

Cultures of Reading in Imperial Russia
Fall 2022 Course Prospectus
(version of April 18, 2022)

Prof. D. Brian Kim (dbkim@sas.upenn.edu)
Wednesdays, 1:45pm–4:44pm

Course ID and 3-digit number: REES 6683-401
ARTH 5730-401
CIMS 5730-401
COML 5730-401
ENGL 5730-401
GRMN 5730-401

Course Description and Level:

What did it mean to be a reader in imperial Russia? What did people read, and to what ends? How was literacy cultivated, and what were the social implications? In this course, students will develop a broad theoretical apparatus in the history and sociology of reading in nineteenth-century Russia to analyze several canonical works of literature that thematize and foreground the act of reading: as a pursuit undertaken for the betterment of self, society, nation, and world; as a light pastime for the bored, contemplative, or idle; but also as an enterprise fraught with potential for moral or civic ruin. In addition to investigating allusions to the specific texts and authors read by literary characters, we will also examine the reading habits of our own authors as both consumers and producers of literary culture. We will consider these dynamics against a backdrop of constant fluctuations in educational policies, the book market, and the circulation of texts within and beyond Russia as we work together to develop an understanding of the imperial Russian reading public(s).

All required readings, lectures, discussion, and written work for this course are in English. Reading knowledge of Russian is welcome, and graduate students specializing in Russian are expected to supplement their readings with the original texts where applicable. This is a graduate-level seminar; advanced undergraduate students with sufficient background in Russian literature may enroll with instructor permission.

Class Structure for Fall 2022:

- This course will be held fully in-person, with weekly meetings on Wednesday afternoons. Class time will be devoted predominantly to discussion with occasional short lectures. There will be no recorded lectures as part of this course.

- Reading assignments will draw from a wide range of both primary and secondary sources, generally not to exceed 200 pages per week.
- A discussion board on Canvas will be open for short responses to the assigned reading, due the night before each class. Students will be responsible for ten such posts (out of a possible total of twelve) over the course of the semester.
- Students will develop an individual topic related to the purview of the course and produce a research paper by the end of the semester.

Outline of Assignments and Assessments:

- Seminar participation, 25%
- Discussion board posts (~300 words), 25%
- Final paper (~6000 words), 50%

Required Books:

This course will require five book purchases for topics to be covered beginning in October; more detailed information will be furnished at the beginning of the fall semester. Other texts will be made available on Canvas.

Preliminary Schedule of Topics and Major Authors (subject to change):

- August 31: Course Introduction
- September 7: Beginnings
- September 14: Translation
- September 21: Markets
- September 28: Publics
- October 5: Education
- October 12: Bibliopsychology
- October 19: Pushkin
- October 26: Dostoevsky
- November 2: Turgenev
- November 9: Tolstoy
- November 16: Kuzmin
- November 30: The East