## Spring 2022 International Master Jack Peters

Class numbers 60212 and 60214 Slavic Dept. THH 255

Tuesdays 5:00-6:50 PM or Thursdays 5:00-6:50 PM Phone: 213-740-2735

### **Chess and Critical Thinking**

Slavic Languages and Literature 199 (2 units)

##### **Course Objectives**

Chess is an intellectual activity that develops skills of critical thinking useful in many contexts. Chess occupies a unique position in the history of human endeavor at the convergence of art, sport and science. Since chess is governed by a well-defined set of rules, it is possible to make definite objective observations on the chessboard. Thus, chess provides an ideal reflection of many aspects of a society’s culture. This is particularly true of Russia and the former Soviet Union, where chess was not only a national pastime but also a vehicle for government propaganda. By analyzing significant games, this course will demonstrate how chess can be used 1) as a metaphor for other cultural activities and 2) to help us understand a particular culture more generally. We will explore different ways of thinking about chess with special attention to the Russian experience, before, during, and after the Soviet period. At the same time students will learn to play a stronger, more rewarding game of chess.

**Requirements**

This class is graded CREDIT or NO CREDIT, without letter grades, based on the following:

Class participation, 15% Quizzes and Tactical puzzles, 20%

Midterm examination, 30% Final examination, 35%

**Course Materials**

Students must have the course reader and a tournament chess set with traditional Staunton design pieces.

# **Academic Policies**

Class participation is an important aspect of this course. Students should try to attend class once every week, on either Tuesday or Thursday. If a student must miss a week’s lecture, he should watch the Zoom recording before the next week’s class.

**Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences.  Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards*<https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>.  Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university.  You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>.  This is important for the safety of the whole USC community.  Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person.  *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

## Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing.  Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more.  Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs* <http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html> provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.  If an officially  declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/>will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

**Chess and Critical Thinking – SLL 199**

The current plan is that the first week of classes will be conducted online via Zoom. Subsequent classes will be held in CPA 108. I will give similar lectures at 5 p.m. Tuesday and 5 p.m. Thursdays. Each week, students may pick the day they wish to attend. Zoom recordings of lectures from an earlier semester will be available for those who cannot attend during class hours.

The course reader contains the weekly reading assignments and homework puzzles. Students may submit their puzzle answers to me on paper at the start of class or by e-mail to either [peters-j@pacbell.net](mailto:peters-j@pacbell.net) or japeters@usc.edu.

I hope to reserve time during some classes for us to play chess, but I urge you to play frequently outside of class hours, with a friend, at the USC Chess Club, or on one of the many online chess websites.

## Week 1, Jan. 11 or 13: Introduction to Chess

Explanation of rules and chess notation. Basic chess strategy and tactics. How the chess world is organized. Chess titles. The role of professional chess players. What students should expect from this course.

Illustrative games: Anderssen – Lange, 1851; Morphy – Consultants, Paris 1858.

Read before next class: Algebraic Notation; Chess Symbols; Chess Tactics; Chess Terms.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: X-Rays #3.

## Week 2, Jan. 18 or 20: Chess as an Art Form

Recognizing beauty in chess. Brilliancy and best game prizes.

Illustrative games: Gibaud – Lazard; Fleissig – Schlechter, 1895; Ed. Lasker – Thomas, 1912.

Read before next class: The Four Elements; World Champions; The Evolution of Chess Principles.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: X-Rays #4.

## Week 3, Jan. 25 or 27: Chess as a Science

Discovery and evolution of chess principles. The Romantic, Classical, Hypermodern, and Dynamic eras in chess. The contributions of Morphy, Steinitz, Tarrasch, Alekhine, Botvinnik, and Kasparov.

Illustrative games: Trap in Three Knights Game; Tarrasch – Taubenhaus, 1903; Biyiasas – Dzindzichashvili, 1980.

Read before next class: The Value of the Pieces; The Thinking Routine.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Pin #4.

## Week 4, Feb. 1 or 3: Chess as a Business

Efficiency in chess. Establishing priorities. Managing the chess clock. Point count methods. Simple criteria for calculating positional advantages and the valuation of chess pieces in various situations.

Illustrative games: Vasiukov – Speelman, 1978; Augustin – Nunn, 1977.

Read before next class: Chess and Techniques of Problem Solving.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Pin #5.

**Week 5, Feb. 8 or 10:** **Chess and Techniques of Problem Solving**

Setting priorities. Juggling short range and long range goals. Splitting a problem into smaller units. Asking helpful questions.

Illustrative games: Adams – Torre, 1920; J. Lakdawala – Peters, 1984.

Read before next class: Chess and Intuition; Alekhine Blindfold; The Blindfold Game; Observation Point – What is Your Chess IQ?

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Double Attacks #5.

**Week 6, Feb. 15 or 17: The Psychology of Chess**

Ingredients of chess talent. Chess prodigies and geniuses. “Chunks” of knowledge. Use of intuition. Surprise moves and sacrificial shock. Unsettling your opponent, ethically.

Illustrative game: Lasker – Capablanca, 1914.

Read before next class: How Chess Computers Work; A Computer World Champion? - interview of Botvinnik.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Double Attacks #6.

**Week 7, Feb. 22 or 24:** **Chess Computers and Artificial Intelligence**

How machines play chess differently than humans. History of man vs. machine competition. How today’s masters use computers. The future of chess programs.

Illustrative games: Deep Thought – Kasparov, 1989; Kasparov – Deep Blue, 1996; Leela Zero – Stockfish, 2020.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Discoveries #5.

**Week 8, March 1 or 3: Midterm Examination**

All students will play the instructor in a simultaneous exhibition. Each student will have a week to write answers to questions about his game, with some guidance from the instructor. Completed exams are due at the Week 9 class.

**Week 9, March 8 or 10: Analysis of Midterm games**

Midterm exams due! The class will review the most interesting midterm games, trying to figure out what went right and what went wrong.

Read before next class: Physiological Changes During Tournament Chess.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due March 22: Discoveries #6.

**Spring Recess, No Class March 14-18**

## Week 10, March 22 or 24: Chess as a Sport

How one thinks about chess if the goal is to win tournaments. Modern training methods. Principles of sportsmanship. Chess ethics. The physical demands of chess. Coping with tension and uncertainty.

Illustrative game: Kasparov – Karpov, 1987.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Removing the Guard #2.

**Week 11, March 29 or 31: Chess and Politics in Russia**

Origin of chess in Russia. Government support for chess. Using chess as propaganda. Soviet era training methods. The role of chess in the Cold War and Bobby Fischer’s impact. How the dissolution of the Soviet Union affected the chess world. Contemporary Russian professionals.

Illustrative games: Hoffman – Petrov, 1844; Botvinnik – Portisch, 1968.

Read before next class: The Morals of Chess.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Removing the Guard #4.

**Week 12, April 5 or 7: History of chess in the United States**

Significant figures in American chess, from Benjamin Franklin to Wesley So. The birth of the Swiss system and weekend tournaments. The U.S. Chess Federation and state chess organizations. The Fischer Boom.

Illustrative games: Byrne – Fischer, 1956; Marshall – Burn, 1905; Fischer – Fine, 1963.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Find the Best Capture #1.

## Week 13, April 12 or 14: The Modernization of Chess

Portrayals of chess and chess players in literature, in movies, and on television. The influence of Morphy, Capablanca, Fischer, Kasparov, Anand, Carlsen, and the Polgar sisters.

Illustrative games: Capablanca – Fonaroff, 1918, Kasparov – Butnorius, 1979.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: White Forces Checkmate #1.

**Week 14, April 19 or 21: The Future of Chess**

Will the game be solved? Rules changes. Current trends and predictions of their lasting effect.

Illustrative games: Steinitz – Bardeleben, 1895; Serpik – Fritchle, 1999.

Tactical puzzles to solve, due next week: Black Forces Checkmate #1.

**Week 15, April 26 or 28: Final Examination**

All students will play the instructor in a simultaneous exhibition. Each student will have one week to write answers to questions about their game, paying attention to the chess principles learned during this course. The written exam must be submitted by May 3 for Tuesday students and by May 5 for Thursday students.