The emphasis in this critical thinking class is the development of contemporary politics in Putin’s Russia and neighboring states. Specific sections will cover nationalist identities and mobilizations within Russia (e.g. in the Muslim republics of the North Caucasus); Russia’s re-assertive geopolitics with respect to arms agreements and oil routes, Iran, Kosovo, and relations with the US/NATO; Putin’s pursuit of “controlled democracy” at home; human rights, political movements, and suppression of dissent; and Russia’s relations with the states of the “Near Abroad” especially Ukraine and Central Asia.

The readings will be a mix of current accounts of developments (from news websites) as well as academic articles about each subject. Typical weekly readings will be a couple of academic articles or book chapters plus an overview of the current situation from news sources. All students are expected to read Orlando Figes, \textit{Natasha’s Dance: A Cultural History of Russia} (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005) before the class starts or finish it within the first 2 weeks. There will be discussions about it in the first 2 weeks.

Students will prepare weekly questions from the readings before each session and the collated questions will be the basis for the discussion, organized each week by two students. We will also view and discuss important videos/news stories in class. Students will also write a term paper of 15-20 pages on a topic connected to the class themes; details on this including the proposal will be distributed early in the semester.

Each week’s readings can be accessed online via Chinook or from the class folder (see website). A few key questions and concepts to help focus your reading will be distributed in the previous week’s class.

The paper topic must be approved by the instructor by March 4. Individual 10 minute meetings with all students will be scheduled at the end of February. The paper must be an examination of a contemporary (post-1991) topic within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union (or external relations between a FSU state and abroad). A detailed outline will be collected at the time of the class presentation. The final paper is due by 5pm on Monday May 5, 2008. It should also be submitted to turnitin.com by that deadline.

Obviously, a seminar like this is successful only if the participants are present and have completed the weekly assignment. Therefore, the instructor will take attendance and note participation.

\textbf{Grade distribution:}

- Weekly attendance and participation: 10%
- Weekly written responses: 20%
- Figes book quiz: 10%
- Presentation (individual and rapporteur): 10%
- Paper: 50%
Course Syllabus
Week 1 (15 Jan) – Introduction, and Russian traditions
Readings: Figes, especially chapters 6 (Genghiz Khan) and 8 (Russia abroad)

Week 2 (22 Jan) - Historical legacies – The “Russian soul” and external orientations
Readings: Figes, especially chapters 5 (Russian soul) and 7(Soviet legacy)

Week 3 (27 Jan) - Post Communist elites – politics, cabals, de-democratization, etc
Quiz on Figes
2) Anders Aslund “Purge or coup” Moscow Times, Jan. 9, 2008 (website)

Week 4 (5 Feb) - The Russian economy in transition – winners and losers
Readings: 1) Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss “The myth of the authoritarian model: How Putin’s crackdown holds Russia back” Foreign Affairs, Jan-Feb, 2008 (website)
2) Anders Aslund “Russia’s economic transformation under Putin” Eurasian Geography and Economics, 2004, 45, No. 6, pp. 397-420

Week 5 (12 Feb) – Geopolitics of oil and resources in Eurasia-Caspian-Caucasus
Readings: 1) ICG report “Central Asia’s energy risks 2007” (website)
2) Lutz Kleveman “oil and the new ‘great game’” Nation Feb 16, 2004, pp.11-14 (website)
3) Economist “Not quite the pact that was: Central Asia” 23 August 2007 (website)
4) Economist “Caucasus: Hanging together” 8 February 2007 (website)

Week 6 (19 Feb) – Central Asia – transitions and challenges
2) ICG report on “Central Asia: Is radical Islam inevitable?” (website)
3) ICG report on “Uzbekistan – stagnation and uncertainty” (website)

Week 7 (26 Feb) – no class; meet individually with the instructor to discuss paper topic
Reading: background reading for individual paper topic

Week 8: (4 March) – Russia’s internal diversity – religions and nations
Week 9: (11 March) – Russia -Internal tensions – regional autonomies
Readings: 1) Edward Holland and John O’Loughlin “Nationalism enframed: Aspirations of territorial homelands amongst Dagestani populations” (website)


Week 10: (18 March) – North Caucasus – ethnic maelstrom or just a mosaic?


Week 11: (1 April) – Russia, Ukraine and the West – foreign affairs


3) Adrian Karatnycky “Ukraine’s Orange Revolution” Foreign Affairs March-April 2005 (website)

Week 12: (8 April) Patron Russia – quasi-states and future conflicts in Eurasia


Weeks 13-15: (15-29 April) Individual student presentations in a mock academic setting