



HIST 391.002

# Medieval Russia

## Icons, Mongols, and Mayhem in Moscow

T 3:30-6 PM

Professor Louise McReynolds

**Course Description:** Since medieval times, Europeans have brought back tales of exoticism and barbarism from Russia to their homelands, but few have taken the time to understand the nature of Russian society and culture. This course attempts to examine early Russian society in its own terms, while also studying the historiographic tradition and the issues at stake for the various historians of the field. The course spans the history of Russia from the ninth century, when written records begin, to Peter the Great at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Topics include the formation of the Russian state, the conversion to Orthodox Christianity, the invasion of the Mongol horde, the reign of Ivan the Terrible, and the transformation of Muscovy in the seventeenth century.

Early Russian history poses particular intellectual challenges. The history of this period is not only completely unfamiliar to most people today, but is also complicated by the unreliability of the source record. Imagine trying to make sense of American history if the authenticity of the Constitution were uncertain and scholars were divided about whether or not the Civil War actually took place. This is the degree of uncertainty that plagues the history of early Russia and makes its study exceptionally exciting and interesting. Each student has the opportunity to contribute original insights and to participate in clarifying the opaque record by filling in some of the blanks. This course allows students to experience the joys of original interpretation and research in a field where the answers are still unknown.