

School of Arts & Sciences Prospectus for REES 2671 Everyday Life in the Soviet Union

Course Description

This course is intended for students who have spoken Russian at home and seek to improve their capabilities in formal and professional uses of the Russian language.

The course focuses on the history of everyday life in the Soviet Union during the twenty year period before the collapse of the communist system (1960s-1980s). We will examine experiences, practices and material culture related to various spheres of Soviet life including living arrangements, food, housekeeping, work and leisure, education and health. We will also study emotions and etiquettes associated with romantic, matrimonial and generational relationships and everyday communications. Finally, we will explore how ideas and practices of socialist living continue to influence younger generations of former Soviet families that have never lived under socialism.

Course readings and materials include films, literary texts, memoirs and history documents, social journalism and publications on statistics and social anthropology.

Course Goals and Structure

- The class meets Tue-R 12:00-1:30. The duration of each class meeting is 80 min.
- All readings in the course are in Russian.
- Prerequisite: Russ 361 or an equivalent. Placement in the class based on the results of a placement test is also accepted.
- The course is structured as a series of case studies centered on family relationships and parenthood, nationalities, and popular culture in the 1960s-1980s. Students will read literature, watch films, study media and scholarly articles, diaries and memoirs.

We will explore the relationships, conflicts, interests, and desires of everyday life in the Soviet Union. We will try to answer the following questions:

- Were there class conflicts in the officially classless society?
- What national and colonial tensions underlay everyday relationships?
- What conflicts surrounded the use of the Russian language?
- Was there freedom of expression in the notoriously unfree society?
- What incentivized people at work?
- What made people angry?
- What made people happy?
- How can we access the history of the Soviet everyday beyond Cold War propaganda on both sides of the Iron Curtain?

Types of assignments & assessments:

- Daily homework related to case preparation
- Three presentations of a case

- Final oral interview will include a conversation about facts and readings covered in the course. Students will be able to choose a time and date during the last two weeks of classes. If they prefer, they can take this test later, during the exam period.