RUSS 494.01: Seminar

Clint Walker
University of Montana, Missoula
The Novels of Nabokov and Pasternak

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: RUSS 494 Seminar in Russian Studies Variable cr. (3 cr.) Offered intermittently. Advanced studies in major topics in Russian literature and culture. Topics include: The Russian Novel, Women and Gender in Russian Culture, Dostoevsky and World Culture. All readings and discussion will be conducted in English, but Russian majors will be expected to do selected readings in the original. Honors College Students will be expected to read supplementary texts and to incorporate these texts into the final seminar paper. All students taking the course will be expected to complete an outline, a draft with a working bibliography, and a final version of the seminar paper (12-15 pp.) as part of the course requirements. Honors Students will be expected to write a longer final version of the seminar paper (minimum length: 15 pages). Russian Studies majors will be expected to cite from one novel in the Russian original (and to discuss such citations in more detail in the body of the paper).

This course serves as a seminar and a capstone for Russian majors as well as an opportunity for serious literature and history students from other disciplines to immerse themselves more deeply in the Russian cultural tradition than they could in the regular literature-in-translation courses offered by the Russian Section at UM. While the seminar will be taught in English in order to cover a substantially greater amount of material and to analyze it in more detail, it will provide a perfect opportunity for UM Russian majors to work with select texts and/or secondary sources in the Russian original. Another major purpose of this seminar is to allow students to fine-tune their writing skills in English on a topic relevant to their major. Therefore, the Seminar in Russian Studies will serve as an excellent foundational course for majors intending to pursue graduate study in Russian language, literature, history or cultural studies.

GENERAL COURSE OUTLINE:

This seminar focuses on one of the richest literary legacies in all of world literature, the Russian novel. Rather than attempt to survey the form, we will limit our scope to two novelists writing in approximately the same historical period. Short background lectures and carefully chosen supplementary texts and critical scholarship will further enhance our understanding of the novels included in the course. We will come to see just why Pasternak’s Doctor Zhivago and the novels of Vladimir Nabokov have been hailed as masterpieces of twentieth-century world literature.

GOALS and OUTCOMES:

In this course we will gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the novel as a literary form. We will increase our familiarity with Russian literature and come to appreciate the vital link of all great literary works to a specific cultural and historical context. We will likewise gain insight into the multifaceted dialogue of Russian literature with world culture as a whole.

This seminar satisfies the upper division writing requirement for Russian at the University of Montana. Students will work on improving, expanding and polishing their writing skills throughout the semester by completing a wide range of reading and writing tasks and assignments. Not every task will receive a formal grade, nor will each task necessarily lead directly towards the course’s culminating assignment, a seminar paper on one of the major novels included in the course curriculum, but every writing task has been designed with the overarching aim of making you more successful, more confident and better equipped writers—in the field of Russian Studies in particular as well as in your daily lives. Of all the skills you acquire at the University of Montana, none will be so intimately connected with who you are and who you will become as your ability to write and to think critically through your writing.

The capstone of this course will be your individual seminar papers on one of the novels covered in the course. Each of you will conduct independent research for this project that you will eventually integrate into a final paper. An outline and bibliography and a rough draft of the paper will be due as specified on the syllabus. The final version of your paper should: incorporate at least five academic secondary sources; use appropriate citations and style; be well-argued and supported with evidence from the text and its various contexts; and be clearly organized and elegantly written. The final paper will provide Russian majors in particular with a perfect opportunity to synthesize the knowledge and skills they have acquired throughout their coursework at UM. A number of you will undoubtedly choose to use this seminar paper as a writing sample for graduate school applications.

GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Regular attendance and active participation in class discussion
- Timely reading of assigned works and adequate preparation for discussion
- Class Presentation (5-10 minutes during one class period – there will be a sign-up sheet)
- Seminar paper (12-15 pages; NB -- for honors credit, the minimum is 15 pages)

Students in this class will complete an analytical academic research paper (12-15 pp.) that draws from at least five secondary sources. Early in the semester each of you will need to research at least one of the major works covered in the syllabus using...
academic research databases for literature (e.g. MLA). Later in the semester you will need to integrate similar information into the seminar paper.

NB – Russian majors are expected to work with one of the novels in Russian or with secondary scholarship written in Russian. Therefore, you are strongly encouraged to consider purchasing, downloading or borrowing a Russian copy of Doctor Zhivago if you intend to make this novel the focus of your seminar paper. I would be happy to direct you to sites that sell Russian books. I also have a limited number of Russian copies of Doctor Zhivago.

By conducting preliminary research on one of the novels, you will be forced to address the idea of conflicting interpretations of the same text before you are actually required to integrate such contradictory sources into your own arguments in a formal paper. You will also be introduced to MLA-style academic discourse. Subsequently, each of you will be required to incorporate evidence from at least six academic sources into your final seminar paper. At this stage you will necessarily grapple with a wide range of approaches to the same text, using them to augment and enhance your own arguments. I am hopeful that you will draw from your research experience early in the semester for your later work on the seminar paper. My feedback on your outline and draft will help you refine and polish your ideas before you begin work on the final version of the seminar paper.

Some 70% of your final course grade will be based on the 12-15 page seminar paper (A two-page outline, bibliography and draft will account for 20% of your final course grade, while the final draft of the seminar paper will constitute 50% of your final course grade).

*HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS:* If you are taking this course as part of the Honors College curriculum, the minimum length of the seminar paper is 15 pages. I will also suggest some works that would pair well with the major novels of the course below.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Available from your instructor: Vladimir Nabokov, Invitation to a Beheading

Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita

Boris Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago

Vladimir Nabokov, Pnin

Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire

**GRADING:**

20% Attendance and General Class Participation

10% Class Presentation (5-10 min presentation based on your seminar paper)

20% Outline, Bibliography and Draft (minimum of 10 pages, 2 outside sources) of the Seminar Paper

50% Seminar Paper* (12-15 pages, minimum of five academic outside sources)

**GRADING SCALE**

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>88-89</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-87</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>64-67</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>63 and below</td>
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**PAPER GUIDELINES:**

The seminar paper should be typed or done on a computer and conform to MLA standards for citation of secondary sources. Use a standard 12 point font and double-space. Proofread each assignment for typos, poor wording, mechanics, etc. Late work will be penalized one letter grade per class day (except for in-class writing, which cannot be made up). Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form. Please ask if you have a question about what constitutes plagiarism, but on the whole, if you consult another work for ideas, copy or paraphrase from another source, etc., then you need to acknowledge the source (including the work you consulted, the publication information, and the page number/s) in your paper with a footnote.

**WRITING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA for SEMINAR IN RUSSIAN STUDIES**

(Note that the comments for each letter below are intended to be general in nature and may not correspond exactly to your particular paper. These comments are merely guidelines and points of orientation. I suggest that you read through the material below and think about the rubrics (and my comments for each one) while you are working on the outline, draft/s, and final version of your seminar paper.)

**1) GRAMMAR and MECHANICS**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>EXCELLENT</td>
<td>Correct grammar, punctuation and syntax, etc.</td>
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<td>COMPETENT</td>
<td>Some mistakes and/or awkwardness, but</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEVELOPING</td>
<td>Some more serious errors in mechanics that distract and</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOVICE</td>
<td>Serious problems with mechanics. Grammar mistakes</td>
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*Note that the comments for each letter below are intended to be general in nature and may not correspond exactly to your particular paper. These comments are merely guidelines and points of orientation. I suggest that you read through the material below and think about the rubrics (and my comments for each one) while you are working on the outline, draft/s, and final version of your seminar paper.*
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MAIN ARGUMENT/ THESIS</th>
<th>SUPPORTING EVIDENCE</th>
<th>BASE CONTENT of SEMINAR PAPER</th>
<th>STYLE</th>
<th>USE OF SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIAL</th>
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<td>2)</td>
<td>Strong, clearly stated main argument or thesis that is developed in subsequent parts of the paper.</td>
<td>Perhaps a less clearly stated thesis and may not always contain adequate development for its defense in the body of the paper.</td>
<td>Generally a strong, well-balanced paper that covers its material adequately and in a convincing manner.</td>
<td>Very well written and flows naturally. Arguments build and are linked from sentence to sentence &amp; paragraph to paragraph. Nice variety in sentence length.</td>
<td>Very good use of secondary source material. You bring in ample supporting evidence and address secondary source material. You offer convincing arguments and counter arguments.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>generally does not distract the reader or interfere with meaning</td>
<td>Paper points in the direction of a main argument, but the thesis has not been clearly defined. OR - A weakly defined thesis in need of more development</td>
<td>Relatively solid but with some gaps in content or isolated areas where the argument fails to convince due to inadequate content</td>
<td>Good flow but may have awkward spots or areas where the flow is interrupted by broken syntax, inappropriate word choice, etc. Sentence structure and paragraph length may not contain enough variation.</td>
<td>You may have met the formal minimum of secondary sources, but you do not always use them in a convincing way in your paper. You may fail to bring in secondary sources that offer counter arguments to your own.</td>
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<td>interfere with meaning</td>
<td>No thesis statement present. The paper appears to lack a main thrust or direction. Ideas that just jump around and do not cohere</td>
<td>Paper makes an effort to cite from the main text &amp; support arguments, but the paper lacks enough evidence to convince the reader of its claims. Failure to address opposing points of view or varying interpretations</td>
<td>Flow is broken by bad diction, poor word choice, broken syntax, spelling errors, etc. Sentence structure and paragraph length may need more attention. Breaks in the flow interfere with meaning and detract from your arguments.</td>
<td>You may not quite use enough secondary source material or you may use several secondary sources rather unconvincingly.</td>
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<td>prevent understanding at the sentence and paragraph level</td>
<td>Very weak supporting evidence that is unconvincing. Poor use of the main text/s to support arguments</td>
<td>Most likely, the paper is simply below the recommended length for a seminar paper.</td>
<td>Major problems with style. It is highly recommended that you visit the writing center and work on your writing with a tutor.</td>
<td>Clearly unacceptable use of secondary sources. Most likely you only used a few, and even those that you did use were not very well incorporated into your paper.</td>
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**CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:**

It is essential to the learning process that students treat each other and the instructor with respect. Under the Student Conduct Code, students who are found to be disruptive may be asked to leave the classroom. Disruptive behaviors may include but are not limited to:

- Using electronic communication devices, including cell phones and laptops for purposes unrelated to ongoing class activities.
- Carrying on side conversations that are distracting to the instructor and other students.
- Verbally interrupting the class with comments or questions not relevant to the course or to the current discussion.
- Failure to participate in assigned group activities.
- Significantly interfering with instructor’s work activities during or outside of class.
The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will be glad to work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Syllabus

January

Mon, 14 Discussion of Syllabus, Course Overview
Nabokov: Biography and Video Material
In-Class Reading and Discussion of a Nabokov short story

For next class (Jan 28): Read Nabokov, Invitation to a Beheading

Mon, 21 NO CLASS – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Mon, 28 Nabokov, Invitation to a Beheading

For next class: Read Nabokov, Lolita (at least to the end of Part I)

February

Mon 4 Nabokov, Lolita (Part I)

For next class: Finish Nabokov, Lolita

Mon 11 Nabokov, Lolita (entire novel)

For next class: Read Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago (Parts 1-12)

Mon 18 President’s Day – NO CLASS

Mon 25 Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago

For next class: Read Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago (to the end of the novel, including the poems!)

March

Mon 4 Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago

For next class: Read Nabokov, Pnin (chapters 1-5)

Mon 11 Nabokov, Pnin

For next class: Finish Nabokov, Pnin AND prepare a rough outline and working bibliography for your long paper

NOTE: Your outline and a working bibliography for the seminar paper are due next Monday, Mar 18

Mon 18 Outline & Working Bibliography of Seminar Paper
Due Today (suggested length: 2 pages)!

Nabokov, Pnin (overview)

For next class: Nabokov, Pale Fire

(read the entire novel over Spring Break)

Mon 25 SPRING BREAK

April

Mon 1 Nabokov, Pale Fire

NOTE: Your draft of the seminar paper (with a working bibliography) is due on Monday, April 15. Note that the minimum for the draft is 8 pages. Drafts shorter than this will not receive full credit
Mon  8  **In Class Today:** We will watch a film based on *Lolita*

For Monday, April 15 bring a draft copy of your paper to class
AND prepare a 5-10 min class presentation based on your draft. Use this time to ask your classmates and your professor for constructive feedback/suggestions for the final version of your paper.

Mon  15  **Draft (min. of 8 pages) of Seminar Paper Due Today!**

**In Class:** 5-10 minute informal presentations based on your drafts.
If time permits, we will also begin to watch a film version of *Doctor Zhivago.*

Mon  22  **In Class:** Film based on Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*

*The Final Version of the Seminar Paper (12-15 pp.) is due on Wed of Finals Week (May 1) by 5pm*