

Proposal: AALAC Faculty Workshop

Project Title: “Understanding Putinism: Illiberal Russia through the Liberal Arts”

Host Institution: Reed College

Timing: over two weekend days in the spring semester of 2016

Organizer: Evgenii Bershtein, Professor of Russian, Reed College,
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“The crucial elements of Putinism are nationalism, religion, social conservatism, state capitalism and government domination of the media. They are all, in some way or another, different from and hostile to, modern Western values of individual rights, tolerance, cosmopolitanism and internationalism.” These comments by Fareed Zakaria reflect the practical political challenge Putinism presents to the West. Putinism also presents an intellectual and pedagogical challenge to American scholars and teachers of Russia, working in disciplines as diverse as political science, sociology, anthropology, government, political economy, Russian language, literature and cultural studies. In the context of liberal arts education, the New Russia’s positioning as a leading illiberal force in the contemporary world already triggers many classroom discussions. In order to make them more productive and enlightening for students, the instructor must have an interdisciplinary analytical toolbox along with in-depth knowledge of the materials relevant to the study of Putinism as a doctrine and practice. The proposed scholarly meeting aims at helping the selected AALAC faculty members to build or further enhance such expertise.

Since the end of the cold war, Russian studies have become marginalized in U.S. colleges. Putin’s aggressive stance against Russia’s neighbors and the West reminds us that Russia still matters not only culturally but also politically. Reintegrating the interdisciplinary study of contemporary Russia into our curricula is a necessary task for AALAC member institutions. Our workshop will initiate a structured academic conversation on curricular and pedagogical approaches to teaching Putinism in American higher education and specifically in the liberal arts setting. With this workshop, we plan to begin an informal AALAC faculty network

for sharing scholarly ideas, pedagogic strategies and study materials, which enhance collaboration among the faculty studying and teaching today's Russia.

Workshop Planning Group:

- ◆ Julie Cassiday, Professor of Russian, Williams College
- ◆ Sergei Glebov, Assistant Professor of History, Smith and Amherst Colleges
- ◆ Alexandra Hrycak, Professor of Sociology, Reed College
- ◆ Konstantine Klioutchkine, Associate Professor of Russian, Pomona College
- ◆ William Pyle, Professor of International Economics, Middlebury College.
- ◆ Peter Rutland, Professor of Government, Wesleyan University
- ◆ Olga Shevchenko, Associate Professor of Sociology, Williams College

Members of the planning group advise the organizer on the program of the workshop, present talks at the workshop, and make themselves available to chair workshop panels and/or serve as discussants. Their travel and accommodation expenses are covered from the workshop budget. The AALAC grant will cover the cost of travel and accommodation for at least four more out-of-town participants.

Format: we envision a two-day long workshop-symposium, consisting of three panels, two roundtables, and two invited lectures/seminars. Attendance of all panels will be open to the Reed community and the general public. The panels and roundtables will cover the following topics:

- ◆ "What is Putinism? An Interdisciplinary Approach,"
- ◆ "Putinism's Impact on Culture and the Media in Russia,"
- ◆ "Historical Memory in Present-Day Russian Politics,"
- ◆ "Putinism and the World,"
- ◆ "Teaching Today's Russia(n) to American Students."

Panelists will represent *at least six and ideally up to ten* different AALAC member institutions and have Russia as their primary or secondary teaching and research

area. They will come from such fields as political science, sociology, media studies, political economy, history, anthropology, Russian language, literature, and culture.

We will also host **two invited speakers**, internationally recognized scholars who focus on the study of Putinism. Each will present a lecture/seminar.

Follow-up Activities, and the Evaluation of the Workshop:

- ◆ Participants will start a website, on which they will publish the syllabi of the relevant courses they teach and share curricular and pedagogical ideas.
- ◆ Participants will organize roundtables on approaches, including pedagogical ones, to Putinism for the national conventions of ASEES (Association for Slavic, European, and Eurasian Studies) and AATSEEL (American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages).
- ◆ The organizer, in consultation with the members of the Workshop Planning Group, will produce a report evaluating the workshop and describing its research and pedagogical outcomes.