Course description: The course is organized around a set of questions, which inform the contemporary debates on the politics of Russia and Eastern Europe: Why was the path of modernization of the Russian Empire so different from the Western European path? What role did culture, geography, ethnic fragmentation, and economic backwardness play in charting that path? Why did the Soviet experiment fail, and could it not have failed? Why were the outcomes of political and economic transitions different in different post-communist countries? Why did the end of the Cold War give way to new tensions and rivalries? What explains Russia’s policies in the post-Soviet space? Should the United States accommodate or confront Russia? We shall look for answers to these questions relying on relevant theories and debates in comparative politics, political economy, and international relations theory.

Requirements and grades: Because the class will be a mix of lectures and discussions, students are expected to read the assigned material in advance in order to be able to participate actively in class discussions. Class participation will be worth 10% of the final grade. In addition, there will be two in-class exams and two take-home essay assignments. The exams will test how well the students have mastered the material, while the essays will test the students’ ability to analyze some problem or puzzle based on what they have learned in class. The first exam and essay will be worth 15% and 20% of the final grade respectively. The second essay and exam will be worth 25% and 30% of the final grade respectively.

Texts: There are two books we shall rely on particularly heavily – Ronald G. Suny, The Soviet Experiment, 2nd edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Anders Aslund, Russia’s Capitalist Revolution: Why Market Reform Succeeded and Democracy Failed (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute, 2007). These books are recommended for purchase. All other materials will be available electronically on coursesite. In addition to what is on the syllabus, we will occasionally discuss articles published in major newspapers and websites focusing on Russia and Eastern Europe.

Office hours: Mondays 4:00-6:00PM or by appointment.
Schedule and readings

January 13: Introduction
- No readings.

January 15: Bad Bear

PART 1 – RUSSIA’S ROAD TO MODERNITY

January 20, 22 – Imperial Russia

January 27, 29 – Understanding the Soviet Experiment
- Suny, The Soviet Experiment, chs. 3 (pp. 68-84), 5, 9, 10.

February 3 – Is Russian Politics the Consequence of Russian Culture?
- Nicolas Gvosdev, “Russia, European, But not Western?” Orbis (Winter 2007), pp. 129-140.

February 5 – Geopolitics and Russian Politics

**February 10, 12 – Russia’s Economic Backwardness and Its Effects on Russian Politics**

**February 17, 19 – Ethnic Diversity and Russian Politics (First essay assignment handed out on Feb. 19)**

**PART 2 – WHY DID THE SOVIET EXPERIMENT FAIL?**

**February 24 – After Stalin (Essays are due back at the beginning of class)**
- Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, chs. 17 (pp. 413-433), 18 (pp. 447-449, 455-460, 463-470).

**February 26 – Midterm Examination**

**March 10- Perestroika and the Collapse of the USSR**

**March 12 – Ethnic Diversity and the Collapse of the USSR**

**March 17 – Economic Problems and the Collapse of the USSR?**

**PART 3 – THE ECONOMIC TRANSITION**

**March 19 – The Transition to Market Economy**
March 24 – Why Were the Reforms Flawed?

March 26 - Putinomics
- Aslund, Russia’s Capitalist Revolution, ch. 5.

Part 4 – THE POLITICAL TRANSITION

March 31 – Why Some Transitions Succeeded and Others Failed

April 2 – Combining (or Failing to Combine) Authority and Democracy in Modern Russia

PART 5 – THE COLD WAR AND AFTER

April 7, 9 - The Cold War and How It Ended
- Suny, The Soviet Experiment, chs. 15, 17 (pp. 436-445), ch. 18 (pp. 470-475), reread ch. 19.

April 14, 16 - The End of the End of the Cold War

April 21: Russian Neoimperialism?


April 23 – What Does the Future Hold? *(Second essay assignment is handed out)*


April 28 – Second essay is due back in my office by noon.

Final Examination date TBD.