CIEE St. Petersburg, Russia

Course title: Contemporary Russian Politics and Governance
Course code: POLI 3003 RASP
Programs offering course: Russian Area Studies
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Spring 2021

Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with basic knowledge of the evolution of political life in contemporary Russia and thereby enhance their understanding and skills for living in a globally interdependent and culturally diverse world. This course intends to show Russian politics both through the eyes of Russian political scholars and Western scholarship. The course applies analytical approach to historical perspective of political, economic and social circumstances and tendencies which led to Russia's birth; explores highlights of current Russia development. This course explores fundamental elements of modern Russian statecraft. Students are offered to investigate key dimensions of Russian domestic and foreign policy. The analysis of current political issues will provide students with the tools of understanding contemporary Russia and give an outlook of future developments.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- identify and explain principles, institutions, procedures and decision-making processes in Russia;
- develop analytical, social science disposition toward Russian politics;
- evaluate basic strengths and weaknesses of the political and governmental system of the Russian Federation;
- relate historical events and developments in the USSR to contemporary political issues and outcomes;
- explain key sociopolitical developments in Russia;
- develop their skills in critical thinking by being able to formulate, present and defend their own positions on controversial issues.

Course Prerequisites

None

Methods of Instruction

The course consists of lectures and seminars. Lectures cover major episodes of Russian evolution as an independent state, specific problems of contemporary statecraft and provides background into key modern policies and challenges of the Russian Federation.

Seminars are founded mainly on specification, extension and expansion of suggested themes.

Part of seminars will include student’s mini-research presentations on a given theme and follow-up discussions. Another part will be focused on debates based on home reading.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Research Participation            30%
2. Quizzes                          15%
3. Essay                            25%
4. Final Test                       20%
5. Participation                    10%
TOTAL                                100%

Course Requirements
Research Participation

Each student is expected to conduct two (three) surveys on given themes and present the results of his/her researches at seminars. Each presentation will count for 15% of the course grade.

Quizzes

There will be three quizzes along the course based on the material of previously examined topics. Each quiz will amount for 5% of the course grade. 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.

Essay

The list of themes for the essay will be disseminated on the third class. Students choose and reserve the theme for the essay by the next class by sending an email to the course instructor. Students are free to suggest their themes for the essay, however each of the cases is subject to course instructor approval.

The essay should be 9-12 pages long. It should contain: title page, introduction, argumentation, conclusion, bibliography. Please, use TNR font, 12 point font size. Margin: 2 cm on left, right, top and bottom. Spacing: 1,5.

The text should be well structured, original, supplied by references.

Final Test

The final in-class test is given during the last week of the semester and it tests your knowledge of course concepts, theories and facts. It is a combination of multiple-choice questions, open questions and a short essay on the proposed topic.

Participation

Class participation is essential for the successful completion of the course. Students are encouraged to contribute to the discussion related to the theme under consideration and share their ideas. Participation mark will be calculated by evaluation of frequency and quality of contribution to the discussion. Each class is equipped with mandatory essential reading materials. At the beginning of the class each student is expected to report briefly fresh news in regard to Russian political, social or economic development.

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

Students introduce themselves; explain motivation, personal interests and expectations within the course framework.

Class:  1.2 Political Culture of Russia and its Impact on Political Process

Breaking Myths about Russia

Russia’s portrait: reflection and distortion, images versus reality.

Political culture and its effect on political process.
Week 2
Class: 2.1 Russia and National Identity

Religious factor of socio-political development of Russia

Essential reading:
- Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe

Supplementary reading:

Class: 2.2 Evolution of Russian Political System: from USSR to New Russia

2.1. Transition to independence: Gorbachev, "Perestroika" and the Fall of the USSR.

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:
- Breslauer George W. "Reforming sacred institutions: the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Roman Catholic Church compared." Post-Soviet Affairs, 2017 Vol. 33, №. 3, pp. 177-
2.2 Transformation of Russian Political Regime in 1990s. Boris Yeltsin’s Domestic and Foreign Policy.

**Essential reading:**


**Supplementary reading:**


**Week 3**

**Class: 3.1 Political Leadership**

1.1. “Who are you, Mr. Gorbachev?” Personality factor.

“Who are you Mr. Yeltsin?” Personality factor.

1.2. Communist Party of the USSR: major features


**Essential reading:**


**Supplementary reading:**


**Class: 3.2 Russia - Institutional Design: Modern Governmental and Administrative System**

2.1. Constitution (Russian and the US constitutions – a comparative analysis)

2.2. Executive branch of power:

- President
- Government

2.3. Legislative branch of power:

- Council of Federation
- State Duma
2.4. Judicial system and justice administration

**Essential reading:**

**Supplementary reading:**

**Week 4**

**Class: 4.1 Political and Economic Elites in Modern Russia**

1.1. Key figures and connections in Russian political and economic systems:
- Boris Yeltsin
- Vladimir Putin
- Dmitry Medvedev
- Sergey Sobianin
- Sergey Shoygu
- Other personalities

1.2. Law enforcement agencies of Russia and phenomenon of “siloviki”.

**Essential reading:**
- Rivera David W., Rivera Sharon Werning. “The Militarization of the Russian Elite under Putin: What We Know, What We Think We Know (but Don't), and What We Need to Know.” Problems of Post-Communism, March 2017. pp. 1–12.

Parts 1-4 in English http://www.sho.com/the-putin-interviews


**Supplementary reading:**
- Bateman A. The KGB and Its Enduring Legacy.” The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, 2016. 29:1

**Class: 4.2 Reformation of Electoral System of Russia**
1.1. Foundations and key characteristics.

1.2. Case study: prospects of online voting.

Quiz 1

Essential reading materials:


Supplementary reading:


Week 5

Class: 5.1 Gender and Politics in Russia

Case studies: Elections to regional legislatures (St.Petersburg Legislative Assembly)

Supplementary reading:


Class: 5.2 Parliamentarism and Political rivalry in Russia

1.1. Development of Political parties in Russia.

1.2. Theory of dominant party formation. False start of propresidential party.

1.3. United Russia as the Dominant Party.

Essential reading:


Supplementary reading:

Class: 6.1 Evolution of Political Opposition in Russia: Rise and Fall

Fight against Corruption. Civil Society and Protest Movement

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:
- Transparency international. Russia https://www.transparency.org/country/RUS assessed September 1, 2018

Class: 6.2 Freedom of Speech: Mass Media and Political Process in Russia

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:

Week 7

Class: 7.1

1.1. Rise and Fall of “Oligarchs”.

1.2. Freedom of speech in Russia: critical analysis.

1.3. NGOs struggling for freedom of speech political rights.

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:
- Gel’man Vladimir. The Rise and Decline of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia.
Class: 7.2  Russian Policies: Modern Economic Policy


Quiz 2

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:

Week 8
Class: 8.1

1.1. Energy as an instrument of Russian Foreign policy.
1.2. Competitive sectors of Russia Economy:
   a. Space industry;
   b. Russia and international trade in weapons;
   c. Agricultural sector etc.

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:

Russian Economic performance:
https://tradingeconomics.com/russia/indicators

The Observatory of Economic complexity. Russia
https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/rus/

Class: 8.2  Russian Policies: Modern Security and Defense Policy.

Russia’s Threat Perception
1.1. Russia-NATO relations.
1.2. Russian Nuclear Potential and Balance of Power.

Essential reading:
Week 9
Class: 9.1 Russian Policies: Modern Russian Social Policy

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:

Class: 9.2

1.1. Ethno-nationalism in Russia.

1.2. Environmental risks legacy of Soviet Union and Environmental policy of Russia.

1.3. Cyberspace regulation in Russia.

Essential reading:

Supplementary reading:

Week 10
Class: 10.1 Key Characteristics of Russian Foreign policy

1.1 Foundations, Aims and Means of Russian Foreign Policy.

1.2 Key vectors of Russian Foreign Policy:
- Multilateral Relations.
- Bilateral Relations.
1.3 Regional Approach: Phenomenon of Near Abroad and Post Soviet Area.

**Quiz 3**

**Essential reading:**


**Supplementary reading:**

- Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe

Class: 10.2

1.1. Global challenges and Russian Foreign Policy.

1.2. Russia in International organizations and associations:

- UN
- BRICS
- Organization of Shanghai cooperation

**Essential reading:**


**Supplementary reading:**


**Week 11**

Class: 11.1 Russia and the West

1.1. Russia-US Relations.

1.2. Russia-EU Relations.

Class: 11.2

1.1. Anti-Russian sanctions and their impact over political and economic conditions in Russia.

1.2. Russian Soft power: cultural, educational programs etc.

1.3. Arctic and Antarctic priorities of Russian Foreign policy (case studies).

**Essential reading:**

- Gretskiy Igor, Treshchenkov Evgeny, Golubev Konstantin. “Russia's perceptions and

Supplementary reading:


Week 12

Class: 12.1 Russia and the East

Russian Political Alliances in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Russian Priorities for Economic Cooperation in Asia.


Class: 12.2 Russia and the East, continued

Russia-China relations: 1) political, 2) economic.

Russia-Japan relations: 1) political, 2) economic.

Russian political and economic priorities in Africa.

Essential reading:


Supplementary reading:


Course Materials

Readings

Reading materials will be available on Google drive folder. St.Petersburg University library digital resources (including full text articles/publications) are available to students while on campus.


Brown Archie and Lilia Shevtsova (eds.), Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin: Political Leadership in Transition.


Clunan, Anne L. “Historical aspirations and the domestic politics of Russia’s pursuit of international status.” Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 2014. 47, pp. 281-290

Crowley Stephen. “Monotowns and the political economy of industrial restructuring in Russia.” Post-Soviet Affairs, 2016 Vol. 32, No. 5, pp. 397-422


Daniels R. The Rise and Fall of Communism in Russia. Yale University Press, 2007


Urnov Mark. “Greatpowerness” as the key element of Russian self-consciousness under erosion.” Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 2014. 47, pp. 305-322


**Online Resources**

Students are strongly encouraged to maintain familiarity with “Russian course” by following news flows related to Russia


Russian Political Insight. http://www.russiapoliticalinsight.com/, assessed September 1, 2018

Pew Research Center. http://www.pewresearch.org/, assessed September 1, 2018

Russian Economic performance. https://tradingeconomics.com/, assessed September 1, 2018

The Observatory of Economic complexity. Russia https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/, assessed September 1, 2018

Transparency international https://www.transparency.org, assessed September 1, 2018


The Legatum Prosperity Index 2017. http://www.prosperity.com/rankings, assessed September 1, 2018