COURSE OVERVIEW

Corporations and large businesses are often accused of despoiling the environment in their quest for profit. Free enterprise is often seen to be at odds with environmental preservation so that government regulation is required. But if the profit motive is the primary cause of pollution, one would not expect to find large-scale pollution in former socialist and communist regimes. The socialist world, however, has not been immune to environmental disasters. Why did these regimes, which were not beholden to corporate interests, wreak such havoc on approximately one-sixth of the world’s surface? How did communist ideology, economic interests of the socialist states, foreign policy considerations, and the needs of the population play into environmental preservation/destruction in the former Communist Bloc? In addition to these historical questions, we will also study the enduring consequences of communist-era environmental policies on the contemporary Russian, East European, and Central Asian environment. The disappearance of the Aral Sea, the pollution of Lake Baikal, the Caspian Sea and the Arctic, the nuclear disasters in Chernobyl, Chelyabinsk, and Semipalatinsk, and the spread of Soviet industrial waste will be our main foci this semester. This course aims to not only provide you with a grounding in Soviet history and Soviet environmental policy, but also encourage you to compare the Soviet environmental legacy to that of contemporaneous non-socialist states. We will thus be examining the Soviet environmental legacy within in broader historical and geopolitical context in order to better understand both the internal and external pressures that affected Soviet policies.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

I. Content:

By the end of the semester, students should be familiar with:

- the general chronology of Russian/Soviet history.
- the diversity and complexity of the Russian/Soviet natural environment
- the specific conditions that led to the environmental disasters in the Arctic, Aral Sea, Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal, Chelyabinsk, Semipalatinsk, and Chernobyl.
- how Soviet ideology and environmental practices interacted to produce a idiosyncratic relationship toward the country’s environment and resources
- the evolution of the Soviet nuclear program

II. Cognitive skills:

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- identify and relay an argument of a specific readings concisely and precisely
- think critically about an author’s approach to, and interpretation of, a historical problem.
- think historically about events and processes that led to the current environmental state of the former Soviet Union
- think about Soviet environmental issues within a regional and international perspective
- compare various points of view on a single topic while competently generating an individual perspective on the issue

III. Communication skills:

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- present their point of view concisely and persuasively while staying on topic.
- participate in a group discussion in a productive and collaborative manner.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the Oberlin College Bookstore):

- Peter Thompson, Sacred Sea: A Journey to Lake Baikal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Svetlana Alexievich Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster (New York: Picador, 2006)
- All other readings will be available on BB.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

* 10 Weekly Analytic Writing Assignments (35%)

To help you/motivate you to keep up with the readings, you will turn in ten (10) reading responses that should be between approximately 300-350 words in length. These assignments will be graded individually and are meant to reflect your meaningful engagement with the material. In these writing assignments, your task is to identify the central argument of the day’s readings. In other words, I am not asking you to
identify “what the article/documentary feature is about” [content] but to identify the author’s/director’s argument, perspective, and supporting evidence. In addition to identifying the author’s argument, methodology, and sources, you are welcome (but not required) to reflect on and probe/problematize the author’s/director’s contentions and assumptions. Theses assignments are meant to help you precisely and concisely express your thoughts in any academic/professional setting.

Nota bene:

1. These assignments must be posted to the blackboard site no later than 5 p.m. on every Monday before class. I will return these assignments at the beginning of each class to help you improve clarity of thought.
2. A minimum of five (of the ten) responses must be turned in before Fall break.
3. No assignment can be turned in after a reading has been covered in class.
4. If there are multiple articles assigned for any given week, you are welcome to focus on one article or examine thematic link that tie individual articles into a coherent unit.

* **Map Quizzes (10%)**

There will be five (5) map quizzes over the course of the semester. These quizzes will test your knowledge of: the republics of the former Soviet Union, the former East European members of the Warsaw Pact, and the basic geographic features of the former USSR, such as lakes, rivers, seas, mountain ranges, and cities. The quizzes will be administered at the beginning of the seminar.

* **Attendance and Oral Presentation Skills (25%)**

Attendance is mandatory. Although I will keep track of your attendance, I primarily rely on your observance of the Honor Code when you miss class due to illness/family emergencies/extenuating circumstances.

I will do everything in my power to make class a productive and enjoyable endeavor and your attendance and participation are crucial elements of this goal. Although some class sessions will be lectures, for much of the time we will collectively discuss the assigned readings. Throughout the semester I will keep track of your participation – both in terms of quality and quantity. The ability to engage meaningfully—to engage your colleagues in a way that will add depth and dimension to an evolving discussion—is a crucial skill in both academic and professional settings. I will provide you with individual feedback regarding this aspect of the course after weeks 3, 6, 9 but I encourage you to come speak with me if you have questions or concerns at any point in time. Lastly, if you have trouble speaking in public, please make a point to come see me during office hours to discuss strategies which might help you in this aspect of the course.

* **Final Essay (30 %) [Polished Draft 10% --- Final Paper 20%]**

For the final essay you will be asked to consider Soviet environmental policies as whole and arrive at a generalizable (but thoughtfully reasoned) conclusion about how to understand the USSR’s environmental record within a 20th century context. What principal factors shaped the character of the Soviet legacy? How do we evaluate Soviet policies based on the historical context and contemporaneous priorities? How does the Soviet experience compare to the experience in non-socialist states in the developed world? This assignment is meant to improve your ability to think comparatively and do so in a rigorous fashion by avoiding relativistic thinking. This assignment should compel you to qualify your arguments about Soviet environmental policy. (In other words, if you think that pollution was a structurally inherent in a planned economy, you will need to substantiate your claim.) This is not a research project and your conclusions should be based on the documentary features and scholarly articles you have investigated over the course of the semester.
**POLICIES ON TARDINESS AND MAKE-UP WORK**

* All written work must be turned in to receive a passing grade.

* You will also not be allowed to turn in further assignments until late work has been submitted.

* The grade for the final essay will drop one-third of a letter grade (from a "B" to a "B-", for example) for each 12-hour period.

* Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be given in the case of emergency/illness or if you ask for an extension because of a heavy workload during a week when an assignment is due in this class. In the latter case an extensions will be given provided you give me no less than a week’s notice.

**HONOR CODE**

* "The word plagiarism derives from Latin roots: plagiarus, an abductor, and plagiare, to steal. The expropriation of another author’s work and the presentation of it as one’s own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship." [American Historical Association, Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct]. Presenting the work of others as one’s own goes against everything that a liberal education is about. It is a serious affront to the other students in the course, to me as a member of the course, and to the plagiarizer him/herself. The College requires that students sign an “Honor Code” for all assignments. This pledge states: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment." For further information, see the student Honor Code which you can access via Blackboard>Lookup/Directories>Honor Code. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism, particularly in the context of joint or collaborative projects, please see me or raise it in class.

**ACCOMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

* If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see me or the Office of Disability Services so that such accommodations may be arranged.
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>** Course Schedule **</td>
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<td>Week 1</td>
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<td>Sept. 6</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>** The Glasnost Film Festival</td>
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<td>* Against the Current, dir. Dmitrii Delov, 1988 (27 min.)</td>
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<td>* [August 1994], 70-99.</td>
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<td>* For Gerd Ludwig's photos featured in Edwards' article see:</td>
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<td>** Paul R. Josephson, &quot;Projects of the Century in Soviet History: Large-Scale Technologies</td>
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<td>* from Lenin to Gorbachev,&quot; Technology and Culture 36, no. 3 [1995]: 519-59.</td>
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<td>** Jonathan D. Oldfield, Russian Nature: Exploring the Environmental Consequences of Societ</td>
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<td>* al Change [Burlington, VT.: Ashgate, 2005], 21-42.</td>
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<td>** Douglas R. Weiner, A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to</td>
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<td>* Gorbachev [University of California Press, 1999], 1-21.</td>
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<td>** Natalia Mirovitskaya, &quot;The Environmental Movement in the Former Soviet Union,&quot; in Env</td>
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<td>* ironment and Society in Eastern Europe [1998], 30-46.</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
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<td>Sept. 20</td>
<td>Ideologies vs. the Natural World: The Case of the</td>
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<td>* US and the USSR</td>
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<td>* of the Natural World [Washington: Island Press, 2002]</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
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<td>Sept. 27</td>
<td>Communism vs. Democracy and Post-Socialism:</td>
<td>** Jacob Darwin Hamblin, &quot;Environmental Diplomacy in the Cold War: The Disposal of Radioa</td>
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<td>* ctive Waste at Sea during the 1960s,&quot; The International History Review, Vol. 24, No. 2</td>
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<td>* [2002]: 348-75.</td>
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<td>** Raymond Dominick, &quot;Capitalism, Communism, and Environmental Protection: Lessons from</td>
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<td>* of Peace Research, Vol. 35, No. 3, Special Issue on Environmental Conflict [1998]: 34</td>
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<td>* 1-61.</td>
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<td>** Roger Manser, Failed Transitions: The Eastern European Economy and Environment Since</td>
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<td>* the Fall of Communism [New York: The New Press, 1993], 70-103.</td>
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### Week 5

Oct. 4  **The Disappearing Aral Sea**

- *Killing the Aral Sea: Catastrophe by Design* [electronic resource available through the library website]
- *The Hospital at the End of the Earth* [electronic resource available through the library website]
- On Reserve @ Mudd, 3 short documentaries
- Earth Report VII: Conserving the Peace
- Earth Report XII: Back From the Brink?
- Women Of The Aral

### Week 6

Oct. 11  **The Soviet "Operation Plowshare": Civilian Uses for the Nuclear Bomb**

- On reserve @ Mudd
- *Nuclear Dynamite*, dir. Gary Marcuse, 2000, (Canada)
- Radio Free Europe Reports on Kazakhstan's Nuclear Legacy:
  - Nuclear Testing Grounds:  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFkToNzDXbl&feature=relmfu]
  - Atomic Lake:  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T97xMNtTTTY&feature]

### Week 7

Oct. 18  **The Cold War in the Nuclear Arctic Cricle**

- Michael Wallace and Steven Staples, *Ridding the Arctic of Nuclear Weapons: A Task Long Overdue*

### Week 8

#### Fall Break

**Fall Break**

### Week 9

Nov. 1  **Lake Baikal: Siberia's Pearl in Peril**

- *Journeyman Pictures* special on Lake Baikal  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAS1H0mBng&feature=related]  
  (Unfortunately, no subtitles for Russian interviewees)
- Life and Religion Around Lake Baikal  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBBId-jFTQ]
| Week 10 | Nov. 8 | The Caspian Sea: A Disputed Oil Empire | ** Oil Rocks: City Above the Sea (La Cité du Pétrole), dir. Marc Wolfensberger [2009]  
|---|---|---|---|
| Week 11 | Nov. 15 | "Just Like Lab Rats": Effects of Nuclear Fallout in Siberia and Kazakhstan | ** Tourist promotional on Chelyabinsk: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sy0Oy1NxnjA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sy0Oy1NxnjA)  
** Mayak - Halflife [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pwwb8rTZgl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pwwb8rTZgl)  
** After the Apocalypse, dir. Antony Butts, 2010 [UK] ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kBNilqJlw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kBNilqJlw) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmftADUn9I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmftADUn9I)) |
| Week 13 | Nov. 29 | [Not] Surviving Chernobyl: Memories of a Disaster | ** Svetlana Alexievich Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster (New York: Picador, 2006)  
** Heavy Water: A Film for Chernobyl, dir. David Bickerstaff and Phil Grabsky, 2007. [USA] (Available on reserve @ Mudd) |
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| Dec. 6 | Chernobyl: Present Eerie, Future Uncertain  
* From Chechnya to Chernobyl, dir. Slawomir Grünberg  
* Chernobyl: Life in the Dead Zone (HBO)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVv1vszV0O&feature]  
* Photos from Paul Fusco's collection Chernobyl Legacy  
[http://mediastorm.com/publication/chernobyllegacy]  
* Joint report from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization "Chernobyl's Legacy: Health, Environmental and Socio-Economic Impacts and Recommendations to the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine" (2003-2005) |

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| Dec. 13 | No Reading Assignment.  
* Kindly turn in a polished draft for the final essay at the beginning of class. |