RUSSIAN EMPIRE IN THE MODERN PERIOD:
HISTORY, CULTURE AND THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY

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This course surveys the history of the Russian Empire as a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural space. We will analyze how this space was constructed politically and culturally, and how it was experienced by various subjects of the empire in its different localities. We will trace how the understanding of Russianness evolved from the imperial to the national concept and identity. History is always about telling stories, and thus about remembering names, circumstances, and the sequence of events. However, learning facts about the Russian Empire is not the ultimate goal of the class. It is just a necessary prerequisite for the much more challenging task of imagining life in a very different society and understanding how this complex and unevenly organized imperial society functioned.

How were empires perceived in the long nineteenth century? What mechanisms did they use to govern their diverse populations? How did empires create nations and at the same time nourish hybrid and situational identities? And what were the unique features of the Russian Empire as a modernizing state?

In short, this course is about the Russian Empire as an example of a complex and diverse society and polity adjusting to challenges of modernity such as the rationalization of governance, social, and cultural unification, the rise of mass societies, mass politics, and popular culture, and the rise of nationalism. Students who take this class are invited to share their own experiences of living in multicultural environments.

No textbook is required. Reading for the course is available from BB or the library.