PLS 497: Human Rights

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Office: Pond Lab, room 227
Office Hours: Wednesday 1:30pm-3:30pm and by appointment.

Introduction

This course examines the politics of human rights and repression, focusing on the causes and consequences of human rights violations. The core questions considered include: Are human rights universal? Why do governments choose to repress individuals within their jurisdiction? Have levels of repression changed over time? What strategies have international institutions, non-state actors, and individuals used to uncover and reduce the use of repressive actions? How do we evaluate human rights systematically? Students will learn to identify and critically evaluate human rights issues as they arise in different time periods and regions of the world. Course material will draw from the diverse research methodologies that have been applied to the study of human rights and repression.

The subject matter of this course serves as a tool to help you develop skills to become a better thinker and communicator. Most class periods will consist of a short lecture and then a seminar style discussion based on the readings of the week. Participation is key to the success of the seminar portion of each class. With this in mind, much of the course grade will be based on the quality of student participation during these seminars. The goals for this course are for you to:

Ask good questions. Learning necessitates curiosity.

Assess and synthesize information. Use the course material to arrive at informed opinions.

Engage in analytical reasoning. Respectfully discuss and deliberate ideas.

Communicate effectively. Continue to improve the skills necessary to write or present a clearly argued and well-developed discourse.
Required Reading Material

Books (Full)


Articles and Selected Book Chapters


**Documentaries**

Throughout the course we will watch a few documentaries about contemporary human rights issues. These documentaries are designed to help you make sense of the conceptual issues introduced in the readings and discussed during class.


**Web Documentaries and Lectures**

We will also watch some short web based documentaries and lectures by other scholars concerning contemporary human rights issues.


Class Expectations and Grades

Read all of the assigned materials and be prepared to discuss each piece during the assigned class week. 40% of your grade will be based on participation in classroom discussion about the assigned readings. There will be approximately 10-15 “pop quizzes” designed to assess your comprehension of the weekly readings. These quizzes should take up no more than 5 to 10 minutes of class. Your performance on these quizzes will be incorporated into your participation grade. **Laptops will not be allowed during class meetings**, so make sure to print out the readings before class or come prepared with written notes.

15% of your grade will be based on a two-part research project (5-pages each) in which you (1) compare two human rights reports for different countries in the same year and (2) compare two rights reports for the same country in different years. 15% of your grade will be based on a 2-page assessment of human rights data. The final 15% of your grade will be based on a 8-10 page memo on a local human rights Non-Governmental Organization. You will work on the final project together in groups of no more than 3 people.
Assignments

Note 1: Assignment due dates appear below in the Schedule of Readings section. Assignments are due at the beginning of the first class in week of the due date.

Note 2: For each assignment, preliminary information is due by e-mail prior to the actual due date. Details about this information is contained in the each assignment description below. Reminders are also located in the Schedule of Readings section.

1. **Quizzes**: 10-15 “pop quizzes” designed to assess your comprehension of the weekly readings. Quiz grades will be incorporated into your overall participation grade.

2. **Case Comparison part 1** (4 pages, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, doublespace): With the assistance of the instructor, select two countries in the same year. Find the Amnesty International Human Rights report for the year you have selected and compare the description of the human rights abuses contained in the two reports. **Students must e-mail their case selection to the instructor at least two weeks prior to the due date for this assignment.** Additional information about this project will be provided by the instructor.

3. **Case Comparison part 2** (4 pages, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, doublespace): With the assistance of the instructor, select 1 country. Find the Amnesty International Human Rights reports for two different years at least 10 years apart. Compare the description of the human rights abuses contained in the two reports. **Students must e-mail their case selection to the instructor at least two weeks prior to the due date for this assignment.** Additional information about this project will be provided by the instructor.

4. **Human Rights Data Assessment and Visualization** (2 pages): With the assistance of the instructor, identify a dataset that captures some aspect of human rights. Create a visualization of this data using a program such as Microsoft Excel, or R. (There will be an optional R tutorial for those students interested in learning to visualize data using this free program). On the first page of this assignment describe the data, where you obtained it, and what it measures. On the second page provide the visualization and an informative caption about the image. **Anytime before the end of week 10, students are required to visit the instructor during office hours to discuss potential data sources for this assignment.** Additional information about this project will be provided by the instructor.

5. **Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo** (8-10 pages, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, doublespace): In a group of no more than 3 people find a local non-profit or non-governmental organization working on a contemporary human rights issue. The group can be based here in State College or nearby in New York City, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia or Washington D.C. The goal of this project is identify active human rights organizations working in and around our community. What are the human rights issues that the organization seeks to address? What are the tactics used to achieve the organization’s goals? Does the organization partner with similar groups? **One member of the group must e-mail the instructor a list of group members and the name of the organization selected for this project by 5pm on the Thursday of week 10.** Additional information about this project will be provided by the instructor.
Schedule of Readings

Week 1: The State and Violence part 1

Tuesday
1. Course Introduction

Thursday
1. Scott (1999) Ch. 1

Week 2: The State and Violence part 2

Tuesday
1. Driscoll (2012)

Thursday

Week 3: Conceptualizing Human Rights

Tuesday

Thursday
1. In Class Video: “The Story of Human Rights”.
2. In Class Video: Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1944. “Second Bill of Rights”.
3. Carey, Gibney, Poe (2010) Ch.1 and Ch.2

Week 4: The State and Violence part 3

Tuesday
Thursday

**Week 5: Assessment of Human Rights part 1**

*Reminder:* Case selection for the Case Comparison part 1 assignment is due to the instructor by e-mail this week.

Tuesday
1. Carey, Gibney, Poe (2010) Ch.3 and Ch.4

Thursday
1. Carey, Gibney, Poe (2010) Ch.5, and Ch.6

**Week 6: Assessment of Human Rights part 2**

Tuesday
1. Brysk (1994)
2. Davenport (2010)

Thursday
1. Fariss (2014)

**Week 7: Human Rights Activism part 1**

*Due Date:* The Case Comparison part 1 assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week.

Tuesday
1. Makie (1996)
2. Markin Luther King Jr. (1964)

Thursday
1. Group human rights models
Week 8: Human Rights Activism part 2

Reminder: Case selection for the Case Comparison part 2 assignment is due to the instructor by e-mail this week.

Tuesday
1. Clark (2001) Ch.1 and Ch.3

Thursday
1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.1 and Ch.2

NO CLASS: Spring Break

Week 9: Changing Human Rights part 1

Tuesday
1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.3 and Ch.4

Thursday
1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.5

Week 10: Human Rights in World Politics part 1

Due Date: The Case Comparison part 2 assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week.

Reminder: Students must visit the instructor during office hours to discuss the Human Rights Data Assessment and Visualization assignment by Thursday of this week. Please try to attend office hours before this week.

Reminder: One member of the group for the Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo must e-mail the instructor a list of group members and the name of the organization selected for this project by 5pm on the Thursday of this week.

Tuesday
2. Note that we will no longer be reading Hayner (2002)
Thursday
1. No class today

Week 11: Human Rights Data

Tuesday
4. In Class Video: “DNA Identifies War Victims” (September 29, 2013) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbk6QAfErXA

Thursday
1. R Data Visualization Workshop

Week 12: Human Rights in World Politics part 2

Tuesday
1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.6

Thursday
1. Sikkink (2011) Ch.7 and Ch.8

Week 13: Towards the Future

Tuesday
1. King, Pan, Roberts (2013)

Thursday
**Week 14: Making a Difference Locally and Globally**

**Due Date:** The Human Rights Data Assessment and Visualization assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week. Please bring a draft to class on Tuesday, which I will check. Any last minute issues should be addressed before class on Thursday. We will review each of the visualizations together during class on Thursday. Please bring a color printout to class.

**Tuesday**

1. Keith and Holmes (2009)

**Thursday**

1. Data Visualization Critique

**Week 15: Making a Difference Locally**

**Due Date:** A draft of the Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo assignment is due at the beginning of the first class this week. Each group will also give a 10 minute presentation about their organization.

**Week 16: Finals Week**

**Due Date:** The final draft of the Human Rights Non-Governmental Organization Memo assignment is due during the final exam period this week. You may also resubmit revised versions of the other writing assignment at this time with a 1-page memo that describes the revisions you implemented.
**Introduction to R (OPTIONAL)**

I will introduce students to the R computing environment either in class or during an optional outside meeting. The purpose of this introduction is to teach students how to load data into the R computing environment and then produce a graph with that data as part of the data visualization project described above. Students will need to learn how to use three functions in R for this project: `getwd()`, `read.csv`, and `plot()` (or `barplot()`). You will be able to complete the data visualization project with just these simple functions. More information is available not my website.

**Policy on late assignments**

I will deduct one letter grade from an assignment for each week it is past due.
Academic Dishonesty

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one’s work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in class or take home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at:
http://laus.la.psu.edu/current-students/academics/academic-integrity/college-policies

Note to students with disabilities: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the Office for Disability Services (ODS) Web site at: www.equity.psu.edu/ods/

Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.