

Solutions to Human Rights Problems

UHON 401

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Course Description

Over 20 million people are thought to be enslaved today (some in the United States). Several billion people experience hunger regularly including 14% of Americans. 1 in 6 children on the continent of Africa are dying before the age of five due to preventable diseases. Dictators who deny their citizens basic freedoms rule 70 countries. And yet, humanity is making progress. In the past one hundred years, life spans have increased, literacy is on the rise, and dozens of new democracies have been created. This class will focus on solutions to human rights problems. It will therefore focus on the positive. Many entities contribute to problem solving and we will study their methods. We will learn about the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and what multinational businesses contribute. Thus, students will learn about humanity's failures – the human rights abuses around the world – and humanity's considerable achievements. Multiple academic fields provide insight and approaches to problem solving including those from political science and international relations, and engineering (because of technological innovations). Students will integrate knowledge and methods from disciplines including history, political science, and development studies.

Learning Outcomes At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- * Articulate major human rights problems facing the planet today.
- * Investigate the various “actors” involved in solving human rights problems
- * Analyze and evaluate the methods used in fighting against human rights abuses.
- * Explain why solutions to human rights problems require knowledge and approaches from a variety of academic disciplines.
- * Apply knowledge and approaches from various academic disciplines to the solution of a human rights problem.
- * Apply critical thinking to texts through identifying arguments, data/evidence, and conclusions.

Books/readings

1. Readings Collected from numerous books on four kinds of “actors” who effect human rights: The US, the UN, NGOs, and businesses.
2. Daily newspaper: Each week read a good international newspaper and bring a relevant article to class.
3. Please choose a book to read. Either *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World – And Why Things Are Better Than You Think* or *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*.

Grading

Class participation = 30%

Short writing assignments (in LEARN) = 30%

Essays and final presentation = 40%

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

August

(Week 1) Introductions (to each other & UDHR) State of the world discussion

(Week 2) Topic: Creation of the UN, UDHR, and international law

Readings: “Human Rights Arrives on the World Stage” and “The Central Role of Law in Human Rights” from *Defining Human Rights*, Cargas

Writing: Answer questions in LEARN.

September

(Week 3) Topic: Bush Admin and torture

Reading: “Bush Administration Noncompliance with Prohibition on Torture and Cruel and Degrading Treatment”, from *Bringing Human Rights Home*

Writing: Answer questions in LEARN.

(Week 4) Topic: US and human rights policies

Readings: “US Human Rights in the Post-Cold War Era”; “Empty Promises: Obama’s Hesitant Embrace of HRTS”; “US Foreign Policy and HRTS: Situating Obama”; “Restoring US Credibility on HRTS”

Writing: Answer questions in LEARN.

(Week 5) Topic: UN doing well

Readings: Go to the UN website: 70 Ways UN Makes a Difference and read about the 70 ways. Read articles on the Sustainable Development Goals pros and cons.

Writing: answer questions in LEARN

(Week 6) Topic: UN mistakes

Readings: selected articles

Writing: answer questions in LEARN.

(Week 7) Critical writing

Readings: Selected chapters from *They Say, I say*.

Writing: Exercises from book in LEARN.

October

(Week 8) Topic: Critical thinking short paper due.

Take an assigned article (not book chapter) that you thought was weakly argued and explain why it did not succeed in establishing its conclusion. Detailed instructions will be provided in a handout.

(Week 9) Topic: : NGOs

Readings: from *NGOs in International Politics*

Writing: Answer questions in LEARN.

(Week 10) Topic: NGOs behaving badly

Reading: from *Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid*

Writing: Answer questions in Learn.

(Week 11) Topic: Topic: Business behaving badly

Readings: From *A Game as Old as Empire: The Secret World of Economic Hit Men and the Web of Global Corruption*

Writing: Answer questions in LEARN.

(Week 12) Topic: Business doing the right thing

Readings: from *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World*

November

(Week 13) Topic: 2nd short paper due

Choose either the US government, the UN, or MNCs and write a short essay (based on the readings) on their ability to help protect and promote human rights as well as abuse people's human rights. A handout will provide more detailed instructions.

(Week 14) Topic: Optimism!

Readings: For the next 3 weeks: either *Factfulness* or *Paradise Built in Hell*

Writing: TBA

(Week 15) Presentations – choose a topic discussed in one of the book chapters by Rosling or Solnit and make a seven-minute presentation for the class. Detailed instructions will be provided in a handout.

(Week 16) Presentations and wrap up

Final paper due – Make a thesis driven argument supportive of a specific approach for addressing a human rights problem. You may use the same topic as you did in your presentation. (You must include a writing approach recommended in *They Say, I Say*.)

This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

Learn questions: These are the questions you need to answer in writing, but it might be useful to have them with you as you do the readings.

Reading 1

“Human Rights Arrives on the World Stage” from *Defining Human Rights*, Cargas

“Human Rights and Legal Regimes” from *Defining Human Rights*, Cargas

1. On pg 14 of the first reading it is written, “the idealism of supporting human rights is offset by article 2.7 protecting national sovereignty”. Explain why this is true, that is why is 2.7 a challenge to the idealism behind human rights?
2. Why might the author of this first chapter want to emphasize how many people and countries were involved in writing the UDHR?
3. Some Americans have been afraid of the UN becoming a world government because it would threaten our form of government. What are they assuming?
4. Why is it important for a student of human rights to understand the role of human rights law?
5. Provide a question that the readings have raised for you (small or big!).

Reading 2

“Bush Administration Noncompliance with Prohibition on Torture and Cruel and Degrading Treatment”, from *Bringing Human Rights Home*

1. Has the US signed the Torture Convention?
2. What three arguments did the administration make for justifying torture?
3. What was Colin Powell’s position the Bush administration’s decision to disregard the Geneva Conventions?
4. Provide a question that the readings have raised for you (small or big!).

Reading 3 Various articles on the US and HRTS

1. Extract and list a few positives about what the US does for the protection and promotion of human rights.

Reading 4 is on the UN website “70 Ways the UN Makes a Difference”

1. How many categories are these 70 ways divided into?
2. One category is “development” which is described in way #6. How do they define it in #6, and how or in what “way” do they address each of the three elements of the definition? (3 bullet points are fine.)
3. Name something they do in the category of human rights, humanitarian affairs, and health. (Bullet points are fine.)

4. Describe something you learned or found interesting in this reading.
5. Study the website of one of the UN agencies/organizations mentioned and prepare to share and discuss with the class one or some of its methods and successes. Visuals are most welcome including the website and any video clips they may have.

If the first letter of your last name comes from the first third of the alphabet choose a topic/agency from items 1-20 on the 70 Ways list. If the first letter of your last name is in the middle of the alphabet choose something from 21-40, and if from last third of alphabet choose from items 41-60.

Reading 5

Selected articles on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

1. Explain what is good about them based on the readings.
2. Offer some negative arguments about them from the readings.
3. What do you think about them?
4. Find and bring in an article about the SDGs.

Reading 7

From *NGOs in International Politics*, Ahmed and Potter

1. Name three roles that NGOs play in International Politics and provide an NGO doing something in each of those 3 roles.
2. What are the three kinds of relationships NGOs have with states?
3. In reading boxes 3-3 and 3-4 what methods do those two NGOs use to encourage change?

Reading 8 From *Crisis Caravan*. 1. Be prepared to discuss. 2. Study one of the big NGOs websites. Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, Doctors without Borders, CARE International or any other INGO. Be prepared to present its mission, its methods, and a success story.

Reading 9

From *A Game as Old as Empire*

1. Briefly summarize what the game is how it played out in Iraq.

Reading 11 From *Philanthrocapitalism* no writing assignment