



**THE LANGUAGE FLAGSHIP**

*Creating Global Professionals*

# **NARRATING THE PROFESSIONAL SELF**

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**Russian Flagship students are telling their stories**

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# Narratives and organizations

- In organizations, stories and narratives have attracted considerable attention in the last 25 years, as part of a narrative turn (e.g. Gabriel, 2017; Schreyögg, 2005; Tirvassen, 2018)
- Narratives constitute the way that organizations are constructed and experienced (Gabriel, p. 64)
- Through narratives members of an organization advocate their values (Meyer, 1995).
- Narratives influence human action (Ropo & Hoykinpuro, 2017)

# Self-Narratives: Strategic Stories

- One of the most widespread institutional genres
- A fundamental universal means of making sense of experience (Ochs & Capps, 1996)
- Narratives of possible selves may serve as correlates and predictors of future positive outcomes (King & Hicks, 2006, 2009)

# What features of self-narratives to look for?

- Capacity to elaborate on the goals
- Create a story of confronting challenges and overcoming obstacles
- Demonstrate purposeful development
- Manifest investment through agency and construction of causality (King & Hicks, 2006, 2009; Vaccaro et al., 2018)

# Framework

- Constructivist grounded theory
- Narrative theory
- Discourse Analysis
- Frequency count

# Study

- 40 students
- Cross-sectional study
- A series of “self-edits”:
  - Applications for the Flagship
  - Applications for the FLAS summer scholarships
  - Application for the Boren scholarships

# Interrogating students' self-narratives

- How do students narrate their professional selves?
- Do students' narratives change over time?
- Do students' self-narratives predict their future success in the program?
  - How do students talk about their long- and short-term goals?
  - How do students construct their agency?
  - How do students explain their participation in the program?
  - How do students explain their choices?

# Narrative types

Narrative moves	Application to Flagship	Application for FLAS
Prompts	Please include a statement of purpose which describes your current educational goals, indicates possible future professional interests, and addresses your reasons for applying to the Flagship. What would you like to achieve in the Russian Flagship and how can we help you achieve it?	How will this FLAS Fellowship enrich your academic and career goals; How will the proposed language of training advance your research and proposed program of study; and How will this language and area study training fit in to your long-term career goals?
Suggested size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Please limit your statement to 500 words or less.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• up to 2 pages in length</li><li>• 1-inch margins</li><li>• 12 font size</li><li>• Times New Roman or Arial fonts</li></ul>
Actual size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 299 words on average</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 733 words on average</li></ul>

- **Both groups of students submit shorter than suggested essays**

# Goals

Narrative moves	Application to Flagship	Application for FLAS
Goals: Long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “I will straddle the past and present to shape tomorrow’s best future”</li><li>• “perform whatever job I may be doing after college to the best ability possible”</li><li>• “use my talents in the world”</li><li>• “become the global leader”</li><li>• “complete my dreams of helping anyone and everyone I can”</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Students begin to avoid “flowery goals”</i></li><li>• “The overarching goal of my undergraduate experience is to attain near-native fluency in Russian so that I can also attain my future career goals”</li></ul>

- **Vague long-term goals are replaced with concrete ones**
- **Clichéd descriptions give way to original language**
- **Stylistically, with time, students begin to avoid metaphoric language**

# Goals

Narrative moves	Application to Flagship	Application for FLAS
Goals: Short-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>This group tends to avoid concrete descriptions</i></li><li>• "I plan studying informatics and Russian at Indiana University for my bachelors diploma" (<i>such concrete descriptions appear only 20% of submissions</i>)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "I intend to complete a master's degree with a focus on Russian and Eastern European culture"</li><li>• "My dedication to Russian is the foundation of my undergraduate study"</li></ul>

- **Students become able to elaborate on short terms goals**
- **Student begin to offer concrete descriptions**

# Purpose development

Narrative moves	Application to Flagship	Application for FLAS
Purpose development: Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Avoid describing previous experiences</i></li> <li>• “Throughout my high school career, I've been tempted with many routes of various professions” (<i>only in 12% of submissions</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “When I became obsessed with the Cold War at a young age, my interest in the history of the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. encouraged me to study more about the fascinating country of Russia.”</li> </ul>
Purpose development: Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Avoid describing challenges</i></li> <li>• “Throughout my high school career, I've been tempted with many routes of various professions. I decided my senior year that I will enter the Air Force through Indiana University ROTC” (<i>only in 12% of submissions</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I cultivated this knowledge well before college; I tried to sneak in Russian topics into my high school presentations and papers at every opportunity.”</li> </ul>

- **Discussions of a purpose become a significant part of the narrative**
- **Students connect current interests with the interests they had at high school or earlier**
- **A story about overcoming challenges is a new part of the narratives**

# Agency

Narrative moves	Application to Flagship	Application for FLAS
Agency: Narrator affects change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I decided to challenge myself by taking a class more advanced than I had ever taken” (<i>only in 12% of submissions</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Having the context of living in a Russian speaking country allows me to bring a new perspective into the classroom when I return. By using my knowledge of Russian to study primary sources, I can become more informed about Russia’s role in the world and better participate in the discussion that defines the mission of the Flagship.”</li> </ul>
Agency: Identifying causal relationship		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“When choosing a university, the existence of a Russian Flagship program was crucial in my decision to attend Indiana University and major in international studies.”</li> </ul>

- **Students begin to emphasize their own agency**
- **Students begin to establish causal (instead of chronological) relationship between events in their lives**
- **More advanced students portray themselves as agents of change and the main force behind unfolding events**

# Preliminary conclusions

- Student begin to develop their sense of a group identity after spending at least one and a half years in the program
- The main changes are evident in how students describe their long- and short-term goals, as well as how they construct their agency
- Surprisingly, even after one or more years in the program students do not embrace the narrative cultivated by the program; instead of emphasizing benefits that the program offers them, the students foreground their own agency and describe themselves as a main force affecting qualitative and quantitative change in their lives and abilities.
- This inability to elaborate on the benefits of the program and the alignment between institutional and personal goals warrants further investigation in order to delineate between genre conventions, lack of clear understanding of one's position within the Flagship, the narrow understanding of the critical language initiative and the status of a critical language, and/or a limited access to information about career options and professional networks.

# References

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