

Instructor: Alec Brookes, 864-4788, alec.brookes@gmail.com, abrookes@mun.ca

Office Hours: SN 3052, WTh 4pm or by appointment

Please email ahead to let me know you're coming or book a different time.

The Russian Utopian Imagination



Course Description

Following its failure in the Crimean War, Russia underwent an unprecedented push towards modernization, marked by major scientific advances, the liberation of the serfs, and the rise of ideological and economic liberalism. The utopian imagination played an important part in the making of that history and resistance to it, eventually giving rise to a revolution and a new social order. Subsequently, that new social order provoked some of the most powerful and imaginative critiques and corrections of the utopian project available in world literature.

Set against the background of the deterioration of capitalist institutions at home and abroad, this course prompts us to imagine a world outside of a present that too often presents itself as the only possibility. Some of the questions we will try to answer are: what is Utopia?; what historically has been the role of Utopia in the current social order?; and what potential does utopian thinking have to effect positive change in the future.

Textbooks

Available at the MUN bookstore:

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground* and “The Grand Inquisitor”
Alexander Bogdanov, *Red Star*
Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading*
Andrei Platonov, *Foundation Pit*

All other textbooks will be provided by the instructor in pdf format on d2l at least two weeks before we read them.

Instructor

Alec Brookes

Course Schedule (dates reflect when we begin to discuss particular works and themes. You are expected to have read the books by that date)

September 6: **What is Utopia? And why should we read Utopias now?**

September 11: **Utopia, Reason, and Revolution**

Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *What is to be Done* (novel [selections], 1861)

September 18: **Against Utopia**

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (novella, 1864)

— — —, “The Grand Inquisitor” (excerpt from *Brothers Karamazov*, 1881)

October 2: **Utopia After Capitalism**

Alexander Bogdanov, *Red Star* (novel, 1907)

October 16: **Materializing Utopia**

Andrey Platonov, *Foundation Pit* (novel, 1930)

October 30: **Transcending Utopia**

Vladimir Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading* (novel, 1935)

November 15: **Utopia After Communism**

Evgeny Zamyatin, *We* (novel, 1921)

Irina Polyanskaya, "Clean Zone" (short story, 1990)

November 27: **Where now?**

Black Lives Matter. "A Vision for Black Lives."

Dark Mountain. "Uncivilisation."

Crystal Fraser and Sara Komarnisky, "150 Acts of Reconciliation for the last 150 days of Canada's 150."

Dates to remember:

Monday, October 9: No lecture

Wednesday, October 25: Last day for students to drop courses without academic prejudice (re: "20% rule" for returning feedback; see page 2 of the attached syllabus)

Monday, November 13: No lecture

Method of Evaluation

Engagement: 15%. Based on productive contributions to class discussion. 5% of this mark will be given before the drop date.

Essay 65% broken down into the following assignments (returned within 2 weeks of submission):

Proposal and bibliography 15%: Approx. 300-word proposal plus bibliography. Identify the topic you are writing on or the question your paper will attempt to answer. You will also include 5 sources (other than the text you are analyzing) in MLA or Chicago Style bibliographical format that will help you address your topic. Ultimately, you will have to engage with just two of those sources in the final paper. Mark distribution: 5% feasibility; 5% clarity of project; 5% quality of sources (are they academic sources? are they appropriate for your topic?). You are encouraged to discuss your topic with the instructor (and your peers) before submitting. Due date: **September 29**. Late penalties: 5% per day for a maximum of 3 days.

Introduction 20%: Maximum 3 pages. The introduction should begin with a hook—something that compels my interest in the questions you will attempt to answer in your essay. After you identify the question(s) you are trying to answer, you should give a breakdown of how you will

convincingly attempt to answer that (those) question(s). You will have narrowed down the sources you will engage with seriously to two. You will either draw upon or else disagree with those sources. *You are not merely to repeat or summarize their arguments.* Mark breakdown: 5% Clarity of writing; 5% clarity and coherence of argument; 5% originality of argument; 5% engagement with academic sources. Due Date: **October 27**. Late penalties: Late penalties: 5% per day for a maximum of 3 days.

Final paper 30%: 8-10 pages in Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1-inch margins. This is the execution of the argument you've laid out in your introduction. Mark breakdown: 5% scope of knowledge (how well do you know your topic?); 5% engagement with academic sources; 5% originality and independence of thought; 5% execution of argument; 5% clarity and quality of writing; 5% improvement since the proposal stage. Due Date: **November 24**. Late penalties: 5% per day for a maximum of 3 days.

Midterm 10%. **Take home assignment.** Choose 3 out of 5 identifications: 1pt for author, 1 pt for text, 1 pt for incorporating the original year of publication or writing into its significance; 2 pts for significance of the passage in the context of the course/the history of Utopia. No late submissions will be accepted except according to section 6.7.5 of the calendar.

Final 10% **Take home assignment.** *Based on second half of course only.* Choose 3 out of 5 identifications: 1pt for author, 1 pt for text, 1 pt for incorporating the original year of publication or writing into its significance; 2 pts for significance of the passage in the context of the course/the history of Utopia. No late submissions will be accepted except according to section 6.7.5 of the calendar.

POLICIES

Missed Testing and Late Policies

For university policy on missed testing and late policies, please see www.mun.ca/regoff/calendar/sectionNo=REGS-0601#REGS-0615

Class Cancellations

If I need to cancel a class because of illness or some other reason, I will notify students through MUN's class cancellation web page (www.mun.ca/main/cancellations.php). Any rescheduling will be announced on D2L.

Email Policy

I aim to return emails within one business day.

Accommodation of Students with Special Needs

Memorial University is committed to facilitating and promoting an accessible, inclusive, and mutually respectful learning environment. Students requiring special accommodation are asked to communicate firstly with the Glenn Roy Blundon Centre (www.mun.ca/blundon) at the earliest opportunity. University policies and procedures pertaining to accommodations for students with disabilities can be found at www.mun.ca/policy/site/policy.php?id=239

Classroom Etiquette (*recommended, but not required*)

Treat your fellow classmates with respect, and if you have a problem with someone in the class, feel free to approach me about it. Treat everyone with respect.

As far as cellphones and computers are concerned, I object to you coming to class and then distracting yourself with facebook or solitaire. It will affect the mark I give you for in-class work, but I will only tell you to put it away if it's distracting to me or I feel it's distracting others in the classroom. You can bring food and beverages in to class according to university policy, but please be quiet.

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

Cheating includes but is not limited to allowing another student to copy from your work, presenting someone else's work as your own including through failure to credit the source of ideas, consulting electronic devices such as mobile phones or MP3 players and/or interacting with others while a test is ongoing. Any submission in this course that is similar to another author's work, beyond chance, will be treated as plagiarism. Information about procedures and penalties for academic misconduct is outlined in the University Calendar.

See section 6.12.4 of the University Calendar on Academic Misconduct (www.mun.ca/regoff/calendar/sectionNo=REGS-0748).

Campus Support

The Digital Learning Centre (SN-4030) supports the use of technology to enhanced teaching and learning of all disciplines in the Faculty of Arts. Students may often drop in to use computers for course-related work. See DLC schedule for availability here: mun.ca/DLC/hours/sn4030.php

The Writing Centre (SN-2053) is a free, drop-in facility for students and helps them become better writers and critical thinkers. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND making use of this resource, even if you are already a good writer.

The Academic Advising Centre (SN-4053) provides academic guidance to students in their first year of study. Students seeking advice about a specific Major or Minor should contact the designated undergraduate advisor in that department.

The Commons (QEII library) provides access to print, electronic and technology resources.

The Counselling Centre (UC-5000) helps students develop their personal capabilities, ranging from study strategies to assisting distressed students.

Student Affairs and Services (Answers, UC-3005) answers questions about such things as courses, housing, books, financial matters and health.

The Glenn Roy Blundon Centre (UC -4007) serves students whose disabilities involve conditions affecting mobility, vision, hearing, learning (disabilities), chronic illness, or mental health; support is also provided to students with documented temporary illnesses and injuries.