

The World Through Russian Eyes

Field Research Course

Paul Robinson

Summer 2019

COURSE OUTLINE

Course Overview

This course is designed for MA-level students. It analyzes how Russian responses to Western policies spring from Russians' distinctive view of the world and their place in it. The course is to be held jointly with the Faculty of Global Processes at Lomonosov Moscow State University, and will take place in two segments. The first segment consists of one week of introductory classes held at the University of Ottawa at the end of May 2019. The second consists of two weeks of seminars and field trips in Moscow at the start of June 2019, during which students will have the opportunity to meet and interview Russian public figures and learn about the Russian point of view.

Rising political tensions between Russia and the West make this an important moment to study Russians' perception of the world and their country's place in it. Relations have reached such a nadir that some commentators are even referring to a 'New Cold War'. Canada, along with other Western countries, has imposed a series of sanctions on the Russian Federation and certain Russian citizens, sent troops to the Baltic region to deter potential Russian aggression, and sought to isolate Russia diplomatically. These policies reflect underlying assumptions about Russian responsibility for current tensions, about the nature of the Russian political system and Russian society, and about Russians' attitudes to their own country, its geopolitical neighbourhood, and the wider world.

International relations theorists have long been aware of the importance of misperception in international affairs. State leaders misperceive other states, misperceive how they are viewed by those others, and also misperceive how other states view themselves. The result is often mistaken policy prescriptions. In the current political climate, it is important therefore to have a correct understanding

of Russian perceptions. This can only be done by engaging directly with Russians. This is the purpose of this course.

The course will study Russian national identity, the nature of the Russian political system, Russian views on current international affairs, and Russian foreign policy. It will examine questions such as: 'Do Russians consider their country to be part of Europe, part of Asia, Eurasian, or something different?' 'Where do Russians consider that their future lies?' 'How do Russians explain the rising tensions with the Western world?' 'What solutions do Russians see for current international problems?' 'What are the main vectors in Russian foreign policy, and what factors and institutions shape it?'

Using an analytical technique known as 'red teaming', students will apply the knowledge acquired during the course to assess Western policy options concerning Russia in order to determine likely Russian responses to those policies. From this, they will develop recommendations as to the desirability of the policy options in question.

All classes, both in Ottawa and Moscow, will be in English. No knowledge of Russian is required.

General objective

The general objective of the course is to enhance students' cultural understanding of Russia, in order that they can determine how Russians view themselves and the world, and therefore determine how Russians are likely to respond to Western policies concerning their country. This will enable them to assess the likely efficacy of these policies.

Specific objectives

In order to achieve the general objective, students will acquire an understanding of:

- Russian historical memory
- Russian national identity
- The forces and institutions shaping national identity and Russians' view of the outside world, including political institutions, the media, and the Church
- The roots of current Russian-Western political tensions
- The Russian political system
- Russian foreign policy

Course structure

The course will consist of a combination of the following:

- In-class seminars
- Visits to important institutions (e.g. Russian State Duma, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Orthodox Church)
- Meetings with scholars and practitioners (e.g. diplomats, politicians, religious leaders, and political philosophers)
- Individual research
- Writing reports
- Oral presentation

Prior to going to Moscow, students will undertake a one-week long introduction to Russian history, culture, and politics through seminars held at the University of Ottawa, and through assigned readings. During this period, students will also determine which institutions they wish to visit and which people they wish to interview during the time assigned in Moscow for individual research. Professor Robinson and Moscow State University will facilitate in this determination and in arranging these visits/interviews.

While in Moscow, students will have 3 hours of seminar each morning. These will be led by a professor from Moscow State University or invited guests. Each afternoon they will undertake a field trip to an institution or site relevant to the theme of the morning's seminar. One day will be left free for individual research. On this day, students will be expected to make pre-planned field trips of their own and interview selected Russians about the subject of their final report. On the final day of the course, students will submit their research reports and give an oral presentation to the class.

Assessment criteria

In the first week of the course, students will be divided into groups of 3-4. Each group will be given a different set of future policies which Western states might adopt towards Russia. For their final research report, the groups will use the 'red teaming' approach to determine likely Russian responses to these policies. In the final report they will outline these likely responses, explaining their reasoning. They will then make recommendations regarding the advisability of those policies. Students will submit a written version of the report to Professor Robinson, and also present their conclusions to the class on the last

day of the course in Moscow. The written report and the oral presentation will be each worth 25% of the total final mark.

While in Moscow, at the end of each day involving a field trip, students will individually submit a one-page think-piece reflecting on the day's subject and its implications (8 x 5%, total 40%). They will also write a 2-page commentary on their observations of Russia Day (10%).

Final report, written version – 25%

Final report, oral presentation – 25%

Think pieces – 40%

Russia Day commentary – 10%

Outline of Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction to Russian history, culture and politics (held at University of Ottawa)

Monday 27 May

Overview of Russian and Soviet history

Tuesday 28 May

Morning: Overview of post-Soviet Russian history

Afternoon: Training and practice in red teaming techniques

Wednesday 29 May

Introduction to issues of Russian national identity and culture.

Thursday 30 May

Introduction to Russian politics

Friday 31 May

Discussion of current tensions between Russia and the Western world.

Week 2 – Moscow

Saturday 1 June

Fly to Moscow (overnight flight)

Sunday 2 June

Arrive in Moscow

Monday 3 June

Morning: Seminar discussing issues of historical memory in Russia. How do Russians integrate the various aspects of their past (Kievan Rus', Muscovite, Imperial, Soviet, post-Soviet) into a coherent whole?

Afternoon: Field trip to sites which display differing attitudes to Russia's Soviet heritage, and reflection on the implications for contemporary national identity (Wall of Grief, Museum of the Great Patriotic War).

Tuesday 4 June

Morning: Seminar discussing Russian Orthodoxy, its impact on Russian identity and culture, and the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in modern Russian society

Afternoon: Field trip (Sretensky monastery, meeting with officials of the Russian Orthodox Church)

Wednesday 5 June

Morning: Seminar on Russian political philosophy and current discourses on national identity, including the 'conservative turn' in Russian politics since 2012, Russian nationalism, and Eurasianism.

Afternoon: Field trip (Meetings with nationalist and conservative Russian political philosophers – Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research, Boris Mezhuev, Mikhail Remizov)

Thursday 6 June

Morning: Seminar on the Russian media and how it shapes Russians' perceptions of the world

Afternoon: Field trip (Russian TV channels – RT, *Rossia-1*)

Friday 7 June

Morning: Seminar on Russian political system and current politics

Afternoon: Field trip (Russian State Duma (Russian equivalent of Canadian House of Commons), meetings with Duma Deputies)

Saturday 8 June

Field trip: Trinity Monastery, Sergeev Posad (Founded by St Sergei of Radonezh in 1337, and considered the 'spiritual centre' of the Russian Orthodox Church). Reflection on the cultural legacy of the Mongol conquest and on Russia's place between East and West.

Sunday 9 June

Morning: Visit Kremlin.

Afternoon: Free time

Week 3 – Moscow

Monday 10 June

Morning: Seminar on Russian foreign policy and Russian-Western relations

Afternoon: Field trip (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and international affairs think tanks (Russian International Affairs Council and Carnegie Moscow))

Tuesday 11 June

Morning: Seminar on Russian security and defence

Afternoon: Field trip (Central Armed Forces Museum)

Wednesday 12 June – Russia Day (national holiday)

Students will attend Russia Day festivities and write commentaries on their observations. What does Russia Day tell us about the nature of contemporary Russian patriotism?

Thursday 13 June

Independent research.

Friday 14 June

Morning: Finalization and rehearsal of research reports.

Afternoon: Students present research reports

Saturday 15 June

Free day.

Sunday 16 June

Return to Ottawa