

MGIMO University
School of Government and International Affairs

Syllabus approved
Dean, The MGIMO School of Government and International Affairs
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Russian Identity and Culture

Undergraduate Course Syllabus

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

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PART 1: INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION AND COURSE DESCRIPTION

1.1 General information

- Full course title: **Introduction to Russian Culture**
- Type of course: Required/Optional
- Level of course: B.A.
- Year of study:
- Number of ECTS credits allocated:
- Name of the instructor: Prof. Vladimir Legoyda
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1.2 Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

This course offers an interdisciplinary overview of key categories of Russian culture; the overview relies on historical, culturological, philosophical as well as political science methods. Its objective is to provide a general introduction to Russian culture while placing particular emphasis on the role of Orthodox Christianity as a main culture-forming element. Thus, the course will examine the role of Orthodox Christianity in the formation of main patterns of Russian culture, the Russian national myth, and its main archetypes. It also will provide students with the author's view of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in both contemporary Russia and the post-Soviet space. One of the main objectives of this course is to provide a basic knowledge of the most significant personalities and iconic texts of Russian culture; to develop understanding of the main paradigms of the Russian cultural process. In addition, this course is intended to be not just a learning experience, but both a cultural and an intellectual journey that will help you to comprehend the very essence of Russian culture.

One of the most common classifications of cultures is based upon religion. In terms of such a classification, Russian culture, along with some other Eastern European cultures, is a vivid example of Orthodox Christian culture. All the main cultural spheres in Russia, be it economy, politics, law, art, etc., were formed under the strong influence of Orthodoxy.

Russian political and legal culture are also rooted in Orthodoxy. Contemporary legal nihilism in Russia goes back to a Christian understanding of the Old Testament as law and the New Testament as grace, and the medieval concept of law and grace. It was for the first time formulated in Metropolitan Hilarion's "Sermon on Law and Grace" (11th century).

Russian literature is the quintessence of Russian culture, or the so-called Russian spirit, or the Russian soul. It contains all the distinctive features of Russian culture.

The course covers seven topics (eight lectures), and each topic has required readings.

By the end of this course students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the sources of Russian culture; apply the materials of the course to the culture, history, and national psychology of Russian society; analyze intercultural communication processes while considering

interactions between Russia and the West; and, finally, to explain the influence of Orthodoxy on the main spheres of Russian culture.

1.3 Course Requirements and Grading

Requirements

Students are required to attend no less than 80% of the classes and to be prepared for class discussions.

Reading of the required materials and active engagement in class discussions are expected. Always read and think about the assigned reading materials before class. Perceptive observations and thoughtful questions equally contribute to a good discussion. Each student will give a five-minute presentation. There will be presentations by two students and small- or whole-group discussion at each seminar meeting. There will be also a role-playing game at one of the seminar meetings.

Grading

Final examination – 70%.

Three multiple choice tests – 15% (5% each test).

Class participation – 15%.

PART 2. COURSE CONTENT

2.1 Course Content and Readings by Topic

Topic 1. Russian Culture and its Roots

Methodology of the course (key word “self-identity”). Culture *per se* and its language.

Russian and European/Western Culture: similarities and differences. Common fundamentals of Russian and European cultures. Three pillars of Europe: Athens, Rome, Jerusalem [as symbols of philosophy (Ancient Greece), law (Roman culture) and Christianity]. Russia: East or West? (The junction between East and West). Russia as the other Europe.

Russian culture and Russian identity (the Russian Idea and the American Dream). The Russian Idea — to preserve Orthodox faith till the Judgment Day.

Duality of Russian culture (culture of extremes and opposites).

The Role of Orthodox Christianity in the formation of Russian culture (“guilt” cultures and “shame” cultures).

Required readings:

С.С.Аверинцев “Крещение Руси и путь русской культуры”
<http://www.russ.ru/layout/set/print/content/view/full/82818>

Recommended readings:

Philip T. Grier “The Russian Idea and the West”//*Russia and Western Civilization. Cultural and Historical Encounters*. (M.E.Sharpe, Armonk, New York, London, England. 2003)

Topic 2-3: Russian Culture as Orthodox Culture

Russian Orthodoxy: a cultural and historical perspective.

A brief History of the Russian Orthodox Church: the main periods.

The baptism of Russia: cultural meaning. Russian monasticism as a cultural phenomenon (eldership; from the Kievan monasteries to Optina Pustyn', etc.)

The concept of "Holy Rus' "; Church and State symphony; Moscow as the Third Rome, etc.

The Russian revolution and Russian Orthodoxy. Religion in the USSR. The revival of Orthodoxy in contemporary Russia.

Required readings:

С.С.Аверинцев "Крещение Руси и путь русской культуры"

<http://www.russ.ru/layout/set/print/content/view/full/82818>

Recommended readings:

Topic 4: Peter the Great and Russia's Westernization

Why this topic is chosen: a "cultural revolution" brought about by Peter the Great.

Tzar Peter and the change of cultural orientation in the 18th century. "A Window to Europe."

Peter the Great: his personality, his reforms, and their influence (the onset of "two Russias").

Peter's reforms and the Russian Church: main changes. The beginning of the Synodal period.

Slavophiles and Westernizers: a general characterization.

Required readings:

Recommended readings:

Geoffrey Hosking, *Russian History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2012)

Topic 5: Russian Political Culture: Autocracy as a Cultural Phenomenon (Tsars and Patriarchs, Presidents and Democracy)

Main values and norms of Russian political culture (volition vs freedom)

The problem of freedom and power in Russian political culture. Hierarchy and equality in Russian Culture.

State, Army, Church, political parties, media and other actors in contemporary Russian politics and Russian political culture.

Required readings:

Russel Bova "Democracy and Russian Political Culture"//*Russia and Western Civilization.*

Cultural and Historical Encounters. (M.E.Sharpe, Armonk, New York, London, England. 2003)

Recommended readings:

Topic 6: Russian Literature as the Quintessence of Russian Culture

Russian literature and its religious roots. (“Russian literature is wounded with Christianity”, Berdyaev.) The absence of secular motives in early Russian literature.

Main ideas and ideals in Russian literature. The category of conscience.

Pushkin (“The sun of Russian poetry” Odoevsky; “Pushkin is our everything” A. Grigoriev).

«Eugene Onegin: an Encyclopedia of Russian Life» (V. Belinsky)

Three giants: Dostoevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Chekhov.

Russian literature as a religious and political phenomenon

Required readings:

Ф.М.Достоевский, “Мальчик у Христа на елке” <https://ilibrary.ru/text/4206/p.1/index.html>

Fyodor Dostoyevsky «The Beggar Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree»

<https://www.berfrois.com/2013/12/two-christmas-short-stories-fyodor-dostoyevsky/>

Recommended readings:

Caryl Emerson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Russian Literature*. (Cambridge, 2008)

John Givens *The Image of Christ in Russian Literature: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Bulgakov, Pasternak*

<https://www.scribd.com/book/443408826/The-Image-of-Christ-in-Russian-Literature-Dostoevsky-Tolstoy-Bulgakov-Pasternak>

Topic 7: The Religious-Cultural Meaning of the Russian Revolution. Soviet “Civil Religion”.

The Russian revolution as a landmark in Russian religious life: philosophical and historical assessment.

Robert Bellah and the concept of civil religion. The main religious intuitions in Soviet ideology.

The cult of Lenin as a religious phenomenon. “Hagiography”, “homiletics” and “ecclesiology” of the Soviet civil religion.

Required readings:

Recommended readings:

Stephen Lovell, *The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2008)

Topic 8: Entering the Post-Modern Era: Contemporary Russian Culture (Between Traditionalism and Westernization)

Religion and politics in contemporary Russia. The contemporary search for national identity (after the USSR’s collapse) and its religious dimension.

The Russian Orthodox Church in Russian political and social life.

Required readings:

Recommended readings: