Master Syllabus Department of Geography

GEOG 356: GEOGRAPHY OF RUSSIA AND ITS NEIGHBORS

Course Description

Geographic analysis of the locational, environmental, economic, and cultural diversity of the successor countries to the Soviet Union. Regional examination of Russia, Baltic, and other East European countries, Transcaucasia and Central Asia. (3 credit hours).

Course Objectives

The objectives of the course are:

- to gain an appreciation of the region's many natural and human dimensions, and
- 2. to understand better the origins and manifestations of the social, economic and political problems confronting the people of Russia and its fourteen non-Russian, although controlled by Russia in the past, present-day neighbors: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Course Rationale

This course is designed to provide reasonably detailed, updated, treatment of various spatial aspects of both physical and human environments of the fifteen successor countries to the former Soviet Union. This very diverse region has experienced dramatic transformation during the last three decades, but it remains of great cultural, economic and strategic importance to the whole world, including the United States. Thus, gaining better appreciation of this region's attributes and problems is of important educational value for our students.

Course Content and Format

Students will be presented material mainly in a lecture style format, including various multimedia presentations, and discussion sessions with students representing particular countries, depending upon availability (in cooperation with Ball State Rinker Center for International Programs). Students will develop and present to a class a multivariate project on a specific assigned area. An example of a potential course outline of major topics of this course, with time allotment to each topic at the discretion of the instructor:

1. The region (= the historic Russian sphere):

- a. Introduction: the area, location, major places
- b. Physical setting: landscape regions, waters, climate, vegetation zones
- c. Historic background: Russian Empire, the U.S.S.R.
- d. Post-Soviet transformation: demographic and political problems since 1991

2. The Russian Federation:

- a. Regions of Russia: European Russia, Volga, Urals, Siberia and Far
- b. Population: distribution, growth trends, Russians and minorities, cities
- c. Economy: industrial and agricultural regions, transportation centers
- d. Political, social and other transformation problems
- 3. Russia's "South Flank": Transcaucasia and Central Asia.
 - a. Transcaucasia: Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan
 - b. Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan
- 4. Russia's "West Flank": Baltic and 'Southwest" countries
 - a. Baltic countries: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russian Kaliningrad Oblast
 - b. "Southwest" countries: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova.

Textbook Suggestion

Blinnikov, Mikhail S., 2011: A Geography of Russia and Its Neighbors. New York, NY, The Guilford Press, pp. 439.

Methods of Evaluating Student Performance

Forms of evaluations might include: examinations, map guizzes, in-class and take-home assignments, class project and class participation.

Evaluation of the Course

Student evaluation of the course using university, and departmental, course evaluation forms.