appearance of Kolb’s study, practitioners have commented on the model’s strengths, noting that the cycle accommodates different types of learning styles and places experiential learning at the heart of the educational endeavor (Healey and Jenkins 2007). Kolb’s theories have likewise been the subject of much debate. Some scholars have pointed to the limitations of Kolb’s theories,
demonstrating that the learning cycle can seem restrictive, narrow in focus, and can even encourage dogmatic thinking rather than challenge it (Michelson 1996). Others find Kolb’s theories relating to the cycle’s stages inconsistent, with later writings seemingly contradicting earlier conclusions (Garner 2000). Although these criticisms have merit, they do not negate the overall value of experiential learning as outlined by Kolb. Moreover, Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory provides students and instructors with additional tools in understanding how to present material to different types of learners. In this work we implement Kolb’s model while keeping in mind that it represents a process of acquiring knowledge that accommodates different styles of learning. We emphasize that Kolb’s theories develop “a holistic model of the experiential learning process and a multilinear model of adult development” (Kolb and Kolb 2005, 194). In his work on learning styles, Kolb helps instructors understand how to effectively accommodate the needs of all learners. He delineates four distinct learning styles (diverging, assimilating, converging, and accommodating) that correspond with points on the learning cycle (Kolb 2014). By incorporating each stage of the continuum, P2P experiential learning projects meet the needs of diverse groups of learners while fulfilling the goals of experiential learning.

In settings where P2P projects include experiential learning with a language component, instructors can also align foodways projects with the five curricular standards of the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language (National Standards Collaborative Board 2015), commonly termed the “5 Cs”:

1. Communication: Communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations for multiple purposes.
2. Cultures: Interact with cultural competence and understanding.
3. Connections: Connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career-related situations.
4. Comparisons: Develop insight into the nature of language and culture in order to interact with cultural competence.
5. Communities: Communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world.

Foodways projects can provide students of the Russian language with the opportunities to engage in the five standards. Students conduct interpersonal COMMUNICATION as they speak with and listen to Russian peers. Interpretive communication when they read and listen to course materials (in this case, recipes, restaurant menus, online reviews of restaurants, scavenger-hunt activities to find “locavore” restaurants in Russian-speaking countries), and presentational communication when they give presentations (using either face-to-face or online platforms). They engage directly with CULTURE as they learn practices that form key parts of cultural identity. They make CONNECTIONS between academic disciplines such as history, language, literary studies, and sociology. During P2P exchanges, students make COMPARISONS when they use the language to investigate and reflect upon the concept of food culture in different contexts. Finally, students working on P2P projects develop COMMUNITIES by using the language to interact with others in the classroom and beyond.

Foodways projects fit well within a language program when they are learner-focused and foster active student engagement. As Benjamin Rifkin has noted, putting emphasis on the intensity of engagement in the classroom through student-centered activities can “boost” foreign language learning and may lead to higher proficiency levels (2007). Lesson activities for P2P foodways projects can be structured for maximum student engagement throughout the entire class period. Compare, for instance, the levels of engagement in a typical unit on cooking and cuisine in an L2 class. A classroom with a low level of engagement would ask students to look up a recipe for a traditional Russian dish, write down the ingredients, summarize the methods of preparation, and turn it in for a grade. But a student-focused foodways project can create active engagement through a deeper and more comprehensive approach to the learning process. In the language classroom, the topic of food lends itself to multiphase, collaborative assignments where students work in groups to prepare, present, and teach one another about cuisine. The culmination of such a project could be a student-led cooking competition held in the target language, with
students presenting, tasting, commenting on, and voting for their favorite dish. A follow-up assignment could include an essay on the cultural significance of the assigned dish, submitted along with a copy of the recipe. The material could then be compiled into a collaboratively written course cookbook published online or in hardcopy. In this case, each student is actively engaged through activities that account for multiple intelligences and different styles of learning.

Experiential learning projects can be implemented within the framework of the Proficiency Guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL 2012). The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe what individuals can do in language modalities (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) during real-world situations. As a framework to assess L2 skills, the Proficiency Guidelines help inform pedagogical decisions, from course design to classroom instruction (Hadley and Terry 2001). P2P foodways projects can be assigned at any level of language but have the most efficacy for learners at the Intermediate level of proficiency. Students at the Intermediate level can “create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to everyday life” and can “produce sentence-level language” (ACTFL 2012, 7). In P2P foodways projects, Intermediate-level students are capable of conducting interviews with native speakers from a partnering organization in Russia on the topic of cuisine or on the tradition of tending a garden at the dacha (summer cottage). Although they will likely struggle with the responses of their interlocuters, students can nevertheless participate in the conversation, especially when prepared through appropriate scaffolded exercises. Most importantly, P2P foodways projects in the language classroom can prepare students for higher proficiency levels by asking them to engage in extended conversation with detailed narration.

Experiential learning projects offer significant benefits to participants, whether the project focuses on language acquisition or is part of a standalone course on Russian or a related culture. When implemented with experiential learning, mutual peer learning, and Kolb’s learning styles in mind, P2P projects can engage students with timely material on the meaning of foodways in a global context. No matter which part of the process comes more readily to students, the experiential model
assures that all participants are valued for their contribution to the production of knowledge.

3. Method and context: The UA | GRINT Friendship Garden program

In the following section, we outline a foodways-focused experiential learning project implemented by faculty and students in the Department of Russian and Slavic Studies at UA and their partners at the GRINT Centre for Education and Culture at MUH. Faculty members in the Department of Russian and Slavic Studies at UA received a grant from the US–Russia Peer-to-Peer Dialogue Program for the 2017–2018 academic year in order to implement the UA | GRINT Friendship Garden program. The project brought together students from UA and MUH, with the central goal of using the common language of food to foster dialogue, cultural literacy, and mutual understanding between American and Russian partners. The friendship garden—a mutually shared, collaboratively developed plot of land for P2P learning—was sponsored by the UA Department of Russian and Slavic Studies and located at the Tucson Village Farm, a joint program of the Pima County Cooperative Extension and the University of Arizona.

The UA | GRINT Friendship Garden program centered on a seven-week interdisciplinary course, “Russian and American Foodways: Cultivation, Culture, and Connectedness,” offered in Spring 2018 by the UA Russian and Slavic Studies department in collaboration with the GRINT Centre for Education and Culture. Student participants received credit at their home institutions for the course, which included on-site learning, co-convened online assignments, and an optional study abroad component for both groups of students. Since the course aimed to create a community learning experience that prioritized cross-cultural connections and personal engagement, enrollment was capped at twenty-five students from UA and ten from MUH. UA student participants were recruited from departments across campus, including Russian and Slavic Studies, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (including the departments of Nutritional Sciences, Plant Sciences, Natural Resources and Environmental Science, and Agricultural and Resource Economics), and the College of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Architecture (including the Institute on Place and Wellbeing and the degree program in Sustainable Built Environments). Russian participants were selected
from the International Relations baccalaureate program at MUH through a competitive application process. Criteria for their selection included scholarly merit (assessed by Grade Point Average), interest (assessed by an application essay), and English proficiency.

The course offered students an in-depth study of Russian and American (particularly Sonoran) foodways, with emphasis on the historical connections between the two countries and contemporary issues of sustainability, environmental impact, and global interconnectedness. UA students met in person on the UA campus once per week in the second half of the Spring 2018 semester, with Russia-based participants joining discussions and completing assignments via Google’s G Suite, a set of digital tools designed for educational institutions. G Suite’s learning management system, Google Classroom, served as the course’s “home,” providing students with continuous access to course information such as the schedule of topics, required readings, assignments, forums, and activities. Instructional technologists from the UA Office of Instruction and Assessment assisted Russian and Slavic Studies faculty in designing online activities in order to enable the participation of the Russia-based cohort.

While Russia and Arizona have vastly different climates and geographical conditions, both places have strong cultural traditions connected with urban food cultivation. The course was designed to elicit a comparative approach to the foodways of Russia and the American Southwest. The syllabus was arranged into seven thematic modules, with topics including food and environment, food and identity, hunger and abundance, and globalization. By analyzing cookbooks, memoirs, cultural histories, films, and other media, then reflecting on these materials through peer-to-peer discussion, writing, and interactive field assignments, UA- and Russia-based students learned how food can reflect and bridge the human experience. Assigned readings included Anya Von Bremzen’s memoir *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking* (2013), selections from Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre’s edited volume *Food in Russian History and Culture* (1997), Jeffery Pilcher’s *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (2017), and Enrique Salmón’s *Eating the Landscape: American Indian Stories of Food, Identity, and Resilience* (2012). Students viewed clips from Evgenii Dovzhenko’s Soviet collectivization drama *Earth* (1930), studied cultural artifacts such as the Soviet cookery classic *Book of Tasty*
and Healthy Food (1939, revised edition 2012), and analyzed historical
documents illustrating important points of contact between Russia and
the US, such as Nikita Khrushchev’s 1959 visit to the cornfields of Iowa
farmer Roswell Garst. Guest lectures from UA faculty in sociology,
antropology, education, and the Food Studies program brought
interdisciplinary expertise to the class meetings.

In addition to the classroom work, the project began and ended
with experiential learning components meant to foster collaboration,
community, and intercultural understanding between the US and Russian
participants. A central component of the program consisted of a one-week
trip to Tucson for the Russian cohort at the beginning of the “Russian and
American Foodways” course in April 2018, followed by a weeklong trip
to Russia for the UA cohort in May 2018. A key partner in the initiative
was the Tucson Village Farm, which has extensive experience working
with local university students through instructional programs on
growing and preparing fresh food, with the overall goal of empowering
students to make healthy life choices. Under the guidance of expert staff
members at the Tucson Village Farm, UA and Russian participants
cooperatively tended a plot, learned about sustainable water use,
discovered traditional crops of the Sonoran region, and practiced cooking
Sonoran and Russian dishes with fresh produce they had picked
themselves.

The UA|GRINT Friendship Garden project adhered to Kolb’s
framework by recognizing the value of concrete experience, reflective
observation, abstract thinking, and active experimentation. At the
beginning of the “Russian and American Foodways” course, students
were asked to think critically about two common food clichés: “What’s on
your plate?” and “You are what you eat.” This framework enabled the
students to use their own lived experiences as a springboard for reflection
and ongoing analysis of the meaning of food both within and across
cultures. Lectures, class discussions, and readings were augmented by a
series of field assignments in which students worked in groups to visit
different sites of food production and consumption in Tucson and
Moscow, including restaurants (American-style diners, fast-food chains
like McDonald’s, cafés serving local Sonoran or Russian food, vegan
restaurants, and bistros offering “ethnic” cuisine), grocery stores (large
chain discount stores, health food co-ops, stores catering to local “ethnic”
populations), and farms and community gardens. The field assignments, which consisted of site visits, group blog and vlog reports, and weekly reflective journals, helped foster abstract thinking about the relationship between food and identity as well as about the large-scale social, political, and environmental processes underpinning food habits, food choices, and access to food.

Kolb’s framework informed every stage of the course’s design and implementation, allowing various learning styles to be accommodated through a range of different activities. This alignment is perhaps best reflected in the course’s summative assessment, a digital story, in which students revisited the framing topics of “What’s on my plate?” and “You are what you eat” in order to create a personal narrative tying together the course material with their own perspectives and experiences. The digital story assignment involved a multistep process that included brainstorming, storyboarding, writing and revising multiple narrative drafts, creating and selecting multimedia materials, and assembling all of the components using video-editing software and other digital tools. In this way, the assignment allowed students to combine different modalities and create a product that was simultaneously creative and analytical.

Kolb’s theories were likewise put into practice during the Russian cohort’s visit to UA in March 2018. In particular, experimentation was facilitated as students from both groups engaged in a series of hands-on P2P learning experiences. Russian students were given ten hours of English as a Second Language instruction, conducted by faculty in the UA Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) and tailored to the content of the UA|GRINT Friendship Garden activities. Upon completion, the Russian cohort received a participation certificate from the UA CESL. The course focused on developing students’ speaking, listening, reading, and writing competencies by practicing these skills using the topics of food, food cultivation, and sustainability. Targeted readings and guest lectures from the UA College of Agriculture and Life Sciences prepared the Russian students for their participation in the co-convened components of the “Russian and American Foodways” course. Each day, following their ESL instruction, the Russian students traveled with their UA peers to the Tucson Village Farm, where they spent their afternoons earning a certificate from the Training Youth Leaders through
Horticulture (TYLTH) program and collaboratively planted a variety of crops at a shared plot adopted by the UA Russian and Slavic Studies department. Additional activities included visits to sites of cultural significance in the Tucson area, along with meals at a variety of local cafés and restaurants. The capstone activity of the Russian students’ visit was a collaborative cooking competition. Mixed teams of UA and Russian students were each assigned a traditional recipe: Russian classics like bliny (thin pancakes similar to crepes), salad Olivier (a dish consisting of finely chopped vegetables, ham, and a healthy dose of mayonnaise), and chanakhi (a Georgian lamb stew purported to be a favorite of Stalin) were paired with the Mexican/Southwestern staples of pozole and tamales, as well as the local Sonoran delicacy of NOPALES (the edible pads of the prickly pear cactus). Students worked together to research and give a presentation on the history of their dish, including ingredients, methods of preparation, and social and cultural significance. Together, the Russian and American students prepared their dishes at the Tucson Village Farm kitchen and presented them for a community meal with students and faculty from the Russian and Slavic Studies department. The winning team was selected by a panel of judges whose ranks included the Russian and Slavic Studies department head and the chef of a local farm-to-table restaurant. All in all, the group activities gave students from both countries the opportunity to share stories and information about one another’s food cultures and hospitality traditions; to instruct one another in the Russian and English vocabulary of food preparation; and, perhaps most importantly, to navigate cultural differences in a task-based team setting. In this way, students had the opportunity to test and solidify new knowledge from the course through a P2P collaborative experience.

At the end of the course, eligible UA students from the class traveled to Moscow, Russia, to reunite with their Russian counterparts and tour local sites dedicated to Russian history, culture, and foodways. In preparation for the afternoon excursions, UA students had two hours of Russian language instruction at GRINT each morning. Topics discussed in the language classroom prepared UA students for their excursions around Moscow, where MUH students could give pointers on pronunciation and help them master new food-related vocabulary. The trip included visits to places studied during the “Russian and American Foodways” course, beginning with a guided tour of the All-Russian...
Exhibition Center in Moscow, which was originally conceived and built in the 1930s as the “All-Union Agricultural Exhibition.” Other activities included a visit to the first McDonald’s in Russia, located in central Moscow at Pushkin Square, where students discussed the popularity of the fast-food chain and the relationship between globalization and “burger diplomacy.” Students then headed to Red Square, where they dined at the Soviet-style Stolovaya №57 located in the GUM shopping center. As US students tasted traditional Soviet dishes with their Russian peers, the group engaged in interesting discussions on food production, consumption, nostalgia, and the politics of taste in Russian and American contexts. Participants continued their cross-cultural exchange the following day, when they traveled together to a family-run farm in the Tula region that supplies dairy products to the award-winning locavore restaurant Mark & Lev. Before dining at the restaurant, UA and MUH students sampled freshly made dairy products (yogurt, cheese, milk, cream, and butter) while hearing the history of the farm. Visits to Georgian and Uzbek restaurants prompted students to considered the ways Russia’s multicultural diversity is expressed and commodified through food. The culmination of the UA study abroad program was a groundbreaking ceremony for a GRINT-based “Friendship Garden” that mirrored the plot created earlier in Arizona, followed by a celebratory meal with students, faculty, and staff.

Through these institutional and cross-country collaborations, students engaged in a unique, hands-on learning experience focused on foodways and all that the term encompasses: gardening, agriculture, dietary habits, recipes and traditional food preparation methods, dining and hospitality rituals, and other cultural traditions. While students were not required to have any background knowledge in Russian language or culture in order to enroll in the class or apply to the study abroad portion of the trip, we can foresee a version of the course taught predominantly in Russian or as a module in an ongoing Russian language course. A US–Russian foodways-based P2P project offers students the opportunity to engage with a community of Russian speakers, whether through Skype sessions or through a short-term student exchange like the one initiated at UA. In making these connections, students communicate in the target language outside the classroom and set themselves up for more authentic communication even after the course ends. Such projects can also
incentivize learners to continue their study of Russian language and culture in the curriculum. Projects that effectively advocate for the study of Russian likewise support a general need to communicate the importance of second-language skills to institutions of higher education (Rifkin 2012). Putting P2P projects at the center of curricula can produce tangible results that make language learning and intercultural exchange the heart of the undergraduate learning experience.

Whether as a standalone class or as part of a curriculum, a foodways project course aligns with the World-Readiness Standards by structuring experiential learning initiatives geared for maximum student engagement. Students and faculty are advised to research potential community partners and identify neighborhood gardens, community farms, or campus cooperatives. Drawing on the strengths of a university’s surrounding community can help initiate the program especially when it comes to working with the resident Russian-speaking population. Although the UA P2P foodways project involved Russian participants from Moscow, instructors can also recruit from nearby Russophone populations (whether through Russian restaurants, community organizations, or immigrant service centers) and initiate an exchange or work collaboratively on developing a garden on campus or in the community. Russian-speaking participants could be recruited to take part in a cooking expo or culinary event that showcases the cuisines of the region and their home countries. In this way, a foodways project with a language component would promote each of the 5 Cs: it would foster communication through collaborative interactions with native speakers; students would gain cultural literacy by reflecting on the practices and perspectives of Russian speakers; participants would make connections on the meaning of food production and the traditions associated with it; the project would foster comparisons as students use the language to reflect on their own culture and the culture studied; and students would build communities as they use the language within and beyond the classroom through the common experience of food.

4. Planting the seeds: International foodways programs among universities
The experiential learning project between UA and MUH demonstrates the benefits of international partnerships between universities. Similar
projects can be developed by Russian Studies and related departments at North American institutions. Given that the number and scope of experiential learning programs have expanded in recent years, faculty interested in foodways projects can tap into existing units on campus, such as offices of sustainability, community outreach centers, and university farms. Although it may seem challenging to facilitate such programs, there are available resources that can help instructors as they initiate their own projects, as we explain in the following paragraphs.

Institutions of higher education, including Middlebury College in Vermont and Oberlin College in Ohio, have turned to local farms as a means to combine liberal arts undergraduate curricula with hands-on experience in gardening and sustainable farming; ongoing partnerships and existing programs can serve as resources for a foodways project.\(^1\) Recent data suggest that nearly 30 percent of universities and college campuses in the United States partner with local gardens or maintain their own student farms, and these spaces play an important role in curricula and research (Sayre 2011). The shift toward using locally grown, organic produce in cafeterias at colleges and universities has led to the creation of college-run farms composting programs, and partnerships between local K-12 schools, food producers, and student interest groups.\(^2\) These campus organizations can serve as potential participants or cofacilitators of foodways projects.

Although not all institutions in the US and Russia have student farms, many have close partnerships with cooperative extensions or local community organizations focused on gardening and agriculture. Identifying and establishing working relationships with community partners is essential for experiential learning projects that involve food production. On-campus resources for instructors at North American institutions of higher education include departments of agriculture, life sciences, environmental studies, and sustainable built environments.

\(^1\) On the movement to bring locally sourced food to primary schools, see Emily Richmond, “More Students Are Eating Locally Sourced Food,” The Atlantic, October 21, 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/farm-to-school-gains-momentum/411562/.

\(^2\) For instance, the Community and School Garden Program at the University of Arizona offers internship-based courses for undergraduates and connects them to the school garden movement in Tucson. See https://sbs.arizona.edu/community-and-school-garden-program.
Other potential partners can be located through community gardens, urban farms, and representatives from your county’s Cooperative Extension System (CES). With offices in nearly every county in the US, cooperative extensions put cutting-edge agricultural research into practice through partnerships with local farmers. Often connected with 4-H and other outreach programs, cooperative extensions can serve as a hub to operate an experiential learning project.

Identifying potential partners in Russia (or elsewhere) depends on the scope of the project and the resources of an instructor’s home institution. Some institutions have ongoing partnerships with Russian universities and colleges either through study abroad or faculty exchange programs. In some cases, institutions already possessing memoranda of understanding (MoU) with institutions in Russia can leverage these partnerships to include student exchange through either online course exchanges or study abroad programs. In cases where few or no institutional affiliations exist, instructors can identify potential partners in Russia based on organizations that support gardening, organic farming, or similar forms of outreach. Russian universities and colleges dedicated to the study of agriculture and life sciences often have ongoing community programs as part of their undergraduate curricula. Locating potential partners based on mutual interest may lead to fruitful and long-lasting institutional relationships. Local communities of native speakers can also serve a crucial role in experiential learning, either as coparticipants or as community advocates. In this sense, experiential learning that involves collaboration between Russian and US institutions can benefit not only students, but also campuses and their surrounding communities.

Students at Russian institutions of higher education have initiated similar movements on their campuses. In 2016, students at St. Petersburg State University (SPbU) petitioned the administration and requested that an urban garden be allowed on their campus. For the most part, however, programming has focused on sustainable growth and environmentally

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3 One organization worth mentioning in this regard is Союз садоводов России (The Union of Gardeners in Russia, www.souzasadovodov.ru), which operates in regions throughout Russia and has several community outreach programs.

4 See the following article for details: http://guestbook.spbu.ru/prorektory-spbgu/vasilev-gennadij-sergeevich/9909-ozelenenie-universiteta.html.
friendly policies rather than on student farms or gardens. The Center for Bioeconomics and Eco-Innovation, housed within the Department of Economics at Moscow State University (MGU), was one of the first to offer programming and practical information on implementing sustainable growth on campus and beyond. Other initiatives include those at the Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture, and Design in Moscow. Founded in 2009, Strelka offers educational programs on urban development with focus on sustainable growth. Large institutions like MGU and Strelka are not the only stakeholders in the movement for environmentally friendly campuses and research-driven change: the Bellona Foundation, an independent nonprofit organization housed in Oslo, has spearheaded initiatives with students in Russia to advocate for recycling and other eco-friendly practices.

Over forty universities in Russia have joined the Association of Green Universities, a student-led initiative founded in 2017 to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote sustainability. Students taking part in the association’s programs learn how to establish recycling centers on their campuses and are eligible for grants and educational opportunities in Germany and America. Other institutions have created campus-specific initiatives. For instance, MUH has taken significant steps in changing campus culture to lessen carbon footprint and increase recycling. In 2015, MUH put forth a strategic plan with a vision of becoming Russia’s first “Zelenyi universitet” (Green University). In accordance with this initiative, MUH hosts an annual “Green Week” on its campus with lecture series, presentations, and other educational programming for students, faculty, and the community. In honor of the university’s environmental stewardship programs, Moscow’s Department of Natural Resources awarded MUH with an honorary diploma for eco-conscientiousness. In sum, institutions from large to small, public to private, have started integrating programs for sustainability and environmental awareness.

Although Russian institutions may not have farms on their campuses, many of them have well-established botanical gardens that serve the campus and local community. Indeed, some Russian institutions

5 Their website offers more information about the group’s mission and activities: http://xn-b1afaahy0d3de.xn--p1ai/.
have allotted considerable resources to their botanical gardens. Moscow State University (MSU) houses the famous “Aptekarskii ogorod,” with a garden open to the public, impressive expositions on rare plants, and agricultural displays curated by students. The botanical garden at St. Petersburg State University (SPbU) likewise offers opportunities for public engagement, with students volunteering alongside community members to maintain the garden. Technical institutions are also an untapped potential resource, as they have existing facilities that could accommodate partnerships. Institutions that train students as chefs or prepare them for other positions in the food and hospitality industry could likewise serve as partners for food-based P2P exchanges.

Faculty can advocate for such experiential learning projects by emphasizing the ways students benefit from peer-to-peer learning and cross-cultural collaborations. Although Russian foodways projects without a language component certainly have value, we suggest that in order to maximize impact, a project should collaborate with Russian speakers in meaningful ways. This interaction could involve a variety of elements, such as a co-convened online course for students in Russia and the US, “sister garden” projects between universities and colleges in Russia and the US, pen pal exchanges based on journal entries on farming and gardening, study abroad opportunities and in-country exchanges that use the common language of food to foster dialogue, digital stories on foodways shared through online platforms between students in Russia and students in the US, and oral history projects conducted with Russian speakers in the local community on the topic of cuisine and hospitality. Experiential learning opportunities that follow Kolb’s model can provide undergraduates with course credit, internship merits, or other forms of academic recognition.

Experiential learning projects take time to develop and may need additional funding and administrative support in order to function fully. In cases where instructors wish to facilitate garden projects, some institutions offer seed grants through offices focused on bringing the classroom to the community. Increasingly, colleges and universities across the US are investing in offices of sustainability; these units

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6 One pertinent example is the International College of Service in Kazan, Russia (http://iskazan.com/), which offers educational programs in cooking and confectionary, hospitality, bakery, and aesthetic services.
sometimes hold grant competitions for funding of outreach projects and experiential learning opportunities. At land-grant universities, instructors may appeal to their 4-H extension and tap into a broader network of resources. Communicating the timeliness and importance of international P2P projects is key to garnering administrative support for foodways projects. Facilitators may wish to consult the mission statements of their universities, divisions, or any special ongoing initiatives, since understanding how a foodways project fits in with the larger goals of their home institutions may help facilitators to better advocate for support. One particular strength of P2P foodways projects is that they foster relationships between institutions that can have positive long-term results. Not only do such initiatives provide visibility for the facilitator’s home department, but they also offer a means to internationalize curricula while simultaneously enhancing the profiles of participating universities. Communicating the timeliness and efficacy of a foodways experiential learning project is key to garnering support from students, fellow faculty, administrators, and partners in the community and abroad.

5. Conclusion: Experiential learning through foodways
As the program between UA and GRINT demonstrates, friendship gardens can serve as bridges between students, institutions, and cultures. In terms of student learning outcomes, participants develop intercultural competency while honing their skills as collaborators. With regard to enrollment and interest in Russian Studies, project-based programs like the UA|GRINT Friendship Garden have the potential to reach new sections of the student body not typically drawn to the discipline. Offering P2P exchanges and hands-on experience at student farms or local gardens likewise increases a department’s visibility in the community. Building relationships with regional partners, food justice advocates, farm-to-table restaurants, and student interest groups increases a department’s footprint on campus and in the community. Finally, such projects show that the common source of food can bring people together in ways that encourage lifelong learning and a passion for intercultural exchange.

Higher education programs in Russian Studies and related disciplines can harness the current interest in urban farming and environmental stewardship as a way to connect students in at home and
Foodways can reinvigorate Russian Studies curricula by offering a variety of different opportunities for meaningful learning (Fink 2013). Food can serve as a point of common interest for students from a variety of backgrounds, and it holds particular appeal in the foreign language classroom, where topics of food preparation and consumption can help L2 learners internalize vocabulary and grammatical structures early on in their learning. Food can be used as a conduit for teaching Russian culture as well: for example, the tradition of summer gardening with friends and family at the dacha (summer cottage), which originated in the Soviet era, is a cherished memory for millions of Russians (Zavisca 2003) and it provides the setting for numerous works of literature, film, and visual art. The Russian dacha experience also forms a point of connection to students involved with locavorism, urban gardening, and campus farms. Finally, the academic discipline of foodways itself encourages critical thinking about the production and consumption of food in ways that can foster meaningful discussions between learners. As Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell observe, “Foodways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group’s outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and provide a context for performance of group rituals” (1984, 5). The in-depth study of Russian and American foodways, whether in English, in Russian, or in a blend of the two languages, can bring students together in ways that benefit programs, universities, and the surrounding community. Accordingly, programming in Russian Studies can benefit greatly from cross-cultural exchanges focused on this topic.

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7 Although the UA\GRINT Friendship Garden program was administered at the university level, similar foodways projects could work in K–12 contexts as well. One existing resource for implementing foodways projects in K–12 contexts is the archive of materials from the ORIAS 2014 Summer Institute for teachers (hosted at UC Berkeley), which was dedicated to the topic of foodways in world history. Resources from the Institute’s proceedings are available at https://orias.berkeley.edu/resources-teachers/past-k-12-summer-institutes/foodways-world-history.
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