Overview

Human rights constitute a central and inescapable 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, Syria, and Burundi.

Second, we will examine various approaches to accounting for past human rights abuses, including international courts, foreign courts, domestic courts, truth commissions, and “traditional” forms of justice. Again, we will focus on particular cases, such as the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Chile, 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 and policies take place.
GRADING
Section attendance and participation: 20%
Mid-term exam: 25%
Paper (8-10 pages): 30%
Final exam: 25%

REQUIRED TEXTS


The first book has been ordered and should be available for purchase at the University Bookstore (or you may purchase it through an online source). The second book is available from amazon.com for an online download and will be available as a hard copy in February. There will additionally be a number of articles available on-line at the course’s learn@UW site. Please note that I have provided electronic copies of a majority of the course content in order to contain course costs, but students should feel free to make hard copies of articles.
Paper Assignment
The paper assignment is to write an 8-10 page analytical, research-based essay on a topic of interest to you and relating to the themes of the course. The paper should show independent research. The paper should be materially different from any paper handed in for credit for another class. Below are some possible suggested topics. I encourage you to consult with your TA prior to completing the research and writing.

The topic of your paper is open as to country and subject. That openness is both an opportunity (you get to decide what to study) and a challenge (you have to choose one topic among many). In my experience, I would say that two of the major challenges of an open research paper are: 1) asking a research question and asking the right question and 2) developing an argument. Presumably, there are a number of human rights issues that are or could be of interest to you. For the paper, you need to move beyond choosing an interesting topic; you need to be analytical, and being analytical usually means having a central question that drives the research and writing.

General Suggestions
My general suggestions are two-fold: first, focus on a narrow and researchable topic. You will have a much easier time researching and writing the paper if you are able to concentrate on a fairly specific issue. Second, following the points above, frame your paper as a question. Framing your paper as a question will help you develop a thesis. For example, if you are interested in human rights violations in Burma (Myanmar), you might ask: what are the historical causes of human rights abuses in that country? Are there periods when violations were greater or lesser, and why? What international efforts have been used against Myanmar and which have been most effective? What role have non-governmental organizations played in drawing attention to and changing the human rights environment Myanmar? Have human rights treaties and norms shaped the way in which the government treats citizens? And so forth.

Grading Criteria
We will employ three principal criteria for grading your papers: quality of argument, quality of writing, and quality of research. To receive an ‘A,’ you must excel on all three dimensions. First, quality of argument: your paper must have a thesis, and the evidence that you supply in your paper must support your thesis. In general, strong organization and a logical flow of ideas will strengthen the quality of your argument. Second, quality of writing: I cannot stress enough how important good writing is for whatever you decide to do in life. Now is a good time to start working on your writing skills. Your paper should have no spelling or grammatical mistakes. You should make good word choices. You should not have any run-on sentences. You should use commas when commas are appropriate and semi-colons when semi-colons are appropriate. Every sentence should make sense. Every paragraph should be coherent. You should be concise. Avoid clichés. Avoid colloquialisms: (i.e. “The world should step up to the plate and do something about Darfur”). Avoid mixed metaphors: (i.e. “The world should step up to the plate and drown Sudan’s government.”) The best strategies for improving the quality of your writing are proof-reading and reading your paper aloud. Reread your paper several times before you hand in the final version. Reading aloud often is a good way to determine if
sentences sound right. Third, quality of research: I do not have a set number of sources. The basic idea is that you need to do sufficient independent research beyond the readings assigned in the class. That could mean reading four amazing books, reading two books and six articles, or reading 100 newspaper articles. Your research sources and quantity will depend on your topic, your question, and the available resources. You should use peer-reviewed sources whenever possible. I do not have a set citation style. You may use MLA or Chicago, but whatever you do should be consistent and accurate.

Suggested Possible Topics
You have a huge number of topics from which to choose. You could focus on a major historical event, a contemporary issue, a specific human rights issue in a specific country, the history of a particular convention, and so forth. Below I list some suggested topics. You do not need to pursue these topics, and again you still need to frame your research paper as a question. But nonetheless here are some topics that students have done in the past or that would easily lend themselves to papers:

1) Debates over torture and detainee rights in the context of terrorism
   You could focus on Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, the Geneva Conventions, the Convention against Torture, recent U.S. legislation on the treatment of detainees, etc.
2) Darfur, Syria, and Libya
   Whether what is happening is genocide, the international impasse at the U.N., what might work as an intervention strategy, roots of the violence, U.S. domestic activism on Darfur, etc.
3) International human rights trials
   Cambodia, Iraq, Guatemala, the ICC, any case from Rwanda, any case from the former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, the debate of peace versus justice in Uganda, the truth commission in Guatemala, the case against Augusto Pinochet, etc.
4) Compare death penalty debates in the U.S. versus Europe.
5) Examine a specific human rights issue in Venezuela, Russia, Nepal, Colombia, North Korea, Afghanistan, Morocco, Uruguay, China, this country, Pakistan, Angola, Congo, Indonesia, Haiti, Egypt, or any other country.
6) Female Genital Mutilation, the Muslim veil, and universal rights.
7) Human rights abuses committed by United Nations peacekeepers.
8) Do human rights treaties make a difference? Choose a case and show how and whether the human rights regime has fostered change.
9) Critical debates within a particular human rights organization.
10) Are socio-economic rights “rights”? Is access to life-saving HIV suppression drugs a human right?
11) The debate over ratification of a particular treaty.
12) The American Bar Association’s history and relationship to international human rights.
13) Some issue having to do with Eleanor Roosevelt.
14) Human rights issues that the UDHR missed.
16) The problems or advantages of an “exceptionalism” framework for analyzing U.S. human rights policies.
17) LGBT rights as human rights.
18) The arrogance of global human rights
19) Debates about the history of human rights
20) The human rights tensions between free speech protections and whether speech can be harmful.
21) The current refugee crisis stemming from Syria, Afghanistan, Burundi, and other war zones.
22) Environmental issues as human rights? Climate change and intergenerational rights? Climate change and forced displacement.
23) Anything else!

Again, the topics I list here are suggestions. You do not need to do any one of these. If you are having trouble finding a topic, I also encourage you to read a quality newspaper on a daily basis. The newspapers are FULL of interesting human rights stories these days. Or set up a daily google news search for “human rights” and see what you get.
Resources
Below is an incomplete list of possible sources. There are unquestionably many more
potential sources, but these are useful places to start.

Human Rights Instruments (Laws, Declarations, Statements, etc)
http://www.ohchr.org/english (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights)
http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/ (Minnesota Human Rights Library)
Country Reports
http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/ (State Department)
http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm (International Crisis Group--excellent
country reports and analysis, though not always on human rights per se)
http://www.hrw.org/ (Human Rights Watch)
http://www.amnestyusa.org/index.html (Amnesty International)

Human Rights Organizations
http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/index.asp (Human Rights First)
http://www.phrusa.org/ (Physicians for Human Rights)

Regional Human Rights Bodies and Regional Organizations
http://www.echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=home (European Court of Human Rights)
http://www.oas.org/OASpage/humanrights.htm (Organization of American States)
http://www.au.int/ (African Union homepage)
http://www.asean.org/ (ASEAN homepage)

Genocide Prevention
http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/ (Center for Genocide Prevention—US Holocaust
Museum)
Enough Project http://www.enoughproject.org/

Academic Journals (abbreviated list)
Human Rights Quarterly
Journal of Human Rights
Harvard Human Rights Journal
Health and Human Rights
Humanity
Yale Human Rights and Development Journal
Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights
American Journal of International Law
Journal of Genocide Research
Genocide Studies and Prevention
COURSE OUTLINE

I. INTRODUCTION

January 19: Introduction and Course Overview

January 21: Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights


II. THE FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

January 26: Religious and Political Origins


RECOMMENDED


January 28: Human Rights between the “Revolutions”


III. LANDMARK INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTS

February 2: The United Nations Charter, the UDHR, and the ICCPR

February 4: ICESCR, other “Core” International Human Rights Treaties, and UN Human Rights Institutions


**RECOMMENDED: Available at** [http://www2.ohchr.org/eng/what/law/index.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/eng/what/law/index.htm)

- International Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families (ICRMW)

### IV. PROBLEMS WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS: ENFORCEMENT, COMPLIANCE, JUSTICIABILITY, EXCEPTIONALISM, AND POLITICS

February 9: Treaties, Compliance, and International Law


**RECOMMENDED**


February 11: “Positive Rights,” Enforceability, and Justiciability


**February 16: U.S. Exceptionalism, Torture, and the War on Terror**


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


John Yoo, *War by Other Means: An Insider’s Account of the War on Terror*, pp. vii-xii.

**VI. REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES**

**February 18: Europe**


**RECOMMENDED**  
European Convention on Human Rights  
([http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diana/documents.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diana/documents.htm))

**February 23: The Americas and Africa**

**VII. THE QUESTION OF UNIVERSALITY**

**February 25: Universal Human Rights, “Cultural Relativism,” and the Importance of Localization**


**March 1: Universality and the Female Circumcision Debate**


**VII. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM**

**March 3: Human Rights Organizations**


**Recommended:**


**March 8: Transnational Advocacy Networks and “The Boomerang Effect”**

**MARCH 10: IN-CLASS, MID-TERM EXAMINATION**

**March 15: Overview: Key Debates and Approaches in Atrocity Prevention**


**March 17: No Class**

**SPRING BREAK**

**VIII. INTERNATIONAL ACTION TO PREVENT AND STOP MASS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

**March 29: Iraq (1991) and Somalia**

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

**March 31: Rwanda**


**April 5: Bosnia and Kosovo**


**April 7: No Class**

**April 12: Libya and Syria**


IX. TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND CRIMINAL ACCOUNTABILITY AFTER ATROCITY

April 14: Overview: Key Debates and Approaches


April 19: Ad Hoc International Criminal Tribunals

Reading to be determined

April 21: The International Criminal Court

Reading to be determined


April 26: Community-Based Justice: Gacaca in Rwanda


April 28: The International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg)

No Reading

***PAPERS DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS***

May 3: Truth Commissions, a Justice Balance?, and Conclusion


May 5: No Class

May 12: Final Exam, 2:45-4:45 pm, Location to be Announced
## Appendix 1:
### TA Section Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
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<tr>
<td>9:55 – 10:45</td>
<td>301: Sandeep Kindo VILAS 4004</td>
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<td>11:00 – 11:50</td>
<td>305: Bo Wang VILAS 4004</td>
<td>308: Ben Power NOLAND 539</td>
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<td>1:20 – 2:10</td>
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<td>306: Sandeep Kindo VILAS 4004</td>
<td>311: Charlie Taylor SOC SCI 6105</td>
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<td>3:30 – 4:20</td>
<td>310: Bo Wang WHITE 7117</td>
<td>302: Ben Power WHITE 7117</td>
<td>303: Bo Wang WHITE 7117</td>
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