



RUSSIAN POLITICS

PSC 410, SPRING 2025
INSTRUCTOR: DR. JESS MORRISSETTE

MEETINGS: TU/TH 2:00-3:15, SMITH HALL 433
OFFICE HOURS: M 2-5, AND BY APPOINTMENT
OFFICE LOCATION: SMITH HALL 706

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Study of the politics of Russia and the former Soviet Union (International, 3 credit hours).

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

My name is Dr. Jess Morrissette; I'm a Professor in the Department of Political Science, and this is my seventeenth year here at Marshall University. I earned my MA from Virginia Tech and my Ph.D. from the University of Georgia, where I wrote my dissertation about interstate conflict driven by water scarcity in the Middle East and North Africa. My areas of specialization are International Relations and Comparative Politics, and I have published on topics ranging from resource-based conflict to Russian foreign policy to the rise of extremist movements in Africa. In recent years, my research has focused increasingly on exploring the politics of popular culture and, more specifically, video games.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should be able to...	How we will practice this outcome...	How we will assess this outcome...
Evaluate the legacies of communism in Russia and the post-Soviet states.	Discussions, lectures, in-class activities.	"What if...?" essay, exam questions.
Contextualize key historical junctures the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.	Discussions, lectures, in-class activities.	"What if...?" essay, exam questions.
Compare the political, economic, and social institutions of the post-Soviet states.	Discussions, lectures, in-class activities.	Exam questions, term paper.
Understand others in terms of how people in post-Soviet states view politics, economics, and society.	Discussions, lectures, in-class activities, polling data analysis.	Exam questions, candidate profile.
Integrate Russian foreign-policy interests with a broader sense of geopolitics.	Discussions, lectures, in-class activities.	Geography quiz, term paper, exam questions.
Evaluate how specific approaches to global issues will affect multiple cultural communities or political institutions.	Discussions, lectures, in-class activities.	Exam questions, term paper.
Untangle competing economic, religious, social, political, institutional, or geographical interests of cultural groups in conflict.	Discussions, lectures, in-class activities.	Exam questions, term paper.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Wengle, *Russian Politics Today: Stability and Fragility*.
- Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (3rd edition).

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING POLICY

Your course grade is calculated based on the following assignments.

5%	Participation	A =	90%-100%
5%	Geography Quiz	B =	80-89%
15%	“What If?” Essay	C =	70-79%
25%	Midterm Exam	D =	60-69%
25%	Term Paper	F ≤	59%
25%	Final Exam		

Note that failure to complete any assignment will result in a failing grade for the semester, regardless of the missing assignment’s point value.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance is required in this class, and students are expected to have read and be ready to discuss all assigned readings prior to class. Students will also be graded based on their class participation—engaging in discussion of the readings and current political events, asking questions, and so forth. Once again, attendance is clearly important; if you aren’t in class, you can’t participate.

The participation grade will be determined as follows: 5 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and make valuable contributions to class discussion on a regular basis; 4 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and contribute to discussions occasionally; 3 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently, but seldom participate in class discussions. Attendance grades of 2, 1, and 0 points are reserved for those students who fail to attend class regularly and therefore cannot participate meaningfully in class discussions.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

Please silence your cell phone prior to the start of class.

Classroom discussions will be conducted in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect. Differences of opinion and the challenging of viewpoints—including those of the instructor—are part of the learning experience, but they should occur in a manner that opens up dialogue without being disrespectful, hostile, or threatening toward others.

Unwelcome conduct directed toward another person based upon that person’s actual or perceived race, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, political affiliation, disability, age, or veteran status will not be permitted. Failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in dismissal from class.

This course supports and respects all gender expressions and identities. If you use a name different than what is listed on the class roster, please let me know and I will gladly refer to you by your correct name and pronouns.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Students are expected to adhere to the University's policies concerning academic honesty. Cheating or plagiarism on any exam, quiz, or assignment will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent under University policies. **The penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a failing grade for the course.**

GENERATIVE AI

Students are prohibited from using generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, etc.) in any way on any assignment in this course. The use of generative AI in this course will be considered a violation of both Marshall's Academic Dishonesty Policy and the Student Code of Conduct. As noted above, **the penalty for academic dishonesty is a failing grade for the course.**

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

There is a 24-hour grace period on all written assignments. Assignments submitted within 24 hours of the deadline will not receive a late penalty. This grace period allows flexibility in case of minor delays or technical difficulties.

After the 24-hour grace period, a late penalty of 10% per week will apply to all late submissions. The maximum penalty is 30%. Please note that **the final deadline for submitting any missing assignments is Friday, May 2.** After this date, no further submissions will be accepted.

To ensure your assignment is considered "submitted," you must upload a proper document file to Blackboard that is accessible to the instructor. Missing or corrupt files, as well as links to cloud-based services like OneDrive or Microsoft 365, will not be accepted and will be considered late until a valid file is uploaded. To avoid unnecessary penalties, double-check your file after uploading to confirm it is complete, functional, and visible in Blackboard.

EMAIL POLICY

Please check your Marshall email account regularly. Articles, assignments, and other important announcements may be sent to your "@marshall.edu" email address during the course of the semester. If you prefer to use a different email service, please contact Computing Services for assistance with forwarding your Marshall email to your preferred address.

HEALTH AND SAFETY INFORMATION

All members of the Marshall University community are expected to always observe health and safety protocols. This includes general health and safety protocols as well as specific protocols that might emerge in response to community and campus health conditions.

CAMPUS CARRY POLICY

University Policy, UPGA-12 (Campus Carry Policy) derives its authority from West Virginia State law, including the Campus Self-defense Act (W. Va. Code § 18B-4-5b). It pertains to the exercise of Concealed

Carry on Marshall University's campus, except in designated areas, by individuals with a valid permit to Conceal Carry.

Individuals who choose to Conceal Carry are responsible for knowing and understanding all applicable federal, state, and local laws and Marshall University Board of Governors Rules, University Policies, and Administrative Procedures. University Policy, UPGA-12 applies to areas of campus and buildings that are directly under the possession or control of Marshall University.

Concealed Handguns are not observable to others and must be holstered and concealed on the body of the permit holder or in a personal carrier, such as a backpack, purse, or other bag that remains under the exclusive and uninterrupted control of the permit holder. This includes wearing the personal carrier with a strap, carrying or holding the personal carrier, or setting the personal carrier next to or within your immediate reach at all times. If your participation in class activities impedes your ability to maintain constant control of your Handgun, please make alternate arrangements prior to coming to class.

OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES

By enrolling in this course, you agree to the following University Policies. Please read the full text of each policy by going to <https://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/policies/>.

- Academic Dishonesty Policy
- Academic Dismissal Policy
- Academic Forgiveness Policy
- Academic Probation and Suspension Policy
- Affirmative Action Policy
- Pre-Finals Week Policy
- D/F Repeat Rule
- Excused Absence Policy for Undergraduates
- Inclement Weather Policy
- Sexual Harassment Policy- Title IX prohibits the harassment of students based on sex, which includes pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions. This includes that students will not be penalized for taking medically necessary leave related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related conditions. Marshall's Title IX Office may be contacted at TitleIX@marshall.edu.
- Students with Disabilities (Policies and Procedures)
- University Computing Services Acceptable Use Policy

ASSIGNMENTS

- **Geography Quiz:** This in-class quiz will require students to identify the fifteen post-Soviet states on a map. I will upload a practice map to Blackboard.
- **Midterm and Final Exams:** Students will complete a midterm and a final exam this semester. I will provide additional details on the content and format of the exams as they approach.
- **“What If?” Essay:** What if the 1991 coup to remove Gorbachev from office had succeeded? Would the USSR still be around today, or would internal and external pressures led to its collapse anyway? Drawing on class discussions and readings, write a **3-page analysis** of how you think events might have unfolded.

In your essay, consider the key factors that contributed to the collapse of the USSR, including economic stagnation, nationalist movements, and international dynamics. Think critically about how a successful coup might have altered these dynamics. Would a more authoritarian government have been able to stabilize the USSR, or would resistance from within and pressures from outside have made the collapse inevitable?

- **Term Paper:** Students will write a paper (approximately **8 pages**) comparing a contemporary policy or political issue across two post-Soviet states. For example, you might compare immigration policies in Russia and Lithuania, examine Georgia’s and Ukraine’s relationships with the European Union, or analyze LGBT rights in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan.

The goal of the term paper is to analyze—not just summarize—factual details. A successful paper will not only identify similarities and differences in these policies but also provide an explanation for why these similarities and differences exist. To achieve this, choose a focused topic that allows for in-depth analysis. Broad topics like “the economy” are too general; something more specific, such as “trade relations with the West,” is more appropriate.

Your paper must cite at least eight sources, with a minimum of four scholarly sources (e.g., academic journals or university-press books). Avoid using online encyclopedias and other sources unsuitable for college-level research.

GENERAL WRITING TIPS

- You will submit all assignments via Blackboard.
- When writing your essays, be sure to include a brief introduction that states the essay's purpose, as well as a concise conclusion that sums up what you have written. (This is not necessary, however, for the midterm and final exam questions.)
- Cite your sources! You can choose any widely used citation style (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago), but stay consistent. Also, be sure to make it clear where you found any "outside" information in your essay. This includes not only citing direct quotations, **but also any paraphrased material or statistics**. As a rule of thumb, any information that you decide to include in the paper and didn't know before you began working on the project merits a citation. Also, include a "works cited" page at the end of your essays and exams. Failure to properly cite your sources constitutes ~~PLAGIARISM~~.
- Be judicious in choosing your online sources, and **do not cite Wikipedia or other online encyclopedias**. Articles from major media outlets and official organizational websites are safe bets. On the other hand, if it's a website you've never heard of prior to it popping up in a Google search, that's probably a good sign that it's not an appropriate academic source.
- Write your papers in 12-point Times/Times New Roman, double-spaced with 1" margins and page numbers in the upper right-hand corner. Title pages and works cited pages do not count toward the suggested page length.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of January 13: Introduction

- Wengle, Chapter 1

Week of January 20: The Rise of Communism in Russia

- McCauley, "Soviet Politics, 1917-1991" (online)
- Class cancelled on Thursday, January 23

Week of January 27: The Soviet Era

- Fainsod, "Terror as a System of Power" (online)
- Bailer, "Soviet Stability and Its Sources" (online)

Week of February 3: The Fall of the Soviet Union

- Verdery, "What Was Socialism and Why Did It Fail?"
- Ostrow, "Glasnost Guttled the Party, Democratization Doomed the State" (online)

Geography Quiz
Thursday, February 6

Week of February 10: Yeltsin at the Crossroads

- Dallin, "Causes of the Collapse of the USSR" (online)
- Class cancelled on Thursday, February 13.

Week of February 17: Putin and the Russian Presidency

- Wengle, Chapter 2

Week of February 24: Parties, Elections, and Parliament

- Wengle, Chapters 3-4
- Van Herpen, Chapters 6-7

"What If?" Essay Due
Friday, February 28

Week of March 3: The Russian Economy

- Wengle, Chapters 11-13

Week of March 10: National Identity, State-Building, and Federalism

- Wengle, Chapters 5-6 and 21

Midterm Exam
Thursday, March 13

Week of March 17: Spring Break!

Week of March 24: Political Culture, Civil Society, and Media

- Wengle, Chapters 7 and 17-19

Week of March 31: Class Cancelled for SCMS Conference!

Week of April 7: Russian Imperialism, Then and Now

- Van Herpen, Chapters 1-4

**Term Paper Due
Monday, April 14**

Week of April 14: The Chechen Wars

- Van Herpen, Chapters 10-12

Week of April 21: The War in Georgia

- Van Herpen, Chapters 13-15

Week of April 28: The Ukraine War

- Van Herpen, Chapters 15-18

**Final Exam
Thursday, May 8 (12:45-2:45)**