The Politics of Human Rights
International Studies/Political Science 317
Summer Session 2017, June 19-August 13

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Overview
Human rights constitute a central, inescapable, and sometime controversial ideal in the contemporary world. Governments around the globe routinely commit themselves to upholding human rights, and many states have signed landmark international human rights agreements. The promotion of human rights is, moreover, a fundamental principle of the United Nations and thus of the “international community,” such as it exists. This course is an introduction to the central concepts, laws, and debates in the field of international human rights.

In the first half of the course, we will examine fundamental questions such as: What are human rights? What are the philosophical, religious, and historical foundations of human rights? What are the main international human rights agreements? What are some problems with those agreements? What are the main international institutions that handle human rights? Are human rights universal? How are human rights enforced? And what role do non-governmental organizations play in this field?

In the second half of the course, we will focus on two central and complex human rights issues. First, we will examine the prevention and mitigation of mass atrocities. We will examine the variety of policy tools available to domestic and international actors to mitigate or stop mass violations of human rights. As part of our study, we will explore several cases, including Iraq, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Darfur, Libya, and Syria. Second, we will examine various approaches to accounting for past human rights abuses, including international courts, domestic courts, truth commissions, and “traditional” forms of justice. Again, we will focus on particular cases, such as the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and South Africa—among others. A central proposition throughout the course is that human rights cannot be separated from politics. Indeed, we cannot understand either why human rights abuses happen or why international actors respond to human rights abuses in the way they do without examining the political contexts in which the abuses, policies, and responses take place.
Online Course Overview

The structure of the course consists of four online “podcasts” per week for eight weeks. In addition, each week there is a short introductory lecture about the week’s main topic. Each substantive lecture is about 25-30 minutes in length, and you may stream or download the podcast. There is also a downloadable outline that accompanies each lecture. I designed these outlines as guideposts to the key points in the lectures; some students may fill in the outlines as they listen to the podcasts, but that is not necessary. For what it is worth, I chose the podcast format, instead of videotaped lectures, because many students interested in this course may tune in from locations where bandwidth is limited. Podcasts require much less bandwidth than videos.

On Sunday morning of each week, the introductory and substantive lectures will become available. You may listen to them one at a time, on different days, or altogether. You have the flexibility to choose when to listen to the lectures. Each week has a set of readings. They will run about 100-150 pages a week and sometimes include a video. You will gain more from the lectures, respond better to the question and answer prompts, and score well on the quizzes if you do the readings. We consider the readings to be a reasonable amount of assigned material for a four-credit course; we expect you to budget three to four hours per week for the reading and videos, in addition to the time it takes to listen to the podcasts. Let me emphasize that at least several quiz questions per week will be based on the readings and videos (if there is a video). Lastly, some weeks include “recommended” readings. We do not expect you to read these unless you are particularly excited about the week’s topic, and/or they are relevant to one of your two papers for the course.

In addition to the podcasts and lectures, there will be two online, interactive discussion forums. The first, which we label the “Q+A Forum,” is an open space for any enrolled student to pose a question about the lecture podcasts or the reading assignments. Think of this forum as a space to ask clarification questions of any type—on the readings, the lectures, the course schedule, and so forth.

The second, which we label the “Discussion” forum, is akin to a traditional discussion section. Each of you will be randomly assigned into an online discussion group of between five and six students. One of the TAs will moderate the discussion in each online section. Throughout the semester, you will be in a remote conversation with the other students in your sections. In addition, each week you will be required to post at least two times to this online forum. In your first post, you will respond to a discussion prompt that the TA introduces. Your post should be between 250 and 300 words. This first post must be completed by Thursday noon (Central Standard Time). By Thursday evening, your TA will post a response to your discussion section; the TA post will reflect on themes raised in a number of the student responses and that identifies two different general approaches in the students’ posts. Then you must make a second post, also of 250-300 words in length—by midnight on Saturday night. In this second post, you must take a side of the issue raised in the TA response or elaborate on the "winning" post in your group (more below). Elaboration could take the form of extended agreement, raising concerns, or disagreement.
Each week, you shall vote for the best response in your section to the initial discussion prompt by Thursday at noon. You cannot nominate yourself. The winning post will get some form of extra credit each week. You must vote by Saturday at midnight.

I want to make two points about these weekly posts. First, the length is intentional; we want you to have the experience of writing. Writing is an essential skill in almost every profession; communicating clearly certainly is. We want these posts to be reflective and analytical; they should make a point or several points. Writing is also one of the best ways to learn the material; through writing you are likely to understand the content of the lectures and readings, as well as see how they relate to contemporary issues. Try as much as you can to enjoy the writing; develop your voice, think about problems, and be persuasive! Second, you have to be organized. Each week you will have to block out some time to make an initial post and then to make a second post, in response to the TA’s prompt. Do please make a note to yourself about this.

Lastly, there is a weekly quiz. You may open the quiz at any time starting Tuesday morning and ending Saturday night at 11:59 pm. There will be 12 multiple choice questions per quiz. The quizzes will be based on the reading and the lecture material. Each quiz will be timed; you will have 20 minutes to complete the quiz. The test is open book, and you may consult your notes and readings when taking the quiz. That said, we expect students to work independently. At the end of the exam period, i.e. on Sunday, you will receive your grade as well as the correct answers for each question.

Also please keep an eye out for my weekly wrap-up posts. I will review your comments, consult with the TAs, and offer some general reflections on each week’s material and your engagement with it. While these posts are not required reading, I think you will gain more from the class if you read them.
To help conceptualize the online teaching schedule, we have created this guide to required weekly activities (which may be found online on the course website as well):

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<td>Listen to the introductory podcast, and review announcements on the course homepage.</td>
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<td><strong>Readings</strong></td>
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<td>Complete the weekly readings as listed on the week's homepage.</td>
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<td><strong>Lectures</strong></td>
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<td>Listen to each of the lectures for the week (~120 minutes).</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
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<td>Post an original response to the weekly discussion prompt post by noon on Thursday.</td>
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<td>Respond to TA's post by midnight on Saturday</td>
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<td><strong>Vote</strong></td>
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<td>Vote for best post in your discussion group.</td>
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<td>Ask any questions on topics from the lecture podcasts, clarification on assignments, and/or course structure in the forum.</td>
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<td><strong>Weekly Quiz</strong></td>
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<td>Complete the quiz anytime before 11:59PM Saturday. Grades will be available on Sunday.</td>
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<td>Reflect on how the material for this week relates to the next written assignment for the course. Make sure to discuss any questions you have with your TA, and plan ahead to ensure you are on track to complete the paper by the due date.</td>
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<td>View the weekly wrap up message from Professor Straus, which will be posted on the homepage.</td>
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**Online Expectations**

You should count on devoting around eight hours per week for this course. This includes roughly two hours per week for listening to the lectures, three to four hours per week to do the reading and watch the videos, twenty minutes taking the quiz, and two hours per week following the online discussion and posting. You do not have to be online that entire period, but each week you need to budget at least some time online to download the podcasts, the readings, take the quiz, and contribute to the discussion. You should also try to log in on a regular interval to check news feeds from the professor and the TAs on the home page for the course. Do note that at the end of every week—generally Thursday afternoon or Friday—I will weigh in with some reflections on the week and the commentary that students have raised about the material. Reading my comments is not obligatory but my interventions will be the main way that I interact with your discussion comments and questions.
Essay Assignments
In addition to the weekly requirements, there are two written essay assignments for the class. The first is due at the end of Week Four (July 16), and the second at the end of Week Eight (August 13). The prompt for the first essay can be found under the “Assessment” section of the course website, and the prompt for the second essay will be released after your first essay has been submitted. Please refer to these prompts for details about the specific requirements of each essay. You will be submitting these essays electronically through the course website. The bibliography section is not counted toward the page limit. Your references will need to be in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style Author-Date format: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Summary of Requirements and Grading
Five Major Requirements:
1. Listen to the weekly podcasts
2. Complete the reading
3. Post twice weekly on the Discussion Forum
4. Vote for best post each week.
5. Take the weekly quizzes
6. Complete two essay assignments by July 16 and August 13 respectively.

Grading Breakdown
1. Quizzes: 24% (each quiz is worth three points toward your final grade)
2. Discussion: 32% (each discussion week is worth four points toward your grade)
3. Essay Assignments: 44% (22% for each assignment)

Grading Criteria
The grading scale used in the class is the standard scale used in most courses on campus:
A: 93-100
AB: 88-92
B: 83-87
BC: 78-82
C: 70-77
D: 60-69
F: 59 or lower

The quizzes are multiple choice and will be graded on the number of correct and incorrect answers. Each quiz is worth 3 points toward your final grade.

The discussion posts will be graded on a) whether they are completed properly; b) completed on time; and c) the quality of the post. Each week’s posts are worth 4 points toward your final grade. If you complete both posts on time and with the correct number of words, you will receive 3 points (out of four) for that week. The additional 1 point per week will be based on the degree of engagement with the material, the quality of your writing, and the thoughtfulness of your post. We will subtract two points for every missing post per week. If your post is selected as the best post by your peers, you will receive 0.5 points towards your final grade score.
The essays will be graded on the completeness of the assignment, as well as the quality of the analysis, writing, research, and understanding of the material. To receive the highest score, you need to have a clear argument that the material in your paper supports; the writing needs to be strong and free of grammatical mistakes; you need to have some done enough additional research to complete your paper in a thorough fashion; and you need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the material you are describing. We do not have a set number of sources in mind, but you need to complete some outside research in order to answer the prompts.

**Required Texts**


Both books are available in printed copy and as e-books. The hard copy of the latter is available through amazon.com; electronically, it may be downloaded at [https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/take-action-against-genocide/resources/fundamentals-of-genocide-and-mass-atrocity-prevention](https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/take-action-against-genocide/resources/fundamentals-of-genocide-and-mass-atrocity-prevention). There will additionally be a number of articles available on-line on the course site.
COURSE OUTLINE

I. WEEK 1: FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Podcast 1: Big Questions

Podcast 2: “Three Ps”: Problems, Paradoxes, and Power

Podcast 3: Political Origins of Human Rights

Podcast 4: Toward the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Readings for Week 1


II. WEEK 2: THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY SYSTEM AND ITS PROBLEMS

Podcast 5: The International Bill of Rights

Podcast 6: Other Core Human Rights Treaties

Podcast 7: How Human Rights Work

Podcast 8: Case Study: The United States and the Question of Torture

Readings for Week 2


Watch the following clips of senior Administration officials discussing torture:
  President Donald Trump: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kpj3pp10wD8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kpj3pp10wD8)
  General John Kelly: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm5_39gjy1E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm5_39gjy1E)
  CIA Director Mike Pompeo: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLOMQVnTD7Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLOMQVnTD7Y)

Review all core human rights treaties: [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx)

**RECOMMENDED**


United States Senate Intelligence Committee Study on CIA Detention and Interrogation Program. “Findings and Conclusions,” 19 pp.

III. WEEK 3: REGIONALISM AND RELATIVISM

Podcast 9: European Approaches to Human Rights

Podcast 10: Latin American and African Approaches to Human Rights

Podcast 11: Universalism and Relativism

Podcast 12: Case Study: Female Genital Cutting/Mutilation

Readings and Video for Week 3


Case summary from Fernandez Ortega v Mexico case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights [https://iachr.lls.edu/sites/iachr.lls.edu/files/iachr/Cases/Fernandez_Ortega_et_al_v_Mexico/Fern%2B%C3%ADndez%20Ortega%20v.%20Mexico.pdf](https://iachr.lls.edu/sites/iachr.lls.edu/files/iachr/Cases/Fernandez_Ortega_et_al_v_Mexico/Fern%2B%C3%ADndez%20Ortega%20v.%20Mexico.pdf)

Watch “Mooladé” (as much as possible)

Explore the websites for the three major regional human rights bodies:


RECOMMENDED

IV. WEEK 4: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM

Podcast 13: Human Rights Activism

Podcast 14: Transnational Advocacy Networks and the Boomerang Model

Podcast 15: Three Examples of Human Rights Activism

Readings for Week 4


JULY 16: FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE

V. WEEK 5: ATROCITY PREVENTION

Podcast 16: Atrocity Prevention from World War II to 2000

Podcast 17: Recent History of Atrocity Prevention

Podcast 18: Atrocity Prevention Tools

Podcast 19: An Evaluation of the Atrocities Prevention Regime
Readings for Week 5


VI. WEEK 6: CASE STUDIES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Podcast 20: The Gulf War and Somalia

Podcast 21: Rwanda

Podcast 22: Bosnia and Kosovo

Podcast 23: Darfur, Libya, and Syria

Readings and Video for Week 6

Watch Frontline Video on Rwanda: “Triumph of Evil”

Watch “Blackhawk Down” Clips


RECOMMENDED

Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers*, pp. 139-207.


VII. Week 7: JUSTICE AFTER ATROCITY
Podcast 24: A History of Justice after Atrocity
Podcast 25: Rettributive and Restorative Justice
Podcast 26: The Nuremberg Trials
Podcast 27: Ad-Hoc International Tribunals

Readings and Videos for Week 7


Watch Clips from “Justice at Nuremberg”

VIII. Week 8: Types of Justice: From International to Local

Podcast 28: The International Criminal Court
Podcast 29: Domestic Trials
Podcast 30: Community-Based Justice: Gacaca in Rwanda
Podcast 31: Truth Commissions and the Justice Balance

Readings and Video for Week 8


Watch film on *Gacaca*: “In Rwanda We Say that the Family that Does not Speak Dies”

**AUGUST 13: SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE**