Course Syllabus
PLS 336
Russian & Post-Soviet Politics
University of North Carolina Wilmington
Spring Semester, 2009

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Course Description:
After 1991, the world witnessed the end of the Soviet Union, the Cold War and focused on the promise of democratization of Russia and the other 14 Post-Soviet States. Less than 20 years later we stand on the precipice of uncertainty in the region and its relationship to the larger world. Russia today is a reinvigorated 1st tier power. The hopes of democratization seemed to slip away in 2008 when the legislative elections produced an overwhelming pro-Putin majority, and the presidential elections saw Vladimir Putin hand-pick a successor to office as he moved to the Prime Minister’s position, keeping himself within the major executive power orbit in Russian Politics. Finally, a constitutional amendment altered the term in office of the President from 4 to 6 years, which many believe will be the avenue used to return Putin to the Russian Presidency. At the same time, we have observed a variety of political changes in the post-Soviet states in the Baltics (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), the Western States (Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus), the Caucuses (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), and Central Asian Republics (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan). The Baltic states have embraced fairly liberal forms of democracy similar to standard Western European Models of governance. The Western states and Caucuses have struggled with implementing democratic political systems in the face of ethnic conflict that threatens the very existence of the state. The exception to this is Belarus, which seems to have moved in the direction of the Central Asian Republics. The Central Asian Republics seemed to have abandoned all pretenses of democratic politics and instituted variations of authoritarian political systems.

At the same time the political autonomy of some Former Soviet Union (FSU) states seems increasingly questionable. The recent Russian-Georgian conflict is but one example. Russia has demonstrated the willingness to interfere in domestic politics in some FSU states, using natural resources as a heavy handed foreign policy tool in others, and intimidating other states as needed. Resurgence of Russia as a regional power and (increasingly) a top tier global power is, at this point in history, a foregone conclusion. What we need to understand is the dimensions of Russia’s foreign policy goals in the Former Soviet region and the World.
Course Objectives:
By the end of this course students will be able to…
- Understand the historical trajectory and trends within Russian/Post-Soviet History that shape the current political transformation of these states.
- Analyze the political culture of Russia and how the distribution of values and beliefs today reflects consistent patterns from Russia’s past contoured by generational shifts in the population.
- Evaluate the structure of the Russian political system and the concept of “sovereign democracy.”
- Evaluate the political transformation of other former Soviet states (Ukraine, Latvia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan).
- Analyze the underlying features of Russian foreign policy for the Near Abroad and the International Community.

Required Texts/Readings:

Course Requirements:
Exams: During the semester students will complete three scheduled, in-class exams. Each exam consists of essay/short answer questions. A study guide is made available to all students prior to each exam. Each exam is worth 100 points, and all exams combined are worth 300 points, or 60% of the course grade.

Political Evaluation papers: The required textbook and selected readings provides an analysis of Russian and Eurasian politics based on a variety of topics including the structures of government institutions, distributions of power, the party system, electoral regimes, and interest group systems, ethnic politics, etc. As part of the analysis of these topics the authors provide detailed case studies. The cases include: Russia, Latvia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. During the semester each student will complete four (4) written assignments that evaluate some feature of Russian or another Post-Soviet State’s political system. Assignments are detailed in the course outline listed below. Each assignment should be (typed), and its length should be about 150-500 words (depending on the assignment). Be sure each assignment answers all the questions listed here in the syllabus and reflect any additional requirements explained during class. Each assignment is worth fifty (50) points THE DUE DATES FOR THE ASSIGNMENTS ARE ANNOUNCED IN CLASS, which means you need to be in class in order to get the due dates. Anyone that misses the due date because of an unexcused absence will have the Make-up exams and Late Assignments policy applied to them (see below). All assignments together are worth 200 points, or 40% of the total course grade.

Course Evaluation:
The sum of all course requirements is 500 possible points for each student during the semester: Exams=300 pts. + Country Profile Assignments=200 pts. = 500 pts. The grading scale is a standard 10% scale with 90% or > resulting in an “A.”

Scale: A =450-500pts.; B=400-449pts.; C=350-399pts.; D= 300-349pts.; F=299 or lower.

You can track your points through the semester as exams and assignments are handed back. If at any time you wish to compare your tracking with the instructors records feel free to do so. I encourage students to keep track of their records, including absences. Mistakes do happen when recording final grades and if one is made against you, be sure to address it quickly. Protecting your Grade Point Average is your responsibility.

Course Outline: This course is broken into three topics, but two major areas: Russian politics and Politics in the Post-Soviet States. Russian politics is subdivided into two main areas of interest: Foundations of the Russian system and the Russian political system.

Part I: Political Foundations of the Russian State

1. Introduction
   - Remington, Chapter 1
2. Historical Development of Russia
   - Remington, Chapter 2
3. Recruitment and Political Behavior
   - Remington, Chapter 4
4. Russian Political Culture
   - Remington, Chapter 5

Assignment 1: Explain the concept of “Sovereign Democracy” as the new ideology and foundation for the Russian political system. Sovereign Democracy incorporates historical lines of thought, woven through with core elements of Russian political culture, and “parochial social contracting” behavior. In this essay you need to first lay out as complete an explanation of “Sovereign Democracy” as possible (go beyond the textbook and class notes as needed). Once you have explained Sovereign Democracy completely, link it to various elements of Russian history, political culture and recruitment/participation patterns (particularly parochial social contracting [be sure to fully define this concept as well]). This assignment is limited to 300-500 words only. Be sure to provide proper citation and bibliographic references for any sources you use outside the course notes and textbook. You do not cite class notes.

Exam 1

Part II: The Russian Political System

1. Russian Political System, in a nutshell
   - Remington, Chapter 3
2. The Russian Legal System
   - Remington, Chapter 8
3. Interest Groups and Political Parties
   - Remington, Chapter 6

Assignment 2: Evaluate the Russian Political Party System since the collapse of Communism through to the most recent rounds of State Duma elections in 2007. This will include 5 election cycles. Begin with the table provided on page 177 of the Remington textbook. Instead of looking at parties individually, it will serve you best to combine the vote shares of party families (Democratic, Centrist/Parties of Power, Nationalist, and Leftist). Analyze the vote share trend of these party families from the 1993 election through the 2007 State Duma Election. Which party families are
increasing in power, which are decreasing? In this essay you are served best by putting all your information into a table that lists vote share, and seat share for the parties. Take a moment to comment on the following items: wasted votes, vote share for party families, transfer of party vote share (percentage of the vote) to seats controlled in the State Duma. Using all of this information provide an evaluation on the state of the Russian party system today. Is the system becoming more stable, or less stable? Is the party system reflective of stronger democratic practices, why or why not? To what degree do elections for the State Duma matter at this stage of Russian electoral history, what is the basis of this assessment? Limit your essay to 350-400 words. You will need to go beyond the textbook to get election results for the 2007 elections. Also, you will need to go beyond the textbook to get seat shares for the 1993 and 1995 State Duma elections.

4. Policy: Market Transition and Foreign Policy
   Remington, Chapters 7 & 9

**Assignment 3:** Russia’s roadmap into reclaiming its past power status seems to be linked invariably to its ability to rebuild some semblance of its past empire. This is not to say that Russia intends, or has made moves to rebuild the old Soviet empire. But Russia seems to have some attitudinal leanings, and even institutional networks designed to enhance its regional power position. Russia’s foreign policy to day is clearly oriented to the near-abroad. Define the near abroad, and how Russia would define its boundaries today compared to the old Soviet system. Explain the attitudinal supports for aggressive Russian foreign policy in the near abroad. Outline the significant (and important) institutional vehicles for asserting power in the near abroad, and finally analyze Russia’s potential as a regional power. In this last part pay particular attention to various barriers Russia faces in exerting regional hegemony.

Exam 2

**Part III: Non-Russian Post-Soviet Case Studies**

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<td>1. The Baltic States: Latvia</td>
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<td>2. The Western States: Ukraine</td>
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<td>3. The Caucasus: Georgia</td>
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<td>4. Central Asia: Uzbekistan</td>
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**Assignment 4:** Choose any post-Soviet state (non-including Russia) and outline the structure of its political system including the executive branch, legislative branch, executive-legislative relations, and the judicial system. Next provide an analysis of the country’s political culture. This should be a synopsis. Analyze the political party system in the country to include a table similar to the one from assignment 2, and an evaluation of the party system. Finally, layout the nature of that country’s foreign relations with Russia. Are they hostile, conciliatory, or defined in some other way? Provide evidence to support your assessment.

Final Exam (Wednesday May 6, 11:30-2:30)
Miscellaneous:

Make-up exams: The pace of the course is always in flux. Class discussions and time needed to address study guides and the paper assignment will inevitably take time during the course. As such, quiz and exam dates are announced in class (with the exception of the final exam). If a student misses class it is his or her responsibility to get all information from class on the day missed. This includes notes and announcements regarding quizzes and exams. If a student misses class and subsequently misses a quiz or exam due to the absence, this does not constitute an excuse for a make up quiz or exam, or late paper. Make-up quizzes and exams are allowed for excused absences only. An excused absence is one where the student informs the instructor prior to class that he or she will not be in class on a particular day, or a university excused absence. It is always in your interest, as a student, to inform the instructor before class that you will not be in class on a particular day.

Students with Disabilities: The instructor does recognize and will work with students with various disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing accommodations of any type in order to participate in this class, please notify Disability Services (Westside Hall, 962-7555), provide the necessary documentation of the disability and arrange for the appropriate authorized accommodations. Once these accommodations are approved, any and all accommodations will be implemented as needed during the duration of this course.

General Rules of Classroom Conduct:
As time and technology march on there comes the need for new rules for classroom conduct. Though I personally do not like laying down such rules, they are necessary to ensure a peaceful learning environment for you and your fellow students. So please observe these rules.

Tardiness and Absences: Students must attend all classes scheduled during the semester. The only allowable absences are: a) University excused; b) university holidays; c) pre-approved absences where the student has contacted and informed the instructor of a need to miss class. Students should make any and all efforts (within reason) to be in class at the beginning of the class session everyday. Tardiness is generally disruptive to the flow of the course and is discourteous to your fellow students. If tardiness cannot be avoided, please enter the class quietly and try not to draw attention to yourself. Exercise judgment as well. If you are significantly late to a class, please do not enter. Speak with the instructor afterwards.

Cell Phones, Pagers, other communication devices: Please turn off all communications devices before entering the class room. Only emergency personnel and individuals with outside emergency situations are allowed to keep communications devices on during class, and the device should be set to vibrate in order to avoid any unnecessary disruption during class. Since communications devices can become a vehicle for cheating during exams, any and all devices must be turned off during exams, unless the above mentioned conditions apply. If an approved communication device is on during an exam, the instructor will confiscate it until the end of the exam.