

'Tutor Forces' Helps International Students at SPbPU

According to the Russian State Project '5-100-2020', one of the factors of competitive growth of Russian universities is increasing number of international students who come to study here. Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University holds a position within the top three Russian universities by the number of international students. Here at Polytech we know how to help them feel comfortable at a new place of studying. International students live in dormitories, know little about Russian traditions and Russian language and, of course, they need tutors and individual approach. Russian students - members of tutor organization 'Tutor Forces' - help them with these issues.



Please welcome! Sasha GLAZKOVA, Katya KOVALEVA and Dmitry BURANTSEV are third-year students of Institute of Industrial Management, Economics and Trade (IMET SPbPU). They are a fundamental force of Polytechnic tutor organization. There is one more person in this collaboration: teaching assistant at the Department of International Students Training Pavel Nedelko. He professes History for students, and became a thought leader of 'Tutor Forces'.

The members of tutor organization understand that for international students who

come to study to Russia for the first time it is very important to have a person who can help them with all the emerging issues. A tutor is both a friend and an instructor. Lots of things are up to the Polytech tutor. It is not only help in getting accustomed to the new environment, but also organization of leisure time: concerts, museums, sights of St. Petersburg, cinema - there are plenty of various events.

Tutors meet international students on their arrival to St. Petersburg, and spend a lot of time with them. They should solve many different issues. About some of them our Polytech tutors told us in their interviews.

- Pavel, the first question is yours. Tell us, how did everything start?



Pavel: The idea to create a tutor organization came from SPbPU authorities: Vice-Rector for International Relations, prof. D.G. ARSENIYEV issued this suggestion. And we did it. To help international students get accustomed to life at Polytech, make their living in Russia comfortable, help them with dormitories, timetables, etc. - these things are included in tutors' duties. And as far as I have done it professionally, I needed assistants from the students. That is how our organization has appeared. Then we met Dmitry - he is a manager on the part of the students.

Dmitry: Actually, duty positions are just a formal part of our work. We all here are doing more or less the same tasks; in general, we do everything together. Except three of us, there are a few students more, and for every event we involve volunteers in our work.

- We see that such a work demands a lot of altruism. An international student who is 'attached' to you, can phone you at 3:00 a.m. and say that he has got lost. And even if it is necessary to meet him, you cannot turn your back on him, can you?

Pavel: Yes, every international student who comes to Polytech has a tutor - a person, who helps him in every issue. We do everything absolutely voluntarily. Before arrival we get a name of a student and his or her contacts. And then there can be different situations: someone repulses help, someone phones and says that he cannot find exit from airport.



- Are you really ready to keep in touch and solve such problems 24 hours a day?

Dmitry: We do not have strong regulations on the time we spend with international students. But if they phone us with some issue we cannot say them nay. We help international students with dormitories, everyday issues, and then they decide in their own account whether they wish to communicate with us or not. So it depends on the students.

- You carry out a very serious mission. International student, who is for the first time in our country, would conclude about Russian people after communication with you. It is very responsible!

Dmitry: Every tutor's task is to show St. Petersburg, its citizens and our university to international students in such a way to make it something special. It is very important for him or her to feel here free and comfortable.

- It is interesting to know about your own reasons: why did you decide to become a tutor?

Pavel: When I was a student, I also worked as a volunteer: it was interesting for me. I met Julia TITOVA, who was an organizer of a voluntary shop 'Spasibo'. We are good friends. I have participated in this project since its beginning, it was funny, interesting, and there were creative people, so I was involved in this atmosphere. Then I took part in Ecology project, and some others, and finally came to the work with international students, and started working for establishment of a tutor organization.

Dmitry: A studied at school with in-depth study of German, and went to Germany on a student mobility program. When 'Tutor Forces' was established, I immediately joined it. I like to communicate with people, to learn them better. We always discuss things which surprise them in our culture, and international students tell us about traditions of their countries.



Sasha: I also studied at school with in-deep study of foreign languages, and was interested in them. I speak German, English and recently have started studying Spanish. I took part in student mobility programs, went to Germany, and last year participated in international voluntary project in Greece. I am fond of learning something new about foreign cultures and traditions. Maybe it is not always interesting to read books about it, but real-life communication is definitely amazing!

Kate: We have many different ways to communicate with international students. For example, it is group work, when two tutors organize for a group of international students some events. It can be excursion to some museum, or walk around the city. I love it, because when you do it by yourself, you can see the city from a new side.

- It seems you have lots of friends among international students?

Pavel: Yes, of course! As a teacher I often communicate with them, so I really have a lot of friends.

Dmitry: Sasha is a very active tutor; she has a great number of international friends! For example, when we were first-year students, two international students from Germany came to SPbPU. Sasha and I met them once a week, and spend a whole day together walking on the streets and visiting museums. And since that time we are still keeping in touch with them on Facebook. One of these girls visited St. Petersburg this summer, and, of course, we met with her.

Sasha: Last semester I attended vocal lessons with two guys from Spain. Every weekend during a half of the year we met and sang. It was amazing - we tried to learn Spanish and Russian songs. Also we had a great opportunity to improve our German skills by participating special program, when you meet a native speaker in friendly atmosphere and change the language of communication from time to time. So the student from Germany helped me with German language, and I taught him Russian. Students from Spain invited me to Valencia. Unfortunately I couldn't visit them in summer, but we have already come to agreement to meet in Valencia in winter.



- Tell us about the events you organize for international students.

Pavel: There are different programs and events. In the beginning the 'Tutor Forces' was created for the students who come to Higher School of International Educational Programs of SPbPU to study [foundation programs](#). They study here for a year and learn [Russian language](#), History, Geography, Physics, Math - basic subjects, and then enter universities. In most of the cases they prefer Polytech. We organize excursions and holidays for them, master classes, concerts and so on. Some students come to SPbPU for a semester under the programs of academic mobility. And here we have another task: we should meet them in the airport, transport them to the dormitories, show and tell all the important things: for example, where students can buy a SIM card or medicines. Also we have [International Polytechnic Summer and Winter Schools](#). They have their own [team of tutors](#), and their tasks are almost the same as ours.

Kate: We have conducted survey among international students to find out what they are interested in. I remember a girl from Morocco – Hannah ITRI. She is so active! I have never met such people! She speaks a great amount of foreign languages: one day we played a board game, and she had to explain some word. She started in Russian, continued in English, then - French, Turkish, Arabic and finally managed to explain it!

- Do you need to make international students participate in different events?

Kate: Some students and even groups of students are very interested in everything that is going on, and take part in various events with great pleasure.

Dmitry: Of course, there are always some people, who do not participate. You can meet them in every group, and the reasons are very different. Someone is afraid of being active, someone is too shy. But, of course, we try to interest every student in our projects.



- There are lots of creative young people among international students.
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Pavel: It is true: for example, students from Turkey created here a rock band. We found musical instruments, a room, and now they have a place for musical rehearsals. So there is a big number of really talented people among our students.

- How can a person join your tutor's team?

Dmitry: You should speak at least one foreign language, and have a desire to work with foreigners, to help them.

Sasha: Frankly speaking, knowledge of a foreign language is not always necessary. The main goal of international students is to learn Russian, that is why it wouldn't be worse if a tutor speaks only Russian. It may be more difficult, but also it's an opportunity to learn Russian faster.

Pavel: You should be responsible - this is the main factor, and Sasha always pays attention to it (smiles).

Sasha: Yes, it is important, because you should always be ready to explain elementary things: to show nearest shops, metro stations, pharmacies, to explain

how it works. We have a special handbook, and there is a proper instruction how to tell about all these things and make a life of international student easier. Tutors should have a good memory to keep in mind all these aspects.

Kate: It is important to be open-minded, friendly and non-contentious.

- What about any difficulties? Do you have them?

Dmitry: Frankly speaking, we have lots of ideas, but we do not know how to implement some of them. For example, very soon our own site will start working, but we do not know how to integrate it with the University domain.

Pavel: While we don't have funding, we try to compensate it somehow. For example, to connect some immaterial resources like student clubs or organizations. We can make lots of events together.

- And what about your future plans?

Pavel: We want to open an international club in one of the dormitories. There will be Russian language club, concerts, cooking classes, movie screening - everything will be in one place. Now we do not have our own base: we are located at Higher School of International Educational Programs - when we need in communication, we meet in some of the classrooms. During the last week of August we met about 100 international students. We made a tour about our International campus for them and created an adventure game. Also we launched some free excursions about St. Petersburg, which would be held during September. And in autumn School of Tutors starts working.



Dmitry: Information about this school you can find in our group. We are waiting for everyone. We need people who are ready to participate in our events, their organization and develop tutor organization of SPbPU.

- Thank you very much for your interview! We wish you good luck in your important and responsible work!

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