Kelly M. McMann
Politics of Central Asia (Political Science 362/462)
Syllabus for the course offered in Fall 2002
Case Western Reserve University
Dept. of Political Science

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Once an unfamiliar region to many people of the world, Central Asia took center stage in the fall of 2001, as a result of the U.S. campaign against terrorism. With little experience in the region and little time to learn, the mainstream press and the pundits did their best to characterize Central Asia for their readers, listeners, and viewers. Are the generalizations they made about the region accurate? This course introduces students to the politics of Central Asia, enhancing their ability to evaluate current events. We will focus on the region that is today composed of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan and consider the influences of neighboring countries, such as Afghanistan. After a review of the khanate, tsarist, and Soviet eras, we will explore the following topics: national politics, nationalism, foreign relations, Afghanistan, Islam, gender relations, ethnicity, civic groups, economic legacies, resource wealth, and economic coping.

By studying these topics across time, we can examine stereotypes that foreign media, as well as some Central Asians, often project on the region—Central Asia as a uniform, stagnant region with passive populations and radical Islamic activists. We will challenge these stereotypes by asking: how are the countries of the region similar, and how are they different? How much change has occurred in the region over time? Who have been the initiators of change? What is the nature of Islamic belief and Islamic political activity in the region?

Course Materials

To explore these questions, we will read scholarly works as well as journalistic accounts and policy pieces. Political tracts, novels, and additional scholarly literature are suggested for further reading. The course also incorporates film clips, slides, and artifacts of the region.

Books and Articles: Three works are available for purchase at the bookstore: Central Asian Security, Taliban, and The Day Lasts More Than A Hundred Years. (The Day Lasts More Than A Hundred Years is not required, but recommended.) Other required materials are included in the coursepack, which can be purchased at the bookstore. The three books, the coursepack, and additional recommended materials, unless otherwise noted, are on reserve at Kelvin Smith Library. Extra copies of course handouts and maps of the region are available on the website.

News: Students who wish to follow current events in Central Asia should consult:

- The Analyst, [http://www.cacianalyst.org/](http://www.cacianalyst.org/) for biweekly news analyses, [http://www.cacianalyst.org/Field_reports.htm](http://www.cacianalyst.org/Field_reports.htm) for reports from individuals in the field, or [http://www.cacianalyst.org/News_Bites.htm](http://www.cacianalyst.org/News_Bites.htm) for short news briefs;
Course Requirements

Participation: The focus of each class will be on discussion, and students are strongly encouraged to take notes on the readings in order to be prepared to integrate and critique the materials and to pose questions for discussion. Readings should be completed by the first day of the week they are assigned. During the middle of the semester, small groups of students will each make a 15-minute presentation. Students should coordinate in advance with members of their group and prepare a stimulating, creative, and succinct presentation that poses questions and offers analysis in order to spark debate. Presentations should not summarize the readings. The last week of the course students will provide their own analyses of the region during discussion. Because participation is critical to understanding the material, students are expected to attend all classes. Except under extraordinary circumstances, absenteeism will negatively affect students’ final grades.

Commentaries: In addition to reading course materials and participating in class, students will write a weekly commentary on the readings for six of the 14 weeks for which reading is assigned. The purpose of the commentaries is to help students understand, critique, and integrate the readings and prepare to pose questions for discussion in class. Students should not summarize the readings but should instead use the course materials to answer their own questions and explore their own arguments. Students should incorporate concepts and arguments in readings from previous weeks, and the quality of the commentaries should improve throughout the semester. For the commentaries informal citations—phrases like “as Hirsch argues” or “as the International Crisis Group report notes”—are acceptable. Commentaries should be between one and a half to two pages double-spaced, and they must be submitted at the beginning of the first class of the week. Commentaries will be evaluated as excellent, good, fair, or poor.

Research Paper: Students will also write a research paper that further explores an idea raised in the readings or in class. Each student should meet at least once with the instructor to discuss the topic. The research paper should:

- Offer an analysis, not a summary of research materials.
- Provide evidence of assertions.
- Be factually accurate.
- Provide specific examples so as to avoid vague statement.
- Include citations and a bibliography. For formatting, see The Chicago Manual of Style (under Z253.C57 at Kelvin Reference), www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/, or a similar guide.

To avoid plagiarism, students should review “Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It,” included in the coursepack. Cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be investigated by university judicial bodies.

Undergraduates will submit a paper of 15-20 pages, and graduate students will submit a paper of 20-30 pages. Graduate students are expected to do more extensive research for their papers. All students will submit a one-page, double-spaced paper proposal at the beginning of class Monday, October 14. A 1-2 page working bibliography will be submitted at the beginning of class Monday, November 11. The paper itself is due Friday, December 6 at the beginning of class.

The presentation, the final analysis, overall class participation, and class attendance will constitute 20 percent of the course grade, the six weekly commentaries will count for 40 percent, and the research paper for the remaining 40 percent. Students will lose a half a grade on an assignment for each day it is late.
Course Schedule and Readings

Part I: Historical Background

Week 1: Tribes and Khanates


Week 2: The Tsarist Era


Week 3: The Soviet Period


Part II: Political Issues

Week 4: National Politics—Five Divergent Paths


Olcott. *Central Asia’s New States*. Sections on Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, 120-128, 144-152.


SUGGESTED: If you are particularly interested in Tajikistan or Turkmenistan, read:

Week 5: Nationalism—Manas and Timur Take Center Stage


Week 6: Foreign Relations—A Great Game Rematch?


SUGGESTED:


Week 7: Afghanistan—A Perpetual Security Threat

Part II: Social Issues

Week 8: Islam—From Beaded Bracelets to Shariat


DUE: Monday, October 14—one-page, double-spaced research paper proposal

Week 9: Gender Relations—“Unveiling” and “Reveiling”


Week 10: Ethnicity—“Big Brothers” and Brain Drain


Week 11: Societal Groups—Belonging to a Region, a Mahalla, and an NGO


Part III: Economic Issues

Week 12: Economic Legacies and Reform—A Stakhanovite on the Silk Road to Capitalism


DUE: Monday, November 11—1-2 page working bibliography

Week 13: Natural Resources—A Blessing or a Curse


**Week 14: Coping With “Transition”—Shared Shoes**


**Part IV: Conclusion**

**Week 15: Central Asia—Challenging Stereotypes**

For this week students are expected to review their notes and be prepared to offer generalizations about the politics, societies, and economies of Central Asia. Since there is no reading, commentaries will not be accepted for this week.

**DUE: Friday, December 6—Research Paper**