This course is intended to introduce aspects of Russia today to a general student audience, with particular emphasis on contemporary Russia as a “multinational” country.

No background in the subject is required.

Among the many issues which the course will raise are: the complexities and contradictions of the multiple national identities characteristic of the country’s extraordinary ethnic mix; the attempt to recover the past in Russian culture today; the ways we see the Russians through our own media; the economic and political transformations of Russia, as reflected in culture and everyday life.

Particular attention will be paid this year to the Chechen conflict, its meaning for Russia, and its representation in Russian culture.

There are three informal lectures per week, and a discussion section. Assignments will include readings, film viewings, and regular surveys of English-language media for news about Russia today.

For more information, write to mlmakin@umich.edu.
This course is intended to introduce aspects of Russia today to a general student audience, with especial emphasis on contemporary Russia as a “multi-national” country. No background in the subject is required. Throughout the course various features of modern Russia will be examined through such diverse materials as the literature, cinema, and political history of recent years. Among the many issues which this course intends to raise are: the complexities and contradictions of Russia as a multi-ethnic country (or, as most Russian-speakers would put it, a country of many different “nationalities”); the attempt to recover the past in Russian culture today; the ways we look at the Russians through our own media; the economic and political transformations of Russia, as reflected in culture and everyday life. Particular attention will be paid to the Chechen conflict, its meaning for Russia, and its representation in Russian culture. There are three informal lectures per week, and a discussion section. The required reading consists of the following: readings available on the internet, through the course web site< and the following books: Stephen Kotkin, Armageddon Averted (Oxford University Press, 2001); Peter Aleskhkovsky, Skunk: A Life, tr. Tait, Glas New Russian Writing, no 15 (1997); Anna Politovskaya, A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya (Chicago, 2003);
Viktor Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens*, tr. Andrew Brumfield (Viking, 2002). Students are also required to watch, out of class, four feature films, which will be shown at announced times in the Video Viewing Room and will be available for individual viewing in the Language Resource Center (2nd Floor, MLB). There will, in addition, be a series of internet assignments, announced during the semester. Some of the materials presented in lectures (photographs, maps, other images), will be available on the web site for this course, and students should review them there after seeing them in class. Students are also expected to follow news of Russia in the American (and any other available) media, and discussion of the news will be an important part of section meetings. Evidence of general reading, viewing, and listening will be expected in written assignments, and all students will be expected to show knowledge of current events in Russia during section meetings. Those meetings will also discuss issues raised in lectures, and will examine the reading assignments.

Written assignments for the course are: two short papers and a weekly journal, which should combine notes on students' own coverage of the news from Russia with students’ commentary on that news. Students are expected to make at least two entries in their journals every week, and each entry should be at least 250 words in length. Sources should be cited, but *not reproduced*; entries should discuss the news item in question, the manner in which it has been reported by the source, and, where appropriate, its relevance to material studied or discussed in the course. Journals are to be submitted for grading twice in the semester as indicated. It is recommended that they be kept on disk, and submitted through the course web site. There will also be three in-class examinations of one hour each, as indicated in the syllabus below. Each one-hour examination is worth 10% of the final grade; each paper is worth 20% of the final grade; the journals in total are worth 10% of the final grade. Work in sections (participation in discussions, presentation) is worth 20% of the final grade. There is no final examination.
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES:

JANUARY

W 5 Introduction to class. Requirements, expectations, how to use media for assignments (please bring materials available at course website to class).

F 7 Introduction to Russia -- some history, and general knowledge (reading assignments course website; Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*).

Eastern Orthodox Christmas.

M 10 *Glasnost’, perestroika* – the shock of the new, the return of the old (Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*).

W 12 Cultural liberation in the 1980s: cinema, literature, art, the media. (Reading: Zazubrin, “The Chip”, course website).

F 14 *Armageddon Averted*, conc.

M 17 MLK DAY (no classes)

W 19 The ethnic complexion of the Soviet Union (reading, course website).

F 21 The Chechen Conflict, then and now – introduction (reading -- background materials and Dunlop, Chapters One and Two, course website).

M 24 Introduction to film *Prisoner of the Mountains* (viewing assignment, to be completed by 4 February; details – course website).

W 26 The Chechen conflict, cont. (reading, course website: Lieven, Chapters One and Two).

F 28 The Chechen conflict, cont. (reading, course website: Lieven, Chapters Nine, Ten, Eleven, conclusion.). JOURNALS DUE.

Sun 30 5-7 pm, group showing of *Prisoner of the Mountains*, VVR (2nd Floor, MLB)

M 31 The Chechen conflict, cont. (reading – Politovskaya, *Small Corner of Hell*).

FEBRUARY

W 2 The Chechen conflict, conc. (Politovskaya, *Small Corner of Hell*).

F 4 *Prisoner of the Mountains*, discussion.

M 7 Fiction relating to the Chechen conflict – Makanin “Prisoner from the Caucasus”, course website).
W 9 Introduction to film *Old Women* (viewing assignment, to be completed by 21 February; details – course web site)

   (FIRST PAPER DUE).

M 14 Women in Russia today, cont.
W 16 Women in Russia today, conc.

**Thurs 17 5-7 pm, group showing of Old Women, VVR (2nd Floor, MLB)**

F 18 First in-class Examination.

M 21 Discussion of film *Old Women*.


F 25 Ideas of Russian-ness (Aleshkovsky, *Skunk: A Life*).

M 28 Mid-winter Break (no classes).

**MARCH**

W 2 Mid-winter Break (no classes).

F 4 Mid-winter Break (no classes).

M 7 *Skunk*, cont.

T 8 International Women’s Day.

W 9 *Skunk*, conc.

F 11 Introduction to film *The Return* (viewing assignment, to be completed by 28 March; details – course web site).

M 14 The strange and yet representative case of Nikolai Klyuev (poem, chronology, photographs and text, Shentalinsky, “The Arrested Word”, course web site).

W 16 Memorialization (the case of Klyuev, and what it means). Illustrated lecture, materials for studying on course web site.cont.

F 18 Russia’s urban “others”, old and new. Jewish Russians. Gay Russians (readings – course web site)

M 21 cont.
W 23 conc.

**Thurs 24 5-7 pm, group showing of The Return, VVR (2nd Floor, MLB)**

**F 25 Second in-class Examination.**

M 28 Discussion of film, The Return

W 30 New versions of Russia. Introduction to Brother (viewing assignment to be completed by 19 April; details – course web site).

**APRIL**

F 1 New versions of Russia – Anthony Bourdain, “How to Drink Vodka” (from his book *A Cook’s Tour*, course web site).

M 4 Sport in the New Russia (readings – course web site).

W 6 Sport, conc.

F 8 New versions of Russia, (Viktor Pelevin, *Homo Zapiens*).

M 11 cont. (SECOND PAPER DUE).

W 13 cont. (JOURNALS DUE).

**Weds 13 5-7 pm, group showing of Brother, VVR (2nd Floor, MLB)**

F 15 Discussion of Brother.

M 18 Third in-class Examination.

Michael Makin
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OFFICE HOURS: M 12-1, W 3-4, F 10-11, or by appointment.