

## Hunter College

### Human Rights and Basic Needs in the Americas

HIST 341.15 - M/W 5:25-6:40 PM - 408 HW

**Professor Margaret E. Crahan**  
**Office: 1509HW**  
**Office Hours: M & W 6:45-7:30PM**

#### **Purpose of Course**

The purpose of this course is to demonstrate how history is constructed, interpreted and reinterpreted in order to develop critical analytical skills. In addition, the course will emphasize learning how to write an analytical research paper using diverse sources and employing basic social science methodology. The course will also teach the mechanics of writing a paper in terms of research, notetaking, organization, footnotes, etc.

#### **Course Content**

This course will focus on one of the major problems afflicting the modern world--the widespread violation of human rights. To give the course focus, we will analyze the underlying causes of observance or nonobservance in Latin America, and relevant regional and international factors affecting human rights.

#### **Methodology**

The course will begin with an exploration of the nature of human rights and the relationships among them. Thereupon the extent of human rights violations in various Latin American countries both past and present, as reported by the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights, Amnesty International, Americas Watch, and the US State Department, among others, will be explored. The underlying reasons for the observance or nonobservance of human rights will be examined by analyzing the historical evolution of the Americas particularly with respect to political and socioeconomic factors. Variations in interpretations will be analyzed and students will be expected to critique them, as well as develop their own explanations that are well-rooted in factual data. This will involve analysis of such institutions as the state, military, churches, and political parties. The degree to which these have modified or changed their traditional roles in recent years thereby influencing human rights will be examined. The course will end with an exploration of the status of women's rights in the countries being examined, as well as the increasing use of humanitarian intervention in order to deal with gross violations of human rights.

#### **Requirements of Course**

1. All students will be expected to attend all classes, be on time, and not leave the class except for illness. If one must leave class, it is presumed that the individual is too sick to return to class.
2. There will be no eating or drinking in class.
3. All students will turn off all beepers and cell phones during class.

4. All students will accord each speaker in the class the courtesy of listening attentively, not interrupting until the speaker is finished, and not distracting other students.
5. Students will be expected to do the assigned readings prior to the date they will be discussed in class. All students will be expected to contribute to class discussions on a regular basis. If a student contributes to class discussions in a useful fashion that can raise the final grade.
6. Each student will select by 9/9/98 a Latin American country that she or he will become an expert on.
7. Short written assignments by each student are due on 9/14/98, 9/23/98, and 10/28/98. There will be no extensions, nor incompletes. If any one of the papers is not turned in at the outset of class on the date indicated, no grade will be given for that paper.
8. A research paper based on the short papers is due on 12/2/98. This paper should be typed with full footnotes and bibliography according to the Chicago style. There will be no extensions given, nor incompletes.
9. Fifty percent of the final grade will be based on an average of the grades in the short papers. The other fifty percent will be based on the grade earned in the final term paper. If a student has made regular and high quality contributions to class discussions, the grade earned in the papers could be raised.

### **Required Reading:**

- o Timerman, Jacobo. *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. New York: Vantage, 19???. Available in Hunter Bookstore.

All the remaining readings are on reserve in the Hunter College Library under the course number and the name of the author of the article.

## **Course Outline**

Following is an outline of the course with questions to be kept in mind when doing the readings.

### **August 31**

#### **Introduction to course and topic**

### **September 2**

#### **What are human rights?**

Create functional definition of human rights that captures what is common/essential to all human rights. (It should not be simply a list, nor should the word rights be used in the definition.)

Discussion of functional definition used within human rights communities.

Discussion of common misperceptions/misrepresentations.

Read:

- o United Nations. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. on reserve.

### **September 9**

#### **What is the Relationship of Civil/Political Rights to Socioeconomic Rights?**

Class discussion of relationship of civil/political rights to social/economic rights.

Turn in the name of the country you will study.

Read (on reserve):

- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Social and Cultural Rights

## **September 9**

### **Who are the Victims of Human Rights?**

Do only "good guys" suffer human rights violations?

Read:

- Timmerman--all.

## **September 10**

### **Who are the Victims of Human Rights Violations?**

Film:

- The Official Story

Discussion

## **September 14**

### **Country Characteristics**

How do a country's basic geographic, demographic, political, economic, social, religious, and cultural factors influence fulfillment of human rights?

In class comparative discussion

Turn in a description of the basic geographic, demographic, political, economic, and social characteristics of the country you are studying. (No more than three pages).

## **September 16**

### **The Maxim of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Film

In class discussion

Research the human rights situation in the country you are studying.

## September 23

### **The Realities of Human Rights Observance**

What is the level of human rights observance in the country you are studying?

Read about the country you selected in such sources as:

- Amnesty International Annual Reports & Country Reports
- Human Rights Watch\* Americas Reports
- Interamerican Commission on Human Rights Reports
- Lawyers Committee for Human Rights
- US Department of State Human Rights Reports
- Washington Office on Latin America, etc.

Turn in a brief description of the situation of political, economic, social, religious, ethnic and cultural rights from 1970-1998 in the country you are studying. (Not more than five pages)

In class comparative discussion

## September 28

### **How does a Country's Historical Evolution Affect Human Rights Observance?**

Read:

- Crahan, Chapter I: "The State and the Individual An Historical Overview."

Research the historical background of your country.

In class discussion of the role of history in human rights observance or non-observance.

## October 5

### **Historical Legacies and Human Rights**

Discrimination and the denial of human rights.

Research how discrimination results in the denial of human rights in the country you are studying.

Human Rights and Refugees: Lecture by Robert P. Devecchi President Emeritus, International Rescue Committee and Senior Fellow Council on Foreign Relations

## October 14

### **How does the Military Affect Human Rights?**

Negative impacts

Positive impacts

Read:

- Crahan, Chapter 2: "The Evolution of the Military in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, and Mexico: Implications for Human Rights."

In class discussion of impacts of military on human rights in specific countries.

Research the impact of military on human rights in the country you are studying.

## **October 19**

### **How Can Ideology Influence Human Rights Observance?**

Positive impacts

Negative impacts

Read:

- Crahan, Chapter 3: "National Security Ideology & Human Rights."

Research the role of ideology in your country & its impact on human rights.

In class discussion of the role of ideology in human rights observance.

## **October 21**

### **How do the Military and Ideology Influence Human Rights?**

Turn in 5 page paper analyzing how the military and ideology influence human rights in x country.

In class discussion of the findings of the papers.

## **October 26**

### **How do Socioeconomic Conditions Influence Human Rights?**

Research socioeconomic factors in x country in such sources as the World Bank, InterAmerican Development Bank, etc.

In class discussion.

## **October 28**

### **What is the Current Level of Fulfillment of Human Rights in X Country?**

Research fulfillment in x country

In class discussion.

Turn in 3-5 page paper analyzing the current level of fulfillment of socioeconomic rights in x country.

## **November 2**

### **US Human Rights Policy: Carter**

In class comparative discussion

Read:

- Schultz, "The Carter Administration & Human Rights in Latin America."

## **November 4**

### **US Human Rights Policy: Reagan & Bush**

Comparative discussion

Read:

- William R. Bode, "The Reagan Doctrine in Outline."

## **November 4**

### **US Human Rights Policy: Missing**

## **November 11**

### **US Human Rights Policy: Clinton**

In class discussion: Should human rights be a cornerstone of US foreign policy?

Read:

- Alan Tonelson "Jettison the Policy" & Michael Posner, "Rally Round Human Rights."

## **November 16**

### **US Human Rights Policy: The Role of the State Department**

In class discussion: What impact does State have?

Read:

- USIA. "Washington File: Talbott, Shattuck Brief on 1997 Human Rights Report" & US Department of State
- "Top of the News: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997."

## **November 18**

### **What Impact do Human Rights Organizations Have?**

Discussion: What has been the impact of HRs NGOs in x country?

Read:

- o Jackie Smith, et al. "Globalizing Human Rights: The Work of Transnational Human Rights NGOs in the 1990s."

### **November 23**

#### **Human Rights: Theory and Practice - The Case of Women**

Discussion: Are women included in the Universal Declaration?

Read:

- o Johannes Morsink, "Women's Rights in the Universal Declaration."

### **November 25**

#### **Human Rights: Theory and Practice - The Case of Women**

Film:

- o "In Women's Hands"

Discussion: Do women suffer human rights violations because they are women?

### **November 30**

#### **Human Rights: Theory and Practice - The Case of Women**

In class discussion: What is the status of women's rights in the country you are studying?

Read:

- o Cook, "Women's International Human Rights Law: The Way Forward."

### **December 2**

#### **Turn in Research Papers Answering the Following Questions: No Extensions or Exemptions Except for Doctor Confirmed Illness**

What is the current human rights situation in X country?

What are the factors influencing the observance or nonobservance of human rights in x country?

What is the situation of women's rights in x country?

What would be necessary to improve the human rights situation in X country? Be specific and pragmatic.

## **December 7**

### **Human Rights and Humanitarian Intervention**

What is humanitarian intervention?

Read:

- John Hillen, "Picking Up UN Peacekeeping Pieces: Knowing When to Say When."

In class discussion of pros & cons humanitarian intervention.

## **December 9**

### **Is Humanitarian Intervention Useful?**

Film:

- The UN & Humanitarian Intervention

In class discussion.

## **December 14-16**

### **Discussion of Conclusions of Student Papers**

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