**Course Description:**

The post-Soviet states of Central Asia and the Caucasus are at a political crossroads—familiar territory, since these regions have long been at the crossroads between empires with competing power aspirations. The legacy of competition between Ottoman, Persian, and Russian empires, however, is only one factor to consider in understanding contemporary political challenges in the region, and arguably far from the most important one. Independent only 20 years, the countries of the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) are still young, and face similar questions of identity, economy, and policy. Are we to see them as European, Middle Eastern, or Asian? Are they by-and-large democracies or dictatorships? Have they adapted to the realities of a global marketplace, or are their economies mired in the past traditions of the command economy?

In most cases, the answer to such questions would be “neither nor.” Just as these countries defy easy geographic characterization, so too they generally defy easy political and economic characterization as distinctly one thing or another. Indeed, life in the gray-zone between opposing political and economic tensions is the source of many of the shared challenges of the Caucasian and Central Asian states caught in the gray-zone between opposing regional powers and competing economic forces.

This course is designed as a capstone research seminar to foster a greater understanding of the history, economics, and politics of the post-Soviet states of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Starting by looking back at the legacies of history, we will address contemporary challenges of identity (nationalism, separatism, extremism), the economy (the challenges and curses of geography and resources), and politics (war, democratization, revolution, and nation-building).

**Assignments and Grading:**

Grading of all assignments will be done according to a standard 100-point scale. The final course grade will be determined based on in-class participation, as well as the assignments to be described momentarily, with the grade breakdown as follows:

- Class participation: 20%
- Geography quiz: 5%
- Mid-term take-home: 25%
- Research paper: 50%

**Grading Scale:**

- 100—93%: A
- 92.9—90%: A-
- 89.9—87%: B+
- 86.9—83%: B
- 82.9—80%: B-
- 79.9—77%: C+
- 76.9—73%: C
- 72.9—70%: C-
- 69.9—67%: D+
- 66.9—63%: D
- 62.9—60%: D-
- Below 60%: F
Class Participation: (20%)

For a research seminar format to be effective, it is necessary that all students attend class on a regular basis and come prepared to actively engage in class discussions. Just showing up to class will not ensure that you receive a satisfactory class participation grade. You will be expected to come to class having read all of the assigned readings for that week, and had time to think critically about them. Ensuring that everyone is familiar with the arguments put forth in the various readings is the minimum condition for developing an effective classroom environment. Good seminar participation entails being an active participant in class by asking questions, making thought-provoking arguments, and being engaged in the discussion.

Additionally, since there is much more to be gotten out of a seminar than what goes on during our few short hours together, I will open up a space under the “discussions” tab on the course Blackboard site (https://elearning.villanova.edu) to provide a stepping-off point for subsequent classroom discussions. Constructive input to these discussions will be considered when tabulating the class participation grade, and may provide a great opportunity for those who might otherwise be hesitant to contribute in the more traditional classroom setting.

Geography Quiz: (5%)

On Monday, September 12, 2011 there will be a brief, in-class quiz on the basic geography of the Caucasus and Central Asia. This quiz will comprise 5% of the course grade.

Take-Home Mid-Term Exam: (25%)

The mid-term examination for the class will take the form of a take-home essay question on the historical legacies of the Soviet period. The question will be announced before the mid-semester break, and will be due in class on Monday, October 17, 2011. This essay will not require any additional outside research, but is expected to constitute an persuasive and well-substantiated argument about the legacies of history in the areas in question. The assignment is open with respect to length, but 5-7 double-spaced pages should suffice. The take-home midterm counts for 25% of the overall course grade.

Research Paper (40%)

In lieu of a final exam, the capstone for this research seminar is a research paper that investigates a particular question or topic relevant to the politics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. This paper, conducted under my advisement and oversight, will require research and readings that go beyond those listed in the syllabus, and should be about 18-20 (double-spaced) pages in length. The research paper would be due during the final exam period: 8:30am—11:00am, Friday December 16, 2011.

To ensure that you are making progress in your research, it is necessary to establish additional deadlines. First, you must submit to me—preferably via e-mail—a statement of your preliminary research topic and thesis question, by Monday, October 24, 2011. Broad topic declarations such as “I want to study Chechnya” are too vague—a concrete topic question is required, and can be worked-out in conjunction with the professor. Usually addressing topics with “how” or “why” questions can help: asking instead “why did ethnic conflict break-out only in Chechnya, and not (say) Tatarstan.” Supplementing such questions with some notion of how your research question “matters”—in terms of furthering our understanding of post-Soviet politics or how it may guide approaches to similar incidents in the future—is also a plus. Second, once your research question has been approved, you will need to submit a brief bibliography and conceptual outline of your paper by no later than Monday, November 7, 2011. This should help keep you on schedule, and prevent the sudden appearance of last-minute (and usually highly dubious) papers.

To both deter and detect the plagiarism that is inconsistent with your purpose as a student, I will ask that all research papers also be submitted electronically by the final exam period through the SafeAssign program, which is located on the course Blackboard site: https://elearning.villanova.edu.
Class Policies:

Grading
All assignments will be assessed on a 100-point scale which can be used to translate your number grade into a letter grade. At the end of the semester, your final course grade will be calculated by adding-up the grades on each assignment in proportion to the weights assigned to them above.

Late Assignments
Written assignments turned-in after the due date and time indicated will be penalized one full letter grade (ten points) for each full day that it is late. Therefore, an otherwise “100” quality paper turned-in one day late would become at best a “90” two days late would become at best an “80,” and so forth, all the way down to zero. As all of the deadlines are clearly articulated here in the syllabus from day one so they should come as no surprise, no extensions will be granted, based in part on the same premise as the policy on extra credit (see below).

Questions on Grading
Invariably throughout the semester, students have questions about the grade they received on a particular assignment that goes beyond the given comments on the paper or exam. If you feel that you did not deserve the grade you received on a given assignment, I am certainly open to discussing the matter. However, I insist upon the following:

1) A 24-hour “cooling off” period. Please do not approach me with questions about “why did I receive this grade” within 24-hours of having your test or assignment returned to you. This will allow you time to re-read the comments, and understand whatever shortcomings may be in question.

2) Come to office hours. I will not discuss individual grades during, before or after class. Questions about grades will only be considered in face-to-face discussions during office hours. In the end, it is exceedingly rare that a grade will be altered—but if you can persuade me that the evaluation was in error, I am generally not opposed to re-evaluating the grade, though I do, of course, reserve the right to revise the score upward or downward as the re-evaluation warrants it.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity
Cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, assisting dishonesty and other breaches of the University Policy on Academic Integrity, as outlined in the Enchiridion (http://www.villanova.edu/vpaa/office/studentservices/policies/integrity/), are serious business. Not only are such activities contrary to your entire purpose in attending college and official university policy, but are also a personal affront to me as an instructor and competent human being. So, consider this your prior warning: if blatant breaches of academic integrity are discovered, I will prosecute them to the fullest extent.

Fortunately, when it comes to plagiarism, the Villanova Writing Center has a handy guide to effective citation and how to avoid plagiarism (http://www.villanova.edu/artssci/vcle/writingcenter/guide/citing.htm), I suggest looking it over. If you have additional citation, formatting, or any other questions throughout the semester, please feel free to discuss them with me so that we might clarify any ambiguities and prevent ethical problems before they develop.

The Penalties for Infractions of Academic Integrity are steep, and you should be aware of them: at a minimum, you will flunk the assignment or test, and likely, the entire class. Moreover, an official report of the transgression will be made to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Board of Academic Integrity, and you will be required to complete a program on academic ethics. If a student is twice found responsible for such transgressions of academic integrity, the Dean may expel or suspend you from the University. So, long story short: don’t waste my time, don’t waste your time—just don’t do it. Again, please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have on this issue so that they can be easily resolved before the assignments are completed!
Extra Credit?

No. Let me clarify that: if there comes a situation where extra credit would be appropriate, it would be offered on an equal-opportunity basis to all students, and that would be exceptionally rare. Individual extra-credit opportunities distort the baseline of evaluating every student by the same standard (as do requests for extensions). This is to say, please do not approach me at the end of the semester asking for some extra-credit opportunity to make-up for a poor performance on an earlier assignment. While you might think that such a request conveys a notion of additional dedication to achievement in the course, in reality, the message received is quite different: such requests are based on two implicit assumptions: 1) that the student in question wishes to be held to a different (lower) standard than the rest of the class, and 2) that the professor is willing to bend the rules and sacrifice objective standards of evaluation. As a result, I tend to find such requests to be rather off-putting, even though that was surely not the student’s intent, which is subsequently why I feel compelled to spell-out the justifications for this policy here in the syllabus.

Online Lectures and Materials?

No. Let me clarify that: lecture notes or slides will not be posted online, so please do not ask for them to be. Similarly, review sheets are not used in this class. It is not my duty to provide notes to you: I cannot do the learning for you. I suggest that you exchange your e-mail and contact information with the people seated next to you (or other friends in the class) to obtain notes if you happen to miss lecture on a given day. This interpersonal contact may stimulate the development of more effective study groups, as they have since well before the advent of the internet.

Why not? Here are my reasons, in order of ascending importance: 1) Technical issues: the huge file size precludes uploading. 2) Legal issues: effectively ‘publishing’ lectures online violates the “fair use” doctrine of intellectual property rights protections, by which we may utilize many of the copyright-protected images and other lecture materials. 3) Negative effects on attendance and grades: pedagogical studies have shown that online materials, notes, and review sheets lead not only to dramatic drops in attendance, but also grades. Students tend to become overly-reliant on the printed word, which is often just a stepping-off point for a more important discussion (which in turn is missed if all you focus on is the content written on the power-point slides). These studies demonstrate that students become passive observers rather than active participants in learning, leading to worse correspondingly worse grades. 4) Finally, there is the more existential aspect: if the entire learning experience boils-down to an instructor writing outlines and students reading them, what is the point? What is my raison-d’être at this university: professor, or outline-writer? For that matter, what is yours: student, or outline-consumer? To that end, why not just get an online degree? The answer to all of these questions is in the mix: the traditional dynamic of classroom lectures, discussions, and the exchange between instructors and students that is the hallmark of the university learning experience, which prepares you to become a well-rounded and competent individual, and ultimately prepares you for life outside of academia, where very little is scripted in advance, and available on-demand.

All of these elements are damaged, rather than helped, by posting lectures, notes, slides, and other review materials online. I heartily suggest that, in lieu of such aids, that you take responsibility for your own education. Come to class. Raise questions in class or during office hours. Use e-mail. Post questions on the online review website. Create your own study groups. It is my responsibility to teach, it is your responsibility to learn; and while I will do my best to help you in that endeavor, you likewise have an important role to play.

Living in the Computer Age

Computers are an indelible part of the learning experience. Much of the readings are available online, you’ll probably do a great deal of research online, and write a paper or two on your computer. But as we all know, networks and computers are not always reliable—computers crash, networks fail, printers jam and run out of ink—these are the realities, and we must all confront them. Experience suggests computers disproportionately tend to crash the night before an exam or assignment is due. As a competent adult, it is up to you to take responsibility and plan ahead for
such eventualities. Back-up your files to the web or an external drive. As an excuse for not being able to access online materials or being able to complete an assignment on time, “my computer crashed” will garner little sympathy.

**Respect**

A key aspect of maintaining an interesting and energetic classroom environment is to ensure that all participants in discussions feel free to express their ideas and opinions without fear of scoffs or condescension. To that end, it is incumbent upon everyone to treat everyone—and their ideas—with respect, especially when another student’s perceptions may not align with your own. Of course when speaking of politically charged topics disagreements will surely arise, yet please be aware of and show respect for others’ ideas and feelings. If at any time you feel offended, please try to raise your concerns in a constructive, level-headed manner—either in class, with me directly, or even anonymously—to amicably resolve the situation. Many times, interpersonal conflicts are rooted in simple misunderstandings, other times they reflect serious issues that need to be resolved before continuing.

**Accessibility**

Generally speaking, I am a fairly easy person to get in contact with. I encourage you to e-mail me with questions, clarifications, and concerns as they appear throughout the semester, and I especially encourage you to come speak with me face-to-face during my office hours, or by appointment: nothing beats old fashioned interpersonal interaction. Additionally, preceding the exams, I will open-up a discussion tab on the course website for review where you can feel free to post questions and build upon the concerns of others. For questions asked of me personally on the review thread, I will try to answer them as quickly as possible, given my other duties and obligations.

**Course Website:**

This syllabus, along with relevant class announcements, review materials, reading assignments, and other information will be available on the WebCT course site: [https://elearning.villanova.edu](https://elearning.villanova.edu).

**Periodicals and Resources:**

There are many useful resources that can be used to stay current with political developments in Russia and Eurasia. The *New York Times* and the British magazine *The Economist* generally have very good coverage of international politics. More specific to Eurasia, the following English-language sources are even more useful:

1) The Moscow Times ([www.moscowtimes.ru](http://www.moscowtimes.ru))
4) Russia Today ([www.russiaytoday.com](http://www.russiaytoday.com))

**Assigned Readings:**

The following books are available for purchase at the Villanova University Shop, as well as through online retailers. Just be aware that ordering books online may be a great way to save money, but that must be balanced by the risk that the books may not arrive in a timely manner, which may in turn put you behind in your studies.

- **Asmus, Ronald, A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West** (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2010.
In addition to these books, there are a large number of additional required readings (articles and book chapters) that will be posted electronically through the course site on WebCT (https://elearning.villanova.edu).

All readings marked “required” should be read before the appropriate class session, and should be considered fair game for examination purposes. Recommended readings will also be posted online for those with an interest in additional reading for a more nuanced understanding of the various topics discussed throughout the semester.

Course Outline and Topics:

★ = Reading from assigned books.
● = Reading from online reserves.

Week 1 (Monday, August 29): The Land Between Empires

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Week 2 (Monday, September 5): Labor Day — No Class.

Week 3 (Monday, September 12): Life in the Borderlands

— In-Class Geography Quiz

Required Readings:


Week 4 (Monday, September 19): The Soviet Experience

Required Readings:

Week 5 (Monday, September 26): The Caucasus under Soviet Rule

Required Readings:

Week 6 (Monday, October 3): Central Asia under Soviet Rule

Required Readings:

Week 7 (Monday, October 10): Mid-Semester Break—No Class.

Week 8 (Monday, October 17): Nationalism and Soviet Collapse
—Mid-Term Take-Home Exam Due

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

Week 9 (Monday, October 24): Chechnya
—Research Paper Topic Due (e-mail to: mark.schrad@villanova.edu)

Required Readings:
**Recommended Readings:**


**Week 10 (Monday, October 31): Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh (Happy Halloween!)

**Required Readings:**


**Week 11 (Monday, November 7): The Color Revolutions

**Required Readings:**


**Week 12 (Monday, November 14): Georgia, Russia and the 2008 Ossetia War

**Monday, November 7**

—*Conceptual Outline and Bibliography Due

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**

- Asmus, Ronald *A Little War that Shook the World*, Chapters 3 & 4, “The Kosovo Precedent” and “Diplomatic Shootout in Bucharest,” pp. 87-140.

**Week 13 (Monday, November 21): Islam, Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia

**Required Readings:**

Week 14 (Monday, November 28): Failed States (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan)

**Required Readings:**
- Traub, James, “It’s Not Too Late to Save Kyrgyzstan,” *Foreign Policy*, June 22, 2010.

**Recommended Readings:**

Week 15 (Monday, December 5): The Curses(?) of Oil and Water

**Required Readings:**

Week 16 (Monday, December 12): Directions for American Foreign Policy

**Required Readings:**

Final Exam Period: 8:30am—11:00am, Friday December 16, 2011.