

HRTS/POLS 1007: Introduction to Human Rights
University of Connecticut, Stamford
Spring 2015
DWTN137, Thursdays 2:35PM - 3:50PM

Course Description:

Since the end of WWII, we have seen “human rights” evolve from a more abstract theoretical concept to an increasingly compelling and influential moral and legal instrument in confronting human suffering and injustice. Yet, numerous challenges remain to the prevention and eradication of human rights violations globally. For instance, the very idea of “universal” human rights remains controversial, and debates over what issues can legitimately be considered under the umbrella of human rights persist. This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary study of human rights as a concept, as a set of laws and institutions, and as a set of political and cultural practices. Thus, we will begin with a study of the philosophical foundations of human rights that seeks to answer questions such as “What are human rights?” and “How or why do we have these rights?” We will then move to the practice of human rights and examine the political structures that enable us to address human rights violations around the globe. Finally, we will consider some of the most salient, and often controversial, contemporary human rights challenges we face today, here in the U.S. and abroad. Throughout the semester, we will expand our familiarity with key scholarly debates as well as different policy and advocacy strategies with regard to human rights.

Guiding Questions:

- What are the foundations for human rights? How are they different from other laws?
- Can human rights be enforced? If so, how?
- How does technology impact the enforcement of human rights?
- Are human rights really universal? Do they belong to groups or individual?

Required Course Materials

- There is no required text for this course. All of the readings will be posted on HuskyCT.

Grading

Your final grade in this course will be based on the following criteria:

- Modules and participation (both in class and online): 20%
- Quizzes: 15%
- Midterm: 20%
- Group Project: 15%
- Final Exam: 30%

Modules and Participation: This course is a hybrid course. This means that in addition to meeting in class one day a week, a significant portion of the course will be conducted online. Each week, you will complete an online module. I will try to post this module at least two weeks ahead of time, and you will have until noon on Thursday of the given week to complete the material. Each module will ask you to write a brief journal reflection and to complete the content portion. Content sections may contain videos, lectures, activities or other material that you must complete before taking a short quiz (see below). You are also expected to participate in occasional online discussions and actively participate in class. To be successful in this course, you will need to attend class and complete all of your readings. That being said, attendance is not equivalent to participation.

Quizzes: Quizzes will be given at the end of most online modules. These are not intended to be difficult, but simply to ensure that you complete your reading and watch the required lecture and/or video. All quizzes must be completed by noon on Thursday of a given week. Because I will drop your lowest quiz grade (i.e., ONE quiz), I do not allow anyone to take a missed quiz.

Midterm: One in-class midterm exam will be given on Thursday, March 12. You will be given a study guide one week prior to the exam.

Group Project: One of the goals of a hybrid class is to familiarize yourself with using new forms of technology in an educational setting. To meet this goal, you will complete and present a group project entirely online (using Prezi). You will also be required to respond to other group's presentations. I will present an example during Week 13 (April 14 & 16). You will present and respond to the other group's presentations during Week 15 (April 28 & 30). You will choose your groups and receive more information about the project during class on February 5th.

Final Exam: A take-home final exam will be distributed during finals week (date to be determined). You will have 24 hours to complete the exam. All exams must be returned by NOON on: (date to be determined). You will be provided with a study guide one week prior to the exam.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1: January 22

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS? (OR THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITIONS)

Week 2: January 27 & 29

FOUNDATIONS OF RIGHTS: ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORY AND THEORY

- **Reading:** Micheline Ishay, “Human Rights and the Enlightenment” in *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (U California Press, 2003), 63-116.

Week 3: February 3 & 5

THE UNITED NATIONS: STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION

- **Reading:**
 - Rhona Smith, “The United Nations Human Rights System” in *International Human Rights Law*, edited by Mashood A. Baderin and Manisuli Ssenyonjo (Ashgate, 2010)
 - Rhona Smith “Human Rights in International Law.” In *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*. Edited by Michael Goodhart. (Oxford University Press, 2013).
- **Select groups for group projects**

Week 4: February 10 & 12

GENOCIDE, INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW, and HUMAN RIGHTS COURTS

- **Readings:**
 - Robertson, Geoffrey. “An End to Impunity?” in *Crimes against Humanity: The Struggle for Global Justice*. (The New Press, 2006). Pages 239-280.

Week 5: FEBRUARY 17 & 19

THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF RIGHTS

- **Reading:**
 - Paul Farmer “On suffering and structural violence: A view from below.” In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*. Edited by Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006). p424-437

Week 6: February 24 & 26

TYPES OF RIGHTS 1: CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

- **Reading:**
 - Sontag, Susan. 23 May 2004 “Regarding the Torture of Others,” *The New York Times Magazine*:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/23PRISONS.html>
 - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):
<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

Week 7: MARCH 3 & 5

TYPES OF RIGHTS: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, and CULTURAL RIGHTS

- **Reading:**
 - Minkler, Lanse. "Introduction: Why Economic and Social Human Rights?" in *The State of Economic and Social Human Rights*. Edited by Lanse Minkler. (Cambridge, 2013). pp. 1-12
 - Rhoda Howard Hassmann 1983. "The Full-Belly Thesis: Should Economics Rights Take Priority Over Civil and Political Rights? Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa" *Human Rights Quarterly*. 5(4): 467-490.

Week 8: MARCH 10-12

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE USA

- **Reading:**
 - Human Rights Watch Country Report: USA 2014: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/united-states?page=1>
- **MIDTERM IN CLASS: MARCH 12**

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

Week 10: MARCH 24 & 26

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, SOCIAL MEDIA, and REPRESENTATIONS OF RIGHTS

- **Reading:**
 - KONY 2012 (watch and read the discussion from 8 commentators) <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/03/09/kony-2012-and-the-potential-of-social-media-activism>

Week 11: MARCH 31 & APRIL 2

TRUTH COMMISSIONS and OTHER FORMS OF INNOVATIVE JUSTICE

- **Reading:**
 - Joanna Quinn. "Transitional Justice" In *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*. Edited by Michael Goodhart. (Oxford University Press, 2013).
 - Hayner, Priscilla. 2001. "Introduction." *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. (Routledge, 2010).

Week 12: April 7 & 9

HUMAN RIGHTS NARRATIVES

- **Reading:**
 - Horacio Verbitsky *The Flight*. (New Press, 1996) Chapters 1-3; 15-16. (p1-17, 139-170)
 - Listen to: “What Happened at Dos Erres” This American Life. (Posted on HuskyCT)

Week 13: April 14 & 16

“SPECIAL RIGHTS”: WOMEN’S RIGHTS

- **Reading:**
 - Charlotte Bunch, “Women’s Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Re-Vision of Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 12:4 (1990), 486-498.

Week 14: April 21 & 23

HUMAN RIGHTS DEBATES: UNIVERSALISM VS. RELATIVISM and GROUP RIGHTS VS. INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

- **Readings:**
 - Osiatyński, Wiktor, *Human Rights and Their Limits*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009). p144-160
 - United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2009. “Chapter VI: Human Rights” in *The State of the World's Indigenous People* pp. 190-217

Week 15: April 30

GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOP

- **Assignment:**
 - Post your group project and comment on each other’s presentations
- You will receive a study guide for your exam one week prior to the exam

Finals Week:

TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE: Date to be determined