PSC 316: Human Rights
Spring 2016

Class Location, Time: HHB 227; MWF 11:15-12:05
Instructor: Prof. Robert Blanton
Office: HHB 423
Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:00; 13:15-14:15 and by appointment.
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Course Objectives

This course offers an introduction to key concepts and controversies in the study of human rights. We will address some key issues of the human existence, as well as the role that political actors – governments, institutions, and non-governmental institutions – have in protecting and/or abusing these rights. Specific questions we will examine include:

- What rights are entailed by “human” rights?
- Why do states torture their people?
- Why do genocides occur and why is it so difficult to stop it?
- Do people have a “right” to economic self-sufficiency and a clean environment?
- Does the global economy lead to better or worse human rights conditions?
- Are women and children more vulnerable to human rights abuses?

We will address these issues and controversies (and more) in this course through a combination of reading key documents related to global human rights as well as key works of scholarship in this area. Moreover, we will explore many of these issues through guided discussions and active learning activities.

The overall goal is to provide you with a thorough understanding of what human rights entails, the social, political, and economic implications of these rights, and some of the major threats to global human rights. At the end of the course you will thus be able to:

- define human rights, and identify its major facets
- analyze key issues and controversies related to human rights, including:
  - the role of the state in protecting (and violating) human rights
  - group rights and crimes against humanity
  - how economic and environmental rights fit into the framework of human rights
- recognize groups and institutions related to the promotion of human rights, and
- assess the effectiveness of these groups, as well as relevant international laws, in the promotion of global human rights
Required Texts:


Other readings will be made available on the Canvas page.

Course Policies:

Grading:
Grades will be awarded on a 10-point scale (90-100 for an A and so forth).

Makeup/Late Assignments:
Make-up exams will be allowed ONLY in the case of a documented medical emergency. Unless indicated otherwise, papers turned in after the beginning of class on the due date will be assessed a ten-point penalty. Five points will be deducted for each additional day.

Attendance:
Attendance is necessary for successful completion of the course. Given the nature of the course schedule you will be allowed up to three absences without penalty. However, you are responsible for all material covered during each class (whether they are present or not) and any assignments due that day. Each unexcused absence over the third will result in a one-point reduction in your final grade. NOTE: please arrive to class on time, as it is disruptive and unprofessional to arrive late to class. While I recognize the many variables that can make you late, it is ultimately up to you to ensure your arrival to class. Thus I reserve the right to count particularly egregious tardies (that is coming into class more than ten minutes late) as absences.

Academic Dishonesty:
Any type of academic dishonesty will result in severe disciplinary action on the part of the instructor. Cheating and plagiarism will be grounds for receiving an “F” on the assignment/examination or an “F” for the course, depending on the severity of the offense. UAB policy regarding academic dishonesty is outlined in [https://www.uab.edu/students/academics/honor-code](https://www.uab.edu/students/academics/honor-code) (Links to an external site.)

Students with Disabilities:
If you are registered with Disability Support Services, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability but have not contacted Disability Support Services, please call 205-934-4205 or visit DSS at 1701 9th Ave. South.
Course Structure and Requirements:

Class Participation (10%)
The learning process is very much a “two-way street” requiring the active participation of both instructor and student, and keeping up with the required readings is a necessity for both enjoyment of class meetings and successful completion of this course. To this end, you will be evaluated on the level of preparation that you demonstrate in class discussions. I will regularly call on you in class discussion, and reserve the right to give pop quizzes! You should be able to provide the following information:

For textbook chapters:
- What are the main perspectives offered, and what are the main arguments that constitute these perspectives?
- What are the primary assumptions underlying these perspectives?
- How do the perspectives differ in terms their assumptions, units of analysis, and/or policy prescriptions?

For articles:
- What is the author's argument/thesis?
- What evidence does the author use to support his or her argument?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the author's argument?
- How does the argument compare with related concepts and readings?

Short Writing Assignments/Homework (15%)
You will have the opportunity to complete multiple small assignments. These can take several forms including answering brief questions related to class readings, writing short position papers (either as an individual or as part of a group) related to a specific issue. You will have the chance to complete around ten of these assignments, and the lowest grade will be dropped.

Policy Memo (35% total): A policy memo following the format discussed below is required. The policy memo will be a structured research assignment, focusing on a contemporary human rights issue of interest to you. The issue may be regionally or thematically focused and should have a prominent policy component. While individual papers may vary somewhat in structure, all should be written in the format of a policy recommendation to a decision-maker of your choice. The total paper should be approximately 10-12 pages in length. The specific format to follow is:

To: Your chosen decision maker (i.e. U.S. President, U.N. Secretary-General, Amnesty International Secretary-General, Corporate CEO)
From: Your name
**Issue:** A one to two sentence statement of the issue/problem to which your memo will propose a solution.

**Recommendation:** A 2-4 sentence statement of your policy recommendation.

**Discussion:** This will be the lengthiest part of your paper. Although its structure will vary depending on the question you pose, it should include:
- A detailed statement of the issue/problem
- Relevant human rights law, policy, actors, etc.
- Analysis of recent events/developments relating to the issue.

The Discussion section should read much like a research paper. You should present materials in an objective fashion, even if you are trying to support a particular policy option. The decision maker needs to have a clear picture of the facts to understand the strength of the argument you are making. Organize this section using subheadings to ease the decision maker’s reading of your memo.

**Recommended Action:** a detailed recommendation grounded in an assessment of current factual, legal, and political realities—and a detailed discussion of how the recommendation can be achieved.

**Conclusion:** 1-2 paragraphs.

**Bibliography:** includes all works cited in the Discussion. For consistency’s sake (as well as your own convenience) please follow the APA format (explained here).

Keep in mind that you will be expected to make an argument for a particular policy outcome in an effective and convincing manner. This will require substantial support for your points and an ability to separate your “feelings” about an issue from a hard-nosed assessment of what is politically possible. It will also require you both to present an objective view of the issue and a reasonable argument supporting your preferred recommendation.

The policy brief will be completed as follows:
- **Project Proposal** (due Jan 25; 3% of final grade)
- **First Draft** (due March 28; 10% of final grade).
- **Final draft** of the policy brief will be turned in on April 22 (15% of final grade).
- **Presentations** will take place at the last week end of the semester (7% of final grade).

**Peer Review Process.** Writing is a process, and an important part of the process is responding to your readers. In particular, many studies have found that peer reviews can be very effective in assisting with the writing process, and can produce better projects. We will thus incorporate peer reviews into your policy brief. I will provide more detailed information later.

**Mid-term (20%)**

**Final (20%)**

Exams will be administered on the dates listed on the syllabus. They may be either take-home or in-class.
Course Readings

NOTE: the specific modules may contain additional materials, such as short videos or news articles. Course readings may be subject to change.

Topic 1 (Jan 11-22): What are human rights?

Objectives:
- Identify definition(s) of human rights, and the evolution of the global human rights regime.
- Understand how human rights are inherently “political.”
- Examine how international organizations and social scientists measure human rights.
- Critically assess arguments on the universality of human rights.

Readings:
- Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens (CHS): 1.1-1.5 (“What Are Human Rights?”)
- Goodhart (G): Appendix 1 (“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”).
- CHS: 3.2 (Buergenthal, “The Normative and Institutional Evolution of International Human Rights”)
- G: Chapter 4 (Smith, “Human Rights in International Law”)
- G: Chapter 21 (Landman, “Measuring Human Rights”)
- CHS: 2.1-2.4 (Introduction, articles by Goldstein, Richards, and Gibney & Dalton)
- CHS: 4.1-4.5 (Introduction, articles by Callaway, Halliday, Shakir, and Ibhawoh)

Topic 2 (Jan 25-Feb 5): States and the repression of human rights

Objectives:
- Identify why states repress their people
- Describe the state characteristics are associated with repression (or lack thereof).
- Critically assess torture, including how it is defined and how can it be justified, from both the perspective of the individual as well as the state.
- Appraise whether torture is ever morally permissible.
- Critique the linkages between terrorism and torture.

Readings:
- G: Chapter 5 (Cardenas, “Human Rights in Comparative Politics”)
- G: Chapter 8 (Davenport, “Political Democracy and State Repression”)
- G: Chapter 18 (Schulz, “Torture”)
• CHS: Chapter 9 (“Human Rights and the War on Terror”), 9.1-9.4 (introduction and articles by Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens, Massimino, and Mertus and Sajjad)

**Topic 3 (Feb 8-19): Group rights and crimes against humanity**

**Objectives:**
• Differentiate group rights from individual rights.
• Examine the “value added” of group protections to human rights law.
• Parse the definition of “genocide.”
• Describe the causes of genocide, and the processes that leads to genocide.
• Evaluate the problems associated with preventing genocide.
• Explain the R2P (Responsibility to Protect) doctrine and its significance.

**Readings:**
• CHS: 5.1-5.6 (“Witness to Torture”)
• G: Chapter 16 (Straus, “Genocide and Human Rights”)
• G: Chapter 17 (Kuperman, “Humanitarian Intervention”)

**Topic 4 (Feb 22-March 4): Group rights: women and children**

**Objectives:**
• Evaluate the gendered nature of human rights repression.
• Examine some of the ways in which women and children are particularly vulnerable for human rights abuses.
• Define human trafficking and assess the ways in which humans are exploited in this manner.
• Assess how women’s rights and children’s rights rose to prominence on the international agenda, as well as pertinent laws in these areas.

**Readings:**
Midterm Examination March 4

Topic 5 (March 7-March 28): Economic, social, and environmental rights

Objectives:
- Evaluate whether economic and environment rights “human rights” issues.
- Assess the policy implications for viewing these issues through a human rights framework.
- Define and assess a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development (HRBA).
- Examine the ways in which economic globalization may influence human rights, and the prominent arguments in this area.
- Describe the prospective role of economic actors, specifically multinational corporations (MNCs) in this area.

Readings:
- G, Chapter 10 (Fukuda-Parr, “Human Rights and Politics in Development”)
- CHS: Chapter 8 (“Globalization and Human Rights,”) entire.
- G: Chapter 11 (Richards and Gelleny, “Economic Globalization and Human Rights”)
- G: Chapter 22 (Barry and Woods, “Human Rights and the Environment”)

Topic 6 (March 30-April 13): Promoting human rights

Objectives:
- Evaluate the role and effectiveness of international law in improving human rights practices.
- Explain transnational advocacy networks (TAN’s) and their application to human rights promotion.
- Delineate the major ways in which human rights are encouraged.
- Review the methods in which states and societies deal with the aftermath of human rights repression.
- Examine current threats to human rights and potential areas for expansion.

Readings:
- CHS: 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 (Introduction, articles by Tucker, Dowty and Loescher, and Keck and Sikkink).
- G: Chapter 19 (Quinn, “Transitional Justice”)
- G: Chapter 20 (Goodhart, “The Future of Human Rights”)
Topic 7 (April 15-22): Student Presentations and Discussions
Final Examination: Monday, April 25: 10:45-13:15