When Americans think of "human rights," they tend to think first of their "constitutional rights," and in particular of the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Most of the rest of the world, however, looks instead to authoritative international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Where do these characteristic American and international approaches converge, and where do they diverge? How do American standards and practices measure up to international human rights norms? Should Americans be concerned about their divergences and shortcomings? And how should Americans respond to those abroad who claim radically different understandings of human rights? This course is structured around these questions.

Our principal perspective will be international, not American. Rather than take American norms as given, obviously correct, even "natural," the course proceeds from the assumption that characteristic American practices require more than a historical justification. In fact, international human rights standards challenge some deeply entrenched American self-understandings and practices. Whether one ultimately defends or criticizes the American approach, an international interrogation of American political values should result in a deeper appreciation of the role of basic individual rights in American politics.

The course will be taught entirely in a free form discussion format. I will never lecture -- although you can be assured that I will have plenty to say in the course of our discussions! Typically, I will begin class by asking "Where do you want to start tonight?" and then let the discussion flow from there (with a greater or lesser degree of channeling and redirection). For the class to work, it is essential that you have not only read but thought about the readings for that week. You will be required to shoulder the burden of an active role in the direction that the course unfolds. In return, though, you are assured that if there is an issue that interests, excites, or bothers you, we will be able to devote considerable time and attention to it.

Roughly two thirds of your grade will be based on written work and one-third on participation in weekly discussions.

Your class participation grade will be based primarily on quality, not quantity (although some contribution each week is expected of every student). And I will be much more concerned with the depth and seriousness of your engagement with the issues than with the substance, or even soundness, of the views you enunciate in class. In-class discussion is a time to learn, from mistakes no less than insights, and from formulating problems and puzzles as much as from arriving at "good answers."
For written work, you will have a choice of two 8-10 page papers on separate issues or one more substantial paper (roughly twenty pages) on a single issue, due at the end of the term. More details will be provided at the first class. Most students, however, should exercise the two short papers option.

**Week 1: The Idea of Human Rights**


Universal Declaration of Human Rights (http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm)


Recommended:


Martha Nussbaum, "Capabilities and Human Rights," in Patrick Hayden (ed.), *The Philosophy of Human Rights*.

Peter Jones, *Rights*.

Thomas Pogge, "How Should Human Rights Be Conceived?" in Hayden.


**Week 2: Liberalism, Cultural Relativism, and Overlapping Consensus**

Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism," in _A Matter of Principle_.

Donnelly, chapter 3.


Donnelly, chapters 4-6.

Recommended:


John Rawls, _The Law of Peoples_.

Anthony J. Langlois, _The Politics of Justice and Human Rights_, ch. 4.

Cass R. Sundstein, _Legal Reasoning and Political Conflict_.


Ralph Buultjens, "Human Rights in Indian Political Culture," in Thompson.


**Week 3: The Asian Values Debate**


Recommended:


Marina Svensson, Debating Human Rights in China.


Yash Ghai, "Rights, Social Justice, and Globalization in East Asia," in Bauer and Bell.


**Week 4: The Welfare State in Comparative Perspective**


Recommended:


Week 5: The Limits of Human Rights

Alison Brysk, Human Rights, Private Wrongs