

Going to new heights: the Tutor Forces team celebrates its anniversary

The Tutor Forces tutoring service at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University has turned exactly five years old. From year to year, its members — tutors — help international students from SPbPU to adapt to life in Russia, solve educational and everyday problems, and hold various events. During this time, several generations of tutors have changed within the walls of Polytechnic University, but the core values of the service remain the same. The Tutor Forces are not just a team of like-minded people, it is a close-knit family of Polytechnic students who always help foreign students to get accustomed to the educational and cultural environment. Pavel NEDELKO, the Tutor Forces' founder and ideological inspirer, deputy director of Higher School of International Educational Programs of SPbPU, told about what new happened in the life of tutors during the past years and about the plans for the next «five years».



— Pavel, when you created the Tutor Forces, what goals did you set for yourself? Five years later, can you say that you are moving in the direction you originally planned?

— The idea originally came from the SPbPU International Office. Every year the staff was looking for Russian students who wanted to participate in the buddy program — to meet international applicants and students, to be involved in the organization of the welcome week. At that time, this was most often solved with the help of student interns, but as such a well-established system did not exist. I liked the idea. I at that time just became responsible for the extracurricular training of foreign students in the foundation university program, and I was in acute need of assistants. Therefore, our main goal was to create a sustainable system, through which the Russian students of Polytech could help foreigners adapt to Russia. Five years later, we can say that we have succeeded. The organization exists and develops, new projects appear all the time, the recognition is growing. There have been several generations of tutors in the organization, the heads, whom we call «presidents,» have changed, but every year our Tutor Forces are ready to meet new international students who come to Russia and help and support them.



— How much has the scale of your activity changed in five years?

— Let me give you an example of our event activities. In 2016, tutors held only 7 events, which were attended by about 150 foreigners. And in 2019 we have organized more than 40 diverse events for more than a thousand students. In addition, in 2018, we opened the international student club PolyUnion, where all extracurricular work with international students is concentrated, and where the

Tutor Forces are residents. There are regular language clubs, film screenings, national parties, and more. Every year we start with the official opening of the Interclub season, then we celebrate Interclub Birthday (November 22), then New Year, Shrovetide. This year, the guys decided to celebrate [Nowruz](#), the holiday of spring. The year ends with the official closing ceremony of the season. And the main organizer of all these events is the Tutor Forces team.

— **Speaking of events, which ones are your most memorable?**

— I would highlight a few. The opening and the next year's birthday celebration of the Interclub. These events were held in the presence of distinguished guests, and the tutors showed a very high level of professionalism in organizing events. Celebration of New Year [«DIY Christmas tree»](#) because it is always fun, easy and family-style. Foreigners are already more or less settling in and starting to feel at home by this point. It's so nice to see! And, perhaps, Nowruz. We celebrated it for the first time in 2021. The guys wanted to organize it for a long time, but various circumstances kept getting in the way. This year, too, the coronavirus pandemic made restrictions, but still, Nowruz took place, albeit in a somewhat truncated format. Next year we want to turn it into a real festival!



— **Were there any difficulties, difficulties during these 5 years? Were there any problems that foreign students approached you with, and which were successfully resolved?**

— There were difficulties, of course. At the initial stage, it was building the work of the organization, understanding the goals and objectives. I remember that we met with the students every week to decide what and how we would do next. Then there was a difficult moment when the first group of presidents, who were at the very beginning of the organization, left, and we had to hand over power to the new presidents. All this coincided with the pandemic, so the new guys had to urgently learn crisis-management skills. But the organization persevered and rebuilt itself.

The problems with which international students come to the Tutor Forces are sometimes difficult, but, let's say, commonplace. Someone needs to be met (sometimes late at night), someone needs help with the paperwork, someone has lost his passport and asks to go to the police with it. There were different situations, but the tutors managed to solve them all.



— What do you think Tutor Forces has become for international students?

— Tutor Forces is a big family for both tutors and international students. They are always happy to help. The kids walk, learn and socialize together. I was very glad to see that starting from the second Tutor School international students who had been studying at Polytech for several years and wanted to help their compatriots joined the organization. It was these guys who later became an asset of the

PolyUnion Interclub, which has now evolved from just a venue for events into a separate student organization.

— Does the management of Polytechnic University support your endeavors?

— The university administration pays a lot of attention to international students and all projects related to the internationalization of higher education. The Tutor Forces are not exempt from this attention. For example, with the appearance of the Interclub, the opening of which attended the Rector of SPbPU Andrei Rudskoi, the Tutors got a permanent platform for meetings and events.

We would like to express the gratitude of the Tutor Forces team to Dmitry G. Arseniev, vice-rector for international affairs, and Viktor V. Krasnoschekov, director of HS IEP, who eagerly respond to new tutors' initiatives and render comprehensive support.

It is important that the tutors understand that their work is important for the university, they see their results, they see that the life of international students is becoming more interesting and comfortable.



— How did Tutor Forces change during the pandemic? What was done, what was new in your work?

— The pandemic had a great impact on all international activities, including the work of the Tutor Forces. There are fewer international students, and many have returned home to continue studying remotely. The Tutor Forces' activities also shifted to an online format, where the guys held conversation clubs, film screenings followed by discussions, virtual tours, and launched a series of podcasts. Last year, during the height of the pandemic, an information center for international students was organized with the participation of tutors [to provide advice on lump-sum financial aid payments](#). Tutors became volunteers during the observation of dormitory #13 and also launched a flashmob in support of international students [«WE ARE TOGETHER»](#).

— What do you need to become a tutor now?

— To become a Student Tutor, you need to attend the Tutor School, where you will get acquainted with our structure, learn more about international students and international office of Polytechnic University, and be taught all the necessary skills. But if you don't want to be a member of the organization, but you want to communicate with international students, you can always join Tutor Forces' events as a volunteer.



— What plans do tutors have for the new five years? What tasks do you set for yourself?

— Even though when cooperating with similar organizations at other universities, many have noted the high level of Tutor Forces' work, the main task for the team is to continually improve the quality of the events and the training of tutors. In the next year, until the pandemic recedes, we plan to create projects related to the creation of online content, remote communication, and support. As soon as it becomes possible, we will develop the excursion direction, as it is always very popular among foreigners. We have planned a number of projects in cooperation with other organizations of Polytechnic University, our old friends and partners: SPbPU Student Council, Harmony Center, YESLAB, and CPVM Rodina. I am sure that all of this will come to fruition.

— Pavel, we have no doubts about it either! Good luck to you, and wish you new achievements!

Дата публикации: 2021.07.08

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