

DePauw University
Department of Political Science

POLS 290A: Introduction to Human Rights

Fall 2016
T/Th 2:20-3:50
Room: Julian 374

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Office Hours: Asbury 107
M: 9:30-11, 1-3; F: 1-4

Course description:

Human rights are an increasing part of social and political conversations today. It can be said that almost every substantial policy debate today in the US addresses some dimension of human rights, whether we talk of privacy and policing in addressing security; reproductive rights and abortion; or economic rights as they pertain to inequality or basic standards of living. Similarly, it is nearly impossible to read or talk about major global events such as the Syrian refugee crisis without considering their human rights implications.

Yet the definitions and obligations associated with these "rights" are fiercely debated among politicians and citizens around the world. Questions of whether something can be considered a right, or whether governments are responsible for fulfilling and protecting them have become increasingly integral parts of policy and governance today, in some cases (such as the Affordable Care Act) being decided by institutions such as the Supreme Court. The goal of this course is to introduce you to the concepts of human rights in order to better understand their foundational origins, why they may be important for us as human beings, and how they relate to contemporary issues in politics and government today.

This course is divided into three modules. In the first part, we will examine the philosophical and legal foundations of human rights: what are "rights"; where do they come from; where are they secured in law, and whose responsibility are they? In the second module, we will examine some of the major theoretical debates surrounding human rights such as their universality, their ties to Western liberal values and congruence with other cultures, and how different rights may coexist with each other. In the third module, we will delve into several of the contemporary issues and growing debates in human rights today, looking at how human rights are an integral lens to understand major political or social issues such as ethical behavior, racial disparity, and economic globalization.

By the end of the course, I expect that not only will you be able to understand and articulate the foundations, concepts, and key historic debates over human rights, but that your understanding of this topic will allow you to use the framework human rights as a lens to approach and think about policy debates around us (e.g. social policy, humanitarian intervention, or economic development).

Course requirements and expectations:

Readings will be assigned for most classes, and these should be read prior to the class meeting: in-class lectures and discussions will build upon core concepts or issues in each reading. Two textbooks are required for this class:

Goodhart, M. (2016). *Human Rights: Politics and Practice* (3rd edition). Oxford University Press.

Osiatynski, W. (2009). *Human Rights and their Limits*. Cambridge University Press.

I will assign other readings that will come from academic journals that can be accessed through the DePauw library databases (e.g. JSTOR). I will also post these readings online using Moodle.

This course will be oriented around both lectures and in-class discussions. The issues that we will examine in human rights have been heavily debated for several centuries based on different ethical or cultural perspectives, multiple approaches to domestic and international policy, and differing or changing perceptions of what constitutes a threat to human life with dignity. In a course such as this, I imagine there may frequently be disagreement due to the variety of such perspectives in the classroom, yet I expect of each student that they be involved in class discussions or debates in a manner that is respectful and considerate of others and their views.

Assignments and grading:

Course grades will be determined as follows:

Exams: Total 70%

Exam 1 (Sept 27): 20%

Exam 2 (Nov 10): 20%

Final exam: 30%

Response papers: 20%

Participation and attendance: 10%

• Exams:

There will be two midterm exams and one final exam. All exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay sections. The two midterm exams are scheduled for Tuesday, September 27 and Thursday, November 10, and will take the entire class sessions.

The final exam will take place Monday, December 12 from 1 to 4 pm, and cannot be changed except due to specific circumstances defined by university policies (e.g. dean's excused absence, or bunched finals). I advise you to not book travel arrangements that have you leaving before the end of finals week. See the DePauw academic handbook at

<http://www.depauw.edu/files/resources/academichandbook.pdf> for university policies regarding exams.

- Response/argument essays:

On two occasions, you will write an argument essay (approximately 1000 words) in response to a particular prompt (e.g. are rights-based or needs-based social policies more appropriate for targeting poverty?) These papers should answer the question in the prompt while examining and reviewing the relevant aspects of the human rights debate. I will post prompts, deadlines, and other specific instructions for the reaction paper assignments as the semester progresses, and give you at least two weeks to write these essays. Your papers should draw on in-class discussions, assigned readings, and at least two additional sources, one of which must be from a peer-reviewed journal. Papers should be submitted online using Moodle. Late submissions will face a penalty of 10 percentage points for each day that a paper is late.

- Participation and attendance

Regular attendance is essential to pass the class as quizzes and exams are based on both in-class lectures and concepts from the readings. I will allow up to two unexcused absences in the semester, but your grade will be penalized for additional absences.

However, attendance alone is not participation: I expect that students who come to class do so having completed the assigned readings, and are willing to participate in a meaningful manner. Your participation grade will be based on the quality as well as the level of participation in class, in terms of adding to discussions or debates with constructive comments and ideas. Simply raising your hand to seek clarification on a topic does not constitute participation; rather, I look for informed comments that actively engage with the lecture topic or readings, or questions that can stimulate or add to ongoing discussions. I also expect that you will also be considerate of others' opinions in the class and respectfully engage with their comments and ideas, whether or not they share your opinions or political views.

Given that human rights inform a substantial part of contemporary political debates, such as discussions over healthcare or the rights of refugees or illegal immigrants, I expect students to also remain fairly well informed on these issues in the news. Current events related to human rights will regularly become part of class discussions, and I suggest regularly reading a major national daily news source (e.g. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall St. Journal*), as well as reading other sites with good political reporting or nuanced analysis (e.g. *The Atlantic*, *FiveThirtyEight*, *The Economist*).

Other policies:

- Electronic devices:

I allow for laptops or tablets to be used in class for purposes of note-taking or accessing journal articles or other readings/media. However, I expect that you will only use these devices for these purposes. I will ask you to put away laptops/tablets should I find that you are using them for reasons unrelated to the class (e.g. Facebook) - this not only hurts

your learning, but is also distracting to others in your class, and will adversely affect your class participation grade.

I do **not** allow smartphones to be used in class, and expect that phones/other electronic devices will be turned off or be set to silent mode during class.

- **Communication:**

Notices about assignment guidelines, quizzes, possible reading changes, and the like will be announced both via email and Moodle. I will usually announce these in class as well, but you are responsible for regularly checking both of these. As many of this course's topics are highly contentious issues in politics today, new policy debates or events may emerge at any point that may require us to deviate from the topics and readings on the syllabus. As such, I reserve the right to amend the syllabus to add/change assigned readings, or discussion topics in order to best meet the objectives of the course.

The most effective way to reach me is by email: I generally respond to emails within 24 hours. I normally keep office hours Mondays and Fridays, but if you cannot make those due to your schedule, please email me to schedule alternative meeting times. I am regularly in the office and am always happy to meet with any student when available (during scheduled office hours or otherwise), but I will always prioritize a scheduled appointment over a walk-in.

- **Student disability accommodations**

It is the policy and practice of DePauw University to provide reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Written notification from Student Disability Services is required. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to request it for this course, please contact Student Disability Services. Allow one week's advance notice to ensure enough time for reasonable accommodations to be made. Otherwise, it is not guaranteed that the accommodation can be provided on a timely basis. Accommodations are not retroactive. Students who have questions about Student Disability Services or who have, or think they may have, a disability (psychiatric, attentional, learning, vision, hearing, physical, medical, etc.) are invited to contact Student Disability Services for a confidential discussion in Union Building Suite 200 or by phone at 658-6267.

- **Academic honesty**

All students taking this class must adhere to the standards of academic integrity outlined in the DePauw student code: see the DePauw academic handbook (URL provided on page 2) for the full academic integrity policy. In cases of plagiarism or cheating on quizzes or exams that violate the academic integrity code, students will automatically get a grade of 0 for the assignment or exam with no opportunity to retake it, and may face further sanctioning in accordance with university policy.

Course schedule and readings:

Module 1: Philosophical and legal foundations of human rights

Thursday, August 25: Course introductions; what is a human right?

Introduction from Goodhart.

Tuesday, August 30: Origins of human rights, and the concept of dignity

Ursula LeGuin - "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (PDF on Moodle)

"Normative and Theoretical Foundations of Human Rights" from Goodhart.

Thursday, September 1: Legal origins of human rights.

"A Short History of Human Rights", pages 1-28 from Osiatynski.

Tuesday, September 6: Human rights in international law

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations/High Commissioner's website, or in the appendix in Goodhart).

"Human Rights in International Law" from Goodhart.

Thursday, September 8: Civil and political rights, and issues of derogability

Selected sections from "Legal measures and instruments", from The Essentials of Human Rights (PDF on Moodle).

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations/High Commissioner's website, or in the appendix in Goodhart).

Tuesday, September 13: The nature of states' obligations: respect, protect, fulfill

General Comment 31 on the Nature of the General Legal Obligation Imposed on State Parties to the Covenant, 2004 (Committee on Civil and Political Rights)

Thursday, September 15: Genocide, criminal law, and the responsibility to protect

"Genocide and Human Rights" from Goodhart.

Tuesday, September 20: Addressing violations: enforcement, transitions, and justice

"Transitional Justice" from Goodhart.

Thursday, September 22: Human rights, activism, and civil society

"Global Civil Society and Human Rights" from Goodhart

Tuesday, September 27: **Exam 1**

Module 2: Major debates in human rights

Thursday, September 29: Constitutional liberalism and human rights in democracies

"Rights and Democracy", pages 70-80 from Osiatynski.

Zakaria, F. (1997). The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. *Foreign Affairs*, 22-43.

Tuesday, October 4: State repression

"Political Democracy and State Repression" from Goodhart.

Thursday, October 6: Women's rights in the public and private spheres

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women

"Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation" from Goodhart.

October 11 and October 13: The universalism of human rights and cultural relativism

"Universal Origins of Human Rights", pages 145-182 from Osiatynski. (Read this first - we will go over both this and the Sen paper on both days.)

Sen, A. (1999). Democracy as a Universal Value. *Journal of Democracy*, 10(3), 3-17.

Zakaria, F. (1994). "Culture is Destiny: A Conversation with Lee Kuan Yew." *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1994 issue. (Read this for Thursday)

October 15-23: Fall break - no classes

Tuesday, October 25: What are economic and social rights?

International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (United Nations/High Commissioner's website, or in the appendix in Goodhart).

Hertel, S. (2006). Why bother? Measuring economic rights: The research agenda. *International Studies Perspectives*, 7(3), 215-230.

Thursday, October 27: Economic rights and policy: Are they truly "rights" or needs?

"Rights and Needs", pages 105-134 from Osiatynski

Tuesday, November 1: Global obligations towards development and poverty

"Human Rights and Politics in Development" from Goodhart.

Thursday, November 3: The right to health

Farmer, P. (1999). "Pathologies of Power: Rethinking Health and Human Rights." *American Journal of Public Health*, 89(10), 1486-1496.

Tuesday, November 8: The rights of children

"Children's Human Rights Advocacy" from Goodhart.

Thursday, November 10: **Exam 2**

Module 3: Emerging issues in human rights

Tuesday, November 15: How do we evaluate human rights outcomes?

"Measuring and Monitoring Human Rights" from Goodhart.

Thursday, November 17: Migration, statelessness, and the rights of refugees

"Human Rights and Forced Migration" from Goodhart.

Watch "Desperate Journey: Europe's Refugee Crisis on the Human Rights Watch website <https://www.hrw.org/tag/europes-migration-crisis>

Tuesday, November 22: Human rights and economic globalization

"Economic Globalization and Human Rights" from Goodhart.

Thursday, November 24: Thanksgiving - no class.

Tuesday, November 29: Human rights in the US: inequality, poverty, and race

Krugman, P. 2002. "For Richer." New York Times
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/20/magazine/for-richer.html?pagewanted=all>>

Hutchings, V. L., & Valentino, N. A. (2004). The centrality of race in American politics. *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.*, 7, 383-408.

Thursday, December 1: Ethical consumption and corporate complicity in human rights

UN Global Compact: The Ten Principles (UN website)

Irene Khan: Understanding Corporate Complicity (Amnesty International website/Moodle)

Tuesday, December 6: Emerging rights: rights to water, sanitation, and the environment

Resolution 64/292 adopted by the UN General Assembly: The Right to Water and Sanitation

Hiskes, R. P. (2005). The right to a green future: Human rights, environmentalism, and intergenerational justice. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27(4), 1346-1364.

Watch: Ted Talk: Why Climate Change is a Threat to Human Rights
https://www.ted.com/talks/mary_robinson_why_climate_change_is_a_threat_to_human_rights?language=en

Thursday, December 8: Course summary, and review session before finals

"Beyond Rights", pages 205-217 from Osiatynski.

Monday, December 12: Final exam