Я не могу предсказать действий России. Она - загадка, завернутая в тайну и погруженная в мистерию. Но быть может, ключ все-таки существует.

У. Черчилль

Умом Россию не понять,
Аршином общим не измерить.
У ней особенная стать.
В Россию можно только верить.

Ф. Тютчев

Кто ты, Россия? Мираж, наважденье...
Была ли ты, есть или нет?
Омут, стремнина, головокруженье...
Бездна, безумие, бред?..

М. Волошин

What do Russians read, watch and listen to today?
Is the mysterious Russian soul still mysterious?
Is there a "Russian physical type"?
How do young Russians view their society?

In this class we will attempt to understand these quotes and answer these and many other questions about contemporary Russia.
Course Goals and Objectives

In this course we will explore aspects of contemporary Russian society and culture, focusing on linguistic and cultural analysis of various types of texts: from contemporary prose to the Russian press (including the Internet), selected films, and pop culture artifacts. Our goal is to understand what and why Russians read, watch and listen to these days. You will learn to communicate effectively in Russian on a wide range of complex subjects. In order to achieve this, you will learn oral presentation techniques (applicable beyond Russian), and necessary vocabulary and stylistic expressions. You will learn to pay close attention to the register of your speech and prepare clear arguments in Russian. The class will require serious lexical work: lexical exercises, word memorization, etc. In the area of grammar and syntax, you will continue to learn how to express your thoughts in Russian in a Russian-like way, getting rid of “Americanisms” and using correct word endings.

Materials

All materials will be provided to you in class in the form of handouts and/or will be available through LATTE in the electronic form. You will be given specific instructions regarding the sources for the films and TV shows you will watch.

You must have access to a good Russian and Russian-English bilingual dictionary. I strongly suggest that you use reputable dictionaries (such as Oxford Russian Dictionary or a definition dictionary by Ожегов or Даль on yandex). Please explore these on-line dictionaries: [http://slovari.yandex.ru/](http://slovari.yandex.ru/) (offers a variety of Russian-language definition dictionaries (equivalents of Webster’s)) and
www.lingvo.com or multitrans.ru (bilingual dictionaries).

Timelines
You will be given a timeline of assignments for each large topic of the semester (there will be two: what Russians read and what Russians watch and listen to). This timeline is flexible and will be changed, depending on how much progress you make in your reading pace and how lively our class discussions are. Therefore, you should always bring the timeline with you to class in order to write in any changes. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out if there were any changes made. If you miss class, you are expected to keep up with the syllabus and come to the next class prepared.

Classroom policies
Behavior: You are expected to contribute to a respectful and positive learning environment.
Punctuality is essential.
Cell phones: I rely on your maturity to know that the use of cell phones in class for any reason is disrespectful and distracting. Phones should be turned off and out of sight while class is in session.
Communication: Please make sure your Brandeis e-mail address is active and check it regularly. I will communicate a lot of important information about the course to you via the Course Announcement function on our LATTE page or by direct e-mailing. Again, I rely on your maturity and respect for this course to maintain an open channel of communication with your instructor throughout the semester.

Grading
Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

30% - Participation in class
10% - Discussion leading/short presentations
15% - Reflection papers
15% - Russia-US tele-collaboration project
10% - Language-learning journal
10% - Quizzes (vocabulary and grammar)
10% - Final oral presentations

Grading Scale

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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</tbody>
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3
COMPONENTS OF COURSE WORK

The text below explains in detail what you are expected to do in this course and how you will be graded. But I invite you to think more about developing your proficiency in the language rather than focusing on the mechanics of the grade. The ultimate goal for you and for me is to improve your Russian so that it gets closer and closer to the level of an educated native speaker.

Participation (30%)
It goes without saying that attendance is mandatory. This course is based on discussions and short presentations by you. In addition, in order to develop a heritage language, you need to be immersed in it and to pay attention to your language environment. Therefore, if you are not in class, you are missing out on the valuable practice and language development time. Just in case this is not enough motivation for you to attend every class, there is also a grade-related motivation. More than three absences will result in the lowering of your final grade in the “Participation” category: (4 absences earn you a “B+”, 5-7 absences – “B”, 8 – “B-“, etc.).

You will receive a daily participation score:

5 pts Well prepared and actively participates in discussions; contributions are meaningful;
4 pts Not prepared (have not done the readings or viewing), but makes all possible efforts to participate in a meaningful way
3 pts Not prepared and makes little or no effort to participate (does not speak up in class)
0 pts Absent (or was more than 30 minutes late)

Discussion Leading (10%)
Students will work to lead a class discussion of the texts or films assigned as homework. Depending on the size of the class, each student will lead 2 or 3 discussions. You will be able to sign up to be a discussion leader at the first class meeting. Your grade will be based on the thoroughness of your preparation (as evidenced by the level of questions you ask: analytical rather than descriptive questions; thought provoking open-ended questions rather than simple yes/no questions), your contact with the audience (you maintain eye contact, you speak loudly and clearly; you appear to be sincerely interested in the contributions of your peers and you contribute yourself), on clarity of thought (as evidenced by the use of precise vocabulary) and on grammatical accuracy (all efforts have been made to ask grammatically correct questions and provide commentary by using Russian-like grammatical structures). Grades in this section are based on 100% scale (see breakdown above).
**Reflection/analytical Papers (15%)**

You will do a lot of reading in this course. You will be required to turn in papers for all major reading and watching assignments. Your papers should be no less than 700 words (1.5 pages double-spaced). You can choose to approach this assignment as a reflection paper where you express your opinions, thoughts and reactions to the style, form and content of the texts (literary or visual) OR you can choose to be more analytical and make use of your knowledge of literary or cultural theories you know from your other courses to critique a text. Please follow my advice to heart when working on your papers: you will need to work with a good dictionary to find **precise and content-rich** words for your thoughts.

To help you develop an academic writing style in Russian, you will work with two drafts for each paper. You will submit your first draft (which should not be a *rough draft*) for comments and corrections, not grades. You will then have an opportunity to fix problems and develop your arguments better, and submit your second draft for a grade.

The grade for each paper will be a total of two evaluation criteria: 50% for clarity of thought (which requires precise vocabulary), organization, level of analysis; and another 50% for grammatical accuracy.

Each draft must be submitted on the day when they are due. If you know that you will not be able to make it to class, submit your homework in advance or arrange for a friend to hand it in for you.

**Russia-US tele-collaboration (15%)**

Brandeis has partnered with the Far Eastern Academy of Economics and Law (Khabarovsk) to use webinar, skype and teleconferencing technologies to enhance language learning and create opportunities for cultural information exchange.

There will be two large themes that students will work on:
- appearance (e.g., is there such a thing as "Russian physical type" or “a typical American look”) and life styles
- education: challenges in contemporary world

Each topic will be developed in three stages: a) a webinar when the topic is introduced; b) individual discussions with peers over skype; and c) a three-way teleconference, summarizing and debating.

At the first stage, you act as experts of the country where you live. Therefore, you will prepare presentations on the topics as they relate to Americans and the U.S. Your presentations will be in Russian. You will hear presentations of Russian students on these topics as they relate to Russians and Russia. Their presentations
will be in English (for their language practice). The challenge is to describe intricate
details of something that you are very familiar with in the language you are LEAST
accustomed to using for such purposes.

At the second and third stages (individual skype calls and teleconferences), you will
have opportunity to use both languages for discussion and clarification.

Your participation in the tele-collaboration project is part of the oral communication
component of this course. Each of you will make at least one presentation during
the project, either during the webinars or during the teleconferences.

You will receive detailed instructions regarding each step of the process at least one
week prior to each tele-collaboration event.

Please note that webinars and teleconferences will take place during the time that is different from
our scheduled time. I really appreciate your efforts in making yourselves available for this exciting
project! It is not easy to work with our widely varying schedules, a 14-hour time difference and
inconsistencies in keeping winter/summer times between the two countries.

**Language-learning Journal (10%)**
You will keep a journal throughout the semester for two purposes:

1) to take a note of words, expressions and grammatical constructions that are
new to you

2) to write down additional thoughts regarding cultural issues we discuss in
class or to write down a particular linguistic or cultural question you have for
me, your peers or yourselves.

The Journal will allow you to “customize” your learning. If your vocabulary is
already rather developed in Russian, you can use the Journal to create “domains” of
words. For example, how many verbs related to speaking can you come up with in
Russian? (talk, tell, say, murmur, whisper, mutter, chat, blabber, etc. + idiomatic
expressions). If you hear lots of words that are new to you in class or find them in
your readings (or in movies), please write them down in your journal. It is
especially important to note the words you cannot easily access on your own. You
already know that you can understand a lot more than you can say, so you should
pay special attention to vocabulary difficulties you have in expressing your
thoughts, not just when listening to others speak.

Each word/expression in your Journal must be accompanied either by a translation
into English or a dictionary (!) explanation in Russian. It should also have grammar
information: if it’s a verb, the case questions it requires; or if it’s a noun, it’s gender.

You can keep your journals in an electronic form, but please don’t hide behind your
computers in class. I will collect your journals every other week and will return
them to you at the next class period. Your grade will depend on thoroughness of
your work: 3-5 words in a two-week period is an obvious neglect of your duties. It
would be fair to estimate an average of 30-40 words/expressions per week +
regular notes, commentaries, thoughts out loud on the language, grammar or
culture.
You will have regular individualized vocabulary quizzes based on your Journal’s
entries. This means that part of your daily homework will be vocabulary
memorization even if it is not stated explicitly in the assignment. You should plan
on setting aside some time each day for memorization work.

My goal here is to help you develop a healthy habit of any bilingual, which is
essential for maintaining and developing the balance between languages. I
hope you will treat this component of the coursework very seriously and will
take an initiative in keeping the Journal.

Quizzes (10%)
There will be regular individualized quizzes over selected vocabulary items and
grammar concepts. Your vocabulary list will be created by you, whereas the quizzes
will be administered by your peers. You will receive specific instructions on how to
prepare for the quizzes well in advance. The usual grading scale will be used (see
above). There will be no pop-quizzes.

Final Oral Presentations (10%)
Your final presentation can be on any topic discussed during the semester
(developing it further) or on something new (introducing and analyzing it).
Possible topics may relate only to Russia and Russians, or may focus on
comparisons of American and Russian cultural trends (including reading and movie
preferences, fashion, “national character”, etc.) OR on Russian-speaking diasporas.
Your presentations should not be only descriptive in nature, but rather need to have
a fair amount of analysis. To achieve this, you will need to do outside reading and
independent research of both English and Russian sources. (The research can be
carried out in English; however all presentations must be in Russian.)

Depending on the number of students in the class, the presentations may be done in
pairs or individually. You will receive specific guidelines on how to prepare for the
final presentations and on how you will be evaluated. You will be required to meet
with the instructor twice in preparation for the final presentation; the last meeting
will be at least one week prior to your scheduled date to discuss strategies for a
successful final presentation. You will receive a written feedback on your
presentation from peers and instructor. Written feedback from your instructor will
include evaluation of your presentation and suggestions for improvements.
Useful Contacts
The undergraduate advisor for the Russian language program is professor David Powelstock (pstock@brandeis.edu). He will help you plan out your Russian Studies major or minor and guide you in questions related to study abroad credits.

The Russian program’s Undergraduate Representatives for the 2014-2015 academic year are Eve Litvak (evlitvak@brandeis.edu) and Mikhail Vilenchuk (mvilen@brandeis.edu). Mikhail (Misha) and Eve (Eva) are heritage speakers of Russian: they grew up speaking Russian at home and now study it formally at Brandeis. The UDRs can answer your questions about choosing a Russian major or minor, professors in the Russian program, etc. Eve and Misha are wonderful resources for your questions about major/minor or connection of Russian to other academic disciplines.

What to do if you need extra help
Please do not wait until problems start piling up. If you need help, come to see your instructor (Irina Dubinina) during office hours or by appointment, Fulbright TA (Rossina Soyen) during her office hours, or the BUGS tutor (Breanna Vizlakh) by appointment. Breanna Vizlakh (bvizlakh@brandeis.edu) is your BUGS tutor for this semester.

Information on Russia-related Events on Campus
There are two list serves you may want to join.
  1) Brandeis has a very active Russian Club. If you are interested in participating in events organized by the club, please sign up for their e-mail list. (Find them through Brandeis website)
  2) If you are interested in receiving messages with announcements about Russian language and culture related events, please sign up for the Russian list serve (put your e-mail on the Bio Info Form)

Links to these listserves are also available at the program’s website:
http://www.brandeis.edu/departments/grall/russian/

Study-abroad and other related opportunities
Brandeis has a number of approved programs for studying Russian in the Russian Federation. You will be able to choose between summer programs, semester-long and year-long programs. Brandeis Russian Language Program recommends that you have at least 4 semesters of Russian before a study-abroad program. You are well on your way toward this goal! If you are interested in going abroad, please talk to your instructor and visit the Study Abroad office and our website. There are also several summer intensive Russian language programs in the U.S. The Russian program’s website lists a few of them. If you would like to know more about these programs, please talk to your instructor.
**Statement on Brandeis Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person, be it a world-class philosopher or your lab partner, without proper acknowledgement of that source.

Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section Three of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure of the course or on the assignment, or in suspension or dismissal from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course, it is your responsibility to ask your instructor for clarification.

Notice of accommodation: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.