PSC 8901: Dynamics of Russian Politics

FALL 2010

Thursdays, 7:30pm—9:30pm
310 St. Augustine Center

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Office Hours: 11:30am—2:00pm, Mondays and Wednesdays, or by appointment

Course Description:
Time and again, world history has been shaped by political events in Russia: from the Bolshevik Revolution to the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union and beyond. Likewise Russia—especially as the primary ideological and geopolitical rival of the United States during the Cold War—has played an enduring role in the theorizing of all manner of political scientists. Accordingly, this graduate-level political science course on Russia has dual aims: one is to better understand the political development of Russia and the legacies of the Soviet Union on the post-Soviet republics. The other aim is to use this baseline understanding of Russian politics as a gateway into a wide variety of literatures on comparative politics. The hope is that by combining the theoretical insights from comparative politics with the empirical study of political developments in Eurasia, we can indeed get a richer understanding of “the dynamics of Russian politics.”

This course is being offered during the same semester as my undergraduate course on Russia, PSC 4401. I am extending an open invitation to any and all graduate students who may not be as familiar with the basic dynamics of Soviet history and Russian politics to sit-in on these undergraduate lectures, which are held Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:30—11:20am in 1001 Bartley Hall. While this course may have some overlap with the undergraduate course, it differs in three extremely important ways: 1) it is a graduate-level course, with correspondingly higher expectations in terms of dedication, amount and quality of work, 2) it is a seminar rather than a lecture, with expectations of greater participation, discussion and debate, and 3) the substance of the discussions (hopefully) will center more on the theories and literatures of comparative politics, rather than the who, what, when, and why of Russian political development. That said, I have made every effort to make the theoretical topics for each week in this course correspond roughly to the topics and time-periods addressed in the undergraduate PSC 4401 class. Indeed, in the schedule of readings and topics for this course, I have also indicated the weekly topics to be covered in the PSC 4401 course, should you want to sit in on a class.

Assignments and Grading:
Grading will be based upon participation in class as, performance in a leading a weekly seminar session, a final exam, and a research paper.

The grade breakdown is as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Seminar leadership</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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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+
- Below 60%: F
**Class Participation: (10%)**
The quality of this course will ultimately depend on the quality of the participation of everyone here. Accordingly, class attendance is necessary, as is involvement in the discussions. Of course, missing a class does not exempt you from the materials covered on that day. You may want to exchange e-mail addresses with some of your classmates to get notes and other materials you might have missed. 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 required readings for that day, and had time to think critically about them, and how each reading fits with the others, and contribute meaningfully to the discussions. The readings listed as “recommended” are only required reading for the seminar leader.

**Seminar Leadership (20%)**
This course will be structured as a graduate seminar. We will begin each week with a student-led discussion based upon the required (and even the recommended) readings for the week. Afterward, I will present some lecture materials as a means of getting at some additional targeted questions for discussion. For this to work, each student will sign-up to be a discussion leader for a class session of their choice, which will be scheduled during the first class meeting. While there is no uniform blueprint for leading a class discussion, the expectation is that the first 15-20 minutes of class will include presenting some brief summary of the main topics and issues addressed in the readings, your perspectives on them (what you find convincing or wanting; questions that arose in your reading, etc.) as well as posing questions for subsequent discussion. This requirement will count 10% toward your final course grade.

**Final Exam (30%)**
There will be a final exam for the course during the week of finals, **7:00–9:30pm, Thursday, December 16, 2010.** The exam will combine objective and essay questions, and will draw from the readings and materials presented throughout the duration of the semester. The exam will count 40% of your final grade.

**Research Paper (40%)**
As a research seminar, the keystone to the class is an extended research paper of **around 25 pages,** due in hard copy during the final class session, **7:30–9:30pm, Thursday, December 2, 2010.** Please make note that this is a relatively early due date for a final paper, which means that you should get started on it early, and make steady progress on it throughout the semester. In fact, I have instituted a number of benchmark deadlines for the creation of the research paper. While these requirements are not graded, they are nevertheless *required* in order to get full credit for the assignment.

First, you will need to submit to me—either in hard copy or e-mail—a preliminary statement of your research question by the final class session before the mid-semester break: **Thursday, October 7, 2010.** This should go beyond a declaration of interest into a particular topic area to include some topic question that you feel is sufficient to drive your research.

Second, you will need to submit a preliminary bibliography and conceptual outline of your paper by no later than **Thursday, November 4, 2010.** This should help keep you on schedule, and prevent the sudden appearance of last-minute (and usually highly dubious) research papers.

**Additional Guidelines for Research Paper**
The expectations for this class include a professional academic research paper (since in graduate education we are all academic professionals), and the final paper will be judged according to appropriate standards. That is to say, I will evaluate the paper as though it were submitted for consideration to be published in an academic journal. Accordingly, there are a number of expectations that I have for a good paper:

1) The paper should be an original contribution of your own (see policy on academic integrity below.)

2) The paper should have a clear and persuasive argument to answer a question of importance to our
understanding of politics in the post-Soviet space. 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.

3) The paper should have a coherent and consistent structure to convey the argument, rather than meandering, stream-of-consciousness thought.

4) A good paper will be firmly grounded in the theoretical literature (and may well advance that literature), while supporting evidence for your position should be drawn from the empirical realm of Soviet and/or post-Soviet society, economics, politics or history—preferably (though not necessarily) based on primary sources in translation.

5) The paper should be presented with a minimum of typographical errors and other “local concerns” that might otherwise erode the credibility of the author, and thereby the argument.

6) The paper must include adequate references following a proper and consistent citation style. Since political science stands at the intersection of a wide variety of social sciences, each with their own standards for citation, ultimately I am less concerned about which style you use or how you cite your sources, and more concerned that you cite your sources, and do so in a consistent fashion.

Throughout the semester, we will discuss further what should be included in a good research paper, as well as how to go about finding useful evidence and source materials about the former Soviet Union, although the following resources provide a good starting point, especially as a supplement to current political developments in Russia and Eurasia from more traditional sources, such as the New York Times or the Economist.

- The Moscow Times (www.moscowtimes.ru)
- Johnson’s Russia List (www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/)
- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (www.rferl.org)
- Russia Today (www.russiatoday.com)
- Eurasia Daily Monitor (www.jamestown.org/edm/)
- Window on Eurasia (windowoneurasia.blogspot.com/)

**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.

**Make-Up Exams**

Make-up exams will only be granted under extreme circumstances, resulting either from 1) genuine family emergencies, 2) travel associated with university obligations (academic or athletic), or 3) severe illness or injury. If you are traveling due to university obligations, you must inform me at least two weeks prior to the event. If you are genuinely ill or injured, you will need documentation from your physician.

**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/artsci/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 great. Ever more, computers are an integral 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 has shown that 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 Blackboard/WebCT course site: https://elearning.villanova.edu/webct.

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.

★ Kenez, Peter, A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End. 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

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 Blackboard/WebCT (https://elearning.villanova.edu/webct). These readings should be read before the appropriate class session, and should be considered fair game for examination purposes. Additional recommended readings will also be posted online for those with an interest in additional reading for a more nuanced understanding of the various topics and themes discussed throughout the semester.

Course Outline and Topics:
★ = Reading from assigned books.
☞ = Reading from online reserves/reading packet or Compass website.

Week 1: Course Introduction: Russia in Comparative Perspective
Thursday, August 26

Required Readings:
(Topic in PSC 4401: Course Introduction)
Week 2: Social Revolutions

Thursday, September 2

Required Readings:

Recommended Readings:

(Topic in PSC 4401: Autocracy, Revolution, and the Rise of Lenin’s Soviet Union)

Week 3: Totalitarianism

Thursday, September 9

Required Readings:

Recommended Reading:

(Topic in PSC 4401: Soviet Totalitarianism Under Stalin)

Week 4: Communism in Theory and Practice

Thursday, September 16

Required Readings:

Recommended Reading:

(Topic in PSC 4401: The Soviet Gilded Age from Thaw to Stagnation under Khrushchev and Brezhnev)
Week 5: Empire

Thursday, September 23

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


(Topic in PSC 4401: Gorbachev and the Dilemma of Soviet Reform)

Week 6: Nationalism

Thursday, September 30

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


(Topic in PSC 4401: Into the Abyss: Boris Yeltsin and the Challenges of the Quadruple Transition)
Week 7: Crafting Institutions — Thesis Statement Due. Thursday, October 7

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


(Topic in PSC 4401: Putinism in the Russian Federation)

Week 8: Mid-Semester Break — No Class. Thursday, October 14

Week 9: Democratization I: Transitology & Democratic Waves Thursday, October 21

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


(Topic in PSC 4401: Confronting the Soviet Legacy: Economic Reform from Gorbachev to Yeltsin)
Week 10: Democratization II: Beyond Transitology

Thursday, October 28

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


(Topic in PSC 4401: Surviving Economic Freefall: The “Virtual Economy”)

Week 11: Democratization III: Color Revolutions

— OUTLINE & BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE. Thursday, November 4

Required Readings:


Recommended Readings:


(Topic in PSC 4401: Russia from Crisis to Crisis: 1998, 2008 ...?)
**Week 12: Russia’s Curses—Resources and Geography**

**Thursday, November 11**

**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**(Topic in PSC 4401: Demographic and Environmental Catastrophes)**

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**Week 13: Can Russia Reform?**

**Thursday, November 18**

**Required Readings:**

**Recommended Readings:**

**(Topic in PSC 4401: Federalism, Ethnic Separatism, and Human Rights)**

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**Week 14: Thanksgiving Break. No Class.**

**Thursday, November 25**
Week 15: Regional Challenges  
Thursday, December 2  

**Required Readings:**


**Recommended Readings:**


( Topic in PSC 4401: Regional and Foreign Policy Challenges )

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**Week 16: The Future of Russia in Comparative Perspective — Research Paper Due. Thursday, December 9**

**Required Readings:**


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**Final Exam: 7:00—9:30pm, Thursday, December 16, 2010.**