SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET CINEMA AND SOCIETY

SAMPLE SYLLABUS

**Course Description:**

The purpose of this course is to study the ways in which Russian filmmakers have used the medium of cinema to explore history, culture, politics, and social issues prevalent in the Russian society at different periods of its development from mid-19th century till today. The course will follow the development of Soviet and Russian cinema from Golden Age of silent films, through the periods of Socialist Realism, WWII, the Thaw, Stagnation, Perestroika, and finally the Russian Federation up to the present day. By the end of the course students will have a solid grasp of the Russian film aesthetics, theory, production, history and culture. He/or she will acquire critical tools to provide an informed verbal and written analysis of the films and discuss how various aesthetic and ideological approaches to filmmaking inform the cinema practice over the time.

The course will combine screening of Russian films and class discussion of issues raised in these films. All students are expected to complete the assigned readings of chapters in history book and other material prior to each class and print out questionnaires for class discussions posted on the course blackboard after the film screenings. Informed class participation is strongly encouraged and will positively affect your final term grade.

**Course setup, communications, and class discipline:**

1. Since pdf files of some articles and film reviews are to be posted on the Course Backboard site, check the blackboard site for this course weekly or more for announcements and other assignments.

2. I will be sending email via blackboard (bb) which goes to your Hunter address. You have the following options:
   a. check your Hunter email account
   b. forward your Hunter email to your preferred address
   c. email bb@hunter.cuny.edu and ask them to change your email address for course code.

3. Cell phones, ipods, pagers, and other similar devices must be off during class.
4. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to get the notes from another student, to complete any assignments given during your absence, and to learn of any schedule changes. I suggest you exchange contact information with a few students early in the semester.

5. Class attendance of both screening and discussion parts of the class is compulsory. If you can’t attend a class for a good reason, you must notify the course instructor by e-mail and provide adequate proof of your reason for absence. You are allowed one unexcused absence without penalty. An excused absence must be documented (e.g. doctor’s note). Please bear in mind that your attendance grade (part of overall grading) is lowered two grade points for each unexcused absence. If you miss two or more classes regardless of its reason, you may not be allowed to take the final exam.

Unexcused class tardiness is equally unacceptable. In fact, coming to class late twice will count as one absence.

**Course Requirements:**

3. Examinations and term paper:

   There will be two examinations in the form of essays during the semester: midterm and final. The midterm examination will be written during the first half (5:40 – 6:55pm) of the class (TBA). The final examination will be written in class as scheduled.

   Term paper. The list of suggested pairs of films and paper topics is posted on the course blackboard. You may choose other pairs of Russian/American (or Russian versus a film from cultures other than American providing that the film is available in English subtitles).

   You may also approach comparing and contracting suggested pairs of films on the list from another vantage point or explore another issue common to them. In both cases, before choosing a term paper topic not on the offered list, you are advised to consult with the course instructor. Russian films other than those shown in class are available on Hunter Library Reserve (second floor).

   Term Paper Format: 8-10 pages (2,000-3,000 words), numbered throughout, font #12 (courier preferable), double-spaced, at least 1” margins.

**READINGS:**

The readings will be drawn from a required reader (see below) and articles to be posted on BlackBoard (BB) [http://bb.hunter.cuny.edu](http://bb.hunter.cuny.edu). Please buy the book immediately so that the bookstore can order additional copies as needed (they tend to under-order).

**Required Texts:**

Available in Shakespeare Books (Lex. Ave. bet. 68 and 69 St.), and on reserve in the library. Shakespeare works with financial aid vouchers.

- Texts required:
  - John Thompson, *Russia and the Soviet Union*

**Recommended Literature** (on Library Reserve):

- Andrei Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization*
- Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*
- Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost*
- Anna Lawton (ed.) *The Red Screen*
Grading Policy

To pass the course, you must complete all the requirements. Final papers to be printed out in prescribed format. Please also bear in mind that this is intensive writing (W) course. All exams and term paper are to be written in English only. You will be graded not only on how well you explore a given topic but also on the quality of your writing. The Writing Center is available for help with the logistics of good writing. They have appt. and drop-in hours. http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/hours.html

Your term grade breakdown:
30 pts 1. Midterm (Friday, October 17)
30 pts 2. Final Exam [date and time TBA]
30 pts 3. Term paper due on (or before) the last class meeting (December 5)
10 pts 4. Attendance & Class Participation

A+ 98-100   B+ 88-89   C+ 78-79   D 60-69
A  93-97     B  83-87    C  70-77    F  0-59
A- 90-92     B- 80-82

A indicates work of superior quality. It is on time, contains almost no factual errors, and expresses fully developed (possibly thought-provoking) ideas that show theoretical sophistication. The writing is eloquent and imaginative.

B indicates work of good quality. It is on time, well thought out, well written, and accurate with only a few insignificant factual errors or omissions. It repeats ideas that have been hashed out in class but without drawing innovative connections or conclusions.

C indicates work of acceptable quality. It is on time, adequately written but does not shine, with a few factual errors or omissions that reflect a coarse grasp of ideas.

D or F indicates work of poor quality. It makes serious factual errors, or doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t answer the question or has little relevance to the question or assignment. Answers are superficial or irrelevant regarding the question posed.

Hunter College Policy on Academic Integrity:

"All work completed for this course must be completed by the student enrolled in the course. All work for this course must be made in this course and not fulfilling the requirements of another prior or current course unless pre-approved by the instructor. Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense which will result in penalties ranging from reduction of class grade to failure in the course. Plagiarism occurs when the ideas, images, and words, published or unpublished, of others are presented as one’s own without citing the original source. Plagiarism also occurs when the papers, research, or creative works of another person are presented as one’s own work."
"Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism, cheating on examinations…) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty." Cheating, including plagiarism, will result in an F in the course, and will be reported to the Dean. For guidelines on distinguishing between paraphrasing and plagiarizing go to: **http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/on-line/qpp.html

**A (tentative) Course Schedule:**

**Week**

1

1. Introduction to the course
2. Screening of documentaries on Russian history

2 **Read:** Thompson, Chapter 8.

1. Screening of documentaries on Russian history (continued)
2. Screening of Oblomov (Dir. Nikita Mikhalkov, 1979, 140 min)

3 **Read:** Thompson, Chapter 9.

1. Discussion of Oblomov
2. Screening of An Unfinished Piece for a Mechanical Piano (Dir. Nikita Mikhalkov, 1977, 105 min)

4 **Read:** Thompson: Chapter 10

1. Discussion of An Unfinished Piece for a Mechanical Piano
2. Screening of Of Men and Freaks (Dir. Alexei Balabanov, 1998, 95 min)

5 **Read:** Thompson: Chapter 11

1. Discussion of Of Men and Freaks
2. Screening of Flight (Dir. Alexander Alov and Vladimir Naumov, 1970, 196 min)

6 **Review:** Thompson: Chapter 11

1. Discussion of Flight
2. Screening of Heart of a Dog (Dir. Vladimir Bortko, 1988, 130 min)

7 **Review:** Thompson: Chapter 11

1. Discussion of Heart of a Dog
2. Screening of From Lenin to Stalin (documentary)

8 **Read:** Thompson: Chapter 12

1. MIDTERM (5:40 -6:55 pm)
2. Screening of The Road to Life
9 To read in Thompson: Chapter 12 (211-24)
Discussion of The Road to Life
Realities of Stalinist Russia
Screening of My Friend Ivan Lapshin (dir. Alexei Gherman)

10 To review in Thompson: 219-223
Discussion of My Friend Ivan Lapshin
Screening of Volga-Volga (dir. Grigory Alexandrov)

11 To review in Thompson: Chapter 12 (211-24)
To read in Thompson: Chapter 6 (Peter the Great)
Discussion of Volga-Volga
Justification of Strong Central Power
Screening of Peter the Great (dir. Vladimir Petrov)

12 To read in Thompson: Chapter 12 (224-32)
Discussion of Peter the Great
Stalin’s Cult of and World War II
Screening of Fall of Berlin (dir. Mikhail Chiaureli)

13 To read in Thompson: Chapter 13 (234-36, 243-7)
Examination of Stalinism:
Screening of The Inner Circle (dir. Andrey Konchalovsky)

14 Discussion of The Inner Circle
Stalin’s Always with Us? (documentary)