Dostoevsky’s Russia was beset by violent terrorism, political and economic uncertainty, religious fervor, and social experimentation. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821-1881), one of the world’s greatest authors, wrote *Poor Folk*, *The Double*, *Notes from Underground*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *Demons*, *The Adolescent*, *A Writer’s Diary*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. He grappled with the major questions of the modern era in a boldly experimental style. His characters and his novels debate criminality, sexuality, sin, and redemption. Politics and religious and ethnic tension are explicit themes of his works. He was a political radical as a
young man, who was sentenced to death for crimes against the government, but was reprieved. By the end of his life he associated with right-wing government figures. He suffered epileptic seizures during which he experienced mystical ecstasy. He described himself as a child of his century, subject to doubt, and yet later proclaimed his belief in the resurrection of the body and eternal life. The Idiot (18690 is Dostoevsky’s portrait of a “wholly good man,” Demons (1871) is the opposite, a portrait of evil. Dostoevsky’s twin explorations of terrorism and capitalism are particularly timely in the early 21st century.

Required reading (available Illini Union Bookstore unless otherwise noted). Please buy these translations:
2) Nechaev, Sergei. “Catechism of a Revolutionist” (online)

Attendance and grading:
Bring the reading and be ready to talk about it. Attendance will be taken and questions cards will be used (see below). If you miss 2 weeks of class (4 classes), your grade will go down half a step, for example, a “B” becomes a “B-.” Each additional absence lowers your grade by a half step. If you miss 5 weeks of class, you fail. Only students with letters from the Emergency Dean are exempted from this policy: 300 Turner Student Services Building, 610 East John Street, Champaign, IL 61820, (217) 333-0050.

Question cards:
Every Thursday, you will submit a written question in class on the material assigned for that day; the question must be substantive, for example, “Why does Dostoevsky begin Demons with Stepan Verkhovensky? If you fail to submit a question card, you will be marked “absent” for that day. On days that papers are due, you don’t have to submit a question. Questions are to be submitted in writing and in class on Thursdays. No electronic questions accepted.

You are expected to show respect for others by participating in class. Talking to your neighbor, sleeping, and snickering are not acceptable. All electronic devices are prohibited, including laptops, tablets, and cell phones. Using cell phones in class will result in a grade of “absent” for that day.

Writing and grading (it’s easy to get an “A”):
1) 30% (for two 3 page essays, see below)
2) 50% (for two 5 page essays, see below)
3) 20% for attendance and participation (see above).
LATE ESSAYS will be marked down one half grade (an A- becomes a B+) for the first week they are late; one whole grade for the second week. Work more than two weeks late will receive a maximum grade of 50% (better than a “0”). You should always contact me about late work before the due date; a conversation after the due date is still helpful to you, and a conversation with me is vastly preferably to plagiarism.

Essays are due in the first ten minutes of class; essay due dates are: Thu, Feb 5, Thu, March 8, Tu, April 7, and Thu, May 5. For topics, see reading schedule below and also, the end of the syllabus.

Plagiarism:

If you use someone else’s work (words or ideas) and you fail to provide a citation for it, you fail the class. As Professor Rob Rushing puts it:

“Plagiarism means ‘handing in work that you claim is your own original work when it is not.’ Any student who hands in any work of any kind for this course that contains material written by someone else that is not clearly cited (i.e., with quotation marks, title of essay, page numbers, etc.) will fail the entire course.

If you hand in any writing whatsoever (character sketch, draft, essay, idea) in which a paragraph is copied from SparkNotes or any other source, including your friend who took the class previously, you will fail the class. If you hand in an essay in which one sentence is copied from someone else’s personal web site, you will fail the class. If you hand in a character sketch in which a couple of unimportant sentences are copied from a web site or an essay you found in the library, you will fail the class (http://www.complit.illinois.edu/242/Policies.html).”

Please complete the reading by the indicated date on which it will be discussed.

Weeks 1-8 The Idiot
Week 1
Tu Jan 20 Introduction: Dostoevsky, his ecstasy and his demons, his history, and why capital punishment is a greater evil than random murder.
Thu Jan 22 Submit question Idiot to page 51, end of Chapter 4 (Nastasya Filipovna’s back story)

Week 2
Tu Jan 27 Idiot to p. 102. Nastasya Filippovna arrives at the Ivolgins.
Thu Jan 29 Submit question Idiot to p. 155, end of Chapter 14, the confession game.

Week 3
Tu Feb 3 Idiot to p. 175 end of Part I

*Thu Feb 5 Idiot to p. 217, to the end Part II, Chapter 3.
**Essay 1 due. Three double spaced pages.** Why does Dostoevsky have the characters call Prince Myshkin an “idiot?” What does this term mean in the context of Part I? Is Dostoevsky calling attention to the shortcomings of his hero or to the shortcomings of the people around him? Analyze a particular scene as evidence for your argument. **Three double spaced pages.**

**Week 4**
Tu Feb 10 no class instructor out of town; keep reading.
**Thu Feb 12 Submit question** Finish Part III (p. 321), focus on the Holbein portrait of Christ taken down from the cross, and the Prince’s reflections on his epilepsy

**Week 5**
Tu Feb 17 Idiot Part III, through Chapter 4, p. 381, Lebedev’s apocalyptic vision.
**Thu Feb 19 Submit question** Idiot Part III, through Chapter 6, p. 411. The beginning of Ippolit’s confession.

**Week 6**
Tu Feb 24 Finish Part III.
**Thu Feb 26 Submit question** Idiot, Part IV, through Chapter 2, p. 482.

**Week 7**
Tu March 3 Idiot, Part IV, through Chapter 5, p. 525.
**Thu March 5 Submit question** Idiot, Part IV, through Chapter 7, p. 555.

**Week 8**
Tu March 10 Idiot to end.
**Thu March 12 Conclusions: did goodness do any good in this novel?**
**Essay 2 due. Five double-spaced pages. Choose one topic (see end of syllabus for choices).**

**Week 9-15 Demons**
Tu March 17 Demons through Part I, Ch 1, “Instead of an Introduction,” p. 39 AND “Catechism of a Revolutionist” ([http://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/Nqv.catechism.thm.htm](http://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/Nqv.catechism.thm.htm))

**Thu March 19 Submit question** Demons through Part I, Ch 3, Section IV, p. 96

Spring break March 21-27 Demons through Part I, all, through p. 206

**Week 10**
Tu March 31 Demons through Part II, “Night,” Chapter 1, p. 256.
**Thu April 2 Submit question** Demons through Part II, “Night,” Chapter 2, p. 281.

**Tu April 7 Essay 3 due (3 pages)** Kirillov preaches the God-man, while Shatov preaches the God-nation. Explain, using specific language from Demons.
Continue reading *Demons* through Part II, Ch 5, p. 342

**Thu April 9** Submit question *Demons* through Part II, Ch 6, p. 387

Week 12
Tu April 14 *Demons*, Finish Part II, p. 458.
**Thu April 16** Submit question *Demons*, Part III, Ch. 2, p. 518.

Week 13
Tu April 21 *Demons*, Part III, Ch. 4, p. 565
**Thu April 23** Submit question *Demons*, Part III, Ch 5, p. 596

Week 14
Tu April 28 *Demons*, Part III, finish, p. 678.
Thu April 30 *Demons*, “At Tikhon’s.”

Tu May 5 Last day of class. *Essay 4 (five pages) due.*

Fri May 15 Finals end

Essay topics. Pick one for each indicated date, following page limitations specified.
*Thu March 12* *Essay 2 due. Five double-spaced pages. Pick from topics below.*

1) Does the ending of *The Idiot* show that Dostoevsky gave up on his Prince Christ? Is the ending Dostoevsky’s way of saying that Prince Myshkin was ineffective in the world of St. Petersburg? Or is he saying St. Petersburg needs to change? How does the phenomenon of “holy foolishness” play a role?

2) How does the episode of the Holbein portrait of the dead Christ ramify elsewhere in the novel? Use the discussion of the Holbein plus one other episode in the novel.

*Tu May 5* *Essay 4 due. Five double-spaced pages. Pick from topics below.

1) Who or what are the "demons" in *Demons*? Identify a set of characters, a trend, or a cluster of ideas in the world that Dostoevsky portrays, using one to two substantive passages from the text on which you build your argument. What is Dostoevsky's particular take on the meaning of the demonic? How do the demons accomplish their goals?

2) One of the most important scholars of Dostoevsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, argues that in distinction from the conventional novel, in which the characters reflect the author's consciousness, "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses ... is the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 6). Dostoevsky presents a world of characters who debate who they are with one another and in their own distinct voices. Using one to two substantive passages from the text of either novel, make the case for Bakhtin's view of Dostoevsky's "ployphonic," or, multi-voiced, novel. [Note that chapters of Bakhtin are available online; see me for access].