

The Politics and Practice of Human Rights

**Political Science 3240/8245
International Studies 4140-009
University of Nebraska Omaha
Fall 2018**

**Tuesday & Thursday 1:00 pm - 2:15 pm
Roskens Hall 401**

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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, 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:

Participation: 20%

Inter-Generational Conversations on Politics: Human Rights in the News: 10%

Critical Book Review: 30%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

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.

Inter-Generational Conversations on Politics: Human Rights in the News (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, and starting September 6, each student will lead and conduct an hour of discussion based on a current event in human rights with the residents of Aksarben Senior Living on the first and third Thursday nights of each month at 6:45 p.m. The schedule of student discussion leaders will be prepared in the first few weeks of the semester. The discussions at Aksarben Senior Living will carry our class discussions to the community and allow students the opportunity to explore current events in

light of the course material in an informal setting. The assignment has three parts: (1) Select a news article, write a double-spaced one-page summary of the article that demonstrates a link to the course material and presents at least two questions for discussion—you will submit the article and one-page write-up by the Tuesday of your Thursday visit, (2) Lead discussion at Aksarben, and (3) Write a double-spaced one-page reflection paper summarizing your discussion and experience.

I frequently use current events and news articles to illustrate the ideas and issues in this course. You can view examples from Fall 2017 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

Tuesday, August 21: Introduction to the course

Thursday, August 23: 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

Tuesday, August 28: Foundations of Human Rights

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

Thursday, August 30: 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.

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

Week Three

Tuesday, September 4: International Relations and Human Rights

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

Thursday, September 6: Comparative Politics and Human Rights

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

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

Week Four

Tuesday, September 12: 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”

Thursday, September 14: 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

Tuesday, September 18: International Law

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

Thursday, September 20: 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 Six

Tuesday, September 25: Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – **Guest talk from**

Dr. Laura Alexander, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Goldstein Family Community Chair in Human Rights, University of Nebraska Omaha

Thursday, September 27: Democracy, Majoritarianism, and Individual Rights

- ❖ Davenport, “Political Democracy and State Repression”

Question: Is it right for one state to invade another to safeguard human rights? Why? Why not? What are the pitfalls in doing so? What steps should be taken to improve humanitarian intervention?

Week Seven

Tuesday, October 2: Human Rights Activism (**Class meets in Criss Library Room 112; Guest presentation from Jonathan Acosta, UNO Academic and Career Development Center**)

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

Thursday, October 4: 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

Tuesday, October 9: In-class review

Thursday, October 11: **In-class Midterm Exam**

Week Nine

Tuesday, October 16: Fall break (No classes)

III. After Atrocity

Thursday, October 18: 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

Tuesday, October 23: 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.

Thursday, October 25: 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

Tuesday, October 30: Amnesties

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

Thursday, November 1: 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

Tuesday, November 6: Does Transitional Justice Work?

Thursday, November 8: 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.

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

Tuesday, November 13: Economic Development and Human Rights

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

Thursday, November 15: Economic Globalization and Human Rights

- ❖ Richards and Gelleny, “Economic Globalization and Human Rights”

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, November 20: Human Rights and the Natural Environment – **Guest talk from Dr. Elizabeth Chalecki, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Nebraska Omaha**

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

Thursday, November 22: Thanksgiving break (No classes)

Week Fifteen

Tuesday, November 27: Refugees and Human Rights – **Guest talk from Lacey Studnicka, Director of Advancement – Community Services, Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska**

- ❖ Loescher, “Human Rights and Forced Migration”

Thursday, November 29: Human Trafficking – **Guest talk from Temir Mamatisaev, UNO Political Science M.A. student**

- ❖ Bertone, “Human Trafficking”

Week Sixteen

Tuesday, December 4: 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”

Thursday, December 6: **In-class Final Exam**