



**POLI 3505 – Foundations: Human Rights**  
Professor Leah Sarson

Schedule: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 1:05-2:25  
Location: DUNN 135  
Office Hours: HH 362; Wednesdays: 9:30-11:30  
Email: Leah.Sarson@dal.ca  
Website: Brightspace

**Course Description**

This course explores human rights in theory and practice. It considers the necessities for human dignity and integrity of the person in the context of universal principles and values. We will study the ideas, laws, structures and actors that influence how human rights are conceptualized, monitored, and enforced. The first half of the course introduces the concept of human rights, including their history, philosophy, laws, institutions, and policies. We consider the international community's understanding of human rights, the decisions states make to enforce rights at home and abroad, actors beyond the state such as the United Nations, and key debates related to morality, cultural relativism and humanitarian intervention. The second half of the course looks at specific rights and the mechanisms in place to protect them. We explore how the deep contestation surrounding human rights affects their implementation, integrating case studies to analyze how rights are prioritized, conceptualized, and protected globally. This interdisciplinary course provides a framework through which students can develop and articulate analyses of human rights.

**Learning Objectives:**

- 1) Identify and define the key concepts and ideas that shape the politics of human rights;
- 2) Recognize, assess, and evaluate the primary debates in the field to develop analytical arguments;
- 3) Comprehend and respond to the scholarly literature on human rights;
- 4) Understand and articulate the evolution of human rights, including the interrelationships between the philosophies and implementation of rights.

**Required Readings**

*Please purchase:*

- 1) Smith, Rhona K. M. 2018. *International Human Rights Law*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford University Press.
- 2) Donnelly, Jack. 2013. *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Cornell University Press.

*Other readings as noted; these will be available on Brightspace.*

## Communication with the Professor

In all email communications with me, please include POLI 3505 in the subject line and proper greetings and salutations. Always sign-off with your full name. I will do my best to respond in 24 hours.

Office hours are Wednesdays from 9:30 to 11:30 or (occasionally) by appointment. My office is room 362 in the Henry Hicks Building.

We will be using Brightspace. Please check it regularly for announcements, assignments, and other resources.

## Assignments

1) *Midterm (25%)* – February 14 (in-class)

2) *Annotated bibliography (10%)* – March 7 (in-class and on Brightspace)

Students will prepare an annotated bibliography of the scholarly sources that they will draw on for their research papers. No fewer than eight sources must be included. In addition to a proper citation, students will provide an overview and evaluation of each piece. Annotations should be no longer than 150 words each. Students **must** include their paper topics at the top of their assignment. More information will be provided in-class and on Brightspace.

3) *Research paper (35%)* – March 21 (in-class and on Brightspace)

Drawing on the annotated bibliography, students will produce a research paper of 2500-3000 words (approximately 10 pages) that articulates an analytical argument related to human rights. More information will be provided in-class and on Brightspace. Due in my office and on Brightspace.

4) *Take home exam (30%)* – April 8 (on Brightspace)

\*\*\*Please note: This is an exam and exam rules apply. No extensions will be offered except in the most extreme circumstances.

Letter grades have a grade point assigned that is used to calculate your GPA (Grade Point Average). The following table explains and defines Dalhousie's grading system and shows the GPA value that corresponds with each letter grade.

Grade	Grade Point Value		Definition	Notes
A+	4.30	90-100	Excellent	Considerable evidence of original thinking; demonstrated outstanding capacity to analyze and synthesize; outstanding grasp of subject matter; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
A	4.00	85-89		
A-	3.70	80-84		
B+	3.30	77-79	Good	Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytical ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature.
B	3.00	73-76		
B-	2.70	70-72		

C+	2.30	65-69	Satisfactory	Evidence of some understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems; benefitting from his/her university experience.
C	2.00	60-64		
C-	1.70	55-59		
D	1.00	50-54	Marginal Pass	Evidence of minimally acceptable familiarity with subject matter, critical and analytical skills (except in programs where a minimum grade of 'C' is required).
F	0.00	0-49	Inadequate	Insufficient evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytical skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.
INC	0.00		Incomplete	
W	Neutral and no credit obtained		Withdrew after deadline	
ILL	Neutral and no credit obtained		Compassionate reasons, illness	
P	Neutral		Pass	
TR	Neutral		Transfer credit on admission	
Pending	Neutral		Grade not reported	

## Academic Integrity

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect (The Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 1999). As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity.

At university we advance knowledge by building on the work of other people. Academic integrity means that we are honest and accurate in creating and communicating all academic products. Acknowledgement of other people's work must be done in a way that does not leave the reader in any doubt as to whose work it is. Academic integrity means trustworthy conduct such as not cheating on examinations and not misrepresenting information. It is the student's responsibility to seek assistance to ensure that these standards are met. We will be using Urkund in this class as a tool to avoid academic integrity issues.

In your work, please be sure to:

- Make sure you understand Dalhousie's policies on academic integrity. Please visit [http://www.dal.ca/dept/university\\_secretariat/academic-integrity/academic-policies.html](http://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity/academic-policies.html)
- Do not cheat in examinations or write an exam or test for someone else.
- Clearly indicate the sources used in your written or oral work (including diagrams, videos, etc.).
- Do not use the work of another from the Internet or any other source and submit it as your own.
- When you use the ideas of other people (paraphrasing), make sure to acknowledge the source.
- Do not submit work that has been completed through collaboration or previously submitted for another assignment without permission from all instructors involved.
- This is not a comprehensive list. If you are ever unsure about any aspect of your academic work, please contact me or a TA. The library also offers services to help you ensure your academic integrity.
- Academia can be incredibly stressful. Whatever you do, do not be tempted to plagiarize or otherwise cheat. It is not worth it. Instructors are required to report every suspected offence.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

This classroom is a safe, equitable, and professional learning environment, in which students are encouraged to express their views in a collegial and respectful manner. To maintain a healthy learning environment, there is a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination and harassment of any sort.

Please familiarize yourself with the Dalhousie University rules and regulations on student rights and responsibilities, which can be found here: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities.html)

### **Absences and Late Policy**

Dalhousie students are asked to take responsibility for their own short-term absences (3 days or less) by contacting their instructor by email prior to the academic requirement deadline or scheduled time and by submitting a completed Student Declaration of Absence to their instructor in case of missed or late academic requirements. The Student Declaration of Absence Form was introduced in select courses to replace sick notes for absences of three days or fewer that result in missed or late academic requirements. The Student Declaration of Absence Form functions the same as a sick note.

You may use the Student Declaration of Absence Form **once** during this academic year. Please ensure it is provided to me prior to the beginning of class. The form may only be used in cases of missed class work.

More information is available here: [https://www.dal.ca/campus\\_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-policies/student-absence.html](https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-policies/student-absence.html)

**The late policy is 3% per day.** If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on-time, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss *potential* alternative arrangements.

**No extensions will be offered for the take-home exam except in the most extreme circumstances. Documentation to support any rationale will be required.**

The submission of the form does not provide an automatic exemption from any academic requirements that were missed or late during an absence. Any alternate coursework arrangements for missed or late academic requirements are at the instructor's discretion.

For students experiencing or anticipating barriers to their learning environments or other issues, please see the Accommodations Office. Accommodation levels the playing field to support your success. It reduces or removes barriers to your learning to ensure fair and equitable access to your classroom, testing or co-op/fieldwork environments. Accommodations can be introduced when a protected characteristic (as defined by provincial human rights legislation) may place you at a disadvantage compared to other students who are not affected by a protected characteristic. I encourage these students to work with the office to ensure that their needs are met.

If you face a serious unexpected challenge during the course for which you require special accommodations, please notify me as far in advance as possible.

## **Schedule and Assigned Readings**

### **January 8: Introduction**

- Donnelly, Jack. "The Concept of Human Rights (Chapter 1)." *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (hereafter UHRTP), 7-23. (Temporarily available on Brightspace)

### **January 10: Origins of Human Rights**

- Donnelly, Jack. "A Brief History of Human Rights (Chapter 5)." *UHRTP*, 75-92. (Temporarily available on Brightspace.)
- Sussman, Alan. 2014. "Why Human Rights Are Called Human Rights." *Ethics & International Affairs* 28 (2), 171–82.

### **January 15: Background – Philosophies**

- Donnelly, Jack. "The Universal Declaration Model" (Chapter 2). *UHRTP*, 24-39. (If required, available on Brightspace.)

### **January 17: Background – International Law**

- Smith, Rhona. "Introduction" (Chapter 1) and "Historical Background" (Chapter 2). *International Human Rights Law* (hereafter IHRL), 1-26.

### **January 22: Questioning Foundations**

- Mutua, Makau. 2001. “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights.” *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, 201-245.
- Ibhawoh, Bonny. 2011. The Right to Development: The Politics and Polemics of Power and Resistance. *Human Rights Quarterly* 33 (1), 76-104.

### **January 24: Cultural Relativism**

- Donnelly, Jack. “The Relative Universality of Human Rights (Chapter 6)” and “Universality in a World of Particularities.” *UHRTP*, 93-118.

### **January 29: Institutions**

- Smith, Rhona. “The United Nations” (Chapter 3). *IHRL*, 27-37.
- Smith, Rhona. “Regional Protection of Human Rights” (Chapter 6). *IHRL*, 86-96.
- Reference: Smith, Rhona. “The United Nations – Organizational Structure” (Chapter 5). *IHRL*, 53-85.

### **January 31: The State**

- Donnelly, Jack. “Human Rights and Foreign Policy” (Chapter 12). *UHRTP*, 197-213.

### **February 5: NGOs and Civil Society**

- Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. 1999. “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics.” *International Social Science Journal* 51 (159), 89-101.
- Brysk, Alison. “Introduction: Globalization and Private Wrongs.” *Human Rights and Private Wrongs*. Routledge, 1-14.

### **February 7: Enforcement and Accountability**

- Smith, Rhona. “Monitoring, Implementing, and Enforcing Human Rights” (Chapter 10). *IHRL*, 156-181.

### **February 12: Key Debates in Human Rights**

- *Midterm Review*
- Smith, Rhona. “Substantive Rights – General Comments” (Chapter 11). *IHRL*, 182-194.

### **February 14: \*\*\*Midterm (in-class)\*\*\***

### **February 19 and 21: No Class (reading week)**

### **February 26: Humanitarian Intervention**

- Welsh, Jennifer M. 2016. “The Responsibility to Protect after Libya & Syria.” *Daedalus*, 145(4), 75-87.
- Donnelly, Jack. “Humanitarian Intervention against Genocide” (Chapter 15). *UHRTP*, 254-273.

## **February 28: Right to Life and Genocide**

- Keirnan, Ben. 2007. "Introduction," *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1-40.
- Reference: Smith, Rhona. "The Right to Life" (Chapter 13). *IHRL*, 219-236.

## **March 5: Torture and Lawlessness**

- Smith, Rhona. "Freedom from Torture" (Chapter 14). *IHRL*, 237-254.
- McKeown, Ryder. 2009. Norm Regress: US Revisionism and the Slow Death of the Torture Norm. *International Relations* 23(1), 5-25.

## **March 7: Modern Slavery**

\*\*\*Annotated bibliography due\*\*\*

- Gallagher, Anne T. and Joy Ngozi Ezeilo. 2015. "The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking: A Turbulent Decade in Review," *Human Rights Quarterly* 37(4), 913-940.
- Nolan, Justine and Gregory Bott. 2018. "Global supply chains and human rights: spotlight on forced labour and modern slavery practices." *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 24(1), 44-69

## **March 12: Self-Determination and Nationalism**

- Smith, Rhona. "The Right to Self-Determination" (Chapter 17). *IHRL*, 293-309

## **March 19: Indigenous Rights**

- Smith, Rhona. "Indigenous Peoples and Minority Rights" (Chapter 21). *IHRL*, 353-376.
- Lightfoot, Sheryl. 2016. "Introduction." *Global Indigenous Politics: a Subtle Revolution*. Routledge, 1-32.

## **March 21: Democracy and Development**

\*\*\*Term paper due\*\*\*

- Donnelly, Jack. "Human Rights, Democracy, and Development" (Chapter 13). *UHRTP*, 217-234.
- Ibhawoh, Bonny. 2011. The Right to Development: The Politics and Polemics of Power and Resistance. *Human Rights Quarterly* 33(1), 76-104. (Repeat from Jan. 22)

## **March 26: Feminism, Gender, and Sex Discrimination**

- Donnelly, Jack. "Non-Discrimination for All: The Case of Sexual Minorities" (Chapter 16). *UHRTP*, 274-291.
- Collins, Dana, Sylvanna Falcón, Sharmila Lodhia and Molly Talcott. 2010. "New Directions in Feminism and Human Rights." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12(3-4), 298-318

### **March 28: Guest lecture**

- TBD

### **April 2: Migration**

- Smith, Rhona. “Rights for Specific Vulnerable Persons” (Chapter 22 - partial). *IHRL*, 377-386.
- Allen, William, Bridget Anderson, Nicholas Van Hear, Madeleine Sumption, Franck Düvell, Jennifer Hough, Lena Rose, Rachel Humphris and Sarah Walker. 2018. “Who Counts in Crises? The New Geopolitics of International Migration and Refugee Governance.” *Geopolitics* 23(1), 217-243.

### **April 4: Looking to the Future**

- \*\*\*TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM\*\*\*
- Forsythe, David P. 2018. “2018 IPSA Conference Plenary Lecture The future of universal human rights: hard times, but...”. *Australian Journal of Human Rights* (24)3, 281-291.

*Please note: while I have done my best to finalize the syllabus, some changes may be possible.*