

Floods in the Midwest detour Russian student to desert

Olga Laskina completes scholarship thanks to collaborative spirit at EMSL

While having school closed for foul weather is a source of joy for some, it was not for Olga Laskina. An undergraduate student at St. Petersburg Institute of Technology, Olga received a scholarship to the University of Iowa's Nanoscience and Nanotechnology Institute. At the institute, she planned on studying the applications and implications of nanoscience and nanotechnology for 3 months. In particular, she was interested in environmental processes and human health, as well as the fundamental properties of nanomaterials.

However, when Olga arrived at the University of Iowa in June, she was met by the sight of people filling sandbags in anticipation of the coming storms. The next day, the building where she was to begin her research was under 5 feet of water.

With the Iowa campus closed and Olga having limited time in the country, the director of the Nanoscience and Nanotechnology Institute, Dr. Vicki Grassian, decided to see if Olga could work on a university project at another location. A member of EMSL's User Advisory Committee, Vicki called her colleagues—including Olga's brother, Alex Laskin—at the U.S. Department of Energy's EMSL. Could the national scientific user facility accommodate Olga on University of Iowa-EMSL projects?

Her EMSL colleagues answered with a resounding "yes!" Olga travelled to EMSL, located in the dry desert of southeastern Washington State. She joined the research team working on understanding the fundamental properties of organic material on aerosol particles. This work is designed to better understand the chemistry of aerosol particles in the upper atmosphere. Olga worked on elucidating the chemical composition and structure of the peptides and polyaminoacids that coat the particles using mass spectrometers.

"EMSL has very good instruments for doing research projects, and it was really interesting to work there," said Olga. Even when the flood waters receded, she stayed at EMSL to complete her scholarship.



*Photo by Mauro Heck,
Iowa City*

When the University of Iowa campus flooded, Olga Laskina completed her research scholarship at EMSL.