

GGG 326/GGS 526 Geography of Eastern Europe & Russia
Fall Semester 2020, CREDIT HOURS: 3
David Rockwell, Ph.D.
drockwe@gmu.edu (or drockwell@tealgroup.com)
Office Hours: Exploratory Hall 2204 (Time TBD)

'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. Eastern Europe? Why Eastern Europe?

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.

The instructor is an American, but I 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 (pre- and post-European Union) and Ukraine (in 2018), as well as guest lecturing in Germany. 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 complex in Sibiu

(Hermannstadt), Romania – in Transylvania (yes, “Vampire country”). We have most recently been living in Luxembourg (Western Europe).

I have been visiting Eastern Europe and Russia for 20+ years, and 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.).

Eastern Europe and Russia have recently become geopolitical flashpoints again, with a resurgent Russia engaging in powerful and aggressive actions from Syria to the Baltics, with a continuing (but little known) war still being fought today in eastern Ukraine, and with the American President closely (and perhaps scandalously) involved with Ukraine.

Today, “Eastern Europe” is perhaps more relevant than ever, and 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 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...).

Finally, we will address the geopolitics of Russia and NATO today. The instructor has been working in the aerospace and defence forecasting industry for more than 20 years (based in Fairfax), in addition to teaching. This is not *per se* a geopolitics course, but students will be free to choose geopolitical topics for their creative research paper (see below), and the instructor’s professional background will assist with these projects.

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 initially 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 two (2) unexcused absences.* Each unexcused absence after the two permitted will reduce the participation grade by one point per unexcused absence. Late arrivals to class will be penalized after the second late arrival. More than eight (8) 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 and Readings:

There will be no required textbook (because one does not exist in English), but several book chapters and numerous readings will be assigned (often handed out in hard copy) by the professor – and will be on exams. One (inexpensive) non-fiction book will need to be purchased (available in the bookstore): *In Europe's Shadow: Two Cold Wars and a Thirty-Year Journey Through Romania and Beyond*; Robert D. Kaplan (2016).

The professor will also assign at least two chapters from fiction novels and/or short stories. At least two movies will be required watching, with written analysis assignments. Required readings will be on exams and some will also require written analysis assignments.

VIII. Supplementary Readings:

Additional supplementary readings may be handed out in class.

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 from 2020 and 2019 as much as possible.

IX. Graduate Students (GGS 526):

Graduate students signing up for GGS 526 will participate in the class in most ways as other students, but will be expected to conduct a *longer, more sophisticated Research Project in their field of expertise* (their choice of topic) – 14-18 pages/3,500-4,500 words for a written research paper. *This longer Research Project will be worth 30% of their total grade, with Exams to be worth 10% less than listed below.*

Graduate students will also have an *additional, more in-depth fiction (or movie) assignment* requirement. In addition to the two+ chapters the professor will assign to all students, GGS 526 students will choose/read a complete novel and write a (4-6 page) review essay *OR* watch three (3) complete movies and write a (4-6 page) comparative essay.

GGS 526 students will be expected to discuss these additional/longer projects with the professor during office hours or after class.

Finally, grading for most projects and assignments (other than Exams) will also be more rigorous for GGS 526 students.

X. Course Grading/Evaluation:

CLASS PARTICIPATION	10%
SHORT PROJECTS + MOVIE/BOOK REVIEWS	35%
EXAMS (TOP 2 OF 3) (and QUIZZES)	35% (25% for GGS 526)
RESEARCH PROJECT	20% (30% for GGS 526)
BONUS QUIZZES	VARIES

Grading Scale:

100-90%	A+, 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 (35%):

Short projects to be completed at home (or in-class) will make up an important part of the student's grade. These might range from assigned article analyses to in-class group projects, 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%) (In-class QUIZZES also included in 35%):

There will be three (3) short exams. Only the top two (2) grades will be counted toward the student's overall grade. 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 (20%):

This will be a creative, student-chosen research project, taking the form of a short (6-8 pages/1,500-2,000 words) written paper or map project. 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 mining, as well as more “traditional” topics such as the environment and geopolitics....

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.