

ML 2050 Russian Culture Syllabus

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Course overview:

Russian culture is among the most vibrant and fascinating in the world. Yet despite Russia's extensive contacts with the West in recent years, its culture still remains an enigma to a Western observer. ML 2050 seeks to demystify Russia by examining (1) important events and characters that have shaped the Russian mind over the span of a thousand years and (2) its contributions to the world culture. The course will cover the following three areas:

-The historic roots and cultural manifestations of Russia's unique Eastern-Western character. Russia's geographical location as a trade route between Europe and Asia contributed to the ambivalent cultural identity of its peoples, while its vast territory brought about the need to balance strong, sometimes violent, political rule with intense quests for individual freedom and spirituality. Students will examine how this cultural ambivalence is reflected in folklore and daily life.

Special attention will be paid to Asian influences during the 250-year-long Mongol occupation of Russia and the effects of Peter the Great's westernization effort. Examples of film, visual art, and fiction will illustrate the rich cultural production of the Russian Empire during the 300 years of Romanov's rule leading to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

-The changes to the Russian life style and mentality after 1917 as seen in essay, short fiction, documentary and feature films, and visual art. This portion of the course will examine the shaping of the *homo sovieticus* during and after the Communist Revolution, the creation of the GULAG system, World War II, and stagnation during the late Soviet era. The quest for the new Russian identity following *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and the emergence of capitalism will also be addressed.

-Russians in the United States. Russians left their mark in the US from Alaska and California to Brooklyn, New York. Students will examine the Russian presence in this country and the legacy left by Russian-born Americans, such as Igor Sikorsky (aviation), George Balanchine and Mikhail Baryshnikov (ballet), and Vladimir Nabokov (literature).

As a Multicultural Course, ML 2050 will meet the following learning outcomes:

- A) Demonstrate knowledge of cultural, economic, social, political or racial diversities in the United States or throughout the world:**

This course will challenge many of the assumptions that stem out of a Western-centric view on that country. These include race (Russian serfdom, a form of submission strongly reminiscent of slavery, was not racially based) and gender (Russian culture has had a great deal of respect for strong women, from rulers to workers and peasants, as reflected in many sources, from early chronicles to contemporary film). It will explore Russia as a multiethnic, multireligious society as manifested in cuisine, architecture, and music (a growing proportion of Russians are Muslim and virtually all faiths and confessions are present, from Catholic and Protestant to Buddhist). This course will especially explore how Russia's enormous territorial expanse and geographical location straddling Europe and Asia has historically influenced what has been regarded by some as "internal colonization", or disproportionate use of natural and human resources to benefit limited groups within the country itself. Historical manifestations of resistance to this socio-economic model will also be analyzed.

b) Apply the methods of inquiry of the natural sciences, social sciences or the arts and humanities to understand cultural, economic, social or racial diversity

The Russian Empire, and its successor the Soviet Union, were some of the most diverse societies in the history of the World, as they comprised both Western, Eastern Pacific, and Central Asian cultures. The course will place particular emphasis on critical reading of texts produced by women, minorities and those without power in the Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet society. Students will view films depicting cultural and gender-based tensions within the Russian-speaking world. Through a variety of written and visual texts, students will be presented with multiple perspectives on the issues of empire, nations and nationalism, gender, and culture as a system of values manifested through the arts and in everyday life, and they will be asked to formulate and argument their responses through classroom discussion, presentations, homework assignments, and essays.

c) Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary social or ethical issues related to diversity

The course will provide a deep and broad historical perspective on and context for today's issues in Russia and on its periphery encompassing the former Soviet Union. While it historically has been one of the most diverse societies in the world, governing such enormously extensive and socially diverse area has involved much uniformity and minority suppression of various ethnic, social, and religious groups. Through reading and viewing testimonies of resistance and dissent, students will become aware of the historical roots of today's ethnic and political tensions in the post-Soviet world.

d) Demonstrate skills required to engage in an informed and respectful way with diverse people, cultures and histories

Through role plays and debates, students will be taught to cultivate a respectful attitude for the opinions of their peers and learn from the comments of others. Guest speakers

from the community will be invited to present first-person accounts of life in the Russian-speaking world and engage students in thoughtful discussions. Much cultural content in this course, such as the Russian naming system and largely gender-based holidays and celebrations such as International Women's Day and the Homeland Defender's Day, as well as current news, lend themselves to fruitful discussions about the degree of respect afforded to different demographics, gender groups, and minorities in the Russian culture.

Texts:

I. Required: Suzanne Massie, *Land of the Firebird: The Beauty of Old Russia*, 1980. ISBN 0-671-23051-4 (cloth), ISBN 0-9644184-1-X (paperback). We will read chapters 1-14, 18, and 21.

II. Required essays, fiction, and poetry (photocopies on a 2-hour reserve; electronic reserves):

1. Anonymous, *Domostroy* (16th-century set of household rules)
2. Nicholas Gogol, *The Overcoat*
2. Isaiah Berlin, "Russian Populism"
3. Varlam Shalamov, "Dry Rations" (from *Kolyma Tales*)
4. Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *The Blockade Book* (excerpt)
5. Joseph Brodsky, "In a Room and a Half"
6. Joseph Brodsky, "A Guide to the Renamed City" (excerpt)
7. Samuil Marshak, *Mister Twister*
8. Sergei Dovlatov, "Finnish Crepe Socks" (from *The Suitcase*)

III. Recommended movies (excerpts from most movies will be shown in class):

Old Russia:

Catherine the Great (documentary)

Sibirskii tsirulnik (The Barber of Siberia)

Agoniia (Agony) (Rasputin and the end of the Romanovs)

Morozko (Russian folklore)

Soviet Union:

The Battleship Potemkin (produced in 1925; 1900s)

Chronicle of October (1917)

Doctor Zhivago (1900s to 1930s)

Burnt by the Sun (1930s)

Babi Yar (WWII)

900 Unforgettable Days (WWII)

East-West (1940s to 1960s)

A Driver for Vera (1960s)

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (1950s and 1970s)

Ivan Vasilievich Changes Career (1960s)

The Adventures of Cheburashka and Friends (Cartoon, 1970s)

Autumn Marathon (1970s)

Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears (1950s/ 1980s)

Contemporary (Post-Soviet) Russia:

Little Vera

Brother

Svad'ba (The Wedding)

Prisoner of the Mountains

House of Fools

Tycoon

Elena

Requirements:

Student success in this course depends on regular attendance, participation, and systematic reading and reflection. You will be responsible for daily readings. Each reading is accompanied by a questionnaire consisting of identifications, dates, and short essay questions that must be completed **before** each meeting. Daily assignments are posted in Pilot. These exercises help you stay on track, prepare you for the exams, and provide you with a written record of what you have done. They are also worth a substantial part of your grade. There will be a midterm and a final exam based on readings, homework assignments, and classroom presentations.

Assignments may be accepted by e-mail in exceptional cases but the professor will not print out your work for you. If you know you will be missing please turn in your assignment before, not after, the class.

All students must have a Wright State e-mail account. Professor will use the Wright State e-mail list to communicate with the students.

Grading system:

- midterm exam: 20%
- final exam: 20%
- newspaper/media presentation: 10%
- daily homework assignments: 50%

There will be two exams during the semester: **midterm** and **final exams**. Both exams will be based on the readings and class discussions.

Each student will be responsible for two newspaper/media presentations about contemporary Russia. Twice a semester, you will bring a news item to share with the class and a question for discussion. The news may cover any area of Russian culture, art or politics.

In addition, you will be responsible for daily homework.

The grade breakdown is as follows: 90-100, A; 80-89, B; 70-79, C; 60-69, D; below 60, F.

Attendance policy:

In accordance with attendance policy in the Department of Modern Languages, you are allowed to miss 5 classes without penalty and 6 classes with a loss of a letter grade. Missing 7 classes or more automatically results in the grade of F for the course. You are still responsible for homework assignments if you missed class.

Making up missed work:

Classroom presentations, media, and other materials will be posted in Pilot for your reference. A makeup midterm may be offered only in exceptional cases to be determined by the professor and only if the professor is available. There is no makeup for the final exam.

Statement on Plagiarism

Students should abide by the Wright State University Code of Student Conduct in all class work, activities, and assignments related to their language classes. Plagiarism is the copying of language and/or ideas from any outside source without proper attribution or documentation, including translations. The direct presentation of anyone else's translation, or of the output of a computer-based 'translator,' as if the translation were your own, is plagiarism. You are encouraged to use dictionaries and grammar resources to assist you with your writing. However, no other person, resource, or electronic entity may compose an essay or an oral presentation for you or contribute to the ideas or substantive expression of individual assignments. For more information, see the Wright State Office of Student Judicial Affairs website, at <http://www.wright.edu/students/judicial/>

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

Please notify your instructor if you require special accommodations. The Office of disability services will contact the instructors to arrange for exams and other assignments requiring accommodations. E-mail: disability_services@wright.edu
http://www.wright.edu/students/dis_services/
 Phone: (937) 775-5680

Teaching Schedule and Assignments

Week 1: Introduction to the course.
 Homework: Massie Chapter 1.

The beginnings of Russia. A dispute about Russian origins. Kievan Rus and Old Ladoga.

Homework: Massie Chapter 2.

Week 2: Monday 14. Kiev and Novgorod. *The Song of Igor's Campaign* (excerpts).
Homework: Massie Chapter 3.

Russia under the Tatar yoke. Russia's Asian identity.
Massie Chapter 4.

The rise of Moscow.
Homework: Massie Chapter 5.

Week 3: Monday 21. Moscow and its culture.
Homework: Massie Chapter 6.

Ivan the Terrible and the *oprichnina*.
Homework: Massie Chapter 7.

The Time of Troubles.
Homework: Massie Chapter 8.

Week 4: Peter the Great and his reforms.
Homework: Massie Chapters 8 and 9.

Russia and the West: before and during the time of Peter the Great

St. Petersburg, Russia's other capital.
Homework: Massie Chapter 10.

Week.5: The age of Catherine the Great. Russian America.
Homework: Massie Chapter 11.

Between Catherine and Napoleon: Russian and Western Europe

Napoleon's invasion and its aftermath.
Homework: Massie Chapter 12.

Week 6: Russia's two cultures in the XIXth century.
Massie Chapter 13.

Russia's folk culture.
Homework: Massie Chapter 14.

Alexander Pushkin in the Russian culture. Russia as a literature-centric society.

Homework: Nicholai Gogol, *The Overcoat*.

Week 7: *The Overcoat* and the “little man” in Russian culture.

Homework: Study for Midterm Exam (topics to be given for review)

Discuss, review issues covered on Midterm Exam

MIDTERM EXAM.

Homework: Massie Chapter 18.

Week 8: Russian Serfdom: an overview. The freeing of the serfs (compare with the Emancipation Proclamation and its results in the United States).

Reforms by Alexander II and the beginnings of Russian terrorism.

Homework: Isaiah Berlin, “Russian Populism,” 200-217.

The end of the Romanov era. Russian revolutionary culture.

Homework: Isaiah Berlin, “Russian Populism,” 218-237.

Week 9: Russian revolutionary culture (continued). From avant garde to socialist realism.

Homework: Varlam Shalamov, “Dry Rations,” from *Kolyma Tales*.

The 1930s: Five-year plans and industrialization. The Terror.

Homework: Read to the end, <http://www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch20.htm>

The Soviet-Nazi Non-aggression Pact. The beginning of WWII.

Homework: Ales’ Adamovich and Daniil Granin, *The Blockade Book* (excerpt).

Week 10: WWII through Russian eyes. Post-war life in the Soviet Union.

Homework: Joseph Brodsky, “In a Room and a Half.”

Individual and power in the Soviet Union. A poet on trial: Joseph Brodsky.

Homework: Massie Chapter 21.

The 1960s: Individual and power, continued: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Week 11: The “stagnation” period. Late Soviet life in the 1970s and 1980s.

Homework.: Samuil Marshak, *Mister Twister*.

Childhood in the Soviet Union. *Perestroika* and *glasnost*.
Sergei Dovlatov, "Finnish Crepe Socks," from *The Suitcase*.

- Week 12:** Post-Soviet Russia.
Homework: Review article, Dmitry Likhachev, "Russian Orthodoxy."
- Russian and Soviet holidays and celebrations.
Homework: Joseph Brodsky, "A Guide to the Renamed City" (excerpt).
- The Republics of the USSR before 1991: the Soviet "Family." Ethnicities and languages in the USSR.
Homework: read "Globalization and transnational organized crime: the Russian mafia in Latin America and the Caribbean"
- Week 13:** Music, literature, film, and social media in the new Russia.
Today's Russia.
- Week 14:** Women in Russian and Soviet Culture. Russians in the United States.
Review (material since the Midterm Exam) and Group discussions.
- Week 15:** **FINAL EXAM**