Winter is nearly upon us, and in the Pacific Northwest that means it's time to break out the skis. And if you're looking to relax with a hot chocolate and a good book after a long day on the slopes, check out Everyone To Skis!: Skiing in Russia and the Rise of Soviet Biathlon by UW History PhD recipient W. D. Frank.

The history of skiing and biathlon in Russia has intrigued Frank since long before he began his studies as a historian. During the 1970s and '80s, Frank was a competitive biathlete, training with the U.S. national team and even qualifying for the U.S. Olympic Trials in 1980. "The Americans against whom I competed were talented athletes," Frank recalls, "and yet, they would get trounced at international races at the hands of the Russians. I could never understand why." Having looked high and low for a book that could explain this puzzle, Frank finally decided that he would have to write it himself. He began his research on the history of biathlon in the Soviet Union as part of his dissertation work at UW. "I was very fortunate to have an excellent group of area advisors in the Department of History. The Russian courses in the Department of Slavic Studies were also phenomenal," he notes.

The finished book, published in 2013, charts the complex story of how popular recreation, political culture, government programs and historical experiences all came together to create the Soviet biathlon juggernaut. And although the center of the biathlon universe has since shifted to Germany, Frank's story remains resonant. "Vladimir Putin has revived the Ready for Labor and Defense Program, an athletic training system that emphasized cross-country skiing and rifle-shooting first proposed by Stalin in the 1930s," notes Frank. "And recently the World Anti-Doping Agency issued a blistering report about drug use and blood doping in Russia. Although this report focuses on track and field, cross-country skiing and biathlon programs have been implicated as well." In this sense, Everyone to Skis! is not only about biathlon, but also about how the forces of big business and state-sponsored nationalism have helped to create the epidemic of performance enhancing drugs and blood doping that plagues the sports world today.

Everyone to Skis! has been warmly received by historians and sporting enthusiasts alike. Among other accolades, it earned Frank the International Skiing History Association's 2015 Ullr Award; and it has also kept him busy lecturing everywhere from Norway to Stanford. Despite these calls on his time, Frank has also been able to pursue a new historical project, focused on an anthology of
Soviet sports memoirs from the 1950s. He is preparing an article based on this research for publication next year.