

219 Anderson
W 3:00-6:00
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Anderson 204 A
Office Hours – F 10:00-11:30
and by appointment

**POS4931 - Special Topics in Political Science:
UNDERSTANDING TYRANNY (Honors)**

PREREQUISITES: Open to all students enrolled in the Honors Program. An active mind, strong nerves and stomach, and a willingness to read and discuss.

Non-Honors Student Registration

Non-Honors students can register for an Honors course on a space-available basis starting the third day of each semester by completing [this form](#) via their [UF G Suite account](#). Requests to register must be submitted by 4:00 pm ET on the last day of drop/add.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Using source materials that often do not figure prominently in the literature of political science (memoirs, novels, and films), this course is intended to give students a different and fuller perspective on highly repressive political regimes. Rather than approaching the problem at the level of the state, this course will approach tyranny from the perspective of those who experience it.

The course will explore extreme repression as experienced in Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, and as depicted in imaginary tyrannies (cacotopias, fr. Greek kak- = bad + topos = place). In the sections on Nazism and Stalinism we will read detailed historical accounts of the Holocaust and the Great Terror, in addition to reading novels and memoirs, and viewing films.

The course will be conducted as a reading and discussion seminar. For this reason, preparation and attendance are essential. Students are expected to take an active role in educating themselves and the instructor.

This course has three critical pedagogical objectives. The first is to educate the students about the reality of highly repressive political regimes in a way not possible with normal political science materials. While works of political science are helpful in understanding why repressive regimes come into being and the broad outlines of the policies they pursue, political scientists have paid less attention to how repression is experienced by those subjected to it. One way to understand this is through firsthand accounts, novelistic and film treatments of the problems of everyday life under tyranny. In this way, the students will achieve a more profound and human understanding of highly repressive regimes.

The course's second objective is to sensitize students to the danger of situations where class, gender, religious, or ethnic hatred is actively advocated as a political aim and where repression or outright destruction of social groups is actively pursued as state policy. Several of the works have been chosen because they pay special attention to the particular problems that women face under repressive regimes.

The course's third aim is to sensitize the students to the fact that political discourse is often conducted through ostensibly nonpolitical (e.g. artistic, literary) works. These potential outlets for political expression become even more important under conditions where censorship effectively stifles overt discussion of politics on a societal level. Not only is this important in itself but it will educate the students on the use, if not the importance, of such materials for their own understanding of politics. Novels, films, memoirs, and the like are useful because they help political scientists understand the meanings that political actors attribute to their actions. As such they are particularly useful in

understanding repressive societies where reliable information is scarce, as well as for orienting ourselves in the politics of cultures different from our own.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Students will be evaluated through class participation, two short thematic papers, and a term paper. Explanations of each type of assignment follow.

Participation: Students should be prepared to take an active and informed role in discussing the works assigned for class. In addition, each student will serve as a discussant for at least one work. The discussant's role is to prepare a list of topics/questions for discussion, which will be made available for the other seminar participants **electronically** on the Monday prior to class at 9:00 am ET.

Thematic papers: During the course of the semester, students will write two short theme papers. These should be comparative in nature, i.e. a discussion of how two, or more, authors treat similar aspects of their experience. These papers should show how the experiences depicted complement or contradict each other, and what this tells us about the reality they are describing.

Term paper: Students should discuss their topics well in advance with the instructor. A range of different types of papers are possible. Students may want to expand the thematic papers they have written earlier in the semester to include more works. They also may wish to compare aspects of the Nazi and Soviet experiences. Students may also do research papers on a particular historical event, controversy, individual, or author. The paper may be interpretive, analytical, or historical. The instructor has no fixed expectations in terms of form, content, discipline, or approach. However, the paper should be serious in intent, well-written and organized, and enhance the student's understanding of the course material. Students may also work on the term paper as a group project (however, be warned that group papers are more difficult to write than individual papers).

The components will be weighted as follows:

general class participation:	15%
topics for discussion:	5%
theme paper 1:	20%
theme paper 2:	20%
term paper:	40%

Late Work: Students may request short extensions on deadlines when they face situations that would qualify for excused absences (see below), or instances where their attendance of multiple courses creates situations where many assignments are due on or about the same day. Such extensions need to be requested prior to the assignment deadline. Unexplained lateness will be subject to the penalty of a reduction of a full letter grade on the assignment.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance at all class sessions is a requirement. The university makes allowances for excused absences for a number of important reasons. See [here](#). Critically, for all planned absences, a student in a situation that allows an excused absence from class, or any required class activity must inform the instructor as early as possible prior to the class. For all unplanned absences because of accidents or emergency situations, students should contact their instructor as soon as conditions permit.

CLASS BEHAVIOR

Cell phones must be silenced and put away during class. Computers and tablets may be open but can only be used for note-taking and reference work on the internet. Engagement with persons outside the class via social media is not permitted.

During discussion, students are expected to comport themselves respectfully in conversation with

the instructor and other students. It is our joint responsibility to maintain an atmosphere where different viewpoints are respected and all participants feel they can express themselves.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (including policy on AI)

Academic integrity entails the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights, and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. To these ends, students admitted to UF have agreed to abide by its [code of conduct](#). It is worthwhile to reread this pledge periodically.

The provisions here about not cheating on assignments are important to my assessment of your written work. Plagiarism will be policed and the full weight of sanctions applied in cases of violation of the Honor Code. All work submitted will be run through anti-plagiarism software. **Please note that under the Honor Code: “Commissioning or seeking to commission another person or Entity, with or without compensation, to produce or complete academic work or to impersonate a student in any academic activity.” This regulation precludes the use of artificial intelligence software (e.g. Chat GPT or similar programs) to write your assignments.** Furthermore, you are here to learn to write, make an argument, think critically, and use evidence to further advance your intelligence and human potential. Reliance on such programs is a form of cheating yourself from realizing your full potential.

DISABILITY ACCESS

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodation should connect with the Disability Resource Center. [Click here](#) to get started with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

STUDENT WELLNESS

Some students experience personal and academic challenges which pose difficulties for their work and life satisfaction. No one needs to cope with these in isolation. UF has extensive services to protect student wellness and assist in academic challenges. Among the many resources are:

Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: Visit the [Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need or visit the [Student Health Care Center website](#).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the [UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).
- *GatorWell Health Promotion Services*: For prevention services focused on optimal well-being, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- *Library Support*: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- *Teaching Center*: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
- *Writing Studio*: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

REQUIRED TEXTS. All are available for purchase (* in a Pro-Copy packet) and are on reserve at Pattee Library:

Colson Whitehead, Zone One.

Yevgenia Ginzburg, Journey into the Whirlwind.

Raul Hilberg, Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders.

Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz.

Oleg V. Khlevniuk, The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror.

Varlam Shalamov, Kolyma Tales.

Nadezhda Mandelstam, Hope Against Hope.

Gisella Perl, I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz.

Olga Lengyel, Five Chimneys.

Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, Volker Riess, eds., The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders.

Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower.

Optional Texts:

George Orwell. 1984.

Miklos Nyiszli. Auschwitz : A Doctor's Eyewitness Account.

COURSE OUTLINE

PART I: STALINISM AND THE GREAT TERROR

Session 1 (August 28, 2024): Introduction. Film -- Interrogation (Przesłuchanie) - 1982 - Ryszard Bugajski. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSn8IqEMBEQ>.

Session 2 (September 4, 2024): Oleg V. Khlevniuk, The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror.

September 11: No Class. Replaced by Individual sessions on paper topics on September 30.

Session 3 (September 18, 2024): Yevgenia Ginzburg, Journey into the Whirlwind.

Session 4 (September 25, 2024): Varlam Shalamov, Kolyma Tales.

September 30: Individual office visits to discuss Theme Paper 1.

Session 5 (October 2, 2024): Nadezhda Mandelstam, Hope Against Hope.

PART II: NAZISM AND THE HOLOCAUST

Session 7 (October 9, 2024): Film -- "The Gray Zone." <https://www.crackle.com/watch/0A67B03D-C28B-40BA-B55D-44D647C17B44/the-grey-zone>.

Optional reading: based on the book – Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account by Miklos Nyiszli.
[first theme paper due]

Session 8 (October 16, 2024): Raul Hilberg, Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders.

Session 9 (October 23, 2024): Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz.

Session 10 (October 30, 2024): Olga Lengyel, Five Chimneys.

Session 11 (November 6, 2024): Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, Volker Riess, eds., The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders.

PART III: CACOTOPIA

Session 12 (November 13, 2024): Film -- "1984." Optional reading: George Orwell, 1984. **[second theme paper due]**

Session 13 (November 20, 2024): Colson Whitehead. Zone One.

November 25-29: Thanksgiving Break.

Session 14 (December 4, 2024): Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower.

Finals week: **Term paper due December 11, 2024.**