

MGIMO University
School of Government and International Affairs

Syllabus approved
Dean, The MGIMO School of Government and International Affairs
Mikhail Troitskiy
« »
2020

Imagined Russia: Russian History and Culture
in Contemporary Politics
Undergraduate Course Syllabus

Instructor
Anton V. Gumenskiy

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This syllabus is designed in accordance with the MGIMO Educational Standard for the Bachelor Program in International Affairs.

Author _____ A.V.Gumenskiy

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PART 1:
INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION, COURSE DESCRIPTION
AND TEACHING METHODS

1. General information

- Full course title: Imagined Russia: Russian History and Culture in Contemporary Politics
- Type of course: Elective
- Level of course B.A.
- Year of study: 3rd
- Number of ECTS credits allocated: 2
- Name of lecturer(s) and office hours:

Anton Gumenskiy

Department of Public Relations

Office hours: [Wednesday, 2PM-5PM], office [4129]

E-mail: Anton.Gumenskiy@gmail.com

2. Course aims and learning outcomes

The course «Imagined Russia: Russian History and Culture in Contemporary Politics» aims to providing students with knowledge of the essentials of the Russian culture, traditions and historical heritage, and their role in contemporary politics. The emphasis is put on problematization of culture as a social construct and a phenomenon that is present in any and every act of public policy, mass media, corporate governance, technology, and everyday life.

The starting point of the course is the fundamental interdependence and consistency of culture and social and political processes. The conceptual basis is Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities and the overall social constructivist idea of "the imagined".

The second core assumption is the cultural exchange between Russia and the world: from Rurik and "Trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks", to Oleg's shield on the gates of Tsargrad/Byzantium, to dynastic marriages of Rurikids (Anna Yaroslavna) and Romanovs, and to plagiarism in Soviet popular culture - borrowing melodies of foreign hits, fashion, lifestyle, celebrities' culture (Lyubov Orlova ft. Marlene Dietrich), etc.

The third main point is the ongoing and seemingly constitutive conflict/dialogue between Westerners and Slavophiles.

Classes aim to promote independent thinking, critical analysis, self-reflection, and cooperative and responsible communication culture. Teaching methods include lectures, seminars, case studies, presentations and discussions.

Course objectives:

1. To introduce students to the main conceptual and methodological instruments for analysis of political and cultural phenomena.
2. To orient students to the key issues and paradoxes of the contemporary politics, mass culture, public sphere, cultural heritage, nation building, and media phenomena and practices.
3. To provide students with an essential cultural and historical background for further in-depth research within politics, social culture, media, and other relevant fields.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. conduct an independent, problem-oriented, and methodologically correct critical research within the fields of cultural heritage, collective memory, Russian contemporary culture, mass culture and politics.

2. evaluate opportunities and risks of given strategies and solutions related to politics, culture, and media;
3. control own communication behaviour, effectively adapt to diverse cultural environments;
4. operationalise available theories and conceptualise on accessible empirical data.

3. Course requirements and grading plan

Course requirements

Students are required to attend not less than 75% of classes and be prepared for class discussions. Thorough reading of the assigned materials is essential.

Grading plan

- Class participation – 40%. Students are encouraged to read texts from the reading list, actively participate in discussions, and make presentations and reports up to 10 minutes on the relevant topics (every student has to present a report at least once a semester). The failure to make a presentation results in a penalty -10% of the final grade.
- Three mid-term “check-points”/ in-class essays – totally 60%. Three times for a semester students write short in-class essays (duration of the assignment is 30-45 minutes), demonstrating their knowledge of the required texts, and their abilities for critical thinking, information analysis, and creativity.

PART 2. COURSE CONTENT

2.1 Types of work

Types of work	Academic hours	ECTS credits
Total	72	2
Total for lectures, seminar	32	
Lectures	16	
Seminars	16	
Homework	40	
Reading assignments	20	
Writing an essay	10	
Preparation for final test and exam	10	
Course works		

2.2. Course content and readings by topic

Topic 1. Imagination and Reality.

Summary: Imagined Communities, Imagined Geographies, the role of media in the process of nation building, the problem of representation and language

Keywords: imagined, social constructivism, agency, reality.

- Compulsory readings:
 1. Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Further readings:
 1. Said, Edward W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Topic 2. Enchanted by Powers: Russian Soft Power and its Side Effects.

Summary: Ideology, Goals, and Specifics of the Russian Soft power, Desirable Results & Unintended Consequences.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Propaganda, Language, Manipulation.

- Compulsory readings:
 1. Konstantin Kosachev. *The Specifics of Russian Soft Power*. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 7 october 2012. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Specifics-of-Russian-Soft-Power-15683>
 2. Fyodor Lukyanov. *Why Russia's Soft Power Is Too Soft*. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 1 february 2013. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/Why-Russias-Soft-Power-Is-Too-Soft-15845>

Topic 3. Russian Intelligentsia: between Revolution and Emigration

Summary: Mythology, perceived status and mission, self-consciousness, life choices and lifestyle of Soviet and Russian educated class

Keywords: education, lifestyle, activism, philosopher's steamboat .

- Compulsory readings:
 1. Müller, Martin (2008). *Making Great Power Identities in Russia: An Ethnographic Discourse Analysis of Education at a Russian Elite University*. Zürich: LIT Verlag.
 2. Utekhin, Ilya; Alice Nakhimovsky, Slava Paperno, Nancy Ries (2006-2008). *Communal living in Russia: a virtual museum of Soviet everyday life*. 2006-2008. <http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/index.cfm>
- Films:
 1. *I am Twenty*, 1965, www.imdb.com/title/tt0058361
 2. *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, 1980, www.imdb.com/title/tt0079579

Topic 4. Second-Oldest Profession: Media and Journalists.

Summary: Soviet and Russian Journalism, Role in politics and social life, Censorship, Mission, Ethical dilemmas and Moral Choice, Social Development, Responsibility, Freedom of Speech, and Self-censorship

Keywords: education, lifestyle, activism, philosopher's steamboat .

- Compulsory readings:
- 1. Gatov, Vasily (2015). How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together. The Moscow Times, March 11, 2015. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/03/11/how-the-kremlin-and-the-media-ended-up-in-bed-together-a44663>.
- 2. Rostova, Natalia (2019). Saving Their Profession: Russian Journalists and Their New Media. December 17, 2019. www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/saving-their-profession-russian-journalists-and-their-new-media
- 3. Rubin, Michail; Zholobova, Maria; Badanin, Roman; in collaboration with OCCRP. Master of Puppets: The Man Behind the Kremlin's Control of the Russian Media. Proekt.Media. June 5, 2019. <https://www.proekt.media/portrait/alexey-gromov-eng>
- 4. Yaffa, Joshua (2019). The Kremlin's Creative Director. How the television producer Konstantin Ernst went from discerning auteur to Putin's unofficial minister of propaganda. The New Yorker, DEC. 16, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/16/the-kremlins-creative-director>

Topic 5. War and Peace: Status of the Military in the Russian Culture

Summary: Mythology and Discourses of War, Power, Enemy, Defence, Securitisation of Social Life and Culture, National Holidays, the V-Day

Keywords: ideology, patriotism, lifestyle, motherland.

- Compulsory readings:
- 1. Dolin, Anton (2012). No Surrender. Film Comment, March-April 2012. www.filmcomment.com/article/the-strange-case-of-russian-maverick-aleksei-german
- Film:
- 1. Officers, 1971, www.imdb.com/title/tt0067517

Topic 6. Thaw: a Deep Breath between Terror and Zastoy.

Summary: A short period of uprising and emancipation of political and social life between tyranny and reaction, new soviet arts, cinema, music, literature. Thaw as a myth, and hope for its return in the Russian culture.

Keywords: lifestyle, liberation, new wave.

- Film:
- 1. I am Twenty, 1965, www.imdb.com/title/tt0058361

Topic 7. Russian Orient.

Summary: «Fifteen Sisters» Spring-water, Soviet Union as an Empire with its metropolis and its colonies. Orientalism in Soviet and Russian Politics.

Keywords: education, geography, colonialism, Asia, Caucasus.

- Compulsory readings:
 1. Tolstoy, Lev (1912). Hadji Murat. <http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/43/9.pdf>
 2. Geraci, Robert. (2001). Ivan N Smirnov and the Multan Case. In *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (pp. 195-222). Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press. Retrieved February 18, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv75d6pv.12
- Further reading:
 1. Said, Edward W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Film:
 1. *Born in the USSR, 1991-2012*, www.imdb.com/title/tt4505410

Topic 8. Runet.

Summary: Origins, Stages and Current Status of the Russian-speaking Internet. Perspective of the social and technological development in Russia. Runet and Politics.

Keywords: Internet, hackers, scientists, officers.

- Compulsory readings:
 1. Asmolov, Gregory; Kolozaridi, Polina (2017). The imaginaries of RuNet: the change of the elites and the construction of online space.
 2. Konradova, Natalia (2020). The Rise of Runet and the Main Stages of Its History.
- Further reading:
 1. Suleimanov, Sultan; Rothrock, Kevin (2019). RuNet: The Miniseries ‘Meduza’ interviews creator of new documentary about Russian Internet's rise. *Meduza*, 4 Sept, 2019. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2019/09/04/runet-the-miniseries>.
- Film:
 1. Loshak, Andrey (2019). *InterNYET: A HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN INTERNET*. <https://en.currenttime.tv/p/7345.html>
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFRQplrTcKj_d20omBf8dpWwd3qonfl2H

Topic 9. Soviet Nostalgia: Everyday Life and Phantom Pains

Summary: Imagined past, Soviet Union in images, lifestyle, design and mass-culture. Revisionism in politics and public sphere.

Keywords: communal living, charm, past, myth, traditions, childhood.

- Compulsory readings:

1. Utekhin, Ilya; Alice Nakhimovsky, Slava Paperno, Nancy Ries (2006-2008). Communal living in Russia: a virtual museum of Soviet everyday life. 2006-2008. <http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/index.cfm> .
- Film:
 1. Born in the USSR, 1991-2012, www.imdb.com/title/tt4505410

Topic 10. New Russia: Roaring 90s and Young Democracy.

Summary: Controversial and critical period in new Russian history, regarded by many as a «true democracy» in contrast with following years of Putin’s presidency. Freedom of Speech kept company with «Freedom to Shoot».

Keywords: democracy, liberalisation, crime, poverty, crisis,.

- Films:
 1. Born in the USSR, 1991-2012, www.imdb.com/title/tt4505410
 2. Brat, 1997, www.imdb.com/title/tt0118767 / Brat 2, 2000, www.imdb.com/title/tt0238883

Topic 11. Dreaming of Space: Techno-Optimism and Techno-Pessimism in Russian Culture

Summary: Soviet Cosmic Past and Russian Digital Future, the role of technological discourse in Russian politics, Space as a Dream and an Utopia.

Keywords: solutionism, neoluddism, technocracy, efficiency, progress, future, space.

- Compulsory reading:
 1. Konradova, Natalia (2020). The Rise of Runet and the Main Stages of Its History
 2. Pertsev, Andrey (2016). Sergei Kiriyenko: The Dreamer in the Kremlin. Carnegie Moscow Center, 02.11.2016. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/65015>
- Film:
 1. Dreaming of Space, 2005, www.imdb.com/title/tt0464665

2.3. Consolidated reading list

- Compulsory readings:
 1. Asmolov, Gregory; Kolozaridi, Polina (2017). The imaginaries of RuNet: the change of the elites and the construction of online space.
 2. Dolin, Anton (2012). No Surrender. Film Comment, March-April 2012. www.filmcomment.com/article/the-strange-case-of-russian-maverick-aleksei-german
 3. Dubson, Oleg, and Dolin, Anton (2014). “In the belly of the Beast.” Film Comment, vol. 50, no. 6, 2014, pp. 42–47., www.jstor.org/stable/43459550. Accessed 15 Feb. 2020.

4. Gatov, Vasily (2015). How the Kremlin and the Media Ended Up in Bed Together. *The Moscow Times*, March 11, 2015. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/03/11/how-the-kremlin-and-the-media-ended-up-in-bed-together-a44663>
5. Geraci, Robert. (2001). Ivan N Smirnov and the Multan Case. In *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (pp. 195-222). Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press. Retrieved February 18, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv75d6pv.12
6. Konradova, Natalia (2020). The Rise of Runet and the Main Stages of Its History.
7. Kosachev, Konstantin (2012). The Specifics of Russian Soft Power. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 7 October 2012. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Specifics-of-Russian-Soft-Power-15683>
8. Loshak, Andrey (2019). *InterNYET: A HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN INTERNET*. 2019 <https://en.currenttime.tv/p/7345.html>
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFRQplrTcKj_d20omBf8dpWwd3qonfl2H
9. Lukyanov, Fyodor (2013). Why Russia's Soft Power Is Too Soft. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 1 February 2013. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/Why-Russias-Soft-Power-Is-Too-Soft-15845>
10. Müller, Martin (2008). Making Great Power Identities in Russia: An Ethnographic Discourse Analysis of Education at a Russian Elite University. Zürich: LIT Verlag.
11. Ostrovsky, Arkady (2017). Rocking the Kremlin. *The Economist*: 1843, August/September 2017. <https://www.1843magazine.com/features/rocking-the-kremlin>
12. Pertsev, Andrey (2016). Sergei Kiriyeenko: The Dreamer in the Kremlin. Carnegie Moscow Center, 02.11.2016. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/65015>
13. Rostova, Natalia (2019). Saving Their Profession: Russian Journalists and Their New Media. December 17, 2019. www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/saving-their-profession-russian-journalists-and-their-new-media
14. Rubin, Michail; Zholobova, Maria; Badanin, Roman; in collaboration with OCCRP. Master of Puppets: The Man Behind the Kremlin's Control of the Russian Media. Proekt.Media. June 5, 2019. <https://www.proekt.media/portrait/alexey-gromov-eng>
15. Suleimanov, Sultan; Rothrock, Kevin (2019). RuNet: The Miniseries 'Meduza' interviews creator of new documentary about Russian Internet's rise. *Meduza*, 4 Sept, 2019. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2019/09/04/runet-the-miniseries>
16. Tolstoy, Lev (1912). Hadji Murat. <http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/43/9.pdf>
17. Utekhin, Ilya; Alice Nakhimovsky, Slava Paperno, Nancy Ries (2006-2008). Communal living in Russia: a virtual museum of Soviet everyday life. 2006-2008. <http://kommunalka.colgate.edu/index.cfm>
18. Yaffa, Joshua (2019). The Kremlin's Creative Director. How the television producer Konstantin Ernst went from discerning auteur to Putin's unofficial minister of propaganda. *The New Yorker*, DEC. 16, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/12/16/the-kremlins-creative-director>

- Further readings:

1. Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
2. Barthes, Roland (1957). *Mythologies*. Paris, Editions du Seuil.
3. Bekbulatova, Taisiya (2018). Russia's invisible, ubiquitous lobbyists: How armies of fixers and specialists negotiate the nation's dicey relationship between businesses and the state. *Meduza*, January 8, 2018. <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2018/01/08/russia-s-invisible-ubiquitous-lobbyists>
4. Geertz, Clifford (1973), "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, pp. 3–30

5. Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, ed. (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Pelevin, Victor. *Generation "II"*. Moscow, 1999. (the English translation published by Faber and Faber, UK as *Babylon*, 2001, and by Penguin as *Homo Zapiens*, 2002).
7. Postman, Neil (1985). *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. USA: Penguin.
8. Seabrook, John (2000). *Nobrow. The Culture of Marketing. The Marketing of Culture*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.
9. Said, Edward W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
10. Troitsky, Artemy (1987). *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia*. London: Omnibus Press.

- Film list

1. *Andrey Rublev*, 1966, www.imdb.com/title/tt0060107
2. *Born in the USSR*, 1991-2012, www.imdb.com/title/tt4505410
3. *Brat*, 1997, www.imdb.com/title/tt0118767 / *Brat 2*, 2000, www.imdb.com/title/tt0238883
4. *Dreaming of Space*, 2005, www.imdb.com/title/tt0464665
5. *I am Twenty*, 1965, www.imdb.com/title/tt0058361
6. *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, 1980, www.imdb.com/title/tt0079579
7. *Officers*, 1971, www.imdb.com/title/tt0067517

- Internet resources

1. Carnegie Moscow Center: <https://carnegie.ru>
2. Meduza: <https://meduza.io/en>
3. Proekt: <https://www.proekt.media>
4. Russia in Global Affairs: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru>

PART 3. FINAL REMARK ON PLAGIARISM

- Plagiarism is a severe violation of academic rules and a breach of ethics. Plagiarism is unacceptable. Proved plagiarism in any written work or oral presentation results in F-mark for the course regardless of the fulfilment of all other requirements.