Course Description

The surprising collapse of communism in 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe ushered in a triple transition: political, economic, and social. The purpose of this course is to examine the establishment, crisis, and collapse of the communist regimes and to analyze the politics and outcomes of the ensuing transition period.

The first part of the course provides the historical context for the subsequent analysis of country trajectories during the transition period. It discusses the establishment of communist regimes in the region, the political underpinnings and the legacies of conflict between the state and society during the communist period, as well as examines the causes and theories of the communist system’s collapse in 1989.

The course next turns to the politics of triple transition, first analyzing the establishment and institutionalization of the nascent democratic regimes. It then considers the most significant challenges to economic reform, the debates it generated, as well as its social effects. The course subsequently investigates the social aspect of transition, as it examines issues such as development of civil society and the different manifestations of ethnic conflict. While it considers transition largely from the domestic perspective, the course explicitly studies the relationship between domestic-level variables and external effects, such as those emanating from the European Union. Lastly, the course explores the causes of the diversity of outcomes across the political landscape of postcommunist countries.

Course Requirements

This seminar is a capstone course for political science majors and it builds upon the analytical skills acquired throughout years of coursework. The class is centered upon two components: individual student research and analysis of course material. Regarding research, the aim of the class is to help produce a piece of original research on a topic of student’s choice. As an intensive seminar, the course requires creative thinking and the requirements for this class are geared towards making the most out of individual and collective input.
Grade components:

1. Senior thesis paper (total: 60%):

Producing quality senior thesis is the central objective of the course and constitutes the most important component of the final grade - 60%. You are asked to start thinking about the thesis topic immediately and are strongly encouraged to meet with me to discuss your potential topic ideas during the first several weeks.

- **Senior thesis topic and annotated bibliography (15% of the final grade) – due on February 20th**

On February 20th, you are required to hand in a page outlining your central research question, its importance, hypotheses, and ways in which you will approach investigating it. To help you formulate a research question and relevant hypotheses, you will also be asked to produce an [annotated bibliography](http://library.richmond.edu/information/csguides/PLSC400Transition.htm) of at least twenty scholarly sources. Please use the course website, [http://library.richmond.edu/information/csguides/PLSC400Transition.htm](http://library.richmond.edu/information/csguides/PLSC400Transition.htm), as a resource when searching for research materials and contact the social science library liaison, Ms. Laura Horne (lhorn@richmond.edu), for assistance.

- **First draft (15%) and presentation of your research (10%)**

During the two weeks of March 26th and April 2nd, you will give a 10-15 minute presentation of the first draft of your paper. The class will spend the remaining 7-10 minutes on constructive criticism of the paper (see the “written critique” part below). The research presentation will be worth 10% of the grade while the first draft will be worth additional 15%. Should the final paper grade be higher than that of the draft, your final grade for the paper will supersede that of the draft. You are encouraged to show your drafts and get my feedback prior to in-class presentations.

- **Final paper (20%), due on April 24th at 5 p.m.**

The final senior thesis (25-35 pages) will be due on April 24th at 5 p.m. You are strongly encouraged to send me your post-presentation penultimate draft for feedback, as well as to use the services of the Writing Center when preparing the final draft.

2. Written critiques and suggestions for drafts: 10%

One of the most effective ways of learning is through the close reading and critique of the work of others. Your own work also benefits tremendously from receiving feedback at its formative stage. In order to get feedback from a variety of perspectives on your research papers, I ask you to circulate your drafts among classmates on Monday, by noon at the latest, prior to the date of your presentation. The entire class will be required to read the drafts and to engage in constructive criticism. Each student will be asked to raise at least one positive point regarding the paper, make at least one critical point and
corresponding suggestions as to how to improve the paper. These short critiques of each paper will be due in class on the day of the presentations. The length of each critique does not matter – feel free to use as little or as much space as you need to make your point.

3. Reading responses and questions (five one-page responses over the course of the semester): 20%

As part of honing your analytical and critical thinking skills, you will be asked to submit one-page reading responses for five weeks of your choice when there are readings assigned. You are asked to respond critically to the readings, i.e., engage the debates they present, try to extend the presented analysis, find a point of disagreement with the readings, or define a problem/issue raised therein and comment on it. The way you approach this assignment is up to you, as long as you can demonstrate analysis of the subject matter at hand. You can use the guiding questions for the week as a springboard into your analysis. For the remaining five weeks when you will not be writing the responses, you are asked to submit one thoughtful question you have about the readings. The responses and questions are due by 2 p.m. before class and may be used as part of in-class discussion.

4. Participation in class discussion: 10%

It is imperative that you come to class prepared, having completed the assigned readings and ready to discuss them. You should use the questions posed for each week as a guide through the readings. Since the class is a seminar, the success of the collective learning experience rests upon active student engagement in the discussion. Throughout the semester, you will be asked to participate in group activities and to take part in structured, readings-based debates. While class participation accounts for 10% of the final grade, it will be the decisive factor in case of borderline grades. If you have more than one unexcused absence, you will fail the class participation portion of the grade.

The grading scale will be as follows:

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<td>C-</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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Late Work: All assignments are due in class on the specified date. Late assignments will result in a letter grade deduction per each day of delay, unless there are extraordinary circumstances discussed with me prior to the original due date.

Honor Code: All work must adhere to the University’s Student Honor Code and pledge.

Computer Use: Computers are to be used solely for the purpose of taking notes and actively participating in class discussion. I reserve the right to ask you not to use your
computers if I have reasons to suspect that you are using them to surf the web, check email or engage in other non-course-related activities.

**Getting Help:** If you are experiencing difficulties with the material, please contact me! You are also encouraged to use the resources of the Writing Center, Speech Center, and the Academic Skills Center (just remember to make appointments in advance!).

**Readings**


Unless noted otherwise, all readings are available on library e-reserve: [http://librarycat.richmond.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=rbSearch](http://librarycat.richmond.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=rbSearch).

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 (Jan. 16th): Introduction**

Introduction and overview of the course, explanation of course requirements
Discussion: How to write a good research paper? Read assigned articles and examine how they are structured.
Lecture: Imposition of the communist regimes in post-war Central and Eastern Europe and overview of the communist system

**Week 2 (Jan. 23rd): Post-Stalinist Thaw and Anti-Communist Rebellions**

*Questions:*
What were the various reasons for anti-communist rebellions in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia? How were the following uprisings different in their origins and consequences?

- 1953 East German uprising
- 1956 Polish (Poznań) uprising
- 1956 Hungarian Revolution
- 1968 Prague Spring
- 1970 Worker revolt in Poland (as opposed to the March 1968 events)
- 1980/1981 Solidarity Revolution in Poland

*Readings/assignments:*

Joseph Rothschild & Nancy M. Wingfield, “Revenge of the Repressed” (ch.5 in *Return to Diversity*)

Watch *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron* and prepare questions for class discussion.
Week 3 (Jan. 30th): Perestroika

Questions:
What, exactly, was Perestroika and how was it both similar and different from previous attempts to reform socialism? Why did it come about? What constraints did Mikhail Gorbachev work under? What were the political and economic consequences of Perestroika and was it successful?

Readings:

Week 4 (Feb. 6th): Fall of Communism

Questions:
What are the different hypotheses as to why communism fell in Central and Eastern Europe? Which one do you find most persuasive and why? How did the fall of communism differ across Central and Eastern Europe? What factors could these different processes be attributed to (here, pay attention to the interaction between domestic and external variables)?

Readings/assignments:

Students will be expected to pair up and be ready to discuss the fall of communism in at least one of the following countries: Poland, Hungary, GDR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, and the USSR.

Suggested country-specific readings (on library book reserve):
Week 5 (Feb. 13th): Transition in Politics: Reforming Political Institutions

Questions:
What institutional choices did the decision-makers and polities face at the outset of transition? What challenges did the transition countries need to overcome to (re)build democratic political institutions? What adverse legacies did they have to wrestle with? How have the effects of historical legacies on political institutions differed throughout the region? How did the communist successor parties adopt to the new political environment and how and why did their adaptation differ throughout the region?

Readings:


Week 6 (Feb. 20th): Transition in Economics: Politics of Economic Reform

Questions:
What challenges did the transition countries need to overcome in order to (re)build free market institutions? What specific legacies hindered that effort and how? What were the main theoretical approaches to economic reform in transition countries and how did they differ? Which approach prevailed? How did the reform choices differ throughout the region and why? How did the progress of economic reform differ throughout the region? What were the main determinants of economic reform choice? Who were the main winners and losers of economic reform?
Readings:

Gérard Roland, “Understanding Transition,” (ch.1 in Transition and Economics) and “Synthesizing Lessons from Transition” (ch.13)


***Senior thesis topic and literature review due***

Week 7 (Feb. 27th): Transition in Society

Questions:
What are the major explanations accounting for the noted weakness of civil society, including organized labor, in transition countries? Which of the communist legacies have been particularly detrimental to the development of a vibrant civil society? What has been the fate of workers in the former “workers’ states”: what specific challenges did organized labor face in the context of transition and why? How has it adjusted to the new economic and political context? What challenges has the family, as the basic social unit, faced under transition? How has transition impacted gender relations? What unique pressures and influences has the postcommunist state faced and how has postcommunist state-formation differed from earlier historical experience of state-building?

Readings:


**Week 8 (March 5th): Nationalism and Ethnicity: German Reunification, Dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Fate of the Gypsies**

*Questions:*
What was the historical, political, and economic context of German reunification? What were its foreseen and unforeseen consequences? Has German reunification been a success – why or why not? By contrast, why did Czechoslovakia break up? What were the political, economic, and social causes of the breakup? Was the breakup of Czechoslovakia inevitable? Why or why not? If not, then what were some other solutions that could have preserved the union? What implications did the “velvet divorce” have for the political and economic development of both countries? One of the ethnic groups most negatively impacted by transition has been the Romany (Gypsy) population. What accounts for the plight of the Roma and what explains their relative lack of political voice?

*Readings:*


Plus, one of the following (remaining readings are recommended):


***Spring Break***

**Week 9 (March 19th): War in the Former Yugoslavia**

*Questions:*
What are the different hypotheses explaining the breakout of the war in the former Yugoslavia? Which explanation do you find most persuasive and why? Why was the war a surprise for many? Was the break-up of Yugoslavia inevitable? Why or why not?
Why was the dissolution of Czechoslovakia peaceful while of Yugoslavia violent? Was the war inevitable? Why or why not? What role did the West play in the war?

Readings:


Watch film: Grbavica (on reserve)

Week 10 (March 26th):
Research Presentations (7)

Week 11 (April 2nd):
Research Presentations (7)

Week 12 (April 9th): Diversity of Outcomes across Postcommunist States I: Transition Success Stories

Questions:
What are the different explanations for the wide variety of transition outcomes? Why have some countries been able to overcome adverse legacies while others haven’t? How did the international actors help transition countries overcome their past? Under what circumstances was this external pressure successful? While usually lauded as a great source of reform, the EU has also been criticized for having negative impact on democratic political competition in candidate countries. Do you agree with this criticism? Why or why not?

Readings:


**Week 13 (April 16th): Diversity of Outcomes across Postcommunist States II: Transition Laggards**

**Questions:**
While last week’s readings focused on transition success stories, this week’s readings turn to the transition “laggards.” Focusing on the less successful cases and contrasting them with those from last week, why did, to cite McFaul, “some transition countries abandon communism for democracy, while others turned to authoritarian rule? Why are some states stuck in between?” What alternative explanations are there? Why have the recent waves of pro-democratic protests been less successful than their predecessors in 1989? What, specifically, accounts for the slippery slope to authoritarianism in Russia? Why has Belarus been able to remain the “last European dictatorship”? What alternative explanations can be posited?

**Readings:**


**Week 14: April 23rd**

Conclusion, Review, Legacies reassessed

**Final papers due: Thursday, April 24th at 5 p.m.**