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"Foundations of Russian statehood": results of the first experience in teaching future artists of traditional arts and crafts

Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis of the experience of teaching the academic discipline "Foundations of Russian statehood" at the Russian University of traditional art crafts. The difficulties and problems that arose during the conduct of educational activities on this discipline are described. The peculiarities of teaching the discipline to future artists of traditional arts and crafts are indicated. Conclusions are drawn that this discipline has been established and has potential for further development. Proposals have been made for changes in the educational and methodological complex of this discipline.

Keywords: Foundations of Russian statehood, patriotism, ideology, statehood, traditional values, state-civilization, civilizational approach.

This article is a continuation of the author's previously published work, which focused on the specifics of teaching the course "Foundations of Russian statehood"⁴⁵. The purpose of the article is to scientifically analyze the experience of the first two years of teaching this academic subject at the Russian University of traditional art crafts, identify current issues in teaching the discipline and draw key conclusions based on the obtained experience.

Starting from the 2023–2024 academic year, a new academic discipline called "Foundations of Russian statehood" (FRS) was introduced into Russian universities. This discipline is considered as an introductory, practice-oriented course within the university preparation program for students. In terms of content, FRS course is linked with courses such as "History of Russia" and "Philosophy". It belongs to the block of compulsory disciplines.

The FRS course consists of five blocks (sections):

- What is Russia?
- The Russian state-civilization;
- The Russian worldview and values of Russian civilization;
- Political system of Russia;
- Challenges of the future and country development.

The introduction of the new discipline "Foundations of Russian statehood"

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was carried out based on Presidential Decree No. 809 dated November 9, 2022, "On Approval of the Fundamentals of State Policy for Preserving and Strengthening Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values", which had the status of a "strategic planning document" [9]. Speaking at a meeting of the State Council, the President pointed out the vulnerability of young Russians to information and ideological influence: "In connection with well-known geopolitical events, young people were hit by a barrage of information attacks and found themselves in a very vulnerable position. This informational confrontation has always existed, but now it has taken on a particularly acute character" [3].

According to the President of the Russian Federation, the new academic course aims to provide young Russians with a solid foundation in the form of reliable knowledge. As noted in the letter from the Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education addressed to the heads of higher education institutions, the goal of the course is to "form in students a system of knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as values, rules and norms of behavior associated with the awareness of belonging to Russian society, the development of patriotism and citizenship, the formation of a spiritual, moral and cultural foundation of a developed and integrated personality aware of the peculiarities of the historical path of the Russian state, the originality of its political organization and the alignment of personal dignity and success with public progress and political stability of their homeland" [8, p. 2].

Three decades of "deideologization," or rather the indoctrination of liberal-Western ideas and values into the consciousness of Russian citizens, have led to a certain value-moral crisis in Russian society. Due to many circumstances, domestic social sciences and humanities could not adequately address this crisis. Meanwhile, in just one year—2021—Western countries and private organizations officially allocated \$1 billion 315 million dollars for active destructive propaganda targeting Russian student youth [10, p. 191]. To this we can add the mass immigration to Russia of representatives from numerous countries who received primary education in their home countries, where Russia is often portrayed negatively. We can agree with A.F. Nikitin's opinion that "the Russian education system significantly delayed the introduction of this course, designed not only to fill gaps in students' knowledge but also to address the unique ideological and spiritual vacuum that has formed over the past few decades in the education system" [5, p. 17]. When the FRS course was introduced in 2023, its necessity raised doubts even among some teachers of socio-humanitarian disciplines. It is no coincidence that the main topic of the author's first article, published in issue No. 1 (48) in 2024, was precisely the justification for introducing FRS. Now, nearly two years after the start of teaching the FRS course, the need for this course is no longer questioned by the teaching community.

The central concept of the course is "Russian statehood." The term "statehood" is broader than the term "state," although, of course, the state remains a central component of statehood. Statehood encompasses both the actual system of relations of public authority (the state at various stages of its development) and a special system of relationships between state power and non-state forms of organizing public life (social, ethnic, confessional and other groups of the

population).

Because of this, the concept of "Foundations of Russian statehood" serves as the core element structuring the content of the academic discipline. This affects the methodology of teaching, as each educator delivering the course must operate using categories from various humanities: history, geography, ethnology, law, economics, philosophy, etc. At times, the content of the FRS course overlaps with topics studied within these subjects. However, this circumstance largely helps improve students' comprehension of different disciplines. For example, when studying philosophy in their second year, students immediately recall the philosophical views of Russian slavophiles about Russia as a state-civilization, which was discussed in a simplified manner in the FRS course a year earlier.

It is reasonable to ask whether it is possible to shape a young person's worldview through the FRS course in just one semester of their first year at university, especially given the constant influence of various, including destructive forces via social networks. Of course, a single academic course cannot serve as the basis for a student's worldview. However, like all socio-humanitarian disciplines, the FRS course can help young people independently reflect on their own place and role in the life of the country. In this regard, the role of the teacher becomes particularly important. In order for students to understand Russia as a unique state-civilization in its historical development, share feelings of citizenship and patriotism, while simultaneously cultivating critical thinking and independent judgment, it is essential not to avoid addressing "difficult questions" in the country's history and politics. The educator should ensure an intellectual-emotional response from the student audience. To achieve this, both lectures and practical seminar sessions need to be diversified. In small student groups a discussion-based format appears most effective.

Let us take as an example the teaching of the FRS course at the Russian University of Traditional Arts (formerly known as the Higher School of Folk Arts — Academy). According to the author, the pilot implementation of the FRS course was successful. Evidence of this success was the high level of student engagement during classes. Specifically, students proposed topics for presentations and reports on their own initiative. They also actively participated in discussions, contributing from their seats.

Speaking about our experience teaching the FRS course, it should be noted that it cannot be considered universal. The uniqueness of the Russian University of Traditional Arts lies in the fact that its future artists of traditional applied arts cannot help but be patriots. Russian traditional artistic crafts are not only a phenomenon of Russian art but also one of the foundations of Russian national identity. Students who are ready to dedicate their lives and creativity to Russian art already have a positive attitude toward the FRS course from the beginning.

Students at the university come from the majority of Russian regions. There are few international students and those who do attend are almost exclusively of Russian origin from post-soviet countries (such as Belarus, Latvia, Kazakhstan). This demographic makeup allows the avoidance of challenges related to adapting the course for foreign students. As R.Kh. Usmanov notes, significant difficulties

arise when working with international students due to their lack of a basic historical understanding of the formation and development of the Russian Federation [10]. This problem is fundamental one in teaching FRS in most universities in Russia. However, at the Russian University of Traditional Arts, due to the aforementioned reasons, there is no need to create special courses tailored for international students that supplement the FRS course.

Typically, once a month, after covering one of the topics, anonymous quick surveys were conducted among the students. The aim of these surveys was not only to assess how well the material was understood by the students but also to help the educator gain insight into the questions and interests that emerged during the practical sessions.

At the end of the course, when asked the question, "Should the FRS course be taught in universities?" more than 90% of respondents answered positively. Approximately 10% abstained from answering. Not a single negative answer was given. Thus, although this discipline is mandatory, students recognize the importance of FRS. After completing the first section of the discipline titled "What is Russia," dedicated to the spatial, human, resource and ideo-symbolic dimensions of Russia, students were asked to list achievements in Russian science and technology. It is heartening that along with well-known facts learned in school, such as the invention of radio in Russia and space exploration, the Crimean Bridge was also named among outstanding technical achievements.

The second section of the course, "The Russian state-civilization", initially posed some challenges because the definition of "civilization" itself varies even among scholars. However, the definition of civilization presented by the developers of the FRS course, originally formulated by Russian slavophiles in the mid-19th century, was quickly and easily grasped by the students.

The proposed topic for the lightning poll, "Do you agree that Russia is an independent unique civilization?" surprised with its question formulation. For the surveyed students, a positive answer to the question was obvious. The survey showed that for future traditional applied arts artists, such concepts as "patriotism," "love," "creation" and other value-based foundations (constants) of Russian civilization remain relevant.

Mastering the course section on "Political System of Russia" did not pose difficulties for the students. They were all familiar with the forms of state structure and government throughout the country's history, although they occasionally confused dates and the exact names of state bodies.

The final section of the course, "Future challenges and country development," generated considerable interest. Three surveys were conducted on this section. In response to the question "How do you see the future of Russia?" a wide variety of answers were given. In particular, opinions were expressed that Russia would establish scientific bases on the Moon and Mars. In response to the question "What global challenges and trends could influence the strategic development of Russia?" demographic problems, environmental issues and subversive activities by geopolitical opponents of Russia were listed. To the question "Can the development of traditional artistic crafts contribute to the development of Russia?" there was a

unanimous answer — "Yes."

Such a topical issue as the theme of Special Military Operation arouses keen interest. An anonymous survey conducted by the author revealed that all students support the holding Special Military Operation. Moreover, upon learning that students at the Taganrog Pedagogical Institute unanimously agreed that Russia is fighting against neo-nazism and western globalization [4, p. 115], the author conducted a similar survey among students at the Russian University of Traditional Arts, asking them the same question. However, the students from RUTA in St. Petersburg responded similarly to those from the "frontline" city of Taganrog.

Almost all topics of lectures and practical classes touched upon the history of Russia to some extent. When conducting an anonymous survey, students named modern Russia under President V.V. Putin and the Soviet Union era as most consistent with their ideals. Twenty percent identified the Russian Empire as their ideal. When asked directly which historical period they would like to live in, all students answered that they are satisfied with the current epoch in which they live. Among the great political figures of Russia, whom the students consider the most outstanding, the majority preferred Peter I.

All the collected survey data (over 150 responses), texts of reports, and presentations are preserved and used in further work. It was precisely these survey results that allowed conclusions to be drawn about how well students have mastered the content of the new discipline and identify objective challenges in teaching it.

Students of RUTA show a strong interest in the course not only because they need to listen to it and receive credit. The FRS course is interesting to students for practical reasons as well. Specifically, understanding the fundamentals of the Russian state helps shape their civic stance and awareness of their role in society while facilitating comprehension of the country's political system and legal framework. Students actively presented papers, almost all of which were accompanied by presentations. All students presented their reports, with some of them doing so multiple times. A particular interest was generated by the study and comparison of Russia's regions. The students enthusiastically delivered presentations on the history of various regions of our vast country. Interestingly, not only those hailing from Russian provincial towns but also students from Saint Petersburg and other metropolises demonstrated a keen interest in different parts of the country they had visited or wished to visit. Among the student presentations, narratives about the history and culture of specific regions (particularly Siberia, Arkhangelskaya Oblast' and Krasnodarsky Krai) dominated, as many students originated from these areas. Considerable attention was drawn to the history and current state of Cossackdom. Furthermore, significant interest was evoked by such topics as contemporary challenges (globalization, deteriorating environmental conditions, demographic crisis, etc.) and their impact on Russian statehood and society. Engaging reports were made on these themes.

First-year students, while studying the course, also master a range of applied skills: they acquire public speaking skills, learn to write texts and create presentations, work with literature that reflects various, sometimes opposing, points of view. The FRS course helps students develop critical thinking and an independent

perspective on events and phenomena.

These skills are highly important under modern conditions. As G.V. Sheshukova noted, “currently we have to acknowledge that most students show a decreasing need for humanities knowledge and humanistic culture” [12, p. 24-25]. Non-core theoretical disciplines among non-humanitarian majors and specialties at several universities fail to spark interest because students do not see their connection to future professional activities. However, humanities education at university serves as foundational relative to professional training since it contributes to personal development, acquisition of necessary intellectual qualities, formation of cultural, ethnic, religious tolerance and universal ethics [12, p. 29]. Conversely, students at the Russian University of Traditional Arts demonstrate an interest in philosophical questions, as only someone who has deeply comprehended national history, culture and key aspects of Russian statehood can become a true artist in traditional arts and crafts.

The difficulties encountered in teaching this discipline are no different from those faced when presenting other socio-economic subjects. Specifically, students struggle to remember historical dates, although they generally understand the sequence of historical events; despite their interest in Russian regions, they lack sufficient knowledge of the geography of their own country.

In his teaching, the author relied on two textbooks titled “Foundations of Russian statehood”, edited by S.V. Perevezentsev [6] and A.V. Malko [7]. These textbooks are written in an engaging journalistic style, making reading enjoyable. They are characterized by logical structure, thematic consistency, reliability of information and scientific objectivity. However, they also have certain shortcomings. For instance, when discussing the civilizational approach, arbitrary comparisons are made between universalist, civilizational, formational, stage-based and other approaches without drawing concrete conceptual conclusions. While there is extensive citation of Russian philosophers of the idealist school, there is no mention of the philosophical heritage of A.I. Herzen, N.G. Chernyshevsky, G.V. Plekhanov and others. Additionally, these textbooks contain a wealth of factual and theoretical material, which is often presented simply through description and enumeration. The author intends to create his own textbook on the Foundations of Russian statehood specifically designed for future artists of traditional arts and crafts.

Not only at the Russian University of Traditional Arts, but also in most universities across Russia, the introduction of the Foundations of Russian statehood (FRS) as a subject is received with understanding and approval. As noted by S.A. Zaitseva, who conducted research on how students perceive the FRS course based on higher educational institutions in Moscow, there is predominantly a positive attitude towards this new academic discipline [2, pp. 123-124].

Society has long recognized the urgent need to formulate a consolidating state-national idea. Nationwide sociological surveys [1] confirm the interest of both Russian citizens and students in a course dedicated to exploring the value orientations of past and present Russia. Naturally, students' interest in the topics covered in the FRS course varies depending on individual experiences and

perspectives. This diversity occasionally sparks debates between students and instructors, and even more frequently, among the students themselves.

Teachers face the challenge of avoiding reducing the academic discipline to simplistic propaganda. The FRS course is a worldview-oriented subject, but not a political doctrine. First-year students should not be overloaded with excessive historical details, nuances of government structures or complex theories about the essence of global civilizations. Instead, the course should help foster a sense of attachment to one's country, its past, present and future. The importance of the course is amplified by the fact that, like many theoretical disciplines, the FRS course has a certain "delayed" effect. In other words, many students fully appreciate the significance of the acquired knowledge later, during the study of Russian history, philosophy, basics of religions and other subjects.

Based on these findings, what practical outcomes should follow? Considering the specificity of the Russian University of Traditional Arts, it is essential to expand topics related to the history and culture of Russian cities and regions within the first section of the course, "What Is Russia," which elicits the greatest interest among students. It is also necessary to introduce a special section on the historical geography of Russia (within the borders of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union), as students often struggle to comprehend the essence of numerous conflicts in the post-soviet space. Given the multiethnic character of our country, it is advisable to incorporate certain ethnological data about the peoples of Russia into the curriculum. We can agree with A.F. Nikitin's opinion: "in circumstances where students derive much of their additional learning materials from internet sources, and foreign forces dominate the global network, it seems quite reasonable to teach students skills to recognize hostile propaganda... Essentially, we're talking about forming general ideas among learners about information warfare, its forms and methods" [5, p. 20].

Further development of the FRS course involves, among other things, clarifying interdisciplinary connections with other social sciences and humanities disciplines (such as Russian history, philosophy and religious studies). Thus, the discipline "Foundations of Russian statehood" presents Russia as a civilization-state, relying on approaches laid down by Russian slavophile philosophers more than 150 years ago. This necessitates introducing certain corrections to the philosophy course, though these changes are not fundamental. Specifically, the author proposes giving greater emphasis to the philosophy of 19th-century Russian slavophiles such as A.S. Khomyakov, N.Ya. Danilevsky, K.N. Leontiev.

To summarize: the FRS academic course has been successfully implemented and holds promise for further development.

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