

PLSC 336, Section 001  
Fall 2018  
Professor C. Van Aller  
CRN#:14958

Post-Soviet Politics  
MW 2-3:15, Owens G05  
Credit Hours: Three

Office Hours: Monday 10:00-11:00, Tuesday 2-4:00 and by appointment

Phone: 323-4667 Email: vanallerc@Winthrop.edu (to be used for important messages only) Blackboard may also be used for announcements and will have course materials.

Course Explanation: Why should you study Russian politics? For one, we have gone "back to the future" in alarming ways, in short the Russian Federation is again a threat to the United States and its allies. True, there is less chance of a large scale nuclear war than during the height of the Cold War, yet Putin's Russia is attempting to make itself a great power once again, most obviously in his government's large scale attempt to influence the US domestic political system. How did we get to this challenging situation just a generation after the Cold War? We need to understand this society for our own well-being, and examine how the hopes of Soviet reformers like Gorbachev have died before a renewal of Russian ambitions and rejection of the ideas he championed. On a more universal note, Russia is also a counter example to the world of the benefits of democracy, as its current leader refutes Western principles and tempts societies with the rule of the strong man unfettered by the rule of law. In this sense this country has been a political laboratory for the world for the past twenty years. This course will be of necessity challenging for two reasons. First, for most the subject will be a starkly unfamiliar one that will necessitate doing the reading and asking questions if confused. Second, we will attempt to follow Russian affairs as they happen while understanding how politics there evolved up to the present.

Course Requirements: You are expected to complete reading assignments on time (that is, before class) because the subject is simply too complicated to be learned in lecture or discussion alone. A good grounding in the texts is needed to understand, or at least begin to, current events in Russia and her neighbors. I have pointedly chosen books that are readable and current despite the many changes since the fall of the USSR. My instruction style is informal, and I expect you to ask questions or ask for a clarification. Those who are consistently silent and/or confused should come see me occasionally for a pep talk and suggestions for improvement. In order to have access to current events, I

require that all students HAVE A CURRENT WINTHROP ACCOUNT so that I can send you pertinent articles from authoritative sources!

Goals for the course:

- To comprehend the magnitude of change in Russia since the end of the USSR while appreciating the legacy of previous regimes and leaders.
- To understand the challenges that Russia poses to the United States and similar countries.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students will understand some of the ongoing legacies of previous governments, from Tsarist to Soviet to post 1990 examples.
- Students will demonstrate a knowledge of evolving governmental structures and arrangements to the present day.
- Students will explore questions of whether a new Cold War is emerging, at least in a regional context.

Prerequisites: PLSC 205 or 207 **or** permission of instructor.

Required Texts available in the bookstore at the DiGorgio Center:

**Soviet Politics 1917-1991**, by Mary McAululey, Oxford, 1992

While this is not a history course, we do need some background in the Soviet period and this brief book is a well-written and thoughtful interpretation of the years of the Soviet experiment. This book has been popular in a political science Post-Soviet courses around the country.

**Putin's Russia, Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain**, Stephen Wegren ed., Sixth Edition, Rowman and Littlefield, 2016

This is a text with the contributions of well known scholars on Russia, one that explains the often mysterious political system there despite its ongoing changes. Although this book is written by experts, it is very readable.

**The Man Without a Face** by Masha Gessen, Riverhead Books, 2012

A work by a prominent Russian born writer on the Putin phenomenon, one that attempts to explain the man who will be likely to rule Russia for a generation. As a work written

by a famous journalist, it also is very approachable.

Other readings will be available on *Blackboard* or sent to you via the class listserv.

The Moscow Times online (<https://themoscowtimes.com/>): This free newspaper will help us track current issues in the Russia and other republics. I will send you articles from it as well as the New York Times to download as part of the official readings for the course. Please obtain a NYT account which I think cost one dollar as then you can receive archived materials from me.

Grades will be determined as follows:

Midterm	20%
Paper	25%
Participation	15%
Quizzes (4)	20%
Exam	20%

Student Learning Activities:

- The tests/exams will be a combination of the following: short answers, paragraph answers, and essays. There will be an element of student choice in each of the subsections of the test.
- Participation will include the following: general discussion of the readings, written reactions to the readings, articles brought in for the class, informal debates, and questions brought in for the class to discuss.
- Quizzes will be on selected readings and will take place at the beginning of class. They will be announced one class previous to quiz day, another reason to attend class!
- The exam will follow the basic pattern of the tests but will have a longer essay section, again with choice provided in each of the subsections.
- The topics for papers will be on one of the **current** questions in Russian politics and statecraft, with a requirement that at least three primary sources be utilized.

Grading Scale:

**A 92-100**

**A- 90-91**

**B+ 87-89**

**B 82-86**

**B- 80-81**

C+ 78-79  
C 72-77  
C- 69-71

D 65-68  
D- 60-64

F 0-59

Study Advice: All lectures, discussions, videos, and readings are fair game for tests or quizzes. Study groups are often valuable to review readings and lecture concepts. If you are somehow overextended(I realize this is very rare), you might split up into groups for tests and exams, with each person responsible for part of the material. It will benefit you to take notes on the reading, for example after each chapter. The benefits of highlighting are sometimes illusory if temporarily satisfying. documentation; the Writing Center may be required and Turnitin will be for sure. Students who attend office hours when confused will receive greater consideration at grading time than those whom I fail to see. This is particularly true if you have been absent and neglect to pick up corrected work later and explain why you were not in class. **Late Papers will lose one half grade per day. Quizzes will have no make up: there may be extra credit offered as penance! Missed tests and exams will count as zeros unless there is documented reason for the absence.**

Attendance: Over three unexcused absences will count heavily against participation grade. Chronic lateness is an imposition on other students and will eventually count against this part of your grade. Over five unexcused absences will result in failure for the course.

Student Code of Conduct: The Political Science Department abhors all forms of academic misconduct, and faculty members aggressively investigate all incidents of suspected cheating. This includes, but is not limited to, using turnitin.com. Please click on the enclosed link to read the enclosed policy in detail:

<http://www.winthrop.edu/plsc/PLAGIARISM/%20AND%20MISCONDUCT.doc>

**Turnitin will be required for all major papers.**

For cell phone and laptop use see:

<http://www2.winthrop.edu/artscience/AppropriateUseApprovedPolicyMar2010.pdf>

Students with Disabilities: Winthrop University is dedicated to providing access to education. If you have a documented disability and need classroom accommodation, please contact

Office of Disability Services, at 323-3290, as soon as possible. Once you have your Professor Notification Form, please tell me so that I am aware of your accommodations well before the first test or other assignment.

Tentative Schedule of Readings, Lectures and Discussion topics: I reserve the right to change the pace and content of this course to adjust to the unfolding needs of the class. Please contact me if there is any confusion on your part about assignments. There will usually be more readings on Tuesdays, so consider this arrangement in your planning. Note also that not all digital readings may be available upon time of reading; we will adjust if this is the case. Note that the url's were working at the time of compilation: let me know if any fail to work. You may wish to read the Putin biography **ahead of time**, as it will help you keep up and it is just great to read!

**August 22, Wednesday:** Introduction to the course. Russian music. Geography of Russia.

**August 27, Monday:** The Imperial Russian Legacy. McAuley, Introduction 1-12.

*Blackboard readings:*

Richard Pipes-"*Flight from Freedom*", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 83, No. 3, May June 2004

John M. Joyce-"*The Old Russian Legacy*", *Foreign Policy* 1984.

Angela Stent-"*Sovietology hasn't been this hot since the 1980's*"

**Discussion Question:** Can the patterns of a thousand years of absolutism change in the 21st century?

**August 29, Wednesday:** The Revolution and its conflicting interpretations. McAuley, Chapter 1.

*Blackboard:*

"*The Russian Revolution: Red October and the Bolshevik Coup*"

and "*The Aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution*"

See outline of Marxism-Leninism evolution on Blackboard.

**Discussion Question:** Did the Bolsheviks have a popular mandate to take over the democratic Provisional Government? Were they

absolutists in modern dress? ("Ghengis Khan with the Telegraph?")

**September 3, Monday**—NO class Labor Day (Lenin would approve)

**September 5, Wednesday:** Discussion of the legacy of Lenin, McAuley Chapter Two.

Russian Revolution: From victory to degeneration- <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/russian-revolution-victory-degeneration> Please read the last half of extended version which is linked to this overview.

Book review on Lenin's ruthlessness  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/30/books/lenin-paints-himself-black-with-his-own-words.html>

**Discussion Question:** How would the myths of the Leninist Experiment inspire Gorbachev to rescue the USSR in the 1980's?

**September 10, Monday:** The Stalinist Revolution and its Impact, McAuley Chapters 3 and 4.

See also <https://thevieweast.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/contesting-popular-memory-in-contemporary-russia/>

Blackboard: "Stalin still a force 40 years after death Some long for a strong leader; others fear another dictatorship"

Putin prefers Stalin to Lenin!:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbvgDeraepA>

Stalin's Terror regime:  
<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=video+on+stalin%27s+terror&qpv=video+on+stalin%27s+terror&view=detail&mid=BE0496C3F3CBA4E2EC92BE0496C3F3CBA4E2EC92&&FORM=VRDGAR>

**Discussion Question:** Did the USSR (and Russia subsequently) genuinely recover from the excesses of the Stalinist years?

**September 12, Wednesday :** Stalin's Successors. McAuley, Chapter 5

Overview of Khrushchev's secret speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/26/russia.theobserver>

**Discussion Question:** Why were reforms so inadequate and counter-productive before the advent of Gorbachev? Was reform even possible?

**September 17, Monday:** McAuley Chapter 6.

*Blackboard:* "Swollen State, Spent Society" by Robert Tucker"

Video on the end of the Soviet system due to imperial overstretch-"Messengers from Moscow" Part 4.

**Discussion Question:** How could the Soviet Union appear so strong externally while so weak internally? Like many empires, did it start to weaken long before reform efforts were initiated?

**September 19, Wednesday:** Gorbachev and glasnost: implications for the present. McAuley, Chapters 7 and 8.

*Blackboard:* Melvin Croan-"The Last Stages of Leninism" from Problems of Communism Jan/Feb. 1986

**Discussion Question:** How does a regime attempting to improve its society after years of oppression paradoxically lose support?

**September 24, Monday:** Gorbachev's later reforms, Domestic Reform and International Change:

The Gorbachev Reforms in Historical Perspective  
Valerie Bunce *International Organization* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 107-138 on JSTOR

*Blackboard:*

"Gorbachev's Reforms were too little, too late" from the St. Petersburg Times

"Gorbachev's Lost Legacy" by Cohen.

Short Videos on Gorbachev

**Discussion Question:** Can there be an alternative to both state capitalism and the free market?

**September 26, Wednesday:** : Post-Soviet Dilemmas: Redesigning state and society.

*Blackboard:*

Cohen-"Who Lost Russia",

David Remnick-"Can Russia Change"

**October 1, Monday:** Post-Soviet Dilemmas: Redesigning state and society in the tumultuous Yeltsin years.

*Blackboard:*

"Russia is Finished" by Jeffrey Taylor

"The Rise of Russia's Crime Commissars"

"Russia's Ruinous Chechen War"

**Discussion Question:** Did the West attempt to remake Russia with hopelessly inadequate means and understanding?

**October 3, Wednesday, Midterm, Bring Blue Book.**

**October 8, Monday:** The Executive branch in Russia: the age of Putin, Wegren Chapter 1

*Blackboard:*

"The Accidental Autocrat"

"Andropov's Legacy in Putin's Foreign Policy"

**Discussion Question:** Is Russia evolving toward a system in which the leaders define the rules of the game?

**October 10, Wednesday,** Legislative Politics in Putin's Russia. Wegren Chapter 2,

Duma votes to restrict foreign media unanimously!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9R7RfsRMtQ>

**Discussion Question:** Has the Duma lost all meaningful power to the executive since the days of Yeltsin?

**October 15 no class due to Fall Break**

**October 17, Wednesday,** Regional Politics, Wegren Chapter 3

Russia's Regions: Political Action in Regional Cultures (Anisimova; Echevskaya; Gradskova)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqWTzLik-LO>

**Discussion Question:** Does centralization in Russian politics destroy the façade of federalism?

**October 22, Monday,** Law in the Russian Federation, Wegren Chapter 4,9

Blackboard: video on Mikhail Khodorkovsky: A 7 Year Struggle for Justice

**Discussion Question:** Has corruption become the "system" in Russia, displacing alternative methods of societal interaction?

**October 24, Wednesday** Civil Society and Political Culture, Wegren Chapter 5.

Russian Political Culture Since 1985 <http://geohistory.today/russian-political-culture/>

**Discussion Question:** Are Russian citizens returning to the private sphere that has characterized previous regimes?

**October 29 Monday,** Changes in Russian Media and Communications, Wegren Chapter 6.

Blackboard: How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons

**Discussion Question:** Has Putin perfected the art of information manipulation more effectively than in the Soviet days?

**October 31, Wednesday,** Demographics in Russia, The Politics of Gender, Wegren Chapter 7, 10

See notes to middle class dilemmas on Blackboard

**Discussion Question:** Are Russian failures in providing basic living standards eventually going to catch up with the regime?

**November 5, Monday** Economics in Russia. Wegren Chapter 8, Gessen Chapter 1.

Blackboard: Goldman: Putin and the Oligarchs

Discussion Question: Has Putin returned the economy to the strongly statist position seen previously in Russian regimes?

**November 7, Monday,** Russian Foreign Policy and the United States, Wegren Chapter 11. Late breaking readings a possibility here! Gessen Chapter 2

*Blackboard:* Robert Legvold, "Managing the New Cold War"

**Discussion Question:** Is there a new Cold War, at least in regional terms, between the West and Russia?

**November 12, Wednesday**-Russian Relations with the European Union. The ongoing struggle with Ukraine, Wegren Chapter 12, Gessen Chapter 3

Blackboard: insert Ukrainian war info here.

See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdxG-fLv0vI>

**November 14, Monday**, The Politics of Energy. Wegren chapter 13, Gessen Chapter 4

Blackboard: Micheal Klare Competition for oil in the Arctic-the new geopolitical contest.

Discussion Question: As an energy giant, will Russia suffer the usual "resource curse" of many countries "blessed" with oil and gas reserves?

**November 19, Wednesday**, Nationalism, human security, and relations with the Near Abroad. Wegren Chapter 14, Gessen Chapter 5

Alina Polyakova: "The Rise of Far-Right Nationalism and the Russia Angle"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaqTB8gjtJw>

How does Putin use nationalism as a counter to lower living standards in Russia today, particularly as the oil part of the economy diminishes?

**November 26, Monday**, The Russian Military. Wegren Chapter 15, Gessen Chapter 6

Russian modernization: <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/pay-attention-america-russia-is-upgrading-its-military/>

Discussion Question: Has Putin's emphasis on an on upgraded military made a material difference in Russia's ambitions?

**November 28, Monday**, Gessen, Chapters 7, 8, 9 Review of Putin's personalistic rule.

**December 3, Wednesday**, Putin continued. Gessen Chapter 10, 11, and Epilogue. Gadget Day.

**EXAM: 3 pm Wednesday, December 5**

**Class Listserv:** I will make frequent use of the class listserv provided by the Division of Computing and Information Technology, and you are required to subscribe to it. For additional information, go to:

<http://www.winthrop.edu/technology/default.aspx?id=7081>

**Winthrop's Office of Nationally Competitive Awards (ONCA)**

identifies and assists highly motivated and talented students to apply for nationally and internationally competitive awards, scholarships, fellowships, and unique opportunities both at home and abroad. ONCA gathers and disseminates award information and deadlines across the campus community, and serves as a resource for students, faculty, and staff throughout the nationally competitive award nomination and application process. ONCA is located in Dinkins 222B. Please fill out an online information form at the bottom of the ONCA webpage [www.winthrop.edu/onca](http://www.winthrop.edu/onca) and email [onca@winthrop.edu](mailto:onca@winthrop.edu) for more information.

**Winthrop's Academic Success Center** is a free resource for all undergraduate students seeking to perform their best academically. The ASC offers a variety of personalized and structured resources that help students achieve academic excellence, such as tutoring, academic skill development (test taking strategies, time management counseling, and study techniques), group and individual study spaces, and academic coaching. The ASC is located on the first floor of Dinkins, Suite 106. Please contact the ASC at 803-323-3929 or [success@winthrop.edu](mailto:success@winthrop.edu) or [www.winthrop.edu/success](http://www.winthrop.edu/success).

**Winthrop's Office of Victims Assistance (OVA)** provides services to survivors of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking as well as educational programming to prevent these crimes from occurring. The staff assists all survivors, regardless of when they were victimized, in obtaining counseling, medical care, housing options, legal prosecution, and more. In addition, the OVA helps students access support services for academic problems resulting from victimization. The OVA is located in 204 Crawford and can be reached at (803) 323-2206. In the case of an after-hours emergency, please call Campus Police at (803)323-3333, or the local rape crisis center, Safe Passage, at their 24-hour hot-line, (803)329-2800. For more information please visit: <http://www.winthrop.edu/victimassistance/>

**Plagiarism**

Using the words or ideas of others as one's own is plagiarism. Quoting or paraphrasing material from books or articles without properly citing the source is also plagiarism. All sources used must be properly cited in your papers. Consult your Writing 101 Writing Manual for proper citation techniques. Please consult the Political Science Department Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct for further clarifications:

<http://faculty.winthrop.edu/kedrowskik/academicmisconduct.htm>.

