INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Despite the strategic importance of Central Asia, scholars had very little access to the region—until recently. As a result, the region has been quite poorly understood by policymakers and the public at-large.

This is an advanced research seminar that considers the politics of Central Asia. There is great debate over what constitutes the geographic contours of Central Asia. In recent years, the United States Department of State and most international organizations have moved their administration of Central Asia out of Eurasian or European bureaus to South Asian bureaus. The Department of State recently created the Bureau of Central and South Asia, for example. For the purposes of this course, I define Central Asia quite broadly to include the five former Soviet Republics in the region, as well as Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Due to time limitations, however, we will focus primarily on Afghanistan and the five former Soviet Central Asian Republics. We will discuss Iranian and Pakistani politics throughout the semester.

The reading and workload in this class is commensurate with that of an advanced research seminar. The approach taken here is truly inter-disciplinary, drawing heavily from the fields of anthropology, political science, sociology, economics, and history. We will even read some first hand, primary source accounts in English. In terms of method, the course relies on a framework of comparative analysis. We will think seriously about dynamics in the countries in the region and seek to explain many of the divergent outcomes we witness.

In the past couple of decades, scholars and policymakers have had much better access to the countries of Central Asia. On the one hand, greater access to the region has promoted some truly outstanding scholarship and analysis. On the other hand, because the region is the site of international intervention and growing conflict, it has also attracted a fairly large group of
“helicopter” journalists and scholars who draw broad conclusions about the region or particular countries based on either faulty assumptions or lack of understanding of the region. As a result, much of the contemporary discourse on Central Asia is fraught with inaccuracies or simple romanticizing. In this course, you will be exposed to some of the most important scholarly work on the region by people who have spent significant time on the ground in the region.

This course will not only introduce you to political issues in the region but will also show students how to approach politics through the lens of historical analysis and political economy. As such, we will spend significant time discussing the political, economic, and social history of the region to gain a more nuanced understanding of current affairs.

The first part of the course will focus on the emergence of states in the region. We will compare the trajectories of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics, which found themselves first under the specter of Russian colonial rule and then under banners of Soviet Communism to that of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is one of the few countries in the developing world that never fell—formally—under the control of a colonial power.

The second part of the course will explore the “long peace” in the region. This is the period of Central Asia under Soviet control and Afghanistan during the reign of the Musahiban dynasty (that ended just prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan).

The third and final portion of the course will focus on sources of conflict and other current issues in the region.

**Expectations**

Students are expected to come to class prepared. Proper preparation requires that you not only read the materials, but that you also spend significant time reflecting and dissecting the materials for that week. As this course is a research seminar, this course depends on active participation by students. There will be minimal lecturing.
Evaluation

There will be five written assignments in the course: four short papers that allow you to synthesize and evaluate course readings and a final research or policy paper. Class participation will also be evaluated as part of your final course grade.

- Four short analytical papers (10% each, or 40% total)
  - Paper 1 due January 30
  - Paper 2 due February 20
  - Paper 3 due March 12
  - Paper 4 due April 2
- Final paper and its components (50%)
  - Final due in class on April 16
- Class participation (10%)

The final paper and its components, constitutes 50 percent of your course grade. This paper may be either a research paper or a policy paper. A research paper asks a question that is driven by theory or an empirical puzzle. A policy paper seeks to draw attention to an issue of significance in the region, provide background to the issue or problem, and then provide a series of recommendations to deal with these issues.

- Week 4 (January 30): One paragraph description of paper topic (5% of course grade)
- Week 8 (February 27): Two page outline and bibliography (5% of course grade)
- Weeks 10-15 (Individual dates, TBD): In-class presentation of research paper (5% of course grade)
- Final Paper: Due

Each of these assignments account for 5 percent of your course evaluation. Thus, the elements that constitute your paper account for 60 percent of your grade.

Required Texts

Required texts can be found at any number of retailers online. Other documents and articles have been placed on Courseweb.


Course Topic and Reading Schedule

1. **January 9**  
   **Thinking Comparatively about Central Asia**

   **The Comparative Method**

   **Introducing Central Asia, Its People, and History**

2. **January 16**  
   **Martin Luther King Day**

3. **January 23**  
   **State Formation I: Afghanistan**


4. January 30  
State Formation II – Forming National Soviet Republics
Short Paper 1 Due


5. February 6  
Afghanistan – Before the War
Paper topic due


6. February 13  
The Soviet Experience


7. February 20  
   **The First Wave of Political Islam -- Pakistan and Afghanistan**  
   *Short Paper 2 Due*  

Emergence of a New Central Asia?

8. February 27  
   **Collapse of the Soviet Union and Emergence of New Nations**  
   *Paper Outline and Bibliography Due*  


9. March 5  
   **Spring Break**  
10. March 12  

**Taliban and Neo-Taliban**

**Short Paper 3 Due**


11. March 19  

**Local Politics**


12. March 26  

**Economic Reform and Resources**


13. April 2 Foreign Policy

**Short Paper 4 Due**

- Roy, chapter 10
- Finke, Peter, Central Asian Attitudes towards Afghanistan: perceptions of the Afghan war in Afghanistan

14. April 9 Presentations

15. April 16 Presentations
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honesty. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty would be subject to disciplinary action. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ail.html. This may include, but is not limited to the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating the University Policy.

DISABILITY SERVICES
If you have a disability, contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 216 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-383-7355 (TTY) as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

STATEMENT ON CLASSROOM RECORDING
To address the issue of students recording a lecture or class session, the University’s Senate Educational Policy Committee issued the recommended statement on May 4, 2010. While it is optional, the Committee recommends that faculty consider adding the statement to all course syllabi.

“TO ENSURE THE FREE AND OPEN DISCUSSION OF IDEAS, STUDENTS MAY NOT RECORD CLASSROOM LECTURES, DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTIVITIES WITHOUT THE ADVANCE WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE INSTRUCTOR, AND ANY SUCH RECORDING PROPERLY APPROVED IN ADVANCE CAN BE USED SOLELY FOR THE STUDENT’S OWN PRIVATE USE.”

READINGS