

GGS 333/GGS 533
Issues in World Regional Geography: Understanding Central Asia
Fall Semester 2025, Online, CREDIT HOURS: 3

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Course Description:

In 1991, the Soviet Union imploded, and in its wake fifteen new states emerged. The region known as Central Asia, which consists of five of these states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, remains relatively obscure for many in the West, despite its historical significance, cultural diversity, and contemporary geopolitical importance. The purpose of this course is to introduce students to different facets of Central Asia, past and present.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will, upon completion of this course, be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate comprehension of academic literature on the history, geography, and culture of Central Asia as well as familiarity with contemporary debates about the region in areas like borders and boundaries, migration, identity, conflict, and human rights;
- 2) Analyze the region in a sophisticated way;
- 3) Access and appropriately invoke scholarly research bearing on issues and topics pertaining to Central Asia;
- 4) Apply critical judgment in assessing accounts and explanations regarding Central Asia, with an appreciation of a multiplicity of perspectives; and
- 5) Communicate in a clear, logical, critical, and informed way about complex topics.

Texts:

- **REQUIRED:** Golden (2011) *Central Asia in World History* (ISBN: 978-0195338195)
- **SUGGESTED:** Brunn, Toops & Gilbreath (2012) *The Routledge Historical Atlas of Central Eurasian Affairs* (ISBN: 978-0-415-49752-7)
- **Other texts will be available on Blackboard**

Evaluation:

- Reading journal 25%
- Response essays 25%
- Research paper: 30%
- Final reflections 20%

This course employs the following grade scale:

A: 95-100%, A- 90-94%, B+ 87-89%, B 84-86%,
B- 80-83%, C+ 77-79%, C 74-76%, C- 70-73%,
D+ 67-69%, D 64-66%, D- 60-63%, F 0-59%

Common Policy Addendum: <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/home/gmu-common-course-policies/>

Reading Journal

As the name suggests, the reading journal will ask you to reflect, in an informal and undirected way on the readings that you did that week. What was the main point of the assigned chapters or articles? What did you learn? What was most confusing? What questions did you have? Were there any points or quotes that really stood out for you? The point of the journal is for you to spend a little bit of time each week thinking about what you read and writing about it.

NOTE: The journal will be graded as a whole at the end of the semester. However, you are expected to keep up with it on a weekly basis.

Reading Response Essays

Over the course of the semester, you will be responsible for composing several reading response essays in which you will respond to a prompt that I provide. These prompts will ask you to reflect critically on the readings in a more structured way than in your reading journals. These essays will be 500-700 words.

NOTE: The final reflection essay will function in lieu of a final exam and will ask you to reflect on readings from the whole semester.

Research Paper

The research paper will be 6-8 pages on a subject chosen by the student. However, your topic **must** be approved by the instructor. Start thinking about which topic you are interested in as soon as possible, since you will ideally be working on this paper (reading, researching, taking notes, etc.) throughout the entire class. **YOU WILL NEED TO TURN IN A ONE PAGE PAPER PROPOSAL FOR REVIEW BY THE END OF WEEK 6.**

A NOTE ON SOURCES: An important part of your academic training is learning how to evaluate sources and cite them properly. Therefore, your paper must include a bibliography of at least **8 peer-reviewed or academic sources**, which should be used appropriately (i.e. I'm not going to be impressed if you give me a citation for "Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan"). Please do not use random internet sources or cite Wikipedia – if you have a question about what constitutes a "random internet source," just ask me. Students should use author-date citations with full bibliographical information in the bibliography.

Your paper must include a thesis, or argument. That is to say that you must present some kind of a claim and support it with evidence. Your paper should answer the question: "so what?" A simple

recounting of the history of Kyrgyzstan (“...and then this happened, and then that happened, and then...”) or whatever, is not acceptable. Instead, you need to have an argument (“The Mongol invasion of Transoxania was a historical watershed moment because...”) that you will prove using evidence and citations.

Finally, this is a geography class and your topic must have some sort of geographical or spatial component (defined broadly). That is to say, a paper that, for example, simply traces the history of post-Soviet Turkmenistan (or whatever) will not be acceptable. If you have any questions about what this entails, please ask your instructor.

General Class Policies

1. Cheating, plagiarism or any form of academic dishonesty are strictly prohibited, and will be handled in accordance with university policy.
2. Professional courtesy, mutual respect and civil dialogue in discussions is expected at all times. Respect and tolerance are the central principles of this course. Class discussions are opportunities for engaging in rich conversation pertinent to the course, and not for “rants,” derogatory comments of any nature, jokes, personal attacks, or any content prohibited by university policies. Students who engage in this type of behavior will be warned, and subsequent violations will likely be met with a request to withdraw from class or a failing grade.
3. Any kind of disruptive in-class behavior (defined by the instructor) will be detrimental to your course grade.
4. Alterations to the syllabus may be made by the instructor as deemed necessary.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty of any kind will **NOT** be tolerated and will result in an automatic **F** on the assignment without the opportunity to re-do or re-write the assignment for replacement credit. Particularly egregious cases will be met with a failing grade for the entire class and referral to George Mason University’s academic integrity proceedings. Information about academic integrity can be found on here:

<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>

Academic dishonesty includes:

- **Collusion**, defined as the unauthorized collaboration with any other person in preparing work offered for individual credit.
- **Fabrication**, defined as intentionally falsifying or inventing any information or citation on any academic exercise.
- **Cheating**, defined as intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise.
- **Plagiarism**, defined as the appropriation of any other person’s work and the unacknowledged incorporation of that work in one’s own work offered for credit.

Plagiarism is a violation of the code of academic integrity and will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes copying material (any more than 5 consecutive words) from outside texts, excessive quotations (even if cited), or presenting outside information as if it were your own by not crediting authors through citations. **It can be deliberate or unintended, but in either case it constitutes cheating.** “I didn’t know!” isn’t an excuse and won’t be accepted.

Put simply: don’t try to pass off someone else’s work as your own. I always catch at least one or two people per semester, and those people do get failing grades. Don’t be that person.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Plagiarism also includes turning in a paper written for another class without prior approval. All work done for this class **must** be original work done for this course. So, just to make sure that there is no confusion here... ***PLAGIARISM. OF. ANY. KIND. IS. CHEATING***

AI Policy

It’s really simple:

THE USE OF AI TOOLS TO WRITE PAPERS, DISCUSSION BOARD POSTS, OR ANY OTHER ASSIGNMENT IS PROHIBITED.

All the work you do in this class must be your own, not the product of an AI chat bot. If I suspect a student has used AI tools to write an assignment, they will be asked to meet on Zoom to discuss that assignment with me in person and provide answers to questions that will test their knowledge of the reading or of the subject of their paper.

If I am unsatisfied with their oral response, or if they miss the Zoom call, that assignment will be given an F and I will refer the student for academic dishonesty.

Communication

- Provide a clear subject line.
- Please indicate which class you’re in: I teach many classes at several universities, so please make it clear which one you’re in
- Always include your first and last name in the email message.

I will usually respond to messages within a day. You should make a habit of checking your emails on a regular basis as well.

GMU’s “Common Policies Addendum,” which covers other policies that apply to every course at the University, can be found here: <https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/home/gmu-common-course-policies/>

Students with Disabilities:

The Office of Disability Services coordinates accommodations and services for all GMU students who are eligible. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted the ODS, please do so as soon as possible. Information about their services can be found at <https://ds.gmu.edu/> Please contact your instructor privately in regard to your needs in this course.

Graduate Students (GGS 533):

Graduate students signing up for GGS 533 will participate in the class in most ways as other students, but will be expected to conduct a longer, more sophisticated research paper, ideally connected to their field of expertise or thesis/dissertation topic. Graduate students will be expected to write a 10-12 page paper. Grading criteria will also be more rigorous for GGS 533 students.

Graduate students will also have an additional assignment: All GGS 533 students will choose/read a **complete novel or academic book** (no edited volumes, please) and write a (4-6 page) review essay that critically analyzes that book. **This is not intended to be a summary of the book, but rather an academic book review. If you don't know the difference, ask the professor.**

GGS 533 students will be expected to discuss these additional/longer projects with the professor.

DATE	TOPIC	READING	ASSIGNMENT
Week 1 (Aug. 25)	Where is Central Asia? What is Central Asia? Who are Central Asians?	Golden - Introduction <i>Artman & Diener – Boundaries, Borders & Identities</i> <i>Levi – Turks & Tajiks</i>	
Week 2 (Sep 1)	Nomads	Golden Ch. 1-3 <i>Edgar – Everyday Life among the Turkmen</i> <i>Nomads</i>	
Week 3 (Sep 8)	Islam in Pre-Russian Central Asia	Golden Ch. 4-5 <i>DeWeese – Central Asia</i>	
Week 4 (Sep 15)	Mongols & Chinggisids	Golden Ch. 6-7 <i>Starr – Tamerlane and His Successors</i>	<u>Response Essay 1 Due Sep 21</u>
Week 5 (Sep 22)	Tsarist Central Asia	Golden Ch. 8-9 <i>Khalid – Empire and the Challenge of Modernity</i> <i>Abdullaev, Kotamov & Kenensariyev – Colonial Rule & Indigenous Responses</i>	
Week 6 (Sep 29)	Soviet Central Asia	<i>Cameron – Kazakhstan & the Politics of Hunger</i> <i>Khalid – Development, Soviet Style & Soviet in Form, National in Content?</i>	<u>PAPER PROPOSAL DUE Oct 5</u>
Week 7 (Oct 6)	Post-Soviet Directions	<i>Artman – The Soviet Legacy</i> <i>Lillis – Stories from the Steppe</i> <i>Sharipova & Burkhanov – Nation-Building in Central Asia</i>	
Week 8 (Oct 13)	Geopolitics and the "Post-Soviet"	<i>Diener & Artman – US Soft Power in Central Asia</i> <i>Laruelle – Russia and Central Asia</i> <i>Reeves – Travels in the Margins of the State</i> <i>Marat & Kassymbekova – Time to Question Russia's Imperial Innocence</i>	
Week 9 (Oct 20)	Environment	<i>Artman – Aral Sea</i> <i>Bischel, Mukhabbatov, and Sherfedinov – Land, Water, Ecology</i> <i>Kassenova – Atomic Steppe</i>	<u>Response Essay 2 Due Oct 26</u>

Week 10 (Oct 27)	Religion	<i>Artman – My Poor People, Where Are We Going?</i> <i>McBrien – Mukadas's Struggle</i> <i>Montgomery – Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka</i>	
Week 11 (Nov 3)	Music & art	<i>Köçüm kulkizi - The Kyrgyz Epic Manas</i> <i>Rouland – Music across the Kazakh Steppe</i> <i>Tsay – Contemporary Art in Central Asia</i> <i>Music selections on Canvas</i>	<u>Graduate student book review due Nov 9</u>
Week 12 (Nov 10)	Family life	<i>Harris – Muslim Youth</i> <i>Abazov – Gender, Courtship, Marriage</i>	
Week 13 (Nov 17)	Cuisine	<i>Eden – Red Sands (excerpts)</i> <i>Zanca – Fat and All That</i>	<u>Final paper and reading response #3 due Nov. 23</u>
Week 14 (Nov 24)		THANKSGIVING BREAK NO CLASS	
Week 15 (Dec 1)	Daily life	<i>Tranum – Life at the Edge of Empire (excerpts)</i> <i>Abazov – Festivals, Fun & Leisure</i> <i>Keller – Going to School in Uzbekistan</i>	
Week 16 (Dec 8)		FINAL REFLECTIONS	<u>Final Reflections Dec 12</u>