

# HIST 14100, REES 26015, SOSC 24200

## Introduction to Russian Civilization III

### Spring 2021

**Instructor:** Professor Scott Gehlbach, [gehlbach@uchicago.edu](mailto:gehlbach@uchicago.edu)

**Class time and location:** Monday/Wednesday, 4:10–5:30, Zoom

**Office hours:** Gehlbach: Friday 9:00–11:00, sign-up [here](#)

## Course description

The third quarter of Russian Civilization is a new addition to the curriculum. When taken following Introduction to Russian Civilization I and II, Introduction to Russian Civilization III meets the general education requirement in Humanities, Civilization Studies, and the Arts. The course is thematic and varies from year to year. This year, the course explores the nature of state socialism, or “communism”—the political and economic system that governed much of the world’s population during the twentieth century—and the transition from that system to alternative modes of governance. Course material emphasizes the experience of the (former) Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—especially but not only Russia. That said, many lessons of communism and the postcommunist transition apply also to China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba, where the Communist Party retains political power.

## Grading

Your grade in the course will be governed by your performance in four areas:

- (10 percent) Class participation
- (20 percent) Discussion posts
- (30 percent) Midterm exam
- (40 percent) Final exam

The participation grade will be based on attendance and contributions to the class discussion. If for some reason you are unable to attend class, please let me know in advance; I will provide a recording of the Zoom session. Unexplained absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.

Two days in advance of each class, I will post a pair of questions about the next day’s readings on Canvas. You should choose **one** of these two questions to answer, using **not more than 100 words**. Grading of your responses will be “coarse,” with two points given for a 1) well-formulated response that is 2) written in clear prose, one point for a response that fails to satisfy one of (1) and (2), and zero points for a response that fails to satisfy either. I will deduct a point, with a minimum score of zero, if your response exceeds 100 words.

The midterm exam will be a take-home exam: please see the schedule below. The final exam will be given only on the date selected by the College; it is your responsibility to ensure that you are available on that date. I will say more later about exam format.

This course is not graded on a curve. If you feel that any assignment has been unfairly or improperly graded, then you may request that it be regraded. Your request should be accompanied by a cover letter indicating the source of your concern. I will regrade the *entire* assignment in question, meaning that your revised grade may be either higher or lower than what you originally received, depending on the nature of any errors in the original grading.

## Special accommodations

The University of Chicago, and I personally, support the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The University's policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#). If you have a disability accommodation awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office, please let me know as soon as possible so that we coordinate accommodations.

## Diversity and inclusion

We learn from each other. A diverse classroom encourages us to see the world from new perspectives. To take full advantage of this resource, we must maintain an environment of open inquiry in which all are able to participate. It is my commitment as instructor to foster this environment.

You can find the University's statement on civil behavior in a university setting [here](#).

## Support

The pandemic and move to online learning pose numerous challenges. If you are feeling overwhelmed and/or depressed, you are not alone. I urge you to attend to your mental health. All services of the Student Counseling Service (SCS) are fully covered by the Student Life Fee. If you are seeking new services or resources, please call 773-702-9800 during business hours (Monday—Friday, 8:30 am–5:00 pm) and ask to speak with a clinician. If you need urgent mental-health care, you can speak with a clinician 24/7 by calling the SCS at 773-702-3625. More information is available [here](#).

Beyond SCS, the University provides numerous other forms of support for online learning. Please peruse the available options [here](#).

## Academic integrity

You are a student at the University of Chicago. As such, you have assumed responsibility to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Among other things,

this means that you will not represent another's work as your own or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage. I will report any plagiarism, cheating, or other form of academic dishonesty to the dean of students. I reserve the right to impose sanctions beyond those imposed by the dean, including a grade of zero on the assignment in question; this could result in a failing grade for the course.

## Use of online resources

Online resources are for course use only. More concretely, by enrolling in this course, you acknowledge that:

- You will not (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.
- You will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with any persons not authorized to be in the course session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.
- Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.
- Any violation of this policy will be referred to your dean of students.

## Readings and course schedule

There are three assigned texts for this course:

- *Red Plenty*, by Francis Spufford
- *The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev*, by Daniel Treisman
- *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*, by Timothy Frye

All other readings are available on Canvas. The following is subject to minor and ongoing revision, depending on how long specific topics take.

### March 29: Orientation

No readings.

## Socialism

### March 31: The Socialist Experiment

Ferguson, Niall. 2006. *War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West*. New York: Penguin Press. Chapter 6.

Kornai, János. 1992. *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1–2.

## **April 5: Industrialization and Collectivization**

*Mr. Jones*, a film by Agnieszka Holland, available on Panopto via the course Canvas site.

*Red Plenty*, Part One.

Gehlbach, Scott. 2021. “What Did Stalinist Industrialization Accomplish?” A conversation with Sergei Guriev, available at [Broadstreet](#).

## **April 7: The Classical Socialist System**

Kornai, János. 1992. *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 15.

*Red Plenty*, Part Two.

## **April 12: Reform**

*Red Plenty*, Parts Three and Four.

## **April 14: Retreat**

*Red Plenty*, Parts Five and Six.

## **Transition**

### **April 19: Collapse**

*People Power*, part of the PBS series *People’s Century*, available on Panopto via the course Canvas site.

*The Return*, Chapters 1, 2, and 5.

### **April 21: Collapse, cont.**

Nalepa, Monika. 2010. *Skeletons in the Closet: Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Darden, Keith and Anna Grzymala-Busse. 2006. “The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse.” *World Politics*. 59:83–115.

Freedman, David A. 1991. “Statistical Models and Shoe Leather.” *Sociological Methodology*. 91:291–313. [especially but not only for those who have yet to take statistics]

## April 26: Legacies

Alexievich, Svetlana. 2016. *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*. New York: Random House. pp. 91–106.

Pop-Eleches, Grigore and Joshua A. Tucker. 2014. “Communist Socialization and Post-Communist Economic and Political Attitudes.” *Electoral Studies*. 33:77–89.

## April 28: Economic Transformation

*The Return*, Chapter 6.

Fischer, Stanley, and Alan Gelb. 1991. “The Process of Socialist Economic Transformation.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 5:91–105.

**Midterm exam: Distributed April 28 at 6 pm, due April 30 at 9 am.**

## May 3: Privatization

Appel, Hilary. 2004. *A New Capitalist Order: Privatization & Ideology in Russia & Eastern Europe*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press. Chs. 3–4.

Brown, J. David, John S. Earle, and Scott Gehlbach. 2013. “Privatization.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Russian Economy* (Michael Alexeev and Shlomo Weber, eds.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

## May 5: Initial Outcomes

Svejnar, Jan. 2002. “Transition Economies: Performance and Challenges.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 16:3–28.

Guriev, Sergei and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. 2009. “(Un)Happiness in Transition.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 23: 143–168.

## Aftermath

### May 10: A New System?

*Leviathan*, a film by Andrey Zvyagintsev, available on Panopto via the course Canvas site.

*The Return*, Chapter 3.

*Weak Strongman*, Chapters 3–5.

## May 12: Rule of Law

Volkov, Vadim. 1999. "Violent Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies*. 51:741–754.

Gans-Morse, Jordan. 2017. *Property Rights in Post-Soviet Russia: Violence, Corruption, and the Demand for Law*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3.

## May 17: Cronyism, Connections, and Corruption

*Weak Strongman*, Chapter 6.

Szakonyi, David. 2017. "Businesspeople in Elected Office: Identifying Private Benefits from Firm-Level Returns." *American Political Science Review*. 112:322–338.

## May 19: Media Control and Repression

*Weak Strongman*, Chapters 7 and 8.

Rozenas, Arturas and Denis Stukal. "How Autocrats Manipulate Economic News: Evidence from Russia's State-Controlled Television." *Journal of Politics*. 81:982–996.

## May 24: Protest and Stability

Smyth, Regina. 2020. *Elections, Protest, and Authoritarian Regime Stability: Russia 2008–2020*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1.

Rosenfeld, Bryn. "Reevaluating the Middle-class Protest Paradigm: A Case-Control Study of Democratic Protest Coalitions in Russia." *American Political Science Review* 111:637–652.

## May 26: Taking Stock

Kornai, Janos. 2006. "The Great Transformation of Central Eastern Europe." *Economics of Transition*. 14:207–244.

Shalizi, Cosma. 2012. "In Soviet Union, Optimization Problem Solves *You*." Available at [Crooked Timber](#).