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:


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.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Grade Point Value</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>Considerable evidence of original thinking; demonstrated outstanding capacity to analyze and synthesize; outstanding grasp of subject matter; evidence of extensive knowledge base.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>80-84</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>77-79</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>70-72</td>
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<td>65-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
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<td>0-49</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
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<td>Incomplete</td>
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<td>Withdrew after deadline</td>
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<td>ILL</td>
<td>Neutral and no credit obtained</td>
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<td>Compassionate reasons, illness</td>
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<td>Pass</td>
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<td>Transfer credit on admission</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Grade not reported</td>
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**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
• 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

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.

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


January 10: Origins of Human Rights

- Donnelly, Jack. “A Brief History of Human Rights (Chapter 5).” *UHRTP*, 75-92. (Temporarily available on Brightspace.)

January 15: Background – Philosophies


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

January 24: Cultural Relativism

January 29: Institutions

January 31: The State

February 5: NGOs and Civil Society

February 7: Enforcement and Accountability

February 12: Key Debates in Human Rights
- Midterm Review

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

February 19 and 21: No Class (reading week)

February 26: Humanitarian Intervention
February 28: Right to Life and Genocide


March 5: Torture and Lawlessness


March 7: Modern Slavery

***Annotated bibliography due***


March 12: Self-Determination and Nationalism

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

March 19: Indigenous Rights


March 21: Democracy and Development

***Term paper due***


March 26: Feminism, Gender, and Sex Discrimination

March 28: Guest lecture

- TBD

April 2: Migration


April 4: Looking to the Future

- ***TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM***

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