

GO 327 : Politics in Russia and the Soviet Successor States

Spring 2009

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Course Description:

When the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991, 15 countries appeared on the map where before there had been only one. This course charts the political and economic development of these 15 countries, some of them individually, but also looking at the group as a whole. We attempt to determine, in the process, what, if any, factors remain common in the “post-Soviet” experience, and what, if any, significance those factors have for the current political situation in these states. We begin with a brief discussion of the Soviet Union and its collapse, and then move on to an intensive look at Russia, the most powerful of all the post-Soviet countries, with a specific focus on the unique “tandemocracy” of Medvedev/ Putin and the important that role oil plays in Russia’s economy. We also spend some time looking at the “resurgent Russia” theory, examining Russian foreign policy as regards the US, the EU, and Russia’s own “near abroad”. We then turn to look at the former Soviet republics. We will look at the “success stories” in the Baltic countries, and, arguably, Ukraine, and then turn to look at the less successful “imitation democracies” in the Caucasus and Central Asia, paying special attention to the causes of conflict in these regions, including the interplay of politics, oil, Islam and terrorism.

Learning Goals: In this course, I hope you will:

1. Gain a nuanced understanding of the historical and contemporary forces that determine the levels of political, economic and social development in the various countries of the post-Soviet world.
2. Endeavor to understand why and how these countries differ in their ability to function as functional, modern nation-states in the post-Soviet era.
3. Acquire an appreciation for the conditions that citizens of post-Soviet states live under, and an understanding of how their political, economic and social lives differ from ours.
4. Explore the various ways that these post-Soviet states continue to influence global politics, including especially questions of Russian arms sales and military reform, as well as the problem of terrorism and oil politics in the Caucasus and Central Asian regions of the post-Soviet world.
5. Through various research and writing projects, become acquainted with and gain facility with the best sources of primary data and updated information about political economic and social conditions in the post-Soviet world.
6. Gain a new appreciation for the different methodologies that political scientists use to gather and interpret data and formulate theories about the post-Soviet world.

Required Readings:

Understanding Contemporary Russia, edited by Michael L. Bressler. Boulder : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008.

Petrostate: Putin, Power and the New Russia, Marshall I. Goldman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Caucasus, Christoph Zurcher, 2007.

Silk Road to Ruin: Is Central Asia the New Middle East? Ted Rall. New York: NBM Publishing, 2006.

Course reader packet. Readings from this packet are *required* and are marked in the syllabus with "IN PACKET".

Assignments:

- 1. Course Participation: 40%.** In the interests of making this course as much like a "real seminar" as possible, your informed and consistent participation in class will be worth twice as much as any other assignment. To ensure that you earn this full measure of credit, I will be collecting **DAILY** response papers from you on the reading assigned on the syllabus for every class meeting. ***Please see (and keep!) the accompanying handout on these response papers regarding the required format and the grading schema that I will use for these daily assignments.*** You should be sure to review your response paper before class every day and to be ready to refer to it during class. They will be collected at the end of each class.
- 2. Take-home midterm exam: 20% DUE MARCH 6**
- 3. "A BRIEF FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA" PAPER :** 10 page research paper that will take the form of a foreign policy briefing for the new Obama administration about **one** of the potential foreign policy priorities or goals that will be pursued by Russia or one of the Post-Soviet States (or a number of these states in alliance), with recommendations about how the United States might counter or manage these developments effectively. (Further guidelines to be handed out in class):
20% DUE APRIL 29th in CLASS
- 4. Take-home final exam: 20%: HANDED OUT LAST DAY OF CLASS**

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

- Week One :** **1/21 : Introduction to Course : Where and what ?**
Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 1 -3
1/23: Histories of Post-Soviet Spaces
Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 1-3 continued.
- Week Two:** **1/28 : Post-Soviet Russia : Politics**
Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 4
“How Russia Works: An Assessment of the Medvedev-Putin System”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, #49 (November 5, 2008) : IN PACKET
MAP QUIZ
1/ 30: Putin’s Road to Power and Today’s “Tandemocracy”
--Same readings as 1/28 ; Film “How Putin Came to Power”
- Week Three:** **2/4 : Post-Soviet Russia : Economy**
Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 5
2/ 6: Petropolitics in Russia
“The First Rule of Petropolitics”, Thomas Friedman, *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2006 : IN PACKET
Petrostate: Putin, Power and the New Russia, Marshall I. Goldman, p. 1-54 (Intro, Ch. 1 and Ch. 2)
- Week Four:** **2/ 11**
Petrostate: Putin, Power and the New Russia, Marshall I. Goldman, p. 55-135 (Ch. 3, 4 and 5)
2/ 13

Petrostate: Putin, Power and the New Russia, Marshall I. Goldman, p. 136-209 (Ch. 6 and 7)

“Russia and the Financial Crisis”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, #48, October 17, 2008: IN PACKET

Week Five: 2/ 18 : Multiculturalism and War in Post-Soviet Russia

Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 5

The Post-Soviet Wars, Christoph Zuercher, Ch.4, “Wars over Chechnya”

“Putin’s Long-Ended War Enters Its 10th Year”, RFE/RL Aslan Doukaev, RFE/RL October 31, 2008, IN PACKET

2/20: Religion and Culture in Post-Soviet Russia

Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 11 and 12

Week Six: 2/25 : Environmental Catastrophe, Population Problems

Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 8 and 9

2 /27 : Gender in Post-Soviet Russia

Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 10

Week Seven: 3/4 : International Relations of Post-Soviet Russia

Understanding Contemporary Russia, Ch. 6

“Georgia and the Balance of Power”, George Friedman, *NY Review of Books*, September 25, 2008, plus Daniel Fried’s Response : IN PACKET.

“Russia and the Conflict in Georgia”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, September 4, 2008 : IN PACKET.

3/6 : International Relations of Russia : CONTINUED

MIDTERMS DUE

Week Eight: 3/7 - 3/15 : SPRING BREAK

Week Nine: 3/18 : Post-Soviet Republics : Who is who ?

“Imitation Democracies”, Dmitri Furman, *New Left Review*,
Nov/Dec 2008 : IN PACKET

3/20 : Ukraine’s Orange Revolution

“The Orange Revolution”, Timothy Garton Ash and Timothy
Snyder, *NY Review of Books*, April 28, 2005 : IN PACKET.

Ukraine and the Triumph of Democracy (Film in class)

Week Ten: 3/25 : Ukraine After the Revolution

“Two Years After the Orange Revolution: Ukraine in a Funk”,
Alexander Motyl, *opendemocracy.com* 12/ 2006 : IN PACKET

--Five short RFE/RL articles on Ukraine / Georgia and EU /
NATO : IN PACKET

3/27 : Belarus and Moldova :

“Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus”, Vitali Silitski and
“Pluralism by Default in Moldova”, Lucan A. Way, : IN PACKET

Week Eleven: 4/1 : The Caucasus : GEORGIA

*The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood
in the Caucasus*, Chapters 1 – 3 (p. 1—69), Christoph Zurcher.

4/3 : GEORGIA, Continued

*The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood
in the Caucasus*, Chapter 5, Christoph Zurcher.

“Georgia’s Year of Turmoil”, Miriam Lansky and Giorgi
Areshidze : IN PACKET

Week Twelve: 4/8 : OIL POLITICS IN THE CAUCASUS

The New Great Game : Blood and Oil in Central Asia, Lutz
Kleveman, p. 1 – 50 : IN PACKET

Film : Extreme Oil : The Pipeline

4/10 : ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN AND KARABAKH

The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood in the Caucasus, Chapter 6, Christoph Zurcher.

Several Short Articles on Karabakh from RFE/RL : IN PACKET

Week Thirteen: **4/15** Film : Democratic Revolutionary Handbook

4/17: CENTRAL ASIA

Silk Road to Ruin : Is Central Asia the New Middle East?, Ted Rall, p. vii-68

Week Fourteen: **4/22 : CENTRAL ASIA CONTINUED**

Silk Road to Ruin : Is Central Asia the New Middle East?, Ted Rall, p. 97-108, 139-162

4/24

Silk Road to Ruin : Is Central Asia the New Middle East?, Ted Rall, p. 232-256, 279-295

“Russia Expands Its Military Presence in Central Asia”, RFE/RL November 12, 2008 : IN PACKET

Week Fifteen: **4/29 : “A BRIEF FOR OBAMA” PAPERS TURNED IN AND TAKE-HOME FINAL HANDED OUT**

**DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT
SKIDMORE COLLEGE**

**POLICY ON CIVILITY AND COMPORTMENT IN THE
CLASSROOM**

ADOPTED FALL 2005

The classroom experience is the heart of liberal education, and as such is the most important aspect of your Skidmore College education. Presumably, if you did not agree you would not be attending Skidmore. The faculty of the Government Department takes this understanding as the basis of our educational efforts. It is in an attempt to honor the centrality of the classroom experience that we offer this department policy on civility and comportment.

As is stated in the *Student Handbook*, your presence at Skidmore College is contingent upon your acceptance of, and full adherence to, the Skidmore College Honor Code. This honor code is distinct from the oath you take when writing a paper or taking an exam – it is in fact much more all-encompassing, and much more demanding.

The Code includes the following statement: *“I hereby accept membership in the Skidmore College community and, with full realization of the responsibilities inherent in membership, do agree to adhere to honesty and integrity in all relationships, to be considerate of the rights of others, and to abide by the College regulations.”* Elsewhere, the Code also calls all Skidmore students to *“conform to high standards of fair play, integrity, and honor.”*

What does it mean to do act honestly, with integrity, and according to high standards of fair play, particularly in the classroom? In our view, it includes, minimally, the following.

1. No student shall lessen the learning experience of others in the classroom by arriving late to class.
2. No student shall lessen the learning experience of others in the classroom by leaving the classroom while class is in session, except for true medical emergencies.
3. Cell phones must be turned off during class.

4. No student shall disrupt the learning experience of others in the classroom by talking to a neighbor, writing notes to other students, reviewing one's mail, reading the newspaper, completing homework for other classes, or playing with the laptop computer, while class is in session.
5. No student shall disrespect other Skidmore students, professors or the housekeeping staff by putting feet on the desks or other furniture in the classroom, or by leaving trash, food, or recyclables in the room at the end of the class session.

While we will hold all students to these minimal expectations, we also have some suggestions for those who seek to go beyond the bare minimum of civil classroom comportment to become the type of mature, responsible, active learners who are an asset to any classroom and society at large. These include the following.

6. Every student should take copious and meaningful notes both on assigned readings and during classroom sessions. Note taking is an important skill—if you do not already possess it, you should acquire it.
7. Every student should take some time to review the notes that he or she has taken on the day's assigned reading before each class meeting. You will be amazed how much more invested and engaged in the class you will feel if you go into the classroom well-prepared.
8. Disruptions in class can be a significant impediment to learning, and no member of the Skidmore community—including faculty and students—should tolerate them. Thus every student should take responsibility for holding his or her peers and classmates to both high academic standards and high standards of civility. If people around you are chatting, passing notes or otherwise detracting from the overall quality of YOUR classroom experience, don't let them get away with it.
9. Individual faculty members in the Government Department will determine the level of sanctions for disruptive behavior.

Checklist for Evaluating Written Assignments
Prof. Kate Graney

ON-TIME

Reduction in Grade for Each Day Paper is Late

FORMAT

Title page

Double-Spaced

Page Numbers

Bibliography : Are All Citations Complete (Author, Journal Title, Publisher, Date)

STYLE

Spelling

Punctuation

Their/There

Grammar: Verb Tenses, Syntax

Creativity with Language

CONTENT

Length

Does the Paper Address Assigned or Chosen Topic ?

Use of Sources : Proper Balance of Internet vs. Library Sources (as indicated in assignment)

All Sources Cited and Cited Properly (Author Name, Date, AND PAGES CITED)

Strong and Coherent Argument Supported by Appropriate Evidence and Quotes