



POLI 3505 – Foundations: Human Rights
Professor Leah Sarson

Winter 2024

Schedule:	Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:05-2:25
Location:	[REDACTED]
Office Hours:	Mondays, 1:00-2:00 and Thursdays, 2:45-4:00 (or by appointment) in [REDACTED]
Email:	Leah.Sarson@dal.ca
Course Website:	Brightspace
TAs:	Mirriam Mensah, mirriam.mensah@dal.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores human rights in theory and practice. We study the ideas, laws, structures, and actors that influence how human rights are conceptualized and fulfilled. Beginning with an introduction to the concept of human rights, we explore the origins of human rights and the philosophies behind them. From there, we assess the transition from theory to practice, examining how rights are implemented, monitored, and enforced around the world and conclude with analyzes of specific challenges confronting the contemporary human rights regime. We assess how the deep contestation surrounding human rights affects their implementation, integrating case studies to reflect on diverse approaches to the conceptualization, prioritization, and protection of human rights. This interdisciplinary course provides a framework through which students can develop and articulate their own understandings and analyses of human rights.

Course objectives include:

- Identifying and defining the key concepts and ideas that shape the politics of human rights;
- Critically assessing the gaps between the theory and practice of human rights;
- Recognizing, analyzing, and responding to primary debates in the field;
- Encouraging curiosity about our own rights and responsibilities in the context of the course material.

Required Readings

Most journal articles and news media are available on the library website and most book chapters are available on our Brightspace page. I will not post readings available on the Dal library website because learning to access scholarly material is an essential element of a university education. The librarians are available if you have trouble sourcing articles.

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.

Please feel free to come by my office (Henry Hicks, room 343) during office hours or make an appointment to chat with me at your convenience.

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

Classroom Etiquette

The classroom must be a safe, equitable, and professional academic environment in which students are encouraged to express their views in a collegial and respectful manner. Learning to form and articulate complex arguments is difficult. I expect students to remain humble, to accept constructive criticism, and to maintain the healthy learning environment necessary to nurture new ideas. While we all make mistakes and may say the wrong thing from time to time, there will be no tolerance for hateful or discriminatory behaviour.

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

Accessibility

Our course should be equally accessible to all students. If you encounter any content that is not accessible or perceptible for you, please do not hesitate to inform me or someone from the Accommodations Office. For students experiencing or anticipating barriers to their learning environments or other issues, please see the Accommodations Office. Accommodation 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. Please note that while I will do my best to support all learners and commit to fighting the barriers many students face, some accommodations may not be possible.

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. Accommodations will not be offered post hoc.

Assessment

Please submit all assignments to the relevant Brightspace folder by 11:59 pm on the due date. The folder will close at 11:59 pm and you will be unable to submit unless you have made prior arrangements with me. Please be advised that I do not accept assignments via email. Full instructions for all assignments are available on Brightspace.

1. Collaborative notes (10%, peer-review) - Ongoing

- In assigned groups, students will develop collaborative notes on the day’s discussion, with one group member assigned as the primary note-taker per class. (Please note, should you be away during your assigned note-taking day, it is your responsibility to find a substitute among your group members.)
2. Literature review (25%) – Due February 8 (**optional** second assignment due March 12)
 - Analyze and assess scholarly (peer-reviewed) articles from the syllabus with a focus on distilling and evaluating arguments and synthesizing implications.
 - Students may wish to submit an optional second literature review should they be unsatisfied with their first attempt. In this case, each review will be worth 12.5%.
 3. Human rights in popular culture (30%) – Due March 21
 - Connect the themes and theories of our course to popular films and music.
 4. Take-home exam (35%) – TBC

Schedule and Assigned Readings

1. Background – January 9, 11, and 16

Focus: history, context, and definitions of the international human rights regime.

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- Sussman, Alan. 2014. “Why Human Rights Are Called Human Rights.” *Ethics & International Affairs* 28 (2), 171–82.
- Tremblay, Reeta, James Kelly, Michael Lipson, and Jean Francois Mayer. 2008. “Introduction: Foundations of Human Rights,” in *Understanding Human Rights: Origins, Currents, and Critiques*. Toronto: Thomson Nelson.
- Donnelly, Jack. “The Concept of Human Rights (Chapter 1).” *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (hereafter UHRTP), 7-23. (Available on the library website)
- Human Rights Watch, 2023 World Report, www.hrw.org (N.B. Released on January 11, 2024).

2. Theories of Human Rights – January 18 and 23

Focus: the philosophies and origins of human rights.

- Langlois, Anthony, 2009, “Normative and Theoretical Foundations of Human Rights,” In *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*, ed. Michael Goodhart, OUP, 11-27.
- Forsythe, David, 2017, “Establishing Human Rights Standards,” In *Human rights in international relations*. Cambridge University Press, 29-54.
- Suggested: Petersen, Tracey. 2010. “Moving beyond the toolbox: teaching human rights through teaching the Holocaust in post-apartheid South Africa,” *Intercultural Education*, 21:sup1, S27-S31.

3. Critiquing Foundations – January 25, 30, and February 1

Focus: the big questions and debates in human rights, especially cultural relativism versus universalism.

- Ishay, Micheline, 2004, “What are Human Rights? Six Historical Controversies,” *Journal of Human Rights* 3.3: 359-371.
- Mutua, Makau. 2001. “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights.” *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, **201-209 only**. (N.B. Focus on the first section.)
- Risse, Mathias, 2012, “Universalism vs. Relativism,” In *Global Political Philosophy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 40-61.
- Kapur, Ratna. 2006. “Human rights in the 21st century: take walk on the dark side.” *Sydney Law Review*, 28(4), 665-688.
- Suggested: Simmons, William. 2019. “The Thrill is Gone,” in *Joyful Human Rights*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

4. Review and Reflection – February 6

5. Key Actors – February 8, 13, and 15

Focus: The state, international organizations (e.g. the UN), and civil society (e.g. non-governmental organizations like Amnesty International).

Literature review due February 8

- Jensen, Steven LB, Stéphanie Lagoutte & Sébastien Lorion. 2019. “The Domestic Institutionalisation of Human Rights: An Introduction,” *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, 37:3, 165-176.
- Mertus, Julie. 2010. “A Guide to the New UN Human Rights Practice,” In *The United Nations and Human Rights: A Guide for a New Era*, 2nd ed. Routledge: 1-8.
- Donnelly, Jack. “Human Rights and Foreign Policy” (Chapter 12). *UHRTP*, 197-213.
- Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. 1999. “Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics.” *International Social Science Journal* 51 (159), 89-101.
- Suggested: Risse, T., & Ropp, S. 1999. “International human rights norms and domestic change: Conclusions.” In *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*, Eds. T. Risse, S. Ropp, & K. Sikkink, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 234-278.
- Suggested: Podcast: Canadian Broadcasting Corp, 2019, “The Unconventional Diplomat: Breaking The Rules,” <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1656560195971> (PART 1) and <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1657131587708> (PART 2)

6. International human rights law – February 27 and 29 and March 5 and 7

Focus: implementation, monitoring, and enforcement

- Smith, Rhona, 2022, “Monitoring, Implementing, and Enforcing Human Rights,” *International Human Rights Law*, 10th ed. Oxford University Press.
- Hafner-Burton, E. M. and Tsutsui, K., 2007, “Justice Lost! The Failure of International Human Rights Law to Matter Where Needed Most,” *Journal of Peace Research* 44.4: 407–425.

- Hillebrecht, Courtney and Hannah Roesch Read. 2023. “The ICC beyond the courtroom: Activities, warnings, and impact,” *Journal of Human Rights*, 22:1, 62-77.
- Welsh, Jennifer M. 2016. “The Responsibility to Protect after Libya & Syria.” *Daedalus*, 145(4), 75-87.
- Kershner, Isabel. 2022. “Nazi Tapes Provide a Chilling Sequel to the Eichmann Trial,” *New York Times*, July 4, 2022.
- Video: Michael Walzer on Just War in Iraq, *Big Think*, April 23, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_1rqRYaQn-A

7. Human Rights in/and Canada – March 12 and 14

Focus: Canada’s domestic human rights regime and international human rights policies

- Mackinnon, Mark. 2020. “Anwar and Anwar: How a chance encounter helped lead to a watershed trial linked to Syrian conflict,” *The Global and Mail*, April 24, 2020.
- Jeffrey, Brooke, 2016, “The Evolution of Human Rights in Canada,” In *Human Rights: Current Issues and Controversies*, ed. Gordon DiGiacomo, Toronto: U of T Press.
- Chapnick, Adam, 2020, “Canada’s Campaign for a Seat on the United Nations Security Council: The Historical Context,” *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/cdfai/pages/4359/attachments/original/1580165318/Canadas_Campaign_for_a_Seat_on_the_United_Nations_Security_Council_The_Historical_Context.pdf?1580165318.
- Human Rights Watch. 2024. “Canada: Events of 2023.” www.hrw.org.
- Suggested: Video: Williams, Kerry, 2019, “Figuring out the Who, Where, How and What to Implement UNDRIP in Canada,” Centre for International Governance Innovation, <https://www.cigionline.org/multimedia/figuring-out-who-where-how-and-what-implement-undrip-canada>

8. Panel conversation: careers in human rights (TBC) – March 19

9. Centre for the Study of Security and Development event in honour of Human Rights Day (TBC) – March 21

* Popular culture assignment due March 21*

10. Challenges to Human Rights – March 26 and 28

Focus: political forces (e.g. populism) threatening the international human rights regime

- Neuman, Gerald L. 2020, “Populist Threats to the International Human Rights System.” In *Human Rights in a Time of Populism: Challenges and Responses*, ed. Gerald L. Neuman, 1–19. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, Geoffrey. 2023. “China’s concerning new strategy on human rights: unite the world behind a ‘selective’ approach.” *The Conversation*, September 6, 2023. <https://theconversation.com/chinas-concerning-new-strategy-on-human-rights-unite-the-world-behind-a-selective-approach-212007>

- Choi-Fitzpatrick, Austin. 2022. “The Future of Human Rights.” Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School, https://carrcenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/cchr/files/22_choi-fitzpatrick.pdf.
- Suggested: Mboya, A. 2018. “Human Rights and the Global Climate Change Regime.” *Natural Resources Journal*, 58(1), 51–74.

11. The Future of Human Rights – April 2 and 4

Focus: What can and should human rights look like in the near- and long-term?

- Brysk, Alison. 2022. “The future of human rights: A research agenda.” *Journal of Human Rights*, 21:2, 117. (N.B. It’s only one page!)
- Dancy, Geoff and Christopher J. Fariss. 2023. “The Global Resonance of Human Rights: What Google Trends Can Tell Us.” *American Political Science Review*, 1-22.
- Suggested: Schultz, William and Sushma Raman, 2020. “Why Rights Change,” In *The Coming Good Society: Why New Realities Demand New Rights*, Harvard University Press, 1-25.

Please note: the above class schedule may be subject to change.

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.

DALHOUSIE GRADE SYSTEM

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	