



Celebrating 50 years of NU Trailblazers!

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A Cold War Education: The Russian School

Norwich University's Russian School stood as a beacon of cultural and educational exchange during the Cold War era, offering students a unique and immersive experience in Russian language and culture. Founded in 1960 at Windham College in Putney, VT, the program moved to Norwich in 1968 and thrived under the leadership of Dr. Marianna A. Poltoratzky.



The program awarded a Master of Arts degree in Russian Language and Literature, attracting students to the Northfield campus from across the country. The curriculum, inspired by the Army Language School, was designed to condense a year of college Russian into a seven-week session. While in attendance, participants took a pledge to speak only Russian. During its peak, enrollment reached nearly 300 students, including a significant female presence.



Seven of the eleven members of the inaugural graduation class were women. These pioneers not only excelled academically but demonstrated a communal spirit that transcended the classroom walls. The total immersion in the Russian language continued in extra-curricular activities such as Russian choir, folk dancing, theater performances, cooking and sports.

Each summer the Russian School presented a symposium on topics in Russian literature and culture, bringing internationally renowned scholars to campus. Most famously, renowned Soviet dissident and Nobel Prize-winning author, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (*middle photo, far right*) visited in July 1975. The exiled writer came to Norwich at the invitation of his friend Nicholas V. Pervushin, the then-director of the Russian school. Solzhenitsyn, who had endured eleven years in Soviet prisons for his criticism of the regime, settled in Cavendish, VT in 1976, where he raised his family until his return to Russia in 1994.

As the Soviet Union dissolved and interest in Russian studies waned, enrollment in the Russian



School declined, leading to its closure after the 2000 session.

The legacy of the Russian School and its impact on generations of students stand as a testament to Norwich University's enduring commitment to excellence, innovation, and global engagement.

Records documenting women's history and experience at Norwich are available through the University Archives. <https://archives.norwich.edu/>

In 1972, Vermont College merged with Norwich University. 2024 marks the **50th anniversary** of the first women to live on the Northfield campus and the first to join the NU Corps of Cadets—two years prior to the US Service Academies!

Donate or loan items to the Sullivan Museum and History Center for an upcoming exhibit on Norwich women.

Contact [Amber Wingerson](#), Curator of Exhibits, if you have Corps or athletic uniforms or memorabilia from academic, sports, social or dorm life.
(The exhibit is expected to be ready for Homecoming 2024.)