Imagined Russia: Russian History and Culture in Contemporary Politics

Course Syllabus
The course program developed by Anton Gumenskiy, 2020
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The course “Imagined Russia: Russian History and Culture in Contemporary Politics” has been elaborated in accordance with the MGIMO Educational Standard for the Bachelor’s Program in International Relations (program track “Government and International Relations”).

Author _______________ Anton Gumenskiy, Lecturer in Communication Studies;
Director of the MGIMO library _________________ Marina Reshetnikova;
Director of School of Government
and International Affairs _________________ Mikhail Troitsky.
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.

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**PART 2. COURSE CONTENT**

2.1 **Types of work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of work</th>
<th>Academic hours</th>
<th>ECTS credits</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total for lectures, seminar</td>
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<td>Lectures</td>
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<td>Seminars</td>
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<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing an essay</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation for final test and exam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Course works</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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:

- Further readings:

**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:

**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:

- Films:

**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:

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:
  - Film:


**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:
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:

• Further reading:

• Film:

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:

• Further reading:

• Film:


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:

**Film:**

**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:**

**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:**

**Film:**

**2.3. Consolidated reading list**

**Compulsory readings:**

• Further readings:

• Film list

• Internet resources
  1. Carnegie Moscow Center: https://carnegie.ru
  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.