

**Portraits of Tsarist Russia: Intrigue, Innovation, Institution**  
**Spring 2024 Course Prospectus**  
**(version of October 25, 2023)**

Prof. D. Brian Kim ([dbkim@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:dbkim@sas.upenn.edu))  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30pm–4:50pm

**Course ID and 3-digit number:** REES 0105-001

**Course Description and Level:**

This course covers the history, literature, and culture of Russia from the accession of Ivan IV “the Terrible” in 1547 to the death of Catherine II “the Great” in 1796, representing the monumental period of transition whereby the Tsardom of Russia became the Russian Empire. It is organized chronologically in week-long units that each explore an aspect of social and cultural history through a primary focus on a single literary text, film, or historical document. Main texts will be supplemented with additional materials, including paintings, icons, historical readings, cultural-analytical readings, excerpts from other literary works, &c. Our aim is not only to understand the social codes and rituals that informed early modern Russian life as such, but also to investigate the symbolic value later taken on by the monarchs, historical events, and social conflicts of this era, employing a dual focus on literary interpretation and social history throughout.

All readings, lectures, discussions, and written work are in English. Students who wish to work with texts in Russian are invited to consult with the professor in advance of major writing assignments.

**Class Structure for Spring 2024:**

- This course will be held fully in-person, with twice-weekly required meetings on Tuesdays (lecture) and Thursdays (discussion). There will be no recorded lectures as part of this course.
- The amount of reading assigned will vary from week to week, ranging from approximately 100 to 200 pages.
- Every two weeks, students will submit a short (~500 words), informal, written response to a prompt that will invite them to consider the cultural and social history of early modern Russia in dialogue with our literary texts.
- There will be a midterm and a final exam.

**Outline of Assignments and Assessments:**

- Participation, 15%
- Biweekly responses (~500 words), 35%
- Midterm and final examinations, 50%

**Required Books:**

There are no required book purchases for this course. All required readings will be made available on Canvas.

**Preliminary Outline of Topics (subject to change):**

- Apocalypse
- Majesty
- Dynasty
- Order
- Ascension
- Transition
- Schism
- Imperium
- Innovation
- Succession
- Enlightenment
- Civilization
- Universality
- Legacy