Russia and the Post-Soviet States

This course examines political developments in Russia and the other fourteen Soviet successor states that gained (or regained) independence following the demise of the Soviet Union. The first half of the course provides a historical overview that surveys the entire time period from 1917 to 1991. Primary focus is placed on the unique mixture of Soviet legacies of communist political institutions, state socialist economic policies and ethnofederalism. Much of the literature on the Soviet period is Moscow-centered. We will spend a great deal of time, however, investigating how the policies of the central government played out in the various Soviet republics.

After providing this historical overview, post-Soviet political developments will be analyzed and individual cases compared. Each week’s readings introduce theoretical questions and broader issues in comparative politics that will help to structure our discussion. No previous work in the region is required, although having had courses on comparative politics will be helpful. This course is not a travelogue. We will not cover all of the countries of the region in any empirical detail. Rather, students will be given the analytic tools necessary to compare political developments in the former Soviet Union and beyond.

Course Requirements:
You will be evaluated based on your performance on mid-term and final exams (both take-home) and a research paper (see following page). Exam questions will be distributed in class a week before each exam.

Grading:
Mid-term 25% Due March 8 at the beginning of class
Final 30% Due May 12 at noon (Faner 3165)
Paper proposal 5% Due March 10 at the beginning of class
Paper 25% Due May 5 at the beginning of class
Discussion participation 15%
Comparative Research Paper: You are asked to write a research paper (15 pages for undergraduates, 20 to 25 for graduate students) that compares one political development or public policy in two countries, one of which should be a former Soviet republic. The topic area of your comparative study and the choice of countries remain flexible. This large project will be broken up into smaller steps: You will need to write a 2 to 3 page proposal by March 10, which includes your topic, countries of study, tentative argument and annotated bibliography. I will provide feedback on your proposal. A rough draft of your paper is due on April 14, with a final draft on May 5. We will work in peer-review teams to revise, edit and polish each other’s work. You will improve each draft of the research paper based on peer comments and those of the instructor.

Required Books (Available for purchase at the SIU Bookstore):


Course Schedule:

January 19  Introduction

January 21, 26  The Formation of the Soviet Union and Soviet Nationalities Policy

January 28  Discussion: The Creation of Soviet Central Asia

* Materials available on the library’s online reserves. From the library homepage (lib.siu.edu), click on “books and more” and then “course reserves and e-reserves,” and finally select POLS 459 from the pull down menu. You will need to enter your dawgtag to access the materials.
February 2  **Soviet Political Institutions under Lenin and Stalin**

February 4  **Discussion**

February 9  **Discussion: What does the GULAG tell us about the Soviet political system?**

February 11  **State Socialist Economic Institutions**

February 16, 18  **The Soviet Union after Stalin: Thaw and Stagnation**

February 23  **Discussion: The View from Below**


March 3  
**Transitions from Communism**


March 8  
**Discussion: Transition or Continuity?**


March 10  
**Democratization or Authoritarian Retrenchment?**


March 15, 17  
**Spring Vacation**

March 22  
**Democratic Backsliding**


March 24  
**Discussion: Democratic Backsliding in Russia**


March 29, 31  Political Parties, Party Systems and Electoral Behavior


April 5  Discussion: Post-Soviet Democracy in Practice

April 7  Post-Soviet Economic Reform

April 12  Discussion: Is Russia a Normal Country?

April 14  Discussion: Post-Soviet Business Practices

April 19  The Politics of Multiethnicity

April 21  Discussion

April 26  Discussion
April 28  Geopolitics and Post-Soviet Foreign Policy

May 3  Discussion

May 5  Russian Foreign Policy after the Ukraine Conflict
Readings TBA