Political Science 361  
**Russian Politics**  
Eastern Michigan University  
Fall 2015  
CRN: 13692  

M & W, 12:30-1:45 p.m., 419 Pray Harrold

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**Course Description**

This course will explore the ongoing political, economic and social transformation of Russia, the largest and most powerful successor state of the Soviet Union. Although the primary focus will be on contemporary Russian politics, we will analyze current events within the broader context of Russian and Soviet history. We will explore the causes and consequences of the Revolution of 1917 and the development of the Soviet model of state socialism or communism. We will consider the extent to which Mikhail Gorbachev's attempt in the late 1980s to restructure Soviet socialism was a consequence of both the development of Soviet society and serious problems of the Soviet system. The course will also explore how the reforms of perestroika, intended to address systemic problems, actually aggravated weaknesses and contributed directly to the breakdown of the Soviet system.

The dissolution of the USSR initiated a second period of far-reaching change, as more radical economic reforms were launched under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, who became president of the Russia Federation in 1990. Although the foundations for a democratic political system and market economy were laid during Yeltsin's presidency, the transformation was incomplete and elements of the authoritarian past persisted. Moreover, the price paid by the Russian people for the reforms was high: steep declines in the health and material well-being of most of the population, the dismantling and disintegration of the social welfare system, and a significant increase in the incidence of many social problems.

Under the more predictable and stronger leadership of Vladimir Putin, the economy strengthened and elements of capitalism emerged. However, democratic institutions were significantly weakened, and older political patterns of hierarchy, suppression of dissent, and Russian nationalism reappeared. Putin has revitalized the security services to solidify his power and attempted to modernize the Russian military and military industry so that Russia can again be a great power, if not a superpower. His successor, Dmitry Medvedev, expressed support for democracy and the rule of law, but did not significantly alter the system created by Putin. During Medvedev’s presidency, Russia also fought a five-day war in August 2008 with the Georgia over the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After a four-year stint as Prime Minister, Putin announced that he would again run for president, but faced increasing opposition from society in the form of a widespread protest movement. Nevertheless, he was re-elected president in March 2012 in an election noticeable for its lack of serious contenders. Since then, the Kremlin appears to have successfully suppressed the opposition movement with a carrot-and-
stick approach of promises of reform accompanied by a harsh crackdown on dissent and state control of the mass media.

Since the beginning of the Putin era, Russia’s foreign policy has reflected the nationalist ideology of the Kremlin. The country’s current foreign policy strategy envisions Russia’s national interests as opposed to or in tension with the interests of the U.S., NATO, and the European Union. Strained relations between Russia and the West have contributed to a significant weakening of international security, as can be seen in the paralysis of the United Nations Security Council in the face of several crises, including the civil war in Syria. Since 2014, Russia has taken actions that directly threaten European security: the seizure of Crimea and support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Western nations greatly expanded economic sanctions on Russia after Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine in July 2014, apparently by a Russian Buk surface-to-air missile. A cease-fire agreement between the separatists and Ukraine negotiated with the involvement of Western European nations in late 2014 has broken down, and tensions between Russia and the West remain very high.

How can we explain Russia’s foreign policy and the decisions to use military force? What are the implications of an assertive or expansionist Russia for international security? What will be the effects – economic and political – of the multiple rounds of economic sanctions that Western nations and Russia have placed on one another? How is the estrangement of Russia from Europe and the US affecting Russian society? What is the long-term trajectory of Russian political and economic development? These and related questions will be considered across the semester.

**Objectives**

By the end of the semester, you will have a good understanding of the general patterns of Russian and Soviet political history and political behavior and be able to explain how the events and choices in the past have affected the trajectory of political change and the problems of the present. You will become familiar with various theories of political change and use them to analyze Russian politics. In addition, you will be able to identify and describe Russian political institutions and discuss the factors influencing their performance. Through study of the political and economic evolution of Russia, you will deepen your understanding of the regime types of the contemporary world (communism, liberal democracy, and authoritarianism), as well as of the character and dynamics of different types of economic systems (state socialism, capitalism, and mixed economy). You will also acquire an understanding of globalization and its affects on Russian society and politics.

**Texts and Readings**

Much of the required reading for the course will come from the two texts listed below.


All additional required readings can be found on the course website (log in to canvas.emich.edu). Where possible, readings listed as “recommended” will also be posted on the site. All assignments, class handouts, news articles, and videos will also be available on the course website.

In addition to the required weekly reading, you will read one of the books on contemporary Russia listed below, and write a short summary or précis of the book.


**Expectations and Evaluation**

To do well in this course, you should attend class regularly, complete readings before the class for which they are assigned, and participate in class discussions. You will also prepare for and participate in simulations of the Russian government’s decision-making process. Preparation for the simulation includes will include two short research papers. To assess your mastery of course material and concepts, two exams will be given, a midterm and a final.
Attendance & Participation
Since lectures and discussion will help you to master course concepts, regular class attendance and participation is important. You can earn up to 50 points (approximately 1.85 points per class) for attending regularly and contributing to class discussion. The level of preparation for a class may occasionally be assessed through quizzes and other in-class activities.

Follow current affairs
To benefit fully from this course, I encourage you to follow current news about Russia. Listening to or reading world news will reinforce what you are learning and allow you to apply theories and concepts from readings to analyze current events. Recommended news sources include: The New York Times and The Washington Post (available online); periodicals such as The Economist or The Nation; and radio news broadcasts such as the non-commercial Free Speech Radio News (online at http://www.fsrn.org or broadcast on WCBN, 88.3 FM, 5:30-6:00 p.m. Mon.-Fri.); National Public Radio (online at http://news.npr.org or on the hour at WEMU, 89.1 FM or WUOM, 91.7 FM); and BBC news (online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world or broadcast on WUOM, 91.7 FM, 9:00-10:00 am and 10-12 p.m., Mon.-Fri.).

Book précis
You will write a short, 3-4 page, précis of one of the books listed above on contemporary Russia. It will be due November 4 and be worth up to 100 points.

Russian Government Simulation & Briefing Papers
Simulations of the Russian government’s decision-making process will be held, on November 11 and December 9 & 14. You will be assigned a role as a member of the Russian government or other significant political figure early in the semester and play that role in all three simulations.

To prepare for the simulations, you will write two short (5-7 pages, double-spaced) papers. The first will be a profile of your politician and the second a briefing paper on an issue area of concern to him/her. The profile of your politician will be due October 5 and the issue briefing paper will be due November 18. These papers will be shared with all members of the class on the course eCollege site. Each paper will be worth 100 points.

The simulations will involve consideration of critical problems currently facing the Russian government and the adoption of a resolution or resolutions. Up to 100 points can be earned for participation in all three simulations, approximately 33 points per simulation.

Exams
The exams will be composed of identification, short answer, and essay questions. The midterm (October 26) will be worth 150 points and the final (December 16) 200 points. I will distribute a study guide one week before each exam.
Course Grade
The total number of possible points that you can earn on papers, exams, the simulation and attendance and participation is 800. Your final grade in the course will be based on the percentage of the 800 points that you earn, using a standard grading scale (93-100% = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% etc.).

Support for Research and Writing: The University Writing Center
The University Writing Center (115 Halle Library; 487-0694) offers one-to-one writing consulting. Students can make appointments or drop in between the hours of 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Fridays. UWC also has several “satellite” locations, including one in Pray Harrold 211 (M-Th, 11-4). Students should bring a draft of the paper they are working on and their assignment sheet. The Academic Projects Center (116 Halle Library) also offers one-to-one writing consulting for students, in addition to consulting on research and technology-related issues. Additional information about the APC can be found at http://www.emich.edu/apc.

Late Papers and Makeup Exams
Late papers will not be accepted, except in cases of serious illness or family emergency. Should such a situation arise, contact me immediately and be prepared to provide supporting evidence. We will then negotiate an alternate due date. Similarly, if you cannot take an exam at the scheduled time due to illness or emergency, contact me prior to the exam to reschedule.

Religious Holidays
If you will miss class, paper deadline, or exam due to observance of a religious holiday, you must notify me by email one week in advance in order to make up the work or points lost by non-attendance.

Accessibility
If you believe you may have trouble participating or effectively demonstrating learning in this course, please meet with me (with or without an accommodation letter from the Disability Resource Center) to discuss reasonable options or adjustments. During our discussion, I may suggest the possibility/necessity of your contacting the Disability Resource Center (240 Student Center; (734) 487-2470; swd_office@emich.edu) to talk about academic accommodations. You are welcome to talk to me at any point in the semester about such issues, but it is best if we can talk at least one week prior to the need for any modifications.

Academic Dishonesty
Plagiarism – the unacknowledged use of words written by another person as one’s own – is a serious violation of professional ethics and is forbidden under the EMU Student Code of Conduct. Any assignment that is plagiarized, even in part, will result in an E for the assignment. Similarly, cheating on an exam is forbidden by the Code of Conduct and will result in an E for the exam. Any incident of academic dishonesty will also be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards for additional discipline, which could possibly include suspension or permanent dismissal. I will distribute a handout at the beginning of the semester on how to correctly cite sources and avoid plagiarism.
Classroom Conduct

It is my responsibility as the instructor to facilitate a learning environment in which there is a free exchange of information and ideas, each member of the class is valued, and everyone may express their thoughts. The creation of such an environment requires the combined efforts of all members of the class. During class time, it is important to be fully present by paying attention to whoever is speaking. You should take notes during class: note taking helps to focus attention and facilitates mastery of material presented in class. You should also refrain from using electronic devices (cell phones or laptops) for texting or surfing the web. Finally, in order to have an open and fruitful exchange of ideas, we all must respect the right of others to express their views. Interruption when another person is speaking, disparagement of the ideas or views of others, and any other behavior that disrupts the class or interferes with the exchange of ideas will not be tolerated. For a complete overview of university policies regarding student conduct, see the 2015-2016 EMU Student Handbook.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

Whither Russia?
September 9 & 14


Recommended
Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, Kremlin Rising, pp. 1-37.

Historical Approaches and Models of Soviet and Russian Politics
September 16


Recommended
Robert Tucker, “The Image of Dual Russia,” in *The Soviet Political Mind* pp. 121-142

II. TSARISM, REVOLUTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET COMMUNISM

**Institutional Origins: Kievan Rus’ to the Russian Empire**

September 21

**Reform and Revolution**

September 23
V. I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), and *The State and Revolution* (1917), selections.

**Civil War and the Establishment of the Soviet Union**

September 28
Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, Ch. 3-4

**The New Economic Policy and Revolution from Above**

September 30
Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, Ch. 5-6

****Politician Profile Paper Due, October 5****

**Stalin and Stalinism**

Oct. 5 & 7
Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, Ch. 7-10

**Recommended**
**Additional recommended reading for Sections I & II**


**III. DE-STALINIZATION, “NORMALIZATION” AND RADICAL REFORM**

**The Khrushchev Era**
October 12 & 14

Hosking, *The First Socialist Society,* Ch. 11-12.

**Recommended**
Carl A. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership,* Ch. 1, 2 & 10.

**Brezhnev: “Normalization” and “Stagnation”**
October 19

Hosking, *The First Socialist Society,* Ch. 13-14

**Recommended**

**Origins and Goals of Perestroika**
October 21

Hosking, *The First Socialist Society,* Ch. 15, pp. 446-455
Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika,* Ch. 1, “Origins, Essence, Revolutionary Character”
Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics,* pp. 1-22

**Recommended**

*****Midterm Examination*****

**October 26**

**The Gorbachev Reforms**

October 28

Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, Ch. 15, pp. 455-470

Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics*, Ch. 1, pp. 22-25 and Ch. 4 pp. 115-128.


Recommended

Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, Ch. 9-16.

**The Collapse of the Soviet Union**

November 2


Recommended


Boris Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia*, Ch. 2-3.

**Additional recommended reading for Section III**

Anders Aslund. 1993. *Gorbachev’s Struggle for Economic Reform*, Ch. 1, 2, 7-9

George Breslauer. 1982. *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*.


IV. POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

***Book Précis Due November 4***

**The Post-communist Condition and the Reconfiguration of the Russian Polity**
November 4


**Recommended**
Yeltsin, *The Struggle for Russia*, Ch. 7-9

**Voters, Elections, and Parties**
November 9

White, Ch. 2, pp. 27-62


**Recommended**


**The Legislative and Executive Branches**
November 11

White, Ch. 2, pp. 62-69 and Ch. 3


**Recommended**


**Post-Communist Political Economy**

November 16

White, Ch. 4, pp. 128-161


**Recommended**

Lucas, *The New Cold War*, Ch. 4

Goldman, *Petrostate*, Ch. 3-6

**Russian Security Council Simulation I: State of the Russian Economy**

November 18

***Issue Briefing due, Nov. 23***

**Civil Society and State-Society Relations**

November 23

White, Ch. 5 & 6


**Recommended**


November 25 -- Thanksgiving Break

Russia in the Post-Cold War World
November 30

November 20
White, Ch. 7, “Russia in the Wider World,” pp. 263-318

Recommended
Goldman, Petrostate, Ch. 6
Lucas, The New Cold War, Ch. 6 – 8

The Russia-Ukraine Conflict
December 2


The Trajectory of Political Change in Russia
December 7

White, Ch. 8, “What Kind of System?”

Recommended
Ledeneva, How Russia Really Works, Conclusion
Goldman, Petrostate, Ch. 7
Lucas, The New Cold War, Ch. 9
Russian Security Council Simulation II: Budget for 2016-17 and the Ongoing Situation in Eastern Ukraine
December 9 & 14

***Final Examination***
Wednesday, December 16, 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Additional suggested reading for Section IV

Clifford Gaddy. 1996. *The Price of the Past: Russia’s Struggle with the Legacy of a Militarized Economy.*
David Lane. 1999. *The Transition from Communism to Capitalism: Ruling Elites from Gorbachev to Yeltsin.*
Alexander Litvinenko and Yuri Felshtinsky. 2007. *Blowing Up Russia.*
Anna Politkovskaya. 2007. *A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya*
Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan. 2010. *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia’s Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB.*