Human rights organizations are gaining an unprecedented amount of attention and credibility among people and governments. While universal human rights may seem timeless, they have a long and checkered political and philosophical history. In this class, we will explore that history through anthropology and legal philosophy as well as through historical case studies of individual states and human rights organizations. Our main questions will be how a powerful rhetoric of human rights has developed, who has spoken on its behalf (and who has been heard), and how human rights claims have intersected with existing political, institutional, and legal structures. Students will undertake independent research on an issue, location, and period of their choosing.

This subject is a seminar that meets twice a week.

Subject goals and requirements

The main goal of this subject is to read together. Almost all classroom meetings will be discussions of assigned readings, with the goals of clarifying their contents, raising questions about them, and sharing ideas regarding our own ongoing projects. To facilitate comprehension and discussion, each week students will receive, or will be asked to develop 1-3 questions on the reading for the following week. Responses or questions of a few sentences to a paragraph or two are to be turned in by email by midnight before the day on which the readings are to be discussed. Students will probably wish to bring copies of their responses to class, for their own reference. Because reading is the main goal, there is plenty of it; however, most of the texts are written in an engaging style, and reading assignments are shortened or eliminated immediately before students' writing assignments fall due. Students' weekly answers to questions on readings will be the basis for 40% of the subject grade.

The second most important goal of this subject is to analyze some aspect of human rights practice at any point in the past that is of interest to each student. Therefore, the topic of the final paper (15-25 pages) is open. The paper may be organized around a human rights theme (e.g., women's rights, torture, political imprisonment, death penalty), an organization (e.g., The Hague tribunal, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch), or the human rights history of a given country, or any combination of these. Probably Web research will be useful; however, print versions of any document should be cited wherever possible. Students will be asked over the course of the semester to produce a paragraph-long proposal with some bibliography, a full draft that one or more other students will read, and a final version. Each one of these items should be as carefully written as possible, representing the student's best effort at that point in the project. While the choice
and analysis of the topic will be independent, students and professor will cooperate in producing final versions through trading papers and through class presentations and discussion of research and writing. In addition, it is expected that students will draw upon assigned readings and discussions from class meetings, as relevant, in their papers. **Students' independent research paper, including proposal, draft, and cooperative work on other students' papers, will be the basis for 40% of the subject grade.**

Since this subject accords the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials a central role in the recent development of human rights discourse, a third goal is to gain better knowledge of these trials and the debates they have engendered. On the basis of assigned reading and on the primary sources produced by the trials, students will write a **midterm exercise (5-10 pages)** for which they choose a defendant and develop either a prosecution or defense statement on the basis of ideas of law and human rights at the time. **The midterm exercise will be the basis for 10% of the subject grade.**

To reward those students who contribute to class discussion through regular attendance, **general participation will the basis for 10% of the subject grade.**

Deadlines for major assignments are in italics below. Anything late will receive a lower grade.

**Books available for purchase at the Coop and on reserve at Hayden, in the order in which we will read them, with non-sale prices as of June 1999 on amazon.com as a guide to their cost:**


**Articles or chapters available for purchase as a photocopied packet from the Copy Technology Center (11-004) and on reserve in the original at Hayden, in the order in which we will read them:**

The following article will be provided in class as a handout:


The following article is available free through [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org), a service on the MIT Libraries website. All students should print out their own copy, if possible (printing is a little tricky):


The following articles are not in the photocopied packet because not everyone is expected to read all of them. They are all on reserve at Hayden; also, copies are available for lending at the professor's office. Students will read:


or


and students will read:


or

- Jale Ahmadi, "Women Between Feminism and Fundamentalism: On the Road," unpublished manuscript

### Course Outline

**Week 1 Recent history: Kosovo**

**Wednesday, 8 September**

Introduction to class and discussion of Kosovo

**Week 2 Recent History: Rwanda**

**Monday, 13 September**

Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*, pp. 3-241

(Class writes questions)
Wednesday, 15 September

Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*, pp. 242-353

(Class writes questions)

**Week 3 A Survey of the History of Human Rights**

Monday, 20 September

Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, chs. 1-4

(LW writes questions)

Wednesday, 22 September

Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, ch. 5

(LW writes questions)

**Week 4**

Monday, 27 September

Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights*, chs. 6-8;

(LW writes questions)

Wednesday, 29 September

In-class discussion: The specifics of human rights violations under Nazism; Using the records of the Nuremberg Trial for the midterm project

**Friday, 1 October**

*Paragraph-long proposal, with some bibliography, for final project due at 5:00 p.m.*

**Week 5 The Holocaust and Nuremberg Trial**

Monday, 4 October

Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial*, 1-148

(Class writes questions)

Wednesday, 5 October

Marrus, *The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial*, 149-260
Week 6 The Holocaust and Nuremberg Trial; The Legacies of the Nuremberg Trial

Monday, 11 October
NO CLASS

Wednesday, 13 October
Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, Ch. 15
Lummis, "Time to Watch the Watchers. United Nations' War Crimes Powers"

Week 7 The Legacies of the Holocaust and Nuremberg Trial, continued

Monday, 18 October
Bartov, "Defining Enemies, Making Victims"
Miller, Moyn, Lal, Bartov, "Forum Essay: Responses"
Novick, "Holocaust Memory in America"

Wednesday, 20 October
No class meeting; individual meetings in special office hours

Friday, 22 October
Midterm paper due at 5:00 p.m.

Week 8 Antecedents of Today’s Human Rights Discourse, Part I: Slavery and Antislavery

Monday, 25 October
Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, pp. xiii-226

Wednesday, 27 October
Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, pp. 227-320
Week 9 Antecedents of Today's Human Rights Discourse, Part II: War and Humanitarianism

Monday, 1 November
Hutchinson, Champions of Charity, pp. 1-201

Wednesday, 3 November
Hutchinson, Champions of Charity, pp. 202-355

Week 10 Antecedents of Today's Human Rights Discourse, Part III: Colonialism and Social Reform

Monday, 8 November
Mani, "Contentious Traditions"

Wednesday, 10 November

Week 11 Work on Student Papers

Monday, 15 November
Paper drafts due in class, read someone else's there

Wednesday, 17 November
Make short presentation on the paper you read and on what you plan to do for your own paper.

Week 12 Disciplinary Perspectives on Human Rights: Philosophy and Law

(What is a right? A human right? What is law? Haven't you been wondering?)

Monday, 22 November
Finnis, Natural Law and Natural Rights, pp. 23-25, 198-230, 260-296
(LW writes questions)

**Wednesday, 24 November**


(LW writes questions)

Since this is the afternoon before Thanksgiving, we won't hold class, but you should email answers to my questions sometime before Monday, 29 November.

**Week 13 Disciplinary Perspectives on Human Rights: Anthropology and the Example of the "Asian Values" Debate (What is culture?)**

**Monday, 29 November**

All students read:

Wilson, "Human Rights, Culture and Context: An Introduction"

Students choose between:

Sally Engle Merry, "Legal Pluralism and Transnational Culture"

Richard A. Wilson, "Representing Human Rights Violations"

or

Christine Walley, "Searching for 'Voices'"

(Class writes questions)

**Wednesday, 1 December**

All students read:

Bauer and Bell, "Introduction"

Students choose between:

Othman, "Grounding Human Rights Arguments in Non-Western Culture"

or

Ahmadi, "Women Between Feminism and Fundamentalism"

(Class writes questions)
Week 14 Final papers

Monday, 6 December

*Students present their own papers and bring copies of their penultimate drafts to exchange*

Wednesday, 8 December

*Students critique each other’s drafts of final papers*

Thursday, 9 December

*(last day of classes) -- Papers due at 5:00 p.m.*

There is no final exam.