Course title: Russian Civilization: Popular Stereotypes and Social Behavior
Course code: RAST 3001 RASP
Programs offering course: Russian Area Studies
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

The course aims to take an in-depth look at Russian civilization understood as the conjunction of culture, society, and politics. It will address Russia’s relationship with the West, its national narratives, traditionalism, spirituality, etc. The course will provide a survey of Russian political and cultural history from the point of view of its relevance for the present and address a number of urgent issues facing contemporary Russian culture and society. The course involves students own research on topics of their choice.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- identify and discuss the concept of civilization in historiography and social sciences;
- analyze and discuss some of the "building blocks" of Russian civilization, in their historical development, such as the East/West geographic and ideological divide, religion, urbanism, political and economic development, gender and class;
- discuss multiple factors at play in defining Russian identities over the centuries;
- analyze some of the everyday phenomena, including food, the body, childhood, collective emotions, etc. as parts of civilizational patterns.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

The course material will be presented through the combination of lectures, in-class discussions and field trips to museums, such as the Kirov Memorial Museum and Alexandra Nevsky Cemetery. Students are expected to take active part in class discussions and to give one individual presentation on the topic of their choice.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. 2 Quizzes 30%
2. Paper 20%
3. Oral Presentation 15%
4. Final Test 25%
5. Participation in Class Discussion 10%
TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

2 Quizzes

15% each

Two quizzes will be given during the semester. These quizzes will test your knowledge of course concepts, theories and facts, and they will be a combination of multiple-choice questions and several open questions.
The format and the genre of the paper could be best described as “ethnographic essay.” The purpose of the essay is to analyze a type of behavior, a social practice or an institution, which you consider typical or representative of modern Russian civilization. Using what ethnographers call “participant observation” method, study this phenomenon, describe and analyze it, using conceptual frameworks, acquired in this class.

The topics for the essay could include such diverse phenomena as street fashion, various aspects of urban life (restaurants, public transport, shopping, food markets), interaction within families, housing patterns, classroom behavior, etc. Please, see me during my office hours in order to discuss the choice of topic for your essay by March 15.

Your paper should seek to explore the intersection between your individual, first-hand experience of living in Russia and larger patterns of Russian culture and civilization. Ask yourself: why do people behave the way they do? What kind of larger values and believes (or “building blocks” of Russian civilization) underpin the phenomenon under observation?

Your paper should be 7-10 page long, double-spaced between lines along with 1” margin on all sides and it should use 12-point Times New Roman font.

Oral Presentation

Before submitting the paper to the instructor, each student will give an oral presentation on the chosen topic, as a way to share her/his findings with the rest of the class and receiving feedback from peers and the instructor.

Final Test

Your final test will assess your knowledge of main course concepts, theories and facts, and it will be a combination of multiple-choice questions, several short open questions and a large question, which would require an essay-type response. It will take 45 to 90 minutes, and it will be given during the last class session.

Participation in Class Discussion

Taking part in class discussions is essential for learning. It is important that all students prepare course readings for the assigned date and come to class ready to analyze and debate issues raised by the readings. All reading materials will be made available to students in electronic form (pdf), so having a convenient means to read .pdf files (a laptop, a pdf-capable e-book reader, etc.) would be of great help. If necessary, paper copies of the readings will be available in room 116 upon your request.

Attendance

Attendance is crucial for successful completion of the class. Students are allowed to have two unexcused absences for each course for the whole semester program. These allowed unexcused absences should be used for situations such as minor illnesses without a doctor’s note or personal situations that prevent the student from attending the class. Allowed unexcused absences should not be used in a planned way for travel or other activities. Unexcused absences beyond the limit of two will lower a student’s grade by 2 points on the 100-point scale each. For example, if your overall score in the class is 90 (an equivalent of A-) and you have had three unexcused absences, your final score will be 88 (B+).

N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class: 1.1 Introduction to the Course

The concept of civilization in history and social sciences. Civilization in the age of “digital geopolitics”

Class: 1.2 Geopolitics of Russian Identity: Maps and Geography

Week 2
Class:   2.1 Russia between the East and the West

Class:   2.2 Slavophiles, Westernizers, Eurasionists

Week 3
Class:   3.1 Religion and Spirituality; Russian Orthodox Christianity
Read: Dmitry S. Likhachev, “Religion: Russian Orthodoxy” in The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture, pp 38-56

Class:   3.2 Religion Today: Post-secularism in the Post-atheist Country

Quiz 1

Week 4
Class:   4.1 Between the Fields and the City: the Three Waves of Russian Urbanization

Your paper topic is due

Class:   4.2 Urbanization: the Housing Crisis and Communal Living

Excursion to Sergey Kirov Museum, at 26/28 Kamennoostrovsky Prospect
Meeting place & time: Smolny Campus, 13:50, in front of room 116

Week 5
Class:   5.1 The Individual and the Collective in Russia
Read: John Hosking, “Forms of Social Solidarity in Russia and in the Soviet Union,” in Trust and Democratic Transition in Post-Communist Europe, pp. 47-62

Class:   5.2 Trajectories of Self: from Conformism to Dissent

Week 6
Class:   6.1 Gender and Family Order in Imperial and Soviet Russia

Class:   6.2 Women, Family and “State Feminism” during the Soviet Times
Week 7
Class: 7.1 Gender and Family Order in Post-Soviet Russia

Read:


Valerie Sperling, “Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia.” Chapter 1. The Power of Sex: Culture, Gender, and Political Legitimacy, pp. 1-40

Quiz 2

Class: 7.2 Russian and Soviet Masculinity


Week 8
Class: 8.1 Politics of Food, Practices of Dining in Russia

Food as Social and Cultural Marker in Imperial Russia


Class: 8.2 Soviet Culinary Art: "Socialism on the Table"


Week 9
Class: 9.1 Anthropology and Politics of the Body

The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene and the Soviet State

Read: Tricia Starks, The Body Soviet, pp. 3 – 36

Class: 9.2 Disabled Body in Russian Culture

Read: Frances Bernstein, “Prosthetic Manhood in the Soviet Union at the end of World War II,” pp. 113 – 133.

Week 10
Class: 10.1 Materiality of Life and Death: Cemeteries in Twentieth-century Russia

Read: Catherine Merridale, “Revolution among the dead,” pp. 176-188.

Class: 10.2 Field Trip

Field trip to the cemeteries of Alexander Nevsky Lavra

Date and time: TBA

Week 11
Class: 11.1 Patterns of Collective Emotions Cultural Representations of Emotions


Your paper is due
Class: 11.2 Presentations by Students

Week 12
Class: 12.1 National Traumas and Collective Memories


Class: 12.2 Final Test

Course Materials
Readings


Hosking John, “Forms of Social Solidarity in Russia and in the Soviet Union,” in Trust and Democratic Transition in Post-Communist Europe, pp. 47-62


Online Resources

http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/