

Tolstoy
Fall 2022 Course Prospectus
(version of April 18, 2022)

Prof. D. Brian Kim (dbkim@sas.upenn.edu)
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30pm–4:59pm

Course ID and 3-digit number: REES 0481-401
COML 2004-401

Course Description and Level:

Leo Tolstoy is a figure who arguably needs little introduction, if only as an effigy for the kind of author who writes books like *War and Peace* — prime examples of what Henry James called the “large, loose, baggy monsters” of nineteenth-century Russian literature, the sprawling novels with several parallel plot lines and hundreds of characters who inhabit page numbers in the quadruple digits. In this seminar, we will grapple together with the intricacies of *War and Peace*, learn about the social, cultural, and historical contexts not only of its depiction and genesis, but also of its wide-ranging reception, and consider the big questions that preoccupied Tolstoy throughout his lifetime. Working with a range of his texts including a wide spread of his shorter fiction and also a number of Tolstoy’s non-literary writings on topics such as aesthetics, religion, education, and social and political problems, we will work toward understanding Tolstoy’s work, how he became who he was, and the reverberations of his thought throughout the rest of the world.

All required readings, lectures, discussion, and written work for this course are in English. Students who wish to work with texts in the original Russian are invited to consult with the instructor in advance of major writing assignments. This undergraduate-level course is a Benjamin Franklin Seminar with no prerequisites and fulfills the Sector requirement in Arts & Letters.

Class Structure for Fall 2022:

- This course will be held fully in-person, with twice-weekly required meetings on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Class time will be devoted to discussion as well as occasional short lectures. There will be no recorded lectures as part of this course.
- The amount of reading will vary from week to week, ranging from approximately 100 to 300 pages, but usually falling in the middle. Every effort will be made to distribute the weekly workload in a way commensurate to the amount of time between class sessions.

- 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 fifteen such posts (out of a possible total of twenty-six) over the course of the semester.
- Two formal papers, a midterm and a final, will invite students to synthesize their understanding of core concepts across Tolstoy's life and works. There will be opportunities to receive draft feedback on each of these assignments.

Outline of Assignments and Assessments:

- Seminar participation, 25%
- Discussion board posts (~200 words), 25%
- Midterm paper (~1500 words), 20%
- Final paper (~3000 words), 30%

Required Books:

This course will require three or four book purchases, including Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; more detailed information will be furnished prior to the beginning of the fall semester. Other texts will be made available on Canvas.

Preliminary Outline of Topics (exact dates subject to change):

- August 30–September 29: overview of Tolstoy's career, including shorter literary works
- October 4–November 17: *War and Peace*
- November 22–December 8: late Tolstoy and his reception