

SPECIAL TOPICS: RUSN 3060 (CRN 22723) / POLI 3820 (CRN 24142)

PUTIN'S RUSSIA

WINTER 2024 / TTH 14:35 – 15:55

MCCAIN (FASS), 1198

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Office Hours: W 2-4, or by appointment in McCain 3015



In February 2022, the world looked on with horror as Russia invaded Ukraine. How did we get here? This seminar traces a narrative from the chaos of the lawless “wild 1990s” through the solidification of power in Putin’s Russia, to the rise of diverse forms of protest culture in the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Ukraine. By the end of this course, we will better understand the complex historical causes, myths, and ideologies that have shaped contemporary Russia and led to the ongoing war. Structured thematically, this course will allow us to examine questions of power, gender, trauma, violence, nostalgia, and coloniality as we consider how Russia has developed and changed over the last three decades. We will consider exertions and representations of authority through a comparative, interdisciplinary lens and understand what terms like autocracy and power mean in the context of contemporary art and politics. Course materials include literature, art, film, political tracts, protest performance, news media & journalism, personal testimonies, and more. All readings and discussions are in English, with Russian originals available for interested students.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

Participation	25%	
Discussion forum posts	20%	<i>2x/week</i>
Media report	15%	<i>February 1</i>
“Conference” proposal	5%	<i>February 15</i>
“Conference” presentation	15%	<i>March 5 &amp; 7</i>
In-class test	20%	<i>April 4</i>

### *Participation & Attendance:*

Please come to class on time with your text, enthusiasm, and ideas. Be prepared to discuss the course materials, engage in creative activities, and ask questions. This course is designed as a discussion-based seminar (with occasional lectures), so your participation is very important! Students are expected to make regular, substantive contributions. If you are unable to attend class, please let me know in advance, as attendance is mandatory. Two absences will be excused.

### *Discussion forum:*

All students must post a short response, question, or intervention based on the course material prior to each session. Responses are due at **6 pm** on Mondays and Wednesdays. Suggested length is **100 words**. We will discuss the forum responses in class the following day. A successful forum response might highlight an interesting question (not a factual or yes/no question) and offer an attempt at beginning to answer it.

### *Media report:*

Submit a **two-page report** on a current or past political or cultural event related to the course materials. You may want to discuss, for example, the ongoing war on Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, Navalnyi's poisoning, the 2020-2021 mass political demonstrations and protests in Belarus... These reports should summarize the event and provide a range of perspectives, drawn from the media, on the event. "Media" sources can range from major news sources in North America and Europe, to state-sponsored Russian media, to social media platforms, like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. An analytical, critical perspective on the sources you cite is a key element of this assignment, the goal of which is to encourage thoughtful consideration of the role played by mass media in shaping our understanding of political, social, and cultural events. Additional details can be found on Brightspace.

### *"Conference" presentation:*

Prepare a **10-minute conference presentation** on a text or topic of your choosing. This presentation should feature a thesis, analysis of a primary source, and clear argumentation. PowerPoint presentations are encouraged. All "panels" will be followed by a Q&A. Two weeks before the conference, you will submit a **short proposal** for your presentation (one-two paragraphs). Presentations will take place over two days. You will be grouped by theme into panels, which will take place across these two days. Part of your grade will be based on the questions that you pose to your peers during BOTH class sessions. You will submit a hardcopy of your presentation to Brightspace.

CONVERSION OF NUMERICAL GRADES TO FINAL LETTER GRADES FOLLOWS THE DALHOUSIE COMMON GRADE SCALE:

A+ (90-100)	B+ (77-79)	C+ (65-69)	D (50-54)
A (85-89)	B (73-76)	C (60-64)	F (<50)
A- (80-84)	B- (70-72)	C- (55-59)	

### **DIGITAL POLICY:**

As this is primarily an opportunity for you to discuss the course readings, I highly encourage you to limit your screen-time in section. You may use a laptop or a tablet in class, though *only* for course-related work, such as accessing secondary readings. *Absolutely no* cell phones under any circumstances.

**WRITTEN WORK POLICY:**

Please submit all work on time. If you are unable to meet a deadline, be sure to contact me in advance. I would be happy to provide extensions whenever possible, and to meet with you to discuss the texts or to talk about ideas for your assignments. If you are unable to come to my office hours, please let me know and we can arrange another time to meet.

Generative writing tools like Chat GPT, Google Translate and QuillBot are not permitted in FASS classes, unless explicitly allowed by the course instructor. In the case of our course, these tools are not conducive to our learning objectives and are, accordingly, not permitted. Using AI-powered tools in this course constitutes an academic offense (please note that this may not be the case for all of your classes – always check with your instructor if you are unsure).

Other factors that inform this course’s policy on generative writing tools include the following: these tools (many of which are costly) can exacerbate inequalities; the underlying source material comes from the Western, English-speaking world (all that was available on the internet up to the year 2021) and it, therefore, regurgitates Western, white, English-speaking norms, biases, speech patterns and ideas; and these tools have complex, potentially negative labour and environmental impacts.

**COURSE MATERIALS:**

Only one book is required for purchase: Vladimir Sorokin, *Day of the Oprichnik*, translated by Jamey Campbrell (available at [Indigo](#) and on [Amazon](#)). Please get Campbrell’s translation! All other materials will be available online and via digital copies (for educational use only, please see university copyright and fair use statements below). For any films that are unavailable online, I will organize a screening time/place and notify you in advance.

**TRIGGER WARNING:**

In designing this syllabus, I have done my best to avoid gratuitously violent or sexual content. Even so, the material of this course—all of which I believe to be aesthetically or historically very valuable—will expose you to some references to or depictions of violence and other potentially disturbing human behaviors. Our readings may make you feel uncomfortable at times. If you wish to take this course but have concerns about engaging with sensitive material, I encourage you to discuss those concerns with me. I will do my best to help you identify resources at Dalhousie to provide you with support, or, if appropriate, design alternative assignments for certain reading selections and class discussions.

**TIMEFRAME FOR RESPONDING TO STUDENT EMAILS:**

Please feel free to reach out to me via email if you have any questions or ideas that you would like to discuss. I do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours, during regular business hours.

## COURSE SCHEDULE:

**Jan. 9** Please note: Class **will not** take place in person! **Prof. Papadopoulos will be at a conference.** In lieu of class, you can find a video introduction to course material and themes on Brightspace.

**Jan. 11** Putin's Cult of Personality

- Julie A. Cassiday and Emily D. Johnson "A personality cult for the postmodern age: Reading Vladimir Putin's public persona," in *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*
- Poiushchie vmeste, "Takogo kak Putin" (2002 song) [translation will be provided]

**Jan. 16** Putin's Cult of Masculinity

- Valerie Sperling, "The Power of Sex: Culture, Gender, and Political Legitimacy," in *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia*
- Helena Goscilo, "Putin's Performance of Masculinity," in *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*
- "[Vladimir Putin doing manly things](#)," CBS News (2012)
- "['I see no need to hide': Putin on his shirtless pics that swept the Internet](#)," RT (2018)



**Jan. 18** Chaos, Violence, and the Mafia in 90s

- Balabanov, *Brother* (1997 film)

**Jan. 23** (Post-)Soviet Nostalgia

- Segments of Balabanov, *Brother 2* (2000 film) [Timestamps, TBA; available with English subtitles [here](#)]
- Monetchka (Lil' Coin), "90" (2018 song/[music video](#)) [translation will be provided]
- Excerpts from Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*

**Jan. 25** Medieval Revival 1: Class Cancelled (Prof. Papadopoulos will be giving a lecture off-campus – please watch short lecture video on Brightspace)

- Sorokin, *Day of the Oprichnik*: 3-69
- Mini asynchronous video lecture on Muscovy under Ivan IV aka Ivan the Terrible

**Jan. 30** Medieval Revival 2

- Sorokin, *Day of the Oprichnik*: 70-119

**Feb. 1** Medieval Revival 3

- Sorokin, *Day of the Oprichnik*: 121-146
- Bradley Gorski, "The Battle for (Pre-)Modernity: Medieval Festivals in Contemporary Russia"

**Feb. 6** Medieval Revival 4

- Sorokin, *Day of the Oprichnik*: 147-191



- Excerpts from Vladimir Putin, “[On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians](#)” (July 2021)

**Feb. 8**

The Illusion of Glamour & Westernization

- Excerpts from Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible* (2014)
- In-class: clips from Russian Reality TV

**Feb. 13**

New Drama

- Kirill Serebrennikov, *Playing the Victim* (2006 [film](#), click “engineer” in the CC section for Eng. subtitles)
- Maksim Hanukai & Susanna Weygandt, “Introduction” (2019) to *New Russian Drama: An Anthology*

**Feb. 15**

Pussy Riot

- Lerner, Pozdorovkin, *Pussy Riot, A Punk Prayer* (2013 film; try this free version on [Tubi](#))
- Excerpts from Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, *Read & Riot: A Pussy Riot guide to activism* (2018)
- Excerpts from Eliot Borenstein, *Pussy Riot: Speaking Punk to Power*
- In class: Voina and actionist artist, Pyotr Pavlensky



**Feb. 19 - Feb. 23: NO CLASS – enjoy the break!**

**Feb. 27**

The Gay Propaganda Law

- Roman Utkin, “Introduction” & “Queer Vulnerability and Russian Poetry after the ‘Gay Propaganda’ Law,” in *Illegal Queerness: Russian Culture and Society in the Age of the “Gay Propaganda” Law* (2021)
- Various news coverage of the expansion of the “gay propaganda law,” passed in Nov. 2022 & Jul. 2023

**Feb. 29**

2020-2021 Belarusian Protests

- Mini-lecture on Lukashenko, the mass demonstrations, and Russia’s role
- Rufina Bazlova, *The History of the Belarusian Vyzhyvanka* (<https://www.vyzyvanka.com/>). Especially: Chapters 1, 2, & 3
- Sarah A. Topol, “The Battle for the Mural – and the Future of Belarus” (2022 [NYT article](#); “The Daily” episode is [here](#) if you prefer a podcast version)



**Mar. 5**

Conference Presentations: Day 1

**Mar. 7**

Conference Presentations: Day 2



**Mar. 12**

From Post-Soviet Independence to Annexation: Ukraine between East and West before the War

- In-class lecture. NO READINGS!



**Mar. 14**

Presidential Speeches

- Excerpts from various speeches and official statements: President Zelenskyy
- Excerpts from various official statements: President Putin
- In-class: Clips from military rally in Moscow & the defining the symbol “Z”

**Mar. 19**

Fleeing the War: Migration, Emigration, and the Refugee Crisis



- Ukrainians Seek Refuge in Europe: Jenny Barraol, *Voices of Ukraine* (2022 [documentary](#))
- A Russian Flees Mobilization: “One Man Flees Putin’s Draft” (2022 podcast, [The Daily](#))
- An American Leaves Moscow: Michele Berdy, “The Dots Were All There. We Just Couldn’t Connect Them” (2022 op-ed, [Politico](#))

**Mar. 21**

Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine & Russian Protest Music

- Go to this [website](#). Read **five** poems and choose **two** of them to discuss in a class activity. Please come with your own reading/interpretation & questions prepared (you are encouraged to begin to do this in your forum response for today’s class.)
- Monetochka, “Burn” (2022 [music video](#)) [Russian and English lyrics will be provided]
- Oxxxymiron, “Oida” (2022 [music video](#)) [Russian and English lyrics will be provided]

**Mar. 26**

Russian and Ukraine on the World Stage: International Relations in Times of War

- Readings TBD
- Preparatory assignment: find one news article related to the topic of international relations today and be prepared to describe its contents to the class

**Mar. 28**

Provincial Corruption

- Andrey Zvyagintsev, *Leviathan* (2014 film)

**Apr. 02**

Words of this course – reflecting on the semester & Review Session before final test: come with questions!

**Apr. 04**

**In-class test!**

**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY STATEMENTS:**

*Territorial Acknowledgement:*

The Dalhousie University Senate acknowledges that we are in Mi’kma’ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq People and pays respect to the Indigenous knowledges held by the Mi’kmaq

People, and to the wisdom of their Elders past and present. The Mi'kmaq People signed Peace and Friendship Treaties with the Crown, and section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights. We are all Treaty people. The Dalhousie University Senate also acknowledges the histories, contributions, and legacies of African Nova Scotians, who have been here for over 400 years.

*Internationalization:*

At Dalhousie, ‘thinking and acting globally’ enhances the quality and impact of education, supporting learning that is “interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, global in reach, and orientated toward solving problems that extend across national borders.” All of my courses are designed to encourage the development of cross-cultural, interdisciplinary knowledge. For more information, visit: <https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/internationalization.html>

*Academic Integrity:*

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect. As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity. For further information, visit: [http://www.dal.ca/dept/university\\_secretariat/academic-integrity.html](http://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html)

*Accessibility:*

The Student Accessibility Centre is Dalhousie's centre of expertise for matters related to student accessibility and accommodation. If there are aspects of the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course (online or in-person) that result in barriers to your inclusion please contact the [Student Accessibility Centre](#).

*Conduct in the Classroom – Culture of Respect:*

Substantial and constructive dialogue on challenging issues is an important part of academic inquiry and exchange. It requires willingness to listen and tolerance of opposing points of view. Consideration of individual differences and alternative viewpoints is required of all class members, towards each other, towards instructors, and towards guest speakers. While expressions of differing perspectives are welcome and encouraged, the words and language used should remain within acceptable bounds of civility and respect.

*Diversity and Inclusion – [Culture of Respect](#):*

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. We stand for equality. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity. We are a respectful and inclusive community. We are committed to being a place where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our Strategic Direction prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness (Strategic Priority 5.2).

*[Student Code of Conduct](#):*

Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The Code of Student Conduct allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students don't follow this community expectation. When appropriate, violations of the code can be resolved in a reasonable and informal manner—perhaps through a restorative justice process. If an informal resolution can't be reached, or would be inappropriate, procedures exist for formal dispute resolution.

*[Fair Dealing policy](#):*

The Dalhousie University Fair Dealing Policy provides guidance for the limited use of copyright protected material without the risk of infringement and without having to seek the permission of copyright owners. It is intended to provide a balance between the rights of creators and the rights of users at Dalhousie.

*Student Use of Course Materials:*

These course materials are designed for use as part of the RUSN3060.03/POLI3820 course at Dalhousie University and are the property of the instructor unless otherwise stated. Third party copyrighted materials (such as books, journal articles, music, videos, etc.) have either been licensed for use in this course or fall under an exception or limitation in Canadian Copyright law. Copying this course material for distribution (e.g., uploading to a commercial third-party website) may lead to a violation of Copyright law.

**UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS:**

- [Important Dates in the Academic Year](#) (including add/drop dates)
- [Classroom Recording Protocol](#)
- [Dalhousie Grading Practices Policy](#)
- [Grade Appeal Process](#)
- [Sexualized Violence Policy](#)
- [Scent-Free Program](#)

**LEARNING SUPPORT AND RESOURCES:**

- Academic Support - Advising [Halifax](#), [Truro](#)
- [Student Health & Wellness Centre](#)
- [On Track](#) (helps you transition into university, and supports you through your first year at Dalhousie and beyond)
- [Indigenous Student Centre](#). See also: [Indigenous Connection](#).
- Elders-in-Residence: The [Elders in Residence](#) program provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. Visit the office in the [Indigenous Student Centre](#) or contact the program at [elders@dal.ca](mailto:elders@dal.ca) or 902-494-6803.
- [Black Student Advising Centre](#)
- [International Centre](#)
- [South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre](#)
- [LGBTQ2SIA+ Collaborative](#)
- [Dalhousie Libraries](#)
- [Copyright Office](#)
- [Dalhousie Student Advocacy Service \(DSAS\)](#)
- [Dalhousie Ombudsperson](#)
- [Human Rights & Equity Services](#)
- [Writing Centre](#)
- [Study Skills/Tutoring](#)