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Course Description

This course provides a survey of the politics of post-communist transition in Russia, Eastern Europe, and China. It begins with an overview of the origin and development of communism in the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe. The second part of the course examines and analyzes the profound political, economic, and social changes in former communist societies during the post-communist transition. Specifically, the students are expected to understand the political dynamics within post-communist countries in terms of regime transition; institution-building; economic reforms; social transformation; as well as nationalism and ethnic conflicts. Finally, the students should be able to critically assess the prospects of, rather than to merely assume the inevitability of, liberal capitalist democracy taking root in former communist countries. After taking this course, the students should be able to identify the major challenges confronting former communist countries as they move away from socialism. They should not only learn the theoretical tools necessary for understanding the collapse of communism, but also gain the perspectives crucial to making well-grounded evaluations of the emerging political and socioeconomic trajectories in these countries.

Course Requirements

This is a writing-intensive course. In-class participation, including class attendance, will count for 20% of the overall grade. There will be four take-home written assignments, each consisting of a 5-7 page paper responding to one pre-given question. The first two written assignments will each count for 15% of the overall grade, and the last two will each count for 25%. For the last assignment, students have the option to ask the instructor to read their first drafts before submission. For all the written assignments, your grades will be based on substance as well as on style. There will be no final exam for this course.

The written assignments are designed to develop your ability of critical thinking and to improve your writing skills. Although they do not require any additional research, they should be taken seriously. To write a good paper, you need a coherent argument supported by evidence provided by lecture notes and relevant readings. It is always a good idea to put together an outline before writing. These written assignments should be based on course materials. You are encouraged to consult with the instructor to improve your writing. Their due dates are marked on the syllabus. Late papers will be marked down. Extensions can only be granted for university-approved reasons.

It is mandatory that all class members complete the assigned readings prior to the lectures. Class attendance will be taken regularly. Multiple absences without university-approved reasons (see http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml) will result in a reduction of the participation portion of the overall grade. Students are expected to meet all
standards of academic integrity. **Violation of academic integrity will not be tolerated.** For relevant information, see http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html#integrity

**Readings**


The above books are available at the University Bookstore. The rest of the readings are available on the course’s Blackboard.

**PART I: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

**January 22: Introduction**

- Course syllabus

**January 27-29: Marxism and Leninism**

- Richard Pipes, *Communism*, 1-51

**February 3-5: Leninism in Russia**

A. The Leninist-Stalinist Regime

B. The Post-Stalinist Soviet Regime

- Richard Pipes, *Communism*, 55-87

**February 10-12: Leninism in Eastern Europe and China**

A. Leninism in Eastern Europe

B. Leninism in China

- Stephen White et al., *Central and East European Politics*, 1-15
- Richard Pipes, *Communism*, 117-144
February 17-19: The End of Leninism

A. The Collapse of Leninism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union
B. The Decline of Leninism in China


(First assignment due on February 24)
February 24: Documentary: My Perestroika (award-winning documentary directed by Robin Hessman, 2010)

PART II: DIVERGENT POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

February 26-March 3: Democracy-Building in Eastern Europe

A: Democratization in Eastern Europe
B: Integration into the West

- Stephen White et al., Central and East European Politics, 102-118; 139-203

March 5-10: Russia’s “Hybrid” Regime

A: Failure of Democratization in Russia
B: Authoritarian Consolidation under Putin

- Wegren, Return to Putin’s Russia, 1-62

March 12: Resilient Authoritarianism in China

A: Economic Reforms in China
B: Resilient Authoritarianism in China

- Mary E. Gallagher, “‘Reform and Openness’: Why China’s Economic Reforms Have Delayed Democracy,” World Politics 54:3 (April 2002)
PART III: PROBLEMS OF POST-COMMUNISM

(Second assignment due on March 24)

March 24-26: Post-Communist Economic Development
A: Eastern Europe: Capitalism and Democracy
B: The Rise of “Authoritarian Capitalism?”

- Stephen White et al., *Central and East European Politics*, 228-240

March 31: Case Study: Russian Economy – Growth or Bust?

- Presentations and in-class discussion

April 2-7: Post-Communist Social Transformation
A: Social Condition in Russia and Eastern Europe
B: Social Conditions in China

- Wegren, *Return to Putin’s Russia*, 103-124; 149-172; 189-208
- Stephen White et al., *Central and East European Politics*, 241-256

(Third assignment due on April 9)

April 9: Documentary: *Last Train Home* (award-winning documentary directed by Lixin Fan, 2009)

April 14-16: Post-Communist National Identity
A: Nation-Building under Communism
B: Post-Communist Nationalism


April 21: Case study: The Crisis in Ukraine – Two Perspectives

- Dmitri Trenin, *Russia’s Breakout from the Post-Cold War System: The Drivers of Putin’s course* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014)
- Presentations and in-class discussion
April 23-28: The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transition
A: The International Dimension of Political and Economic Transformation
B: Discussion: Post-Communist Transition in Comparative Perspective

- Wegren, Return to Putin’s Russia, 235-296
- Stephen White et al., Central and East European Politics, 119-138

PART IV: CONCLUSION: FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

(Fourth assignment due on April 30)
April 30-May 5: Making Sense of Post-Communist Transition
A: Lessons and questions
B: Paper return

- Stephen White et al., Central and East European Politics, 257-275