Russia After Communism
History 2114: Issues in European History

The Syllabus

Instructor: Prof. A. Nelson
Class meets: **Athenaeum: A Space for Innovation in the Digital Humanities**

"When the meteor hit Cheliabinsk, it blazed across the sky, spewed out its shards, and then sank quietly into a lake. That's what many hoped the breakup of the Soviet Union would be like. It would end with a compliant Russia as benign as the rock that is now sitting in Cheliabinsk's museum. That has not occurred. The shards continue to resurface, and their ripples are felt far and wide."

Anne Garrels (2016)

Twenty-five years after the demise of the Soviet Union, the legacy of the Soviet project remains palpable in the Russian heartland and across the post-Soviet space, even as new political, economic, technological and environmental challenges shape the societies of our globalizing world. In this course we will explore contemporary Russia from a historical perspective, seeking insight on the present by better understanding the past on which it is built. In particular we will examine how efforts to reform the Soviet Union ended in its dissolution. We will consider how the Soviet legacy informed the efforts to transform the social, political and economic structures of Russia and the former Soviet Republics. And we will develop a deeper understanding of the historical context and current salience of contemporary issues and challenges in what Anne Garrels calls "Putin Country."

Learning Community Constitution

This is an updated version of the syllabus that reflects the input of the class on the key course objectives, requirements and assessments and takes the interests, aptitudes and preferences of the group into account. We developed these together during the first two weeks of the semester. The class schedule lays out a road map for topics and standard readings (from the required texts), and identifies some "tangibles" for everyone who completes the course (see Course Requirements). There is a portion of the material that will serve as a common core for everyone. In addition, each learner will develop expertise on a particular issue or event that interests them. Once the group has clarified the common reading schedule, and the requirements for the final project – and I have approved it – we will "finalize" the syllabus.

Course Objectives Outlined by the Instructor:

1. Cultivate an intellectually robust, collaborative and networked learning community focused on understanding contemporary Russia.
2. Develop your skills in historical analysis
3. Develop your skills in identifying, using and citing historical sources
4. Develop your understanding of the key issues, developments and dynamics of Russian history in the post-Soviet era

Class-Generated Objectives Elaborating on the above, particularly 1 and 4.

1. Place Russia in current / contemporary context
2. Better understand relations between Russia and West
3. Better understand the role and significance of Vladimir Putin;
   a. perceptions of him in the USA vs. popularity in Russia; Role in upcoming presidential elections.
   b. Putin's long-term goals for Russia; What might post-Putin Russia look like?
4. Better understand the complexity of the Russian government
5. Better understand Russia and post-soviet space (former Republics and Eastern European "Satellites")

Course Requirements Developed by the Instructor:

·Interest in the historical context of Contemporary Russia and a commitment to learning more about it
·Reading, thinking, writing about Russia
·Developing your knowledge and sharing it with others.
·Willingness to explore collaborative networked learning by completing the required web work and participating in F2F class sessions
·Completing two annotated chronologies: one on the Collapse of the Soviet Union and the other on the shift from Yeltsin to the Putin regime.
·Developing interest and expertise in a particular topic – your "news beat" as it were.

·Completing a web-based project on your chosen topic

Grades:

Instructor's Perspective on Assessment:

I find that conventional assessment schemes interface poorly with the kinds of learning and habits of mind this course is designed to cultivate. We will talk in person about the kinds of feedback and evaluation that are best suited to our needs this term, and you will have a voice in defining those mechanisms.

The discussion of the assessed components of the course below reflects the input and preferences proposed by the class at the beginning of the semester:

leading discussion, contributing to discussion, responding to other learners' work and ideas 25%

Class-Developed Expectations for "A" Work:
What we expect of ourselves:
Attend class with **little to no absences/tardies**
Come to class prepared to discuss topic through readings, research, etc
I expect to **show up to class**, participate in discussion, and **turn in assignments on time**.
be **prepared**, attentive, and cooperative in the class setting.
be **prepared** before class with research/readings. Also talk more and get out of comfort zones.
What We Expect of Each Other:
Ensure that **all points are heard** and **respected** with minimal disruptions during discussions
I expect others to also have **meaningful discussion**, since discussion is such a large part of this class. **Meaningful conversions** are conducive to learning about a topic.
[everyone should] be **prepared, attentive, and cooperative** in the class setting.
Classmates: discussion, questions, **respect**, **don't be overpowering/dominate** conversation
The more conversation between us the better. I expect everyone to be **respectful** in our discussions.
Overall, I want this to be a safe place to learn and expand. Establish trial and failure.
I expect my co-learners to engage thoughtfully and substantively with the material in every class.
I expect my co-learners to identify issues / topics that interest them and to pursue those interests in scholarly and imaginative way.

Two annotated chronologies (one on the Collapse of the Soviet Union and the other on the shift from Yeltsin to the Putin regime)30%

Class (including instructor) generates terms, events, concepts ahead of time. In-class "exam" to put items in correct chronological order. Take home portion is the annotation to be submitted via Canvas.

Purpose: orientation to historical context; cause-effect; signal vs. noise (what is significant and why?). Integrating information about and understanding of particular events, developments into coherent analytical framework about the past.

Demonstrating proficiency with digital tools and working in networked environments and / or participatory cultures 20%

What tools / skills do we need?
A way to keep track of stuff (Zotero / OneNote / Evernote / hypothes.is)
Various resource outlets either through the library or other databases (Library of Congress)
Efficient research / databases
Working computer with active accounts, ability to work as a collective efficiently, resources with updated information
The internet, databases, news sources
Computers, internet, google
How are we going to accomplish this?
Using networked tools such as Google Drive and Solstice, Hypothes.is as well as resource databases and search engines to find good resources
Using Google Docs, Solstice, Hypothes.is, other media sources/research tools via library and internet
Using google docs and Solstice so we can share our findings with each other

Developing Issue / Topic expertise and final Project 25%

What tools / skills do we need?
Ability to analyze; finding material – taking the deep dive once I have my bearings to find NEW / relevant material.
Ability to evaluate and contextualize my sources
Ability to figure out bias
research abilities

Ability to consolidate important information in a clear and concise manner

How are we going to accomplish this?

Reading widely on issues that interest me. Identifying questions I want / need to answer. Figuring out what I don't know. Figuring out how to come at an issue from multiple sides.

Once I know what I'm doing, perform a preliminary assessment / analysis. Then repeat research cycle.

Doing research on our topic, reading/writing about it and learning about its significance to Russian culture/economics/politics

We try really hard:

Being given a decent amount of time to become semi-experts in a foreign field of study.

Trying really hard to not cry.

Stress relief tools such as foam balls #MidOctoberWho?

 "What do you Meme?" Google Doc to keep us engaged and highlight key issues.

Expectations and Learning Preferences Proposed by Class:

What We Expect of the Instructor:

Assignments that help the class to understand certain aspects of Russian history better.

Leading the previously mentioned discussions, making sure that it does not go off topic.

Be a moderator for us and a source of information when we need help on a topic.

Lay the groundwork for discussions and conversations about all of these concepts/themes/etc.

Support and facilitate discussion and identify relevant readings, films, audio clips for us to work on in class.

Be open to suggestions from others about topics we should pursue as a group.

Provide more / or less scaffolding for assignments as the group suggests.

Expertise (Content) Goals:

In this class, I hope to gain a concrete grasp on the Soviet Collapse and Russia as a modern country. It is also my hope to engage in meaningful conversation with my classmates where the nuances and large questions regarding Russia may be discussed and deliberated. From myself, I hope to have a better understanding of what it means to be a historian and how focusing on one topic at a time may allow a deeper knowledge pertaining to said topic. I hope to learn concentration and focus, necessary skills for this field. Furthermore, I would like to learn about Russia. It has always been a place that has fascinated me with a history as rich as it is complex.

From this class - I'd like to learn more about the culture **(kind of like societal norms)** of Russia and how that affects their views on government, and how it affects public health since that's my area of interest

I hope to develop research skills and to gain deeper understanding of the socio-economic and political issues in Russia

Learning Preferences

Make note of other speakers' points and come up with well thought-out responses to what they say

Keep track, whether written or typed, of discussion progress to ensure all points stay on track

I learn best visually, as in maps and pictures.

I prefer to learn/ understand topics in a discussion setting rather than a lecture. My favorite classes have all been small classes where we do majority of the time in discussion. I also like physical interactions with learning. I prefer the more conversational approach though.

I usually learn better alone outside of class with research and readings. In class I like to ask questions and discuss with others.

I learn best reading/researching before class and then asking questions once I get to class

I like writing essays and doing research projects that challenge me to look at things from many sides

Concerns we have / Challenges to acknowledge and overcome:

This is a lot!

With this event being in a foreign country and affecting multiple other countries, finding sources that will not interfere with my language barrier will be a challenge in my research. Bias will possibly play into effect.

internet issues, computer crashes, lack of available and readable resources, inability to settle differences between people

technical difficulties. Sometimes we like working by ourselves and only sharing our work when it's finished.

Biased sources, fake news, reliability of data (since Russian government might not be best at collecting data/might not publish everything they collect)

Getting hacked by Russian bots, computer crashing, bad wifi signal

What is defined as digital tools for this project?

What databases will we have access to?

- Further, which is the best for the information we're searching for?
- How reliable are certain databases or sources for information in the Eastern European/Central Asian regions?

Required Texts

These books are on order at the bookstore and available online in multiple formats. Newman library has an e-book of *Armageddon Averted*. Hard copies of the other two books are available on two-hour reserve at the circulation desk in Newman.

Stephen Kotkin. *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000* Updated Edition. Oxford University Press, 2008. (Get this edition – not the earlier one.)

Anne Garrels. *Putin Country: A Journey into the Real Russia*. Reprint edition. Picador, 2017.

Masha Gessen. *The Man Without A Face. The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin*. Riverhead Books, 2012

Academic Integrity

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states: **"As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do."**

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/

Special Needs

If you need accommodations because of a dis/ability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment to see me as soon as possible.

Safe Zone

My office is a certified Safe Zone, and I am committed to creating a more inclusive and accepting environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning communities and their allies. For more information on LGBTQ services and opportunities, please visit https://ccc.vt.edu/advocacy/Cultural_Community_Centers/lgbtq--center

Professionalism and VT's Principles of Community will guide our engagement with each other in the web-based components of the course as well as in our class meetings.

Preliminary Schedule / Initial Topics

Week 1: 8/29-31 **Welcome and Course Intro**

Week 2: 9/5-9/7 **Past, Present, Future / Course Mapping**

Reading: *Armageddon Averted*, Introduction, pp. 1-9; *Putin Country*, Chs. 1-3, pp. 3-38; "How the Soviets in 1960 Imagined 2017: Interstellar travel, underground cities, and socialism everywhere." (article – link in Drive folder)

Week 3: 9/12-9/14 **Rust Belt Legacy / Finish Course Mapping**

Reading: *Armageddon Averted*, Chs. 1-2 (pp. 10-57)

Week 4: 9/19-9/21 **After the Fall**

Reading: *Armageddon Averted*, Chs. 3-4 (pp. 58-112)

Week 5: 9/26-9/28 **Yeltsin Years I**

Reading: *Armageddon Averted*, Chs. 5-6 (pp. 113-168)

Due: ***Annotated Chronology – Part 1 in class on Thursday 9/28; Take-home due Sunday 10/1***

Week 6: 10/3- **Yeltsin Years II**

10/5
Reading: *Armageddon Averted*, Ch. 7 (pp. 169-192); *Man Without a Face*, prologue, Chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-42)
10/6:   ***Drop Deadline***
Week 7:   **The New Century**
10/10-10/12
Reading: *Man Without A Face*, Chs. 3-5 (pp. 43-130)
Week 8:
10/17-10-19   ***Due Thursday: Topic Statement (One Paragraph + Bibliography)***
Reading: *Man Without A Face*, Chs. 6-9 (pp. 131-226)
Week 9:
10/24-10/26
Reading: *Man Without A Face*, Chs. 10-11 & Epilogue-Afterward (pp. 227-305)
Week 10:
10/31-11/2   ***Due Thursday: ID Historical Moments / Context (2-3 pages + Bibliography)***
Reading: *Putin Country*, Chs. 4-10 (pp. 39-116)
Week 11:
11/7-11/9   **No F2F Meeting 11/9**
Reading: *Putin Country*, Chs. 11-18 (pp. 117-226)

Week 12:   ***Annotated Chronology 2: Assignment posted on Tues. 11/14; due Friday 11/17***
11/14-11/16   **No F2F Meeting 11/16**

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==> **Thanksgiving Break** <==

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Week 13:   Project Workshop
11/28-11/30   ***Due <u>Tuesday</u>: Project Drafts for Class Curation / Peer Review***
Week 14:   Project Workshop / All-Russia Project Party (pt 1)
11/5-11/7   ***Due Thursday: Self-Assessment for Participation***
Week 15:   All-Russia Project Party (pt 2)
11/13   ***Due: Final Projects***