PS 122: SOVIET, RUSSIAN, AND POST-SOVIET POLITICS
Fall term 2013
T&Th 10:30 -11:45 (Block D+)
LANE HALL 100A

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Office hours: Thur 1:30-3pm, and by appointment
Course website accessible through https://trunk.tufts.edu

Course description and objectives

In this course, you will be studying one of the most important countries of the 20th century, the Soviet Union, and the states – the Russian Federation (Russia) and 14 others – that were formed from its collapse. Approximately one third of the course will be devoted to an overview of political, economic, and social structures that defined Soviet communism. This historical overview will cover the time period from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution through Gorbachev, “perestroika,” and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In the remaining two-thirds of the course we will explore the unprecedented “triple transition” in national identities, political institutions and economic systems that followed the collapse of Soviet communism, and will examine and critically evaluate theoretical attempts to explain the different developmental trajectories upon which the 15 successor states of the Soviet Union have embarked. While Russia will receive the most extensive consideration, we will cover the other successor states as well.

As we examine and compare developments in the region after 1991, we will consider topics such as state collapse and state formation, regime types, political and institutional changes, the politics of economic reform, the challenges of nationalism within the multinational state, causes and consequences of recent electoral revolutions, and others.

Course requirements

Final grade will be based on grades awarded for each of the following:

Class participation 10%
Midterm 35%
Policy memo 15%
Final exam OR research paper 40%

All assignments will be given a numerical grade on the following scale:

A 93 and higher  B- 80-82  D+ 67-69
A- 90-92  C+ 77-79  D 63-66
B+ 87-89  C 73-76  D- 60-62
B 83-86  C- 70-72  F 59 and below
Regular class attendance and active participation (10%). You should come to class having done the readings, having thought about them critically, and prepared to discuss the assigned readings during the class period for which they were assigned. I will be posting a study guide to course website on Trunk at the end of each week for the following week. The study guide will indicate what to focus on when you do the readings, and writing down answers to the study guide questions will be an excellent preparation for the midterm, memos, and also the paper. Students who miss class are responsible for keeping track of any announcements, including possible changes in the syllabus, made in class.

Midterm (35%). The in-class midterm will take place on Thursday, October 17. The midterm will include identification questions on key concepts, events, people, and dates, essay questions, and a map component. Study maps will be posted on course website on the Trunk.

Policy memo (15%). Students will write a two-page (single-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margin) “executive memo” that answers a specific question given by the professor on the basis of course readings pertinent to the topic of the memo. An important aim is to help students learn to write concisely, conveying as much information as possible without being vague--this skill is highly valuable in the policy and business worlds. Memos getting the best grades will be those that make a single crisp, clear argument demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the relevant course material. Memos that are more than 3-4 lines over page limit will be graded down. The memo will be due on Friday, November 22.

Research paper OR final exam (40%). Students can chose to either take the cumulative take-home final exam, or write a 10-12 page research paper (Times New Roman 12 font, double-spaced with standard margins). The paper has to apply one of the theories that we cover in class to an empirical case of your choice. The goal is to provide evidence from one (or more) post-Soviet countries’ experience that either bolsters or challenges a given theory. For example, if you would like to write about Armenia, you can look into how its experience with ethnic conflict in Nagorno Karabakh bears on the theories of ethnic conflict we will discuss in class – which theory does it support and which theory does it undermine. A research guide prepared by Tisch librarian Ms. Reick for our class should help you with identifying respectable sources for your paper. The guide is available at http://researchguides.library.tufts.edu/PoliticalScience122, and also on Trunk. Per final exam schedule, final exams and papers will be due on Thursday, December 12.

Course policies

Late policy: Extensions will be given and make-ups allowed only at the discretion of the instructor and only when a legitimate and documented excuse exists (e.g serious illness, death in the family). Since paper and memo deadlines are known well in advance, I will grant extensions only in truly exceptional circumstances. Students experiencing such circumstances should inform me as far as possible in advance. Under no circumstances will extensions be granted due to general pressures of academic life such as exams and assignments due in other classes, or due to computer failures. No exceptions will be made to this rule, so please plan accordingly.
Possible changes to the syllabus: the syllabus may change as the semester progresses. Updates/changes will be announced in class as well as posted on Trunk. Please treat the version on Trunk as the most up-to-date, and thus definitive, version.

Academic dishonesty. There will be a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty in this course. Tufts holds its students strictly accountable for adherence to academic integrity. The consequences for violations can be severe. It is critical that you understand the requirements of ethical behavior and academic work as described in Tufts’ Academic Integrity handbook (hyperlinked on Trunk). If you ever have a question about the expectations concerning a particular assignment or project in this course, be sure to ask me for clarification. As part of this course, I may utilize Turnitin in the Trunk learning management system to help determine the originality of your work. The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering are required to report suspected cases of academic integrity violations to the Dean of Student Affairs Office. If I suspect that you have cheated or plagiarized in this class, I must report the situation to the dean.

Course readings

Books. There are two required book for this course. They can be purchased at the campus bookstore. The books will also be placed on reserve at Tisch.

- Daniel Triesman, The Return: Russia’s Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev (Free Press, 2011),

Additional required readings are posted on Trunk course site. They are marked TR in the syllabus. If there is enough interest, a course packet can be ordered in Gnomon Copy.

Schedule of topics, readings, and assignments

Readings should be completed *before* the start of the class for which they are assigned. To help you budget time, figures in brackets (e.g., “[32]”) report the number of pages in each reading.

#1. Tue, Sept 3. Introduction to the course.

No readings assigned.

*The Soviet experiment (1917-1991)*

# 2. Thur, Sept 5. The old regime, Marxism, and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution [34].

2. Suny, “Towards a Social History of the October Revolution.” (TR) [16].
4. V.I. Lenin, “Letter to Central Committee Members.” (TR) [2].
#3. Tue, Sept 10. The creation of party-state under Lenin and Stalin: from pluralism to totalitarianism [26].

2. The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (TR) [4].
3. Lenin’s letter to V.V. Kuraev et. al. (TR) [1].
4. Iulii Martov’s letter to A.N. Stein (TR) [5].
6. Lenin’s “testament” (TR) [2].

#4. Thur, Sept 12. Shaping economy and society under Lenin and Stalin: industrialization, collectivization, and famine [61].

1. McAuley, ch. 3, pp. 37-43 only (until “Meanwhile the ruling authorities”) [6].

#5. Tue, Sept 17. Cult of personality, purges and terror under Stalin [27].

1. McAuley ch. 3, pp. 43-49 only; ch. 4, pp. 50-61 [17].
2. Nikolai Bukharin’s letter to Stalin; Interview with Nikolai Bukharin’s widow and Bukharin’s last letter (TR) [10].


1. McAuley chs. 5-6, pp. 62-88 [26].

Tue, Sept 24 – No class.

Class cancelled (professor attending conference in Washington, DC).
Recommended: watch My Perestroika film (on reserve at Tisch)

#7. Thur, Sept 26. Gorbachev and reforms: from optimism to collapse. [41].


#8. Tue, Oct 1. The rise of nationalism in the republics [46].

1. McAuley, ch. 7, pp. 102-106 [4].


1. Triesman, pp. 25-38 [13].

Approaches to understanding post-Soviet trajectories


Tue, Oct 15. NO CLASS (Monday schedule)

#12. Thur, Oct. 17 - IN-CLASS MID-TERM.

Nation-building, nationalism, and ethnic conflict

#13. Tue, Oct 22. Explaining war and peace in the former Soviet space. [57].


**#15. Tue, Oct 29. Challenge of nation-building in Russia 2: inventing the nation. [41].**


The politics of economic reforms.

**#17. Tue, Nov 5. From command to market economy: what had to be done and why it was hard to do [34].**


#18. Thur, Nov 7. Theories of economic reforms meet the post-Soviet realities, or why did some countries reform quicker/better than others? [63].


#19. Tue, Nov 12. Economic reform results: focus on Russia [52].

1. Triesman, pp. 197-239 [42].


**Regime types and trajectories of development**


** Policy memo due Friday, Nov. 22 by 5pm in my mailbox at the PS department.**
#23. Tue, Nov 26. The instability of hybrid regimes and colored revolutions [48].


Thur, Nov. 28 - NO CLASS (Thanksgiving break)

#24. Tue, Dec 3. Democracy and lack thereof after colored revolutions [29].


   Readings TBA.

* Research paper OR take-home exam due Thursday, December 12, by 5pm. There will be a box near the front desk at the PS department where you can drop off your papers/exams (hard copy only, email submissions will not be accepted).