

The Politics and Practice of Human Rights

Political Science 3240/8245
International Studies 4140-005
University of Nebraska Omaha
Fall 2019

Monday & Wednesday 1:00 pm - 2:15 pm
Allwine Hall 305

Brett J. Kyle, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS)
Goldstein Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
University of Nebraska Omaha

Office: Arts and Sciences Hall 275
Office Hrs: M & W 10am-12:30pm
(And by appointment)
Email: bjkyle@unomaha.edu
Web: www.brettkyle.com

Course Description

This course provides a theoretical and empirical basis for understanding human rights and accountability for human rights violations across the globe. The course is organized around the tension between the idea of universal human rights and the acute exercise and protection of such rights—“human rights are only imaginable with appeal to the global and universal...and only concrete when they are local.”¹ We begin by defining human rights and delving into critical views of the concept. We then explore the challenges of civil society mobilization and protecting people under the auspices of human rights in both the context of domestic and international politics. Particularly under conditions of political change, transitional justice measures seek accountability for state-led human rights crimes. The principal debate of the field—between pursuing justice or prioritizing political stability—has been joined by further questions of (1) how effective trials, truth commissions, and amnesties are at achieving either of these goals and (2) how not only to hold accountable those responsible but also how to provide restoration for those affected. We will explore these questions, and in the final section of the course, we examine a selection of contemporary issues in human rights.

Prerequisites

This is an upper-level Political Science course. Undergraduate: PSCI 2210 or junior standing or permission of the instructor. Graduate: PSCI 2210 or equivalent is recommended.

Course Materials

Goodhart, Michael, ed. 2016. *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 3rd edition. (❖ on the class schedule denotes a reading from this book)

¹ Scott Straus and Steve Stern, eds. 2014. *The Human Rights Paradox: Universality and Its Discontents*.

Straus, Scott and Steve Stern, eds. 2014. *The Human Rights Paradox: Universality and its Discontents*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. (📖 on the class schedule denotes a reading from this book)

Individual class readings are available on the Canvas course site under the Files section in folders for their respective weeks.

Evaluation: Your course grade will be based on the following:

Attendance & Participation: 20%

Human Rights in the News: 10%

Critical Book Review: 30%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Attendance & Participation (20%)

This course requires active student participation. As students in my course, you are expected to do the assigned readings and to come to class prepared to share your questions, comments, and ideas. Plan to ask and answer questions, clarify readings, to discuss course material, and to participate in activities. The classroom offers you a forum to engage with your peers and to learn from each other. I expect everyone to promote an active learning environment by supporting each other intellectually, by reflecting on what you have learned, and by being committed to your education.

A few basic ground rules:

- **Attend class.** Pay attention. Take notes when I lecture. Read your notes after each class.
- Put away your electronic devices. Let this class be a respite from the damage networked mobile devices do to the human brain. In this class, you will engage with other humans, and you will think for yourself.
- Take notes when you read so that you will better retain the information in the readings and be prepared to discuss it.
- Treat everyone in the class with patience, common courtesy, and basic human decency.
- Be curious and ask questions of your classmates, of our readings, and of me.
- When you speak, remember that you are in dialogue with the entire class. Speak to and listen to all of your classmates.
- You are responsible for your own learning and accountable for your own work—you are ultimately in charge of your own educational experience.

Human Rights in the News (5% x 2 = 10%)

Human rights issues are all around us. Each day's news brings stories related to the issues we engage with in this course—from human rights being realized to human rights being violated. In this course, students are expected to follow human rights-related news. Two times during the semester, you will select a news article and write a double-spaced one-page summary of the article that demonstrates a link to the course material. You will submit the article and one-page write-up via Canvas, by providing the URL to the news article and your one-page write-up, where indicated in the Assignments section of the Canvas course site. One article/write-up is due

during the first half of the semester (Aug. 26-Oct. 14) and one is due during the second half of the semester (Oct. 23-Dec. 11).

I frequently use current events and news articles to illustrate the ideas and issues in this course. You can view examples from previous years and a few selected more recent articles in the “Human Rights in the News” folder in the Files section of the Canvas course site. The quality of the news source must be in keeping with those examples. Consult the following sources in your human rights-related news reading: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Associated Press*, *BBC*, *Reuters*, *The Economist*, *Foreign Policy*, *Al-Jazeera*, *South China Morning Post*, *Buenos Aires Herald*, and the Latest News sections of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Note: If I find the quality of a news article you select lacking, I will require you to find a different article.

Critical Book Review (30%)

Many ideas and issues in human rights are highly contested in the scholarship of the field. In order to explore tensions, challenges, and evolution in human rights scholarship, each student will read a human rights monograph during the semester and write a critical book review on that work. List of books and further details will be distributed in class.

Exams (Midterm: 20%; Final: 20%)

The in-class midterm and final exams will be essay based. Mastery of both the lecture material and the assigned readings will be necessary for the exams. *Do not miss exams. If an emergency arises and you cannot make it, please contact me beforehand to request a makeup exam. The ability to make up work missed will be at the discretion of the instructor. Make up exams will be more challenging in format and content than the in-class exams. Un-excused absences from exams will result in a grade of zero for that exam.*

UNO Writing Center

The UNO Writing Center offers free one-on-one consultations with trained consultants to all students, faculty, and staff. Their goal is to help writers improve their writing skills and confidence in all types of writing, in all subject areas, and at all stages of the writing process. For more information about their hours and locations or to schedule an appointment, visit their website at www.unomaha.edu/writingcenter or visit them at their main location in Arts and Sciences Hall, Room 150.

Academic Integrity

You must maintain academic integrity at all times. Plagiarism/cheating are serious academic crimes, and I will pursue any infringements seriously and actively. At a minimum, any infringement will result in a grade of zero on the assignment. For more information on University of Nebraska Omaha policies on academic integrity, please see: <https://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/student-conduct-and-community-standards/policies/academic-integrity.php>

Special Accommodations

Accommodations are provided for students who are registered with the UNO Accessibility Services Center and make their requests sufficiently in advance. For more information, contact

Accessibility Services Center (MBSC 126, Phone: 402-554-2872, TTY: 402-554-6015) or go to the website: <https://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/inclusion/disability-services/>.

Late Policy

On daily/weekly assignments, no late work will be accepted. For the paper assignment, late papers will be penalized by 5% per day late. For example, a paper that earns an 85% but is one day late would receive a grade of 80%.

Schedule of Class Meetings

I. Fundamentals of Human Rights

Week One

Monday, August 26: Introduction to the course

Wednesday, August 28: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

- ❖ Appendix I: UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*
- ❖ Goodhart, “Introduction: Human Rights in Politics and Practice”

Question: How are the universal and the local in tension with each other in human rights? Are these tensions resolvable?

Week Two

Monday, September 2: Labor Day (UNO Holiday – No Classes)

Wednesday, September 4: Foundations of Human Rights

- ❖ Langlois, “Normative and Theoretical Foundations of Human Rights”
- ⊛ Stern and Straus, “Embracing Paradox: Human Rights in the Global Age”

Question: Why “human”? Why “rights”? Why do we think we have rights? Where do human rights come from?

Week Three

Monday, September 9: Modern Human Rights & Critical History of Human Rights

- Glendon, Mary Ann. 2002. *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: Random House, preface and Chapters 1-2.

Wednesday, September 11: International Relations and Human Rights

- ❖ Dunne and Hanson, “Human Rights in International Relations”
- Arendt, Hannah. 1951. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 267-290.

Question: How do human rights challenge the idea of the state system? How do they reinforce it?

Week Four

Monday, September 16: Comparative Politics and Human Rights

- ❖ Cardenas, “Human Rights in Comparative Politics”
- Arendt, Hannah. 1951. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 290-302.

Wednesday, September 18: Violence and Violations—Genocide

- United Nations Conventions on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CrimeOfGenocide.aspx>
- ❖ Straus, “Genocide”
- ⊛ Foster Lynch, “Civilian Agency in Times of Crisis: Lessons from Burundi”

Question: Under what conditions does mass atrocity occur? Can it be stopped once under way? What does it take to stop it?

II. Realizing Human Rights

Week Five (Human Rights Week at UNO)

Monday, September 23: Seeing the Myth in Human Rights – **Guest talk from Dr. Jenna Reinbold, Associate Professor of Religion, Colgate University**

Wednesday, September 25: Violence and Violations—Torture

- United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx>
- ❖ Schulz, “Torture”

Week Six

Monday, September 30: International Law

- ❖ Smith, “Human Rights in International Law”
- ❖ Glasius, “Global Civil Society and Human Rights”

Wednesday, October 2: International Intervention

- ❖ Kuperman, “Humanitarian Intervention”

Question: What role(s) is/are there for international law and inter-governmental organizations in realizing human rights in the world?

Week Seven

Monday, October 7: Human Rights Activism (**Class meets in Criss Library Room 232; Guest presentation from Rebecca Martinez, UNO Academic and Career Development Center**)

- ❖ Ackerly, “Feminist and Activist Approaches to Human Rights”
- ❖ Landman, “Measuring and Monitoring Human Rights”

Wednesday, October 9: Human Rights Activism, continued

- ⊛ Kurasawa, “The Aporias of New Technologies for Human Rights Activism” (*aporia = an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory)

Question: Has technological development (especially “Web 2.0”) improved or diminished human rights activism? Why? How so?

Week Eight

Monday, October 14: In-class review

Wednesday, October 16: **In-class Midterm Exam**

Week Nine

Monday, October 21: Fall break (No classes)

III. After Atrocity

Wednesday, October 23: Transitional Justice – Origins and Goals

- ❖ Quinn, “Transitional Justice”
- ⊕ Vinck and Pham, “Consulting Survivors: Evidence from Cambodia, Northern Uganda, and Other Countries Affected by Mass Violence”
- Human Rights Watch, “Policy Statement on Accountability for Past Abuses” in Neil J. Kritz, ed. *Transitional Justice*, 217-18.

Question: What are the goals of transitional justice? Are these the right goals?

Week Ten

Monday, October 28: Trials

- Zalaquett, “Balancing Ethical Imperatives and Political Constraints: The Dilemma of New Democracies Confronting Past Human Rights Violations” in Neil J. Kritz, ed. *Transitional Justice*, 203-06.

Wednesday, October 30: Truth Commissions

- Michael Ignatieff, “Digging Up the Dead,” *New Yorker*, November 10, 1997, 84-93.

Question: Do the leaders of a new democracy have a moral duty to prosecute members of the former authoritarian regime? Is pursuing truth enough? What is the difference between accountability and punishment?

Week Eleven

Monday, November 4: Amnesties

- Amnesty International, “Policy Statement on Impunity” in Neil J. Kritz, ed. *Transitional Justice*, 219-21.

Wednesday, November 6: Restorative Justice

- ⊕ Conley-Zilkic, “Rights on Display: Museums and Human Rights Claims”

Question: Should transitional justice efforts be focused on the perpetrators or on the victims?

Week Twelve

Monday, November 11: Does Transitional Justice Work?

Wednesday, November 13: Critical Perspectives on Transitional Justice

- Draper, “The Business of Memory: Reconstructing Torture Centers as Shopping Malls and Tourist Sites” in Ksenija Bilbija and Leigh A. Payne, eds. *Accounting for Violence: Marketing Memory in Latin America*, 127-150.
- **Critical Summary Due in class**

Question: Does “trauma tourism” raise awareness of the past or trivialize the past? Is it right to make money off of a traumatic past?

IV. Contemporary Issues in Human Rights

Week Thirteen

Monday, November 18: Economic Development and Human Rights

- ❖ Fukuda-Parr, “Human Rights and Politics in Development”

Wednesday, November 20: Gender Equality and Human Rights – **Guest talk from Christiane Youngberg, UNO Political Science M.A. student**

- ❖ Keating and Burack, “Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Human Rights”

Week Fourteen

Monday, November 25: Human Rights and the Natural Environment

- ❖ Barry and Woods, “The Environment”
- ☼ Cullet, “The Human Right to Water in Rural India: Promises and Challenges”

Wednesday, November 27: Thanksgiving break (No classes)

Week Fifteen

Monday, December 2: Refugees and Human Rights – **Guest talk from Jennifer Gentle, Volunteer Coordinator – Community Services, Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska**

- ❖ Loescher, “Human Rights and Forced Migration”

Wednesday, December 4: Human Trafficking – **Guest talk from Natalie Maues Ribeiro, UNO Political Science M.A. student**

- ❖ Bertone, “Human Trafficking”
- **Critical Book Review Due in class**

Week Sixteen

Monday, December 9: Conclusions and the Future of Human Rights

- ❖ Goodhart, “The Future of Human Rights”
- ☼ Hiskes, “A Very Promising Species: From Hobbes to the Human Right to Water”

Wednesday, December 11: **In-class Final Exam**