

RUSS 3222

Culture under Pressure: The Russian Twentieth Century in Literature and Film Fall 2026

Russia's dramatic twentieth century, its historical upheavals and the totalitarian pressures it placed on artistic creation, both stifled and catalyzed creativity. Adversity, obstacles and loss formed a backdrop and impetus for powerful, evocative and original works of art. In this course, we will consider each of the major periods in the history of Russia and the Soviet Union in the 20th century, and, in these contexts, examine representative works of prose, drama or film.

Course objectives/learning outcomes:

- Students will learn the skill of close “reading,” critically analyzing written and film texts both orally and in writing;
- Students will develop an understanding of some of the key issues (historical, social, political and cultural) and conceptual constructs around which Russian and Soviet identity was constructed in the 20th century.
- Students will reconstruct authorial point of view, asking what questions the books and films pose, how they pose them, on what terms they ask to be analyzed, and what frameworks they present for analysis.
- Students will analyze how their own cultural template influences observation and interpretation of behaviors and issues in the target culture in a variety of contexts.
- Students will discuss how ethical problems are implicated in narrative works; and
- Students will practice and refine the skills of extended thinking and writing about art.

Required Books:

Chekhov, Anton. *The Essential Plays* (Penguin Random House; ISBN: 9780375761348).

Babel, Isaac. *Red Cavalry* (Norton; ISBN: 9780393324235).

Bulgakov, Mikhail. *Master and Margarita* (ISBN: 9781419756504). You must use the Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O’Connor translation. It is available at the book store and on Amazon in [paperback](#) and [Kindle](#) editions. There are also other editions available used (like the Vintage edition), but if so you need to make sure it is the correct translation.

Solzhenytsin, Alexander. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (FSG Classics; ISBN: 9781466839410)

Giannetti, Louis. *Understanding Movies* (any edition). Chapters assigned from Giannetti will be *required* reading for those who have not previously taken a film course, but *recommended* reading for those who have prior film background.

Film viewing:

There are several options to view the films. Each film will be shown on a large screen on campus prior to our discussion (tentatively: at 3:30 pm the day prior to the first day of discussion). Copies will also be available in the library on DVD for those who cannot

make it to the screening. (The library can check out to you a USB DVD-player.) I will also distribute information on where the films can be viewed online. All but one are currently available to stream free from reputable sites.

Requirements:

1. Active participation in discussions, facilitated by careful reading/viewing of the works to be discussed. **Three unexcused absences, and every two unexcused absences thereafter, will lower your assigned grade for participation by one letter grade (i.e., your third, fifth, etc. unexcused absence).** Participation grade will be assigned as follows: A – engaged, thoughtful participation which regularly demonstrates thorough engagement with the course materials prior to class; B – some participation, demonstrating acquaintance with course materials prior to class, but participation is irregular; C – present, but little or no active participation. Students will be informed of their current participation grade before the withdrawal deadline and at the end of the semester.
2. Discussion posts: two 1-2 paragraph posts written over the course of the semester (one during the first third; the second during the second third). You can choose which specific works to post on. The posts can deal with any aspect of the work being discussed. Analysis can be thematic or formal (or engage how form and meaning are interrelated), but should be based on details and supported with examples. The posts need not be confined to close analysis of one passage or shot, although this can be a particularly fruitful type of training for the more complex arguments of the longer papers. They also do not necessarily have to be answers. Well-posed questions – supported by specific observations – about how text or film works or what the text or film means are also welcome. Posts should be uploaded to the Canvas forum area by 7:00 am of a class day on which we will be discussing the work in question. Submitted posts are graded check-plus, check, or check-minus, corresponding to A/B/C. Posts submitted after the last discussion of a given work, if accepted, will be lowered one grade.
3. Two papers (5-6 pages each). Each paper will be accompanied by a 10-15 follow-up discussion on Zoom. Paper grade will not be finalized until after the Zoom discussion. The papers are first and foremost interpretive essays, to be based on careful analysis and close viewing of the films. Research is not required, but it is expected that students will be aware of the cultural context as discussed in class. We will discuss appropriate topics closer to that time.
4. Final Exam.

Grading:

Participation	20%
Discussion posts	15%
Paper 1	22.5%
Paper 2	22.5%
Final Exam	20%

Plagiarism/Artificial Intelligence

I take plagiarism very seriously. If you do choose to do outside research for the papers, it must be appropriately documented and rely on vetted sources, like books and published articles. Note that Wikipedia articles are not a vetted source, nor is their content common knowledge. A definition of plagiarism can be found at:

<https://www.plagiarism.org/article/what-is-plagiarism>.

Artificial Intelligence must not be used at any stage of preparation of class assignments (discussion posts or papers).

Institute activity absences

Students who are absent because of participation in approved Institute activities (such as field trips, professional conferences, and athletic events) will be permitted to make up the work missed during their absences. Approval of such activities will be granted by the Student Academic and Financial Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate, and statements of the approved absence may be obtained from the Office of the Registrar.

<http://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/4/>

Course Expectations & Guidelines

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. For information on Georgia Tech's Academic Honor Code, please visit

<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/policies/honor-code/> or

<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/18/>.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarizing on an assignment, project or exam will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services at (404)894-2563 or <http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>, as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail the course instructors as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. See <http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/> for an articulation of some basic expectation that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

The Center for Academic Success (success.gatech.edu) offers a variety of academic support services to help students succeed academically at Georgia Tech (e.g. tutoring, peer-led study groups, study skills, etc.). **The Communication Center** (communicationcenter.gatech.edu) provides support for students with respect to developing competency and excellence in written, oral, visual, electronic, and nonverbal communication.

OMED: Educational Services (omed.gatech.edu/) is the unit charged by Georgia Tech with the retention, development, and performance of the complete student learner who is traditionally underrepresented: African American, Hispanic, and Native American. OMED's programming and academic support services are aimed at equipping all students with strategies to navigate the Georgia Tech environment.

Support for Students in Distress

Counseling Center: counseling.gatech.edu/ 404-894-2575

Dean of Students (Student Life): studentlife.gatech.edu/ 404-385-8772

Student financial assistance: star.studentlife.gatech.edu/

GT Police: police.gatech.edu/ 404-894-2500

Stamps Health Services: health.gatech.edu/ 404-894-1420

Core Impacts

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Arts, Humanities & Ethics area. Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas.

This course directs students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course will help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence