HIST 108:
Russian History From 1861-2012

COURSE OVERVIEW

It is not uncommon to hear—especially in the U.S.—that the twentieth century was “an American century.” However, it could be just as easily argued that the 20th century was very much a Russian one. During the Imperial period, Russia enchanted Europeans with its writers (Lev Tolstoy, Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Dostoevsky), painters (Vasili Kandinsky), and ballet (Ballet Russes with Sergei Diaghilev at its head); shocked them with its radical activists and anarchist philosophers (Aleksandr Herzen, Vera Zasulich, Vera Figner); and beguiled with its autocratic political system and royal opulence. For its part, the Soviet Union transformed “the old, tsarist Russia” and changed the world in the process. The communist system offered a political, ideological, and cultural alternative to liberal democracy and fascism, made the defeat of Nazi Germany possible, and conquered the space by sending the first satellite, man, and dog into space (in that order). This course will not only identify the key triumphs and tragedies in Russian/Soviet history, but will also offer a glimpse into how the imperial and communist systems functioned on top and bottom levels. We will pay as much attention to foreign and domestic policy as we will to the changing (political, cultural, and nationalistic) ideologies of both the imperial and socialist systems as they adapted to the world inside and out.
CENTRAL THEMES

- reforms of the 1860s-1870s, 1960s, and 1980s
- the revolutionary movement; the 1905 and 1917 revolutions
- the radical movements in pre-revolutionary Russia: anarchists, nihilists, populists
- the Russian Civil War
- origins and dynamics of Stalinism
- the impact of World War II and the Cold War
- daily life in the Soviet Union
- history of non-Russian peoples in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union
- the fall of communism, the collapse of the USSR, and the end of the Cold War
- economic and social challenges facing post-Soviet Russia.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- the political, social, economic, and cultural development of Russia from 1861 to the present.
- the general chronology of Russian/Soviet history.
- basic theories, generalizations, and debates of Russian/Soviet history.

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 and execution of a historical problem.
- think historically about events, processes, and significant individuals.

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):

* Fyodor Dostoevsky, Notes From Underground (Plume/Penguin, 2003).
* Arthur Koestler, Darkness at Noon, (Scribner, 2006).
* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (NAL Trade, 2009).
WRITING ASSOCIATE (WA)

This class is very fortunate to be able to count on the expertise of the course’s very own writing associate Rebekkah Rubin. Ms. Rubin completed an incarnation of HIST 108 last year with flying colors and is an excellent writer to boot. In addition to being familiar with the material we will be covering this semester, Ms. Rubin is exceptionally well positioned to assist you to reach your writing goals. I strongly encourage you to seek her out; I doubt not that she will be a uniquely terrific resource for each of you. She will be holding her office hours at the Writing Center every Thursday between 7 and 8 p.m. and every Sunday between 8 and 9 p.m. She can be reached via email at rrubin@oberlin.edu. At the end of your individual sessions with Ms. Rubin, she will, with your permission, let me know that you have taken the time to see her with the aim of optimizing your writing skills. Voluntarily meeting with Ms. Rubin and productively engaging with her during your meetings will indicate to me that you take your writing seriously.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

~ Weekly Writing Assignments (30%) ~

To help you/motivate you to keep up with the readings, you will turn in twelve (12) reading responses that should be between approximately 300-350 words in length. These assignments will be graded individually. In the writing assignment, your task is to identify the central argument of the day’s readings. In other words, I am not asking what the article “is about” but what the author’s argument is. In addition to identifying the author’s argument, methodology, and sources, you are encouraged (though not obligated) to reflect on and probe/problematize the author’s contentions. These assignments are meant to help you precisely and concisely express your thoughts in any academic/professional setting.

Three cardinal rules about analytical short assignments:

• You must turn in one writing assignment per week until you reach the assigned quota of 12 response papers. You can turn in more than one response, but one assignment per week is obligatory. No exceptions.
• If you are absent from class, you must hand in a response paper for the class that you missed as soon as possible. This will count towards your total.
• You must hand in your assignments at the beginning of class in hard copy. No assignment can be turned in after a reading has been covered in class. (Unless, of course, you were forced to miss class.)

~ Attendance and Participation (20%) ~

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 the 3rd, 6th, and 9th week but I encourage you to come speak with me if you have questions or concerns at any point in time. Moreover, I will do everything in my power to create an environment in which all members of this learning community feel welcome and encouraged to vocalize their views and ideas.

Note: I reserve the right to fail anyone with three unexcused absences.
~ Two Film and/or Book Reviews (15% each) ~

During the semester we will watch three Russian films—feature and documentary—about Russian history: *Rider Named Death*, *My Perestroika*, and *Khodorkovsky*. In addition, we will be reading three short novels: A. Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, A. Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and V. Voinovich’s *Fur Hat*. You will be writing on two of the above works of your choosing – with the caveat that you must turn in one review before spring break and one review after spring break.

I ask that you consider what the two works of your choosing are saying about the nature of Russian/Soviet history. Both the films and novels assert a particular interpretation of historical events and these reviews (of approximately 750 words each) are intended to aid you in becoming more self-conscious in detecting the authors’ “agenda.” The goal of these reviews is not to discuss the historical accuracy of these films/novels nor provide the summary of the plot, but rather to discern what the authors are attempting to convince their audience of with their historical narrative.

~ Final Wikipedia Project (20%) ~

It’s no secret that Wikipedia has become the go-to source for information—despite the fact that we all know these entries are incomplete or not always accurate (but more accurate than generally believed). In this final mini-research assignment you will choose an aspect of Russia’s history between 1861 and 2011 and add/modify an existing one. The assignment should be around 1000-1250 words. In addition to allowing you to explore an aspect of Russian history you find most fascinating, this assignment will also allow you to consider the implications and responsibilities involved with creating and “publishing” publicly-accessible information.

POLICIES ON TARDINESS AND MAKE-UP WORK

- All written work must be turned in to receive a passing grade.
- Final Wikipedia project and film/book reviews—The grade for the assignment will drop one-third of a letter grade (from a "B" to a "B-") for each 12-hour period. You will also not be allowed to turn in further assignments until late work has been submitted. These further assignments will also be penalized for late submission.
- 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 ten-day notice.

HONOR CODE

"The word plagiarism derives from Latin roots: plagiarius, 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 plagiariser 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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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td><strong>UNIT 1</strong> Radical Politics &amp; The End of the Russian Empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
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<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Feb. 6 Intro/Syllabus</td>
<td>None</td>
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* Documentary *Russia: Land of the Tsars* Part IV, 1825-93  
www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXPP1j1yahg&feature  
www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PFQ7Th_rAs&feature  
* We will hold a small workshop discussion of the Poe chapter and how Poe’s argument relates to Wood’s depiction of Russian history. |

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**Week 2**

| M.    | Feb. 13 Dostoevsky and Western Europe       | * Derek Offord, *Journeys to a Graveyard: Perceptions of Europe in Classical Russian Travel Writing*, 197-220  
* A workshop/discussion of the Offord’s chapter and his argument. |
<p>| W.    | Feb. 15 No Class                           | * Read Fyodor Dostoevsky’s <em>Notes from Underground</em> in its entirety. |</p>
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>F. Feb. 17</td>
<td>Dostoevsky’s Dystopia</td>
<td>* Discussion of the Underground Man and his worldview.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
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| W. Feb 22 | No Class | [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v83Jd-ccNTU]  
*Write a film review and turn it in on Friday, Feb 24 (if you choose to write one)*  |
* Turn in the film review at the beginning of class (if you’re writing one)*  |
| **Week 4** | | | |
* Documentary on the Russian Revolution: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMGrIwLj7U&feature=BFa&list=PL5923FE66653B5C6E&fla](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMGrIwLj7U&feature=BFa&list=PL5923FE66653B5C6E&fla)*  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdpEaPxNW0g&feature=BFa&list=PL5923FE66653B5C6E&fla](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdpEaPxNW0g&feature=BFa&list=PL5923FE66653B5C6E&fla)*  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mReH_vgrfU&feature=BFa&list=PL5923FE66653B5C6E&fla](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mReH_vgrfU&feature=BFa&list=PL5923FE66653B5C6E&fla)*  |
<p>| <strong>1917 - 1953</strong> | <strong>UNIT 2</strong> | <strong>THE SOCIALIST UTOPIA &amp; STALINIST TERROR</strong>  |
| <strong>Week 5</strong> | | | |</p>
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**Week 6**

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*Palaces on Monday (67-88)  
The Magic Tablecloth (89-114)  
Family Problems (139-163) |
| W.   | Mar 14 | No Class | * Read Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* (1-288)  
*Watch the BBC Documentary on the Gulag – Part 2 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vvY0T70xg&feature] |
| F.   | Mar 16 | Stalinist Show Trials | * Discussion of Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* and the BBC documentary on the Gulag.  
*Turn in a book review* (if you’re writing one) |

**Week 7**

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| W.   | Mar 21 | Prelude to the Cold War | * "Underlying Antagonisms" from Jonathan Haslam’s *Russia’s Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall*, 1-28.  
*CNN Perspectives: COLD WAR - Vol 1 - Comrades 1917-1945 Part 1 - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdD9kQ8SoRw* |
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<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Spring Break</th>
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### Week 9

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* CNN Perspectives: COLD WAR, After Stalin 1953-56  
www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMxxGG9Un/os&feature  
* The transcript of Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the XX Party Congress in 1956 |
* CNN Perspective: COLD WAR, The Berlin Wall  
Part 1: www.youtube.com/watch?v=187yv_yL11A&feature  
Part 2: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvYFun15gK&feature  
Part 3: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nd6w9-6bc&feature  
Part 4: www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-hwd_Qcj3b&feature |
| F.   | Apr 6 | Stalinist Gulag Revisited                                           | * No Class - Read One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich in its entirety  
* Watch the BCC documentary on the Gulag – Part 3  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIPJG59nfUo&feature] |

### Week 10

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| M.   | Apr 9 | The Gulag Experience                                                 | * Discussion of One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich and the BBC documentary on the Gulag.  
**Turn in a book review at the beginning of class (if you’re writing one)** |
Pessimism in the USSR, Crisis in Czechoslovakia  
Part 1: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diSiCr4U_l8&feature]  
Part 2: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nds2KFPes&feature]  
Part 4: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3zZdAeVIEk&feature] |
| F.   | Apr 13| No Class                                                             | Read V. Voinovich's The Fur Hat  
&  
Nikolai Gogol’s short story “The Overcoat” |
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<th>Week 11</th>
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<td>M. Apr 16</td>
<td>Brezhnev-Era Stagnation</td>
<td>* Discussion of <em>The Fur Hat</em> and “The Overcoat”&lt;br&gt;<strong>Turn in a book review at the beginning of class</strong> <em>(if you’re writing one)</em></td>
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<td>W. Apr 18</td>
<td>The USSR in Afghanistan</td>
<td>* Discussion of the mini-documentary of the <em>Glasnost</em> Film Festival on Russian veterans from Afghanistan and an episode from the CNN Cold War Series on the Afghan War&lt;br&gt;<strong>Soldiers of God, 1975-1988</strong> [<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2PwvyU44YI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2PwvyU44YI</a>]&lt;br&gt;<strong>Homecoming</strong> / directed by Tatyana Chubakova (17 min.) 1987 <em>(Material on reserve @ Mudd)</em></td>
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<td>Week 06</td>
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| F. Apr 27 | **The Visual Culture of the Soviet Union** | * VISIT TO THE ALLEN MUSEUM  
* Watch the documentary *My Perestroika* (On reserve @ Mudd Library) for Monday's class.  
* Complete Wiki Drafts, due Monday |

### Week 13

| M. Apr 30 | **Muscovites Looking Back** | * Discussion of *My Perestroika*  
* Write a film review (if you are writing one)  
* Turn in your wiki drafts at the beginning of class. |


| F. May 4 | **No Class** | * Watch documentary *Khodorkovsky* (dir. Cyril Tuschi, 2011) (on reserve @ Mudd Library)  
* Write a film review (if you are writing one)  

### Week 14

| M. May 7 | **Khodorkovsky & Putin’s Russia** | * Discussion of the documentary *Khodorkovsky* (dir. Cyril Tuschi, 2011)  
* Turn in a film review at the beginning of class (if you’re writing one) |

| W. May 9 | **Putin’s Russia – Whither Russia?** | * Ellen Barry, “Memo From Moscow: A Dilemma for Russian Leaders: To Suppress Protests or Not” in the *NYT*, Jan. 2 2012  

| F. May 11 | **Conclusions** | * Discussion: Was the 20th century a Russian century? |