

History 3420G
The Soviet Experiment
Winter 2027

Instructor: **Oleksa Drachewych**

Email: **odrachew@uwo.ca**

Office: **Department of History, Lawson Hall 2233**

Office Hours: **TBA**

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

The Soviet Union continues to be a subject of history that draws many responses. To some, it represented a failed experiment, one that expanded oppression and violence under the claims of building a communist utopia; to others, it initially began as an attempt to build something different from capitalism and liberal democracy but lost its way. Key figures in Soviet history, from V.I. Lenin to Lev Trotsky to Joseph Stalin continue to influence those on the left today, and the ideas of the Soviet Union affected many throughout the world, inspiring people to fight for the utopia of the Bolshevik Revolution and influencing those in the decolonizing world to consider alternate methodologies of governance and economic development. Of course, the Soviet Union was also an empire while claiming not to be one and remains a key historical foil in the histories of many states. Its competition, first with Europe and then later the United States, defined international relations for much of the 20th century. Finally, with the Russo-Ukrainian War, the collapse of the Soviet Union continues to reverberate today in violent ways.

This class will survey the key events of the Soviet Union, from the perspective of both the centre and the periphery, to highlight the variety of experiences that occurred during this “experiment.”

Prerequisite(s): Registration in third year or above, any module.

Course Syllabus

This class will be considered an interactive lecture course, encouraging students to ask questions and bring up connections from the readings. There will be moments of extended discussion as well. This course also presumes a limited although not familiar knowledge of the Soviet Union and its history.

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to:

- Understand and analyze major events in the history of the Soviet Union, including understanding its key ideological positions, and its development from 1917 to 1991

This is a draft outline. 2026-27 version. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

- Effectively read, critique, summarize and understand secondary sources, of a variety of historiographical approaches and methodologies to develop an understanding of some of the key debates in Soviet history
- Analyze the history of Soviet Union through a variety of prisms: a revolutionary state; an oppressor state; an empire; an experiment; a superpower
- Evaluate the history of the Soviet Union from both the perspectives of the centre and the periphery
- Communicate clearly and effectively through class discussions and written assignments.
- Recognize that there were TWO major revolutions in 1917
- Using film and other sources, engage in guided primary source discussion while reviewing these items in context.

Methods of Evaluation

Participation: 15%

Book Review: 20%

Research Paper: 30%

Final Exam: 35%

For all assignments, further instructions will be included on OWL Brightspace.

Book Review: Students will complete a 750-1000 word book review on one of two assigned pieces of fiction. Students can choose to do a deeper reflection on Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog* (due January 27 before class) or Abadzis's *Laika* (due March 10 before class) and answer a guiding question which will also reflect the themes we will discuss in class. Students will be expected to identify the key themes of the book and to connect the book to other assigned readings and lecture material.

Because of the option to choose which book to review, requests for further accommodation will generally be denied.

Research Paper: Students will complete a 2500-3000 word research paper (this word count does not include citations) on a topic related to Soviet History. A list of potential topics will be provided on the Course Brightspace; students are welcome to choose a topic not on the list but should discuss their planned topic with the professor before starting. The research paper is required to use some primary source research, and refer to at least ten secondary sources, three of which must be books. The research paper will be due March 26.

Exam: A three-hour final exam covering the content of the course and consisting entirely of essay questions, with some choice, will take place during the April exam period. The date will be set by the registrar's office.

Participation: Each week, there will be opportunities for students to ask questions, reflect on course content, and consider the intersection of assigned readings with lecture content. These loose in-class discussions are one way to enhance one's participation mark and will reflect roughly a third of the participation mark. The remaining two thirds will come through responses to lecture and reading. Over the duration of the course, students will be required to submit four

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

reader responses of roughly 250 words, submitted to Brightspace, due by the start of the *following* week's class. In each, students will have to answer a guiding question, included on Brightspace. Weeks with relevant reader responses will be clearly delineated on Brightspace. Which four responses the student completes will be up to the student. As a result of this flexibility, any requests for accommodation through the Student Absence Portal will be declined.

All assignments should be submitted online via OWL Brightspace at 11:59:59 pm ET on its due date. The timestamp on OWL Brightspace will be considered final for any disputes regarding the punctuality of submissions. All written assignments will require citations (endnotes/footnotes and bibliography) in the most recent version of Chicago Style.

Make-up tests, midterms, and exams can only be approved by Academic Advising. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Absences and Late Assignments: For all late assignments, a late penalty of **2% per day** will be applied. Should you require accommodation due to medical reasons or otherwise, please contact Academic Advising or consult the Undergraduate Policies and Statements on the History Department website. The final date any assignment will be accepted for evaluation is April 9, 2026.

Course Materials

Most materials will be located on OWL Brightspace, using ebooks or online sources. The following items will be made available for purchase at the UWO Bookstore:

Mikhail Bulgakov, *Heart of a Dog* (Grove Press, 1994).

Nick Abadzis, *Laika* (Roaring Brook Press, 2007).

Recommended:

Choi Chatterjee, Deborah A. Field, & Lisa Kirschenbaum, *Russia's Long Twentieth Century*, 2nd Edition (Routledge, 2025).

The Chatterjee et al textbook is a good introduction to the broad contours of Soviet history with a focus on Russia. It is recommended for those who need a further background in the history of the Soviet Union. It is also available online through Western Libraries. It will not be assigned each week; instead, it is offered as an alternate, and affordable, resource to help in this class. Other resources will be listed on the Course Brightspace for those looking for further background reading.

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1: January 6

Lecture – Introduction – Why 1917? Why the Russian Empire?

Week 2: January 13

Lecture – 1917: The February and October Revolutions

Week 3: January 20

Lecture – War Communism and the Civil War

Week 4: January 27

Lecture – The New Economic Policy and the Leadership Struggle

FIRST BOOK REVIEW DUE JANUARY 27 AT CLASS START

Week 5: February 3

Lecture – The Revolution from Above: Collectivization, Industrialization, and the Cultural Revolution

Week 6: February 10

Lecture – The Great Terror and Culture and Life under Stalinism

READING WEEK – February 13-21

Week 7: February 24

Lecture – The Soviet Union and the Second World War

Week 8: March 3

Lecture – High Stalinism to the Death of Stalin

Week 9: March 10

Lecture – Destalinization, the Thaw and the Khrushchev Years

SECOND BOOK REVIEW DUE MARCH 10 AT CLASS START

Week 10: March 17

Lecture – The Soviet Union under Brezhnev

Week 11: March 24

Lecture – The Cold War from Stalin to Afghanistan

RESEARCH PAPER DUE MARCH 26

Week 12: March 31

Lecture – The Gerontocracy, the Rise of Gorbachev, and the Fall of the Soviet Union

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Week 13: April 7

Lecture – The Fall of the Soviet Union and its Aftermaths in Russia and Eurasia

Additional Statements

Communication policies: Students are welcome to come to the professor's office hours or to arrange another time to meet the professor at his office if they have questions or concerns about the course. Additionally, they may contact the professor via email. The professor will aim to respond to students within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours on weekends. Please use your UWO email address for any correspondence.

Use of electronic devices: Students are welcome to use electronic devices for the purposes of writing notes or reviewing course materials. Recording tools are not allowed without written permission from the instructor.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI): You may use generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course for activities related to improving the structure of your paper, such as drafting an outline to organize your thoughts—but not for generating prose or for your research. All writing submitted in this course must be your own. Any use of such tools must be fully cited, acknowledged, and explained. If in doubt, please ask the professor for clarification and advice.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.