



INTS 362 | Contemporary Societies of the South Caucasus (1.0 Unit*)

Instructor: Dr. Alexander Agadjanian, alex.agadjanian@ysu.am
Time: TBD
Location: Yerevan State University, Faculty of International Relations; Yerevan, Armenia
Number of hours: 75 (5 academic hours per week, over the course of 15 weeks)

**One Bryn Mawr unit is equal to four undergraduate semester credits*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course is designed to provide students with a greater understanding of contemporary societies in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, with particular attention to the development of ethno-national, religious, and sociocultural landscapes against a common historical and evolving geopolitical background. The course will provide a general overview of major contrasting and shared characteristics within the region; actual and potential conflicts within it; the societies' complex interaction within larger political and cultural realms such as post-Soviet Eurasia, Middle East, and Europe.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course will provide the students the understanding of

- key concepts and methods of related disciplines, such as sociology, social and cultural anthropology, cultural studies, and memory studies;
- main historical and cultural prerequisites of the current developments of the South Caucasian societies;
- an overall sociocultural, linguistic, ethno-national and religious landscape of the three countries, as well as its embeddedness in the wider region;
- main developments of the three South Caucasian societies since the dissolution of the Soviet Union;
- the common legacies of the Soviet past in societal practices and cultural memories, as well as major post-Soviet transformations defined by cultural identification and external interactions.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Students interested or specializing in sociology, social and cultural anthropology, religious studies, with a special concentration of the former Soviet Eurasia, and particularly the Caucasus.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance in this class is required. Make-up work will be allowed in cases of excused absences only, which include documented illness, religious holidays or family emergency. In addition to contacting the American Councils Resident Director, you are required to notify me in writing immediately of an absence. Other absences will be considered unexcused and will result in an immediate reduction of your grade of 10%. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late without a valid excuse will not receive credit for attending. More than three unexcused absences will result in automatic course failure.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact American Council in keeping with its Accommodations Policy, which was distributed to all participants upon admission to the program. Student seeking accommodations who have not yet informed American



Councils of this request, should speak to the Resident Director immediately about their needs. Students are also welcome to contact me regarding accommodation but should be aware that all accommodations are provided in keeping with the American Councils Accommodations Policy.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

Grading will consist of:

Category	% Points
In-class participation	20%
Mid-term exam	20%
In-class case presentation	20%
Final research paper	40%
TOTAL	100%

Grade Scale

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
4.0 Scale	4	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.3	2.0	1.7	1.0	0.0
% Points	94–100	90–94	87–90	84–87	80–84	77–80	74–77	70–74	60–70	0–60

READING LOAD

Participants in the course are expected to read from around 60 pages per week. Students are expected to budget their time accordingly in order to complete all required reading selections prior to a particular class for which they have been assigned.

IN-CLASS PARTICIPATION

Participation is key in establishing in-class dynamics and gauging feedback regarding the perception of material presented. Participation will be graded on one time basis at the end of the semester with overall weight of 20%.

MID-TERM EXAM

The mid-term exam will consist of drafting an 800-word research abstract geared towards the completion of the final research paper. The topics will be selected individually by the students in coordination with the instructor.

IN-CLASS PRESENTATION

The presentations will be conducted groups of 2 or 3. The presentation will be based on the topic your group has selected at mid-term from a selected list of other topics proposed by the instructor. It should consist of 5-10 slides that outline the importance of the case selection, relevance, methods and results of your research. Presentations are scheduled on the two past weeks of class.

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER

The final research paper will be a result of your selected mid-term topic and abstract. It will be an original paper in the range of 2500 and maximum 2700 words long that includes overview, theory, research methods, sources used and the results of your research endeavor. The final paper is due December 6, 2026.

REQUIRED TEXTS

These are the texts that contain the required reading for this course:

- Valentina Gevorkyan, Yuliam Antonyan, eds. *Armenia after 2018: Social and Political Transformations*. Peter Lang, 2024
- Stephen Jones, Neil Macfarlane. *Georgia: from Autocracy to Democracy*. University of Toronto Press, 2020
- Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington, Indiana U Press, 1994
- Svante Cornell, *Azerbaijan Since Independence*, M.E. Sharpe, 2011
- Alexander Agadjanian, Ansgar Jodicke, Evert van der Zweerde, eds., *Religion, Nation, and Democracy in the South Caucasus*, Routledge, 2015

Additional and optional reading, when necessary, will be uploaded to Moodle to corresponding lecture units.

COURSE CONTENT

Main themes to be later distributed over the dates of the course.

1. Introduction to the course and discussion of the syllabus. The aims and the rules of the course, the academic disciplines involved, the methods used and the final goals of the course.
2. Introduction to the region of South Caucasus; discussion over the maps: natural, political, linguistic, ethnographic, and economic. Briefly discussing the key concepts and methods of related disciplines, such as sociology, social and cultural anthropology, cultural studies, and memory studies.
3. South Caucasus in a wider regional setting: framing the political and cultural entanglement within former Soviet Eurasia, Iran, Turkey, Middle East and Western Europe (Lecture + seminar). Assigning the themes of the mid-term and final papers.
4. Introducing the historical background of the region: major historical periods in and around South Caucasus; major historical factors influencing the shaping of the ethnic groups and nations; imperial conquests, wars and conflicts that shaped the region; cultural influences and interactions over the centuries (with an emphasis on modern history).
5. The South Caucasus in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: from the Russian imperial rule to independence and to the Soviet period; the societal and cultural legacies of the Soviet Union in the independent states after 1991; an overview of common and specific features of post-Soviet development of the societies; the structure of cultural memory in the context of generational changes (Lectures + seminars).
6. Midterm presentations: discussing the preliminary plans of the final papers.
7. Focus on Armenia: main stages of post-Soviet development; main internal and international tensions and challenges; the evolution of institutions and social groups; the roles of the Armenian diasporas; the generational shifts; the role of Armenian Apostolic church and other religions; the trends in post-Soviet cultural orientations and exposure to regional and global cultural influences - the main trends in literary, artistic life; the role of the Karabakh (Artsakh) issue on the sociopolitical development (Lectures + seminars).

8. Focus on Azerbaijan: main stages of post-Soviet development; the impact of the Karabakh conflict; exponential growth in the oil-and-gas production-based economy and the overall economic growth; the shaping of authoritarian political culture; the development of old and new social groups; the mainstream ethnicity and the minorities; the role of Islam and Turkic identity within the country and across the regional interactions; the issue of mutual exchange/deportation of Azerbaijani and Armenian populations, and the issues of Armenian heritage in Azerbaijan (Lectures + seminars).
9. Focus on Georgia: main stages of post-Soviet development; analyzing conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that led to the secessions of these territories; Armenian, Azerbaijani and other minorities in Georgia; the role of religious allegiances; the decolonial anti-Russian agenda and coping with the persisting Russian pressure and economic impact; decolonial themes in Georgian public discourse and culture, and the European aspirations (Lectures + seminars).
10. In-class group or individual presentations of the final projects (a few classes depending on number of students).
11. Conclusion and main takeaways from the course.