In focusing on “post-Soviet” politics, this course will concentrate on the dramatic political (and social and economic) events that have occurred since the fall of the Soviet empire. However, we can only make sense of the present through an understanding of the history on which it is built. In so doing, the course will explore some of the major political themes of the twentieth century -- the Russian revolution, Stalinism, the nature of the Soviet political system, Gorbachev's perestroika, nationalism, the Soviet collapse, as well as Russia's struggle with capitalism and democracy.

By the end of the course, you should have a good understanding about what the Soviet Union was, and about what led to its demise; you should also know a good deal about the problems confronting Russia and the former Soviet republics, including their attempts to create new political and economic systems and to find their place in the global political economy.

Course Requirements

You are expected to complete the assigned reading (and films) before each class. Class sessions will typically combine lecture and discussion, and will assume knowledge of the reading. There are three additional requirements:

**Blackboard discussion forum:** In order to facilitate class discussion and to insure that students stay on pace with the reading, you will be asked to post regular comments on the reading to the Blackboard discussion forum. Comments will be posted about once a week during the semester. (These are meant to be informal reflections, but also to demonstrate that you have done the reading, have given it ample consideration, and are ready to discuss it. Note that completing the Blackboard postings is a significant part of the final grade.)

**Analytical essays:** There will be two analytical essays (5-6 pages) during the semester (due March 6 and April 24). In these essays you will develop your own argument regarding questions I will pose to you ahead of time; they will not require any additional reading.
Final exam: A final exam will be given during the regular exam time (May 15). There may also be some smaller requirements, such as in-class group exercises and debates.

Grades will be determined as follows:

- Blackboard discussion postings and class participation – 25%
- 2 analytical essays @25% = 50%
- Final exam – 25%

[Note: Regular class attendance is expected. You will not get extra points for attending class regularly, but those students who miss a significant amount of class sessions will find their grade lowered.]

I ask that you not use laptop computers or other electronic devices during class time. While some use laptops solely to take notes, the temptation to do otherwise is great and it distracts other students. If you have a particular need for an exception please let me know.

Confused? Have questions about the course, or simply curious to learn more? Take advantage of attending a liberal arts college rather than a big university, and stop by office hours. You’ll find me always ready to talk about politics, Russia, or both.

Reading:

The following book have been ordered for purchase at the Oberlin Bookstore:


With the exception of these books, all of the assigned readings will be accessible via Blackboard. Additional copies of some of the reading will also be available on regular reserve. Since events in the region are changing quickly, I reserve the right to exchange (replace, not add) additional readings as the semester goes on. We will also rely on documentary films, most of which you will view outside of class time so we can discuss them in class.

You are also strongly encouraged to follow current events regarding Russia and the former Soviet republics, such as by reading *The New York Times, The Guardian, The Financial Times*, or *The Economist*. There are a number of online sources of information about the region; here is a sampling if you are interested:

Class Schedule

February 2-9: The Russian Revolution and Stalinism

McAuley, *Soviet Politics*, intro. and chaps. 1-4

Stephen F. Cohen, “Bolshevism and Stalinism,” in *Rethinking the Soviet Experience*

John Scott, *Behind the Urals*, parts 1-3

Watch the film *Stalin: Despot*

February 11-16: Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and the Soviet Political Economy

McAuley, chapters 5-6

Nikita Khrushchev, "The Secret Speech" [read for main points]


Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Public Opinion: Acceptance of the Regime,” in *A Normal Totalitarian Society*

Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon*, chapters 3-4

February 18-23: Gorbachev’s Perestroika and the Soviet Collapse

McAuley, chapter 7

Stephen Kotkin, *Steeltown, USSR*, chapter 2


McAuley, chapter 8 and conclusion

Martin Malia, “To the Stalin Mausoleum,” in *The Soviet System*

Mikhail Gorbachev, "Resignation Speech," in *The Soviet System*

Film – The Struggle for Russia (part 1)

[Feb. 25: first essay assignment distributed]

**February 25-March 2: Yeltsin and “Shock Therapy”**

Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics*, pp. 128-146

David Kotz with Fred Weir, *Revolution From Above*, chaps. 9-10

Joseph Stiglitz, “Who Lost Russia?” in *Globalization and its Discontents*


**March 4-9: Russia in the 1990’s**


Film -- The Struggle for Russia, part 2


Vadim Volkov, "Violent Entrepreneurship in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 55, no. 5, 1999

Anatol Lieven, “The Masque of Democracy: Russia’s Liberal Capitalist Revolution and the Collapse of State Power,” chapter 4 in *Chechnya*

**March 6: First Essay Due**

**March 11-16: Putin and “the Power Vertical”**

Film – The Return of the Czar

Richad Sakwa, *Putin: Russia’s Choice*, chapter 1

Vladimir Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium,” appendix in Sakwa, *Putin: Russia’s Choice*

Sakwa, “Politics in Russia,” in *Developments in Russian Politics* (read pp. 8-18).

John P. Willerton, “The Hegemonic Executive,” in *Developments*

Stephen White, “The Electoral Process,” in *Developments*
Henry Hale, “Russia’s Political Parties and their Substitutes,” in Developments


March 18-30: Russia’s “Managed Democracy”


David Foglesong and Gordon M. Hahn, “Ten Myths About Russia,” in Joel Ostrow, ed., Politics in Russia

Shleifer and Treisman, "A Normal Country: Russia After Communism," pp. 16-26

Sarah Oates, “Russia’s Media and Political Communications in the Digital Age,” in Developments

Graeme B. Robertson, “Civil Society and Contentious Politics in Russia,” in Developments.


Kathryn Hendley, “Assessing the Rule of Law in Russia,” in Developments

Alena V. Ledeneva. Can Russia Modernize?, introduction

Check out the pictures and videos of Russian social activists: http://www.hrw.org/features/russia-civil-society

[March 23-29: Spring Break]

April 1-April 20: End of Empire, New States

Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs, Latvia: The Challenge of Change, chapt. 3

Pauline Jones Luong, “Competing Views of Central Asian States and Societies,” in *The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence*


Michael Klare, *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet*, chapt. 5


Graeme Herd, “Colorful revolutions and the CIS,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, 52: 2, Mar 2005

Keith Gessen, “The Orange and the Blue,” *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2010


Alexander Motyl, “The Sources of Russian Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov. 16, 2014

See the BBC’s [Ukrainian Crisis Timeline](#)

Margot Light, “Foreign Policy,” in *Developments*

[April 15: second essay assignment distributed]

**April 22-27: Society: Class, Gender and Youth**

Svetlana Stephenson, “Society and Social Divisions in Russia,” in *Developments*


Stephen Crowley, “Russia’s Labor Legacy,” in *Working Through the Past: Labor and Authoritarian Legacies in Comparative Perspective*

*Born in 1989* (selections to be assigned)
April 24: Second Essay Due

April 29-May 6: Is Russia headed West or South?


Film – Putin’s Way

Karen Dawisha, Putin’s Kleptocracy, chapt. 7


Vladimir Gel’man, “Trajectories of Russian Politics: An Interpretation,” in Developments


Paul Christensen, “Russia as Semiperiphery,” in Neil Robinson, ed., The Political Economy of Russia

Friday, May 15, 9 – 11 a.m.: Final Exam

Honor Code:
The Honor Code is a serious commitment. You should all be familiar with the honor code (available at http://www.oberlin.edu/~stlife/Honor_Code/Honor_Code.html). In general, you are encouraged to share your work with other students, and to seek their input, comments and corrections. However, the work you submit must substantively be your own. If you are unsure how the Honor Code applies to a particular assignment, please ask me. It is essential that you write and sign the honor code on all work you hand in for this class. (You do not need to write this on Blackboard discussion postings.) The Honor Code reads: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment.”