

Politics of Russia and Eurasia

POLS 366, Fall 2009
Northern Illinois University
Department of Political Science
Instructor: Vlad Kravtsov

Class: T & Th 2:00—3:15 in DU 459
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the politics of the Russian Federation and Eurasia (aka the Commonwealth of Independent States). First, the course provides some essential historical and geographical background for those who have never had a course in Russian history. This part is organized chronologically and covers the period up to the early 1990s, stressing the enduring impact of communist legacies across the region. The second part of the course is organized thematically with the emphasis on Russia. Some of the topics include state effectiveness and state capacity, the development of political institutions, the politics of economic reform, and federation-building. The third part tackles the pathways of democratic transition and consolidation across the region, the rapid divergence in regional characteristics, such as national identities, political institutions and cultures, as well as changing relations with the outside world. In this part, we are most interested in examining what factors hold the region together and determine the interaction between its various countries. The Russian influence on/in the region (and vice versa) deserves a special attention as it is far from uniform. Throughout the course we engage in experiential learning by using documentaries and motion pictures, and supplementing lectures with in-class discussions.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2001).
Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2006)
Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the new Russia: politics and memory during the Yeltsin era* (Cornell University Press, 2002)
Katherine E. Graney, *Of Khans and Kremllins: Tatarstan and the Future of Ethno-Federalism in Russia* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008)
Stephen K. Wegren and Dale R. Herspring, eds., *After Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, Fourth Edition, (Rowman & Littlefield Publisher 2009).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To develop basic cultural competence. The outcome will be measured by the quality of your brief memos on the films screened in class.
- To develop skills of a confident analyst and a thoughtful consumer of political news from Eurasia. The outcome will be measured by the quality of your topical questions, participation in news discussions, as well as participation in class.
- To understand why Russian and select Eurasian political institutions work the way they do. The outcome will be measured by evaluations of you knowledge of the key terms, definitions and concepts, as well as their significance (midterm and finals).

- To develop essential skills in summarizing others' arguments, comparing and contrasting different views on the same topic, and taking a clear position on arguments you find most persuasive. The outcome will be measured by an evaluation of the literature review.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

CLASSROOM DECORUM

Class communication: the easiest way to reach me with brief questions is via e-mail, or grabbing me before or after class. Following this syllabus, keeping up with dates due and tracking changes is also part of the class communication. I reserve the right to adjust (speed up, or slow down) the reading schedule, if necessary for keeping the appropriate learning tempo.

Attendance: Regular attendance and involvement in the class sessions is pivotal for understanding the course material. It is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of each class. Arriving late to class after attendance is taken will be counted as absent; there will be no exceptions; more than 4 absences will result in a reduction on final grade; a significant number of unexcused absences will result in a failing course grade. Note that I reserve the right to give unannounced in-class quizzes on the assigned readings for the week. The quizzes are not punishment, but rather an encouragement not to procrastinate on your readings and a tool to make sure that you progressively digest the required material. Arrive at class on time, remain in class for the entire session, turn off cell phones etc, and abstain from talking with your classmates rather than the entire group. Discussion involving the entire group, of course, is welcomed and encouraged. Always be courteous and respectful of others.

Extensions: Given the amount of material which we should cover in class, it is important that the class progresses at the steady pace. Assignments must be handed to me in class on the day they are due. Computer problems (disk failure, unable to find a printer, etc.), or other reasons/excuses of a similar nature, are not acceptable. Late assignments, extensions or make-ups will **not** be allowed except for authorized extenuating circumstances (medical or family emergency, religious holiday, etc.). I will excuse any absences that result from religious observances, provided that you notify me in advance of the planned absence. If you miss more than two assignments, you should compensate them by taking the final **comprehensive** exam.

READINGS

Readings: The lectures and the required readings are most of the time matching, but the lectures **do not** simply go over the material from the readings. These readings are fundamental for your overall performance in this class. Make sure to have the assigned texts on you when you come to class. Although this course is **not** a seminar, your involvement is essential. The completion of the week's readings will enable you to contribute to our session in multiple ways. In any case, you should do the reading before the class meets.

Additional readings: Occasionally class discussions will focus on the most recent news, regardless of the scheduled topic for the week. I will sometimes distribute additional news articles in class, or forward it to an account you check regularly. There is no reason to panic about the overwhelming burden of the reading load: these additional readings may include journalistic and policy articles, book excerpts, and policy memos. In case if some issues draw your attention, you may suggest them for the in-class reflection.

News resources: To keep up with the current affairs in Russia and Eurasia, you may follow the cover stories and news from English language version of popular internet resources, including *Gazeta*, available at <www.gazeta.ru/english/>. The free RSS feeds or Reader's accounts from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) are available for subscription at <www.rferl.org/subscribe.aspx>. In selecting the feeds there is no need to get them all—you can choose topic/country of your particular interest. Additional bi-weekly Russian Analytical Digest (RAD) is available at <http://www.res.ethz.ch/analysis/rad/>. Given these options, you may stick to either one particular resource throughout the course, or browse them all. Reading Russian/Eurasian news will give you better sense of the context of our class and will prepare you for submitting more sophisticated questions, as well in-class participation. Also, make yourself familiar with an excellent map collection, available at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth.html>.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Plagiarism & Citation

According to the NIU 2008—2009 Undergraduate Catalogue, “The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work that which he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university” (p. 51). As NIU defines plagiarism as Academic Misconduct, you should familiarize yourselves what constitutes plagiarism before turning in any written work, especially if you are submitting your first research paper. Make sure you understand how to cite properly resources you use. For the further information, visit

http://www.reg.niu.edu/regrec/courses/catalogs/08-09/ug_001to066.pdf

<http://polisci.niu.edu/polisci/audience/plagiarism.shtml>

Academic accommodations for students with disabilities

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, NIU is committed to making reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Those students with disabilities that may have some impact on their coursework and for which they may require accommodations should notify the Center for Access-Ability Resources (CAAR) on the fourth floor of the Health Services Building. CAAR will assist students in making appropriate accommodations with course instructors. It is important that CAAR and instructors be informed of any disability-related needs during the first two weeks of the semester.

Undergraduate Writing Awards

The Department of Political Science will recognize, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Winners are expected to attend the Department's spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and \$50.00. Papers, which can be submitted by students or faculty, must be supplied in triplicate to a department secretary by February 28. All copies should have two cover pages – one with the student's name and one without the student's name. Only papers written in the previous *calendar* year can be considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year's competition even if the student has graduated.

Department of Political Science

Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to <http://polisci.niu.edu>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Questions

You should submit **five sets of two** questions about the readings for the upcoming class. Each set of questions corresponds to one thematic part of the class. These should be **no more** than a paragraph long, and should **focus** on some of the key themes of the readings. Possible questions can be about how the readings relate to each other, how they relate to other things you have read, unclear portions of the readings, how the readings would apply to the similar issues in other countries of the region and beyond, why you think the readings do not make sense and so on. Turning in poorly thought out questions in a rush just to fulfill the letter of the assignment definitely will be noticed. On the topic schedule, you will see that there is certain flexibility when to submit your questions. However, plan your submissions carefully. Failure to turn in questions on time will affect your grade. **NB:** The questions should be sent to my e-mail account **before noon** at the day of the submission.

Memos

You are responsible for writing **two** (out of **five** possible) memos to reflect on the films we watched in class. This assignment will help you develop cultural competence. I suggest you do not simply summarize the movie, but rather find its central theme and relate it to the readings you completed prior to the screening. Memos should be **brief** and carefully focused. Plan the timing wisely! These memos are due **prior** the beginning of the class session following the screening.

Midterm and final exams format

The two exams will consist of both multiple choice questions and short identification questions. The multiple-choice questions will be straightforward, with four answers to choose from. For the short answer portion of the exam, you will be expected to identify several terms and explain, in a few words, why they are important. If you expect to miss midterm/exam, it is your responsibility to let me know (in person or via e-mail) the reasons of your absence. Makeup exams will be given only in **extreme** circumstances. I shall be the final arbiter of what meets the definition of "extreme."

Review paper

Tentative template

The paper assignment for the course is a medium length (about 4 pages, single-spaced, 10th font and normal margins) review article of 2-3 scholarly articles or book chapters on a specific topic. Papers must be typed, proofread and spell-checked, pages numbered. There should be a cover-sheet with the topic of the paper, the name of the student, the course number, and the date, and the three articles/chapters.

✓ What types of claims (fact, definition, cause, policy, value) are made?

- ✓ What are the main supportive claims? Is this a sweeping claim, or a qualified statement?
- ✓ What type of proof (evidence) the author uses? Is this evidence critical? Is there need for more proof?
- ✓ How do the author's arguments compare with other readings? Are they positions are similar, complementary, diverging, opposing or simply unlike? How are the authors' positions different?
- ✓ Are there any other examples that either support or challenge the author's perspective? What is omitted?
- ✓ Does the author explain what can be the potential weaknesses of the argument and respond to this?
- ✓ What are the analytical assumptions that drive the logic of the argument?

The topic chosen by you should be specific enough that you can find [at least] three academic publications that are closely related. For example, a paper on "The role of violence in the making of Russian capitalism" is better than "Violence in Russia." As the course focuses on Eurasia, you are welcome to write a paper on Russia, any post-Soviet state, group of states, or the post-communist region as a whole. Note that picking a very recent event in the news will not yet receive academic articles on the topic. Papers on the background to an issue are acceptable.

Tentative topics

Russian Civil Society	The Orthodox Church
Russian foreign policy	Resurgent Islam
Russian identity	The Russian Electoral System
Corruption in Russia	Georgian-Russian Relations
Ukraine's Orange Revolution	Russian-Ukrainian relations
Regime Type in Post-Communism	Autocratic revival
Gradualism vs. Shock Therapy	Civil-military relations

Tentative sources

It is essential that these articles be **scholarly**, and not journalistic or overly policy-oriented. Thus, they should come from journals such as *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *Demokratizatsiya*, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Journal of Democracy*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, *Problems of Post-Communism*, *Russian Social Science Review*, *Slavic Review*, *World Politics*, etc. More policy-oriented journals such as *Foreign Affairs*, *National Interest*, *Foreign Policy*, *Washington Quarterly*, and *Survival* are excluded. Similarly, book chapters should come from scholarly edited volumes. You should be familiar with how to use library resources, such as ProQuest Research Library, JSTOR, First Search, PAIS, Wilson Full Text, etc., to search for articles.

Grade determination

Questions	20%
Memos	20%
Midterm exam	20%
Final exam	20%
Review paper	20%

COURSE SCHEDULE, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1. Overview of history			
8/25	Logistics	Syllabus	Introduction to each other
8/27	Communist system	Kotkin, Ch. 1, 2	1 st set of question due
9/01	Soviet collapse	Kotkin, Ch. 3, 4	1 st set of question due
9/03	Screening I	No readings	<i>Angel's Aisle</i>
9/08	CA in the USSR	Collins, Ch. 3, 4	Topic due/ Memo due
2. Russia's state and politics			
9/10	Breaking with the past	Smith, Ch. 2, 3	2 nd set of questions due
9/15	Political cleavages	Smith, Ch. 8, 9	2 nd set of questions due
9/17	Russia's weak state	Kotkin, 5, 6	2 nd set of questions due
9/22	Political institutions	W & H, Ch. 1, 2	List of articles due
9/24	Russia's media	W & H, Ch. 5	No assignments due
9/29	Russia's military	W & H, Ch. 12	No assignments due
3. Current economic development			
10/01	Economic development	W & H, Ch. 7	3 rd set of questions due
10/06	Crime and corruption	W & H, Ch. 8	3 rd set of questions due
10/08	Clan politics	Collins, Ch. 2, 9	3 rd set of questions due
10/13	<i>Themes 1 thru 3</i>	No readings	Midterm
10/15	Screening II	News	<i>Tycoon</i>
4. Regions and federalism			
10/20	Federation-building	W & H, Ch. 3	Memo due
10/22	Hyper-federalism	Graney, Ch. 1, 2	4 th set of questions due
10/27	Region-building	Graney, Ch. 3, 4	4 th set of questions due
10/29	Future of the Federation	Graney, Ch. 5, 6	4 th set of questions due
11/03	Screening III	News	<i>Prisoner of the Mountains</i>
5. Transitions and transformations			
11/05	CA I: transition	Collins, Ch. 5, 6	5 th set of questions due/ Memo due
11/10	CA II: transformation	Collins, Ch. 7, 8	5 th set of questions due
11/12	"Revolution in orange"	News	5 th set of questions due
11/17	Russia's foreign policy I	W & H, Ch. 10	No assignments due
11/19	Russia's foreign policy II	W & H, Ch. 11	Review paper due
11/24	Screening IV	News	No assignments due
6. Future uncertain?			
11/26	Thanksgiving break	News	No class
12/01	The end of the collapse	Kotkin Ch. 7, 8	Memo due
12/03	Review for the finals	No readings	No assignments due
TBA	<i>Themes 4 thru 6</i>	No readings	Final exam