

**GGG 333-001/GGS 533-002 Geography of Eastern Europe (and Russia)
(Issues in Regional Geography)
Fall Semester 2019, W (13:30-16:10), Exploratory Hall 2312, CREDIT HOURS: 3
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'The truth is that Eastern Europe belongs less to the geography recorded in road atlases than to psychogeography. It isn't really a place, but a state of mind.'
-- Jacob Mikanowski

'Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?'
-- Poet Mary Oliver

I. Course Description:

This course will provide a regional study of Eastern Europe and European Russia in terms of the areal distribution, spatial movement, and change of physical features, population patterns, economic activities, agriculture and urbanization, planning and politics, migration, religion, landscape, and other issues. This course will stress an analysis of the forces stimulating change within regional patterns.

II. A. Objectives of the Course:

The course will examine social, cultural, and physical geographic processes and phenomena as they relate to Eastern Europe. Students will be expected to understand the fundamental physical, cultural, political, and economic geography of Eastern Europe, and will learn to evaluate the essential cultural and political differences between various regions in Eastern Europe and European Russia.

Secondarily, as with all my courses, this course will hopefully whet the students' appetite for travel, adventure, and learning, as an understanding of geographic principles can make many experiences of the world more vivid and valuable (see Mary Oliver quote above).

B. But Eastern Europe? Why Eastern Europe?

Good question. And one I will ask students on the first day of class. As this course has not been taught before, I will survey student interests in class, and we will tailor the class to meet student needs and wants (in addition to covering what I feel are "necessary" topics).

Today, almost 30 years after the Cold War and the very real *physical* separation of Western and Eastern Europe, some believe the term "Eastern Europe" is no longer as relevant. Indeed, Jacob Mikanowski recently wrote, 'The truth is that Eastern Europe belongs less to the geography recorded in road atlases than to psychogeography. It isn't really a place, but a state of mind.' This class will look at this question throughout the term, to try to decide – just what *is* "Eastern Europe" today.

As for the instructor, I am an American but have visited or lived in every Eastern European country (including unusual places such as Republika Srpska and Transnistria). I have taught at three universities in Lithuania and Ukraine (in 2018). I met my wife in Romania and we and our baby continue to spend at least a month every summer in her Soviet-era apartment in Sibiu (Hermannstadt), Romania – in Transylvania (yes, "Vampire country").

Eastern Europe is a fascinating place which I have been visiting for 20+ years, and I have witnessed a wide range of wonderful – and terrible – “Eastern Europes,” from raves in abandoned buildings in East Berlin to the sometimes bizarre corruption of many universities in Ukraine today, where students *buy* their grades and professors bring price lists to class (\$100 for a B+, \$125 for an A-, etc.). For the past two years, the instructor and his family have been living in Luxembourg (Western Europe).

“Eastern Geography” is still truly different and worthy of study.

III. Topics:

Topics will include the comprehensive range of traditional regional geography topics discussed above, but we will also include in-depth study of unorthodox topics such as Trafficking (people, not drugs) and the “New Tourism Geography” (Low-fare airlines bringing Western Europeans to beautiful historic cities such as Krakow, Tallinn, and Lviv – for cheap beer [\$1], fun, and football...).

Russia is considered by many to *not* be part of “Eastern Europe,” but today’s resurgent Russia – with Vladimir Putin’s war in Crimea (the instructor spent a month in Crimea, just before the war) and powerful action in Syria and elsewhere – demands consideration, if the class approves. We will decide whether or not to include “European Russia” during the first week of class, as we look at definitions of what exactly *is* “Europe.”

IV. Teaching Methods:

Class participation is required of all students. There will be an emphasis on discussion, demonstration, and question/answer.

I tend to teach with a lecture/discussion method – asking questions, but with highly illustrated PowerPoints to enable me to show the places I am teaching about, using mostly my own photos and using my own examples. We will have in-class discussions and projects as well. Student questions and interests drive the class to some extent (and I love student questions!), but I do believe in rigorously covering all of what I feel are the most important topics. I “tell stories” but keep to my plan – classes will be serious, not extended “bull sessions...”.

For this class, I will teach with the aid of movies and fiction/literature, as Eastern Europe has a long, deep tradition of novelists and filmmakers – and this is a great way to learn (through movies and stories) about what is truly a very *different* culture.

V. Unlimited Extra Credit for Movies and Fiction:

Students will be able to choose an unlimited number of movies and novels/stories that relate to Eastern Europe, which (after being approved by the professor) they will then read/watch and write about for extra credit. I tried this when teaching *Geography of Western Europe*, and it worked. If a student is interested enough to read and write a deep analysis of 10 Eastern European movies... believe me, that will provide an unforgettable insight into the region. Win/Win.

VI. Attendance Policy:

Regular attendance and active participation in class are essential for successful completion of this course, and will be reflected in the individual class participation portion of the

course grade. *Students are allowed one (1) unexcused absence.* Each unexcused absence after the one permitted will reduce the participation grade by two points per unexcused absence (remember, there are only 14-15 class sessions). Late arrivals to class will be penalized after the second late arrival. More than four (4) unexcused absences will lead to a Withdrawal/Failure (WF) in the course. Personal situations and concerns may be addressed to me personally on a person-by-person basis.

VII. Required Books:

There will likely be no required textbook (because one does not exist), but several books – fiction and non-fiction – will be assigned and will be required reading during class. Required books will all involve required writing and analysis assignments.

The specific books we will choose will be decided on in the first week or two of class, during in-class discussions.

VIII. Supplementary Readings:

Supplementary readings will be handed out in class, or will be available online – I expect supplementary reading to be required during most weeks.

I expect to make frequent use of current/contemporary articles from *The Economist*, perhaps the English-speaking world's top news magazine with a very geographical focus, co-published in the UK and the US. I will use relevant, current examples as much as possible.

Additional reading materials for your projects, such as peer-reviewed articles, will also supplement the text and assigned readings.

Some peer-reviewed geographical journals to consult:

- *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*
- *The Professional Geographer*
- *Geographical Review*
- *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*
- *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*

A good atlas is invaluable as a supplement to any geography course, and you should have easy access to an atlas whenever you are reading, studying, or writing for this course. A physical "book" atlas often provides more information (including many varieties of thematic maps) than relying solely on electronic maps. You might be surprised. Check it out.

IX. Graduate Students (GGS 533-02):

Graduate students signing up for GGS 533-02 will participate in the class in most ways as other students, but will be expected to **also** conduct a longer, more sophisticated Presentation/Research Project in their field of expertise (their choice of topic). This Research Project will be worth 25% of their total grade, with Exams to be worth 10% less and Short Projects to be worth 15% less than listed below.

X. Course Grading/Evaluation:

CLASS PARTICIPATION	10%
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SHORT PROJECTS + MOVIE/BOOK REVIEWS	55%
EXAMS (TOP 2 OF 3) + MAP QUIZZES	35%
BONUS QUIZZES	VARIES

Grading Scale:

100–90%	A, A-
89 – 80%	B+, B, B-
79 – 70%	C+, C, C-
69 – 60%	D+, D, D-
59 – 0%	F

Class Participation (10%):

Students can learn as much from each other as they do from the instructor, which means that each student also helps others learn. When you don't understand something, by asking about it in class you may help someone else understand – there are probably others who have not asked. However, your class participation grade is not just a measure of how many words you say, but also of your preparation, application of concepts, and willingness to ask clarifying questions. It is, of course, also a way for me to reward those who don't play on their phones in class....

Short Projects + Movie/Book Reviews + Map Quizzes (55%):

Short projects to be completed at home will make up an important part of the student's grade. These might range from assigned article summaries to reviews of current events articles, and will also include more in-depth reviews of assigned books, movies, and novels/stories. These will be assigned throughout the semester, to follow student interests and course development.

Exams (Top 2 of 3) (35%):

There will be three (3) short exams, including two during the semester and one during finals week. Only the top two (2) grades will be counted toward the student's overall grade, worth 17.5% each. There will be no make-up exams. If a student is satisfied with their first two exam scores, they need not take the final. If you miss an exam, you had best show up for the final....

Each exam will cover concepts, principles, and places from the preceding term-section of classes. Exams will consist of multiple-choice, true-false, and short answer questions, as well as short essays. Although the final exam will not directly address topics from earlier term-sections (it will not be "comprehensive"), in essay questions students are expected to show the sum of knowledge and understanding they have learned throughout the year.

Creative Research Project or In-Class Presentation (Graduate Students only):

This will be a creative, student-chosen research project, taking the form of a medium-length written paper, map project, or in-class presentation. The subject will be up to the student (after consultation with the instructor). Past projects from my undergraduate students have looked at amusement parks, electronic dance music, and coal mines, as well as more "traditional" topics such as the environment.... Independent "geographic" thought, supported by data and/or analysis brought in from *beyond* class material, will be required.

Meetings with the professor to discuss topics and monitor development of research and writing will be required.

XI. Academic Integrity:

Cheating and Plagiarism:

From the Council of Writing Program administrators (WPA): In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source. This definition applies to texts published in print or on-line, to manuscripts, and to the work of other student writers.

Plagiarism can be unintentional, but often is not. Either way, don't do it, as today there is a veritable cottage industry of resources for *discovering* plagiarism – it will likely be discovered, and I will likely have no choice but to take very serious measures.