Russian language instruction was first offered at the University of Washington in the 1915-16 academic year by a German professor, Hans Jacob Hoff. The next year, a native speaker of Russian, Elvine Simeon, was hired with financial support from Samuel Hill (1857-1931, n.d. photo courtesy Oregon Historical Society) to teach Russian language, literature, reading and grammar in the Department of Oriental History, Literature and Languages. Her courses were listed in the University Catalog for two years, after which there appears to have been a 15-year hiatus in the teaching of Russian at the UW.

Russian at the University of Washington is rooted in the region's history. Well-known transportation and utilities magnate Samuel Hill's legacy to Washington state includes the Peace Arch at Blaine and Maryhill Museum in Goldendale, which has in its collection an interesting group of 19th-century Russian icons. Hill travelled from Asia to Europe in 1901 using parts of the then incomplete Trans-Siberian Railway, and during World War I he carried out a mission for the U.S. Government to evaluate Russian railways.

A Fresh Start

Russian was reintroduced in 1933 by Ivar Spector, at that time an instructor in Oriental Studies, who expanded the offerings in Russian literature, history and culture through the 1930s and early '40s. George Taylor, who joined the Department of Oriental Studies in 1939, increased both its size and its stature during his tenure as its head. Noah Gershevsky joined the Far Eastern Department in 1943 and was in charge of Russian language teaching until 1963. Vadim Pahn and Elias Novikov were added as Russian language instructors in 1946 and 1947, and in 1949 Victor Ehrlich joined them as assistant professor of Slavic Languages & Literature. In 1953, the appointment of Lew Micklesehn, who took over most of the courses in Slavic linguistics, made it possible for the offerings in Russian literature to be expanded.

Slavic graduate studies were introduced in 1954, and the first doctorate was awarded in 1960. Polish was
introduced in 1954, Czech in 1962, and both languages have been regularly taught since then. In 1964 a well-integrated four-year Russian language program was established.

**Travels In The Far East**

From 1933 to 1968, Russian and other Slavic studies were administratively a branch of Oriental Studies at the University of Washington. First in the Department of Oriental Studies (1933-42), then in the Far Eastern Department (1942-49), and finally in the Department of Far Eastern and Slavic Languages and Literatures (1949-68). In 1968 we achieved our autonomy as the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, but our ties with our original mother institution (as of 1968, called the School of International Studies, and then the Jackson School of International Studies) are still profound and mutually beneficial.

**History of Individual Languages**

- [History of Teaching Romanian at UW](https://slavic.washington.edu/history)

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