

POLI 329: Russian and Soviet Politics

Prof. Juliet Johnson
Winter 2015

The attempt to redefine and recreate a healthy Russian state from the ashes of the collapsed Soviet Union represents one of the greatest political, economic, and social challenges of our time. This course invites students to investigate this transformation by providing a broad introduction to Russian politics. We begin with a brief review of the Soviet era and then explore key issues in post-Soviet Russian politics such as formal and informal political institutions, economic transformation, nationalism and separatism within Russia, and Russian foreign policy. We conclude with an in-class simulation of Russian policy making.

Required Readings

Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge 2011)
POLI 329 Course Pack plus selected other readings

The course pack and book are available for purchase at the university bookstore. In the course outline below, readings from the course pack are indicated by ►. Other readings are either hyperlinked or posted on MyCourses, as noted. For best results, please do the readings for each week ahead of time and in the order listed on the outline.

But events move fast in Russia – much faster than scholarly publishing! Students should keep up on current events in Russia by subscribing to David Johnson's Russia List (JRL), a daily compilation of news reports, analyses, and commentary on Russian affairs from around the world. Don't be overwhelmed by the amount of information in JRL – just choose one or two interesting pieces per day to read. To subscribe to JRL, send an e-mail to davidjohnson@starpower.net, put "Subscription" in the header, and send him your e-mail address. For those of you who enjoy getting your Russia news via podcast, I also recommend RFE/RL's [The Power Vertical](#).

Course Obligations

Students will be evaluated on the basis of four measures:

- 1) Short answers to weekly discussion questions, submitted via MyCourses (10%)
- 2) Conference participation (10%)
- 3) Two 5-7 page essays related to our role-playing exercise (20% each)
- 4) A comprehensive final examination (40%)

You must complete both papers and the exam in order to pass the course.

Weekly Discussion Questions

I will post discussion questions for each week on our MyCourses site, **beginning with Week 2** (click on "Weekly Questions" or "Answer Weekly Questions" for access). Please choose ONE of these questions each week to answer in written form, and submit your short, thoughtful response via the "Answer Weekly Questions" link on MyCourses. To receive full credit, responses must be a minimum of 200 words long and must answer the question with explicit reference to that week's reading(s). No footnote or bibliography needed for this - just be sure that you knowledgeably discuss at least one reading in your answer. **Responses are**

due by noon each Wednesday, and late responses will not be accepted under any circumstances. You can miss one week without penalty - save this freebie for when you get sick, when your computer crashes at 11:50am on a Wednesday, etc.

I will post everyone's responses anonymously on our MyCourses page under "Weekly Questions." The responses themselves *are not graded* – you get 10% of your grade just for writing them. There will be 11 opportunities to submit responses (each Wednesday on Weeks 2-12). If you submit *10 or 11* full-credit responses, you will receive an A for this part of the course; nine responses earn an A-, eight earn a B+, and so on and so forth.

Conference Participation

Please register for a conference time on Minerva. Conferences will begin during Week 3 (replacing our Friday lecture time) and attendance is mandatory. Your conference grade will be based on the quality of your participation in group discussions. Please complete all of the readings for the week before coming to conference. We will not have conferences in Weeks 1-2 and 13-14.

Power and Policy: A Role-Playing Adventure

We will do a policy simulation in which students representing different Russian interest groups will try to persuade Vladimir Putin and his inner circle to adopt policies that the groups have designed. **The role-play will take place on the evening of Wednesday, April 8, from 6-9pm.** *As a result, there will be no regular class on April 7 or 9.* In this exercise, each student will take on a role in the Russian polity (e.g., President, member of parliament, human-rights activist, regional leader, oil baron). As preparation, students will write two essays based on their roles:

- 1) An essay that reviews the political biography of your character, **due by Friday, February 27 at 5pm** and submitted via MyCourses.
- 2) A policy paper, **due April 8 at the start of the role-play**. This will typically be a group paper, depending upon your role and your coalition-building skills.

Each essay must be 5-7 pages long, double-spaced, in 12-point font with reasonable margins. Each is worth 20% of your grade, for a total of 40%. Late essays will be marked down a half grade for *each day* that they are late (e.g., a B+ essay becomes a B on the first day it is late, a B- on the second day, and so on). We will assign roles in early February; further details on the writing assignments will be distributed in class and on MyCourses.

Final Examination

The comprehensive final examination, worth 40% of your grade, will be given on the university-selected date during the regular exam period. The exam will consist of short-answer essay questions closely based on the weekly questions. You should refer to the weekly questions and your collective answers to them when preparing for the exam.

On Copyright

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Course Outline and Calendar

Week 1 (Jan. 6, 8, 9)

The Soviet Legacy

- ▶ Ken Jowitt, "Soviet Neotraditionalism: The Political Corruption of a Leninist Regime"
- ▶ Richard Ericson "The Classical Soviet-Type Economy: Nature of the System and Implications for Reform"

[BBC Timeline: Soviet Union](#)

Week 2 (Jan. 13, 15, 16)

The End of the USSR

White, Chapter 1 and pp116-128

- ▶ Z (Martin Malia), "To the Stalin Mausoleum"
 - ▶ Henry Hale, "The Makeup and Breakup of Ethnofederal States"
- [The Atlantic, "20 Years since the Fall of the Soviet Union"](#) (photos)

Week 3 (Jan. 20, 22) – Conferences begin

Introduction to Russia and the Role-Playing Exercise

White, pp73-78 and Chapter 8

- ▶ David Remnick, "The October Revolution"

Economist Intelligence Unit, [Russia](#) – go to the Reports tab and click "Generate Country Report" (you must be on the McGill system or using the McGill VPN to access this link)

Week 4 (Jan. 27, Jan 29)

Political Institutions

White, Chapters 2 and 3

Week 5 (Feb. 3, 5)

The Siloviki and Informal Politics

- ▶ Gerald Easter, "The Russian State in the Time of Putin"
- ▶ Brian Taylor, "The Power Ministries and the Siloviki"
- ▶ Alena Ledeneva, "Chernyi Piar" [Black PR]

Week 6 (Feb. 10, 12)

Public Opinion and Social Movements

White, Chapter 6

Alfred B. Evans, Jr., "Civil Society and Protests in Russia," (to be distributed with permission via MyCourses)

- ▶ Graeme Robertson, "Protesting Putinism: The Election Protests of 2011 – 2012 in Broader Perspective"

Week 7 (Feb. 17, 19)

Economic Transformation

White, Chapter 4

- ▶ Juliet Johnson, "Russia's Financial-Industrial 'Oligarchy'"
- ▶ David Hoffman, "Roar of the Dragons" (on the financial crash of 1998)

Week 8 (Feb 24, 26) – First paper due February 27

Economy and Society

White, Chapter 5 (“Rich and Poor in Postcommunist Russia”)

▶ Andrew Barnes, "Russia's New Business Groups and State Power"

[Putin 3.0: The Economic Plan \(Rutland and Connolly\)](#)

[Dmitrii Medvedev’s “Go Russia!” speech](#)

Week 9 (March 10, 12)

Nation Building and Nationalism

▶ Oxana Shevel, “Russian Nation-Building from Yel’tsin to Medvedev”

Valdai Club Discussion Report, [“National Identity and the Future of Russia”](#)

Week 10 (March 17, 19)

Federalism and Separatism

▶ Gel’man and Ryzhenkov, “Local Regimes, Sub-national Governance and the “Power Vertical” in Contemporary Russia”

▶ Andrew Jack, chapter 3 (“Prisoner of the Caucasus”)

▶ Richard Sakwa, “The Revenge of the Caucasus”

Week 11 (March 24, 26)

Russian Foreign Policy from Yeltsin to Putin

White, Chapter 7

▶ Charles King, “The Five-Day War”

Week 12 (Mar 31, Apr 2) - Last week of conferences

Russia and its “Near Abroad” – Crisis in Ukraine

Juliet Johnson and Maria Popova, “Ukraine: A Special Report” (distributed via MyCourses)

▶ Alexander Lukin, “What the Kremlin is Thinking”

▶ Roy Allison, “Russian ‘deniable’ intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules”

▶ Marlene Laruelle, “Russian Nationalism and Ukraine”

Vladimir Putin, [Presidential Address on Crimea](#)

Week 13 (April 8) – Role Play

Power and Policy in Russia: A Role-Playing Adventure

Second paper due

We will meet from 6-9pm on Wednesday, April 8 for the role play. As a result, there will be no regular class meetings or readings on April 7 or 9.

Week 14 (April 14)

Reflections on Russia’s Transformation