

**POL 412H/2212H(S): Human Rights Politics and International Relations**  
**Fall 2015**  
**Wednesdays, 4-6, SK222**

**Professor:** W. Wong  
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**Prerequisites:**

This is an advanced course on the theories and politics of human rights in international and domestic politics. In addition to the requirements stated in the Calendar, you should be able to complete and understand approximately 70-100 pages of reading for each meeting. The course will proceed quickly through a wide range of topics, some of which are analytically and conceptually difficult (and most of the time, important). Although an intimate knowledge of case(s) is not required, an interest in learning about human rights violations and/or resolutions to violations is an absolute must.

The course will be taught seminar-style, with a question(s) to start off the discussion. It is student-driven, and therefore anyone who wants to take the course should be prepared to actively engage with others in the course, and prepare to discuss the readings and topics in class. As instructor, I will be giving a few introductory remarks to begin the course and facilitating discussion. Take advantage! This will be one of few classes in which there is no lecture, and you can analyze the readings with your peers.

**Purpose of the Course:**

This course is designed to provide a theoretical and analytical overview of major issues in the study and practice of human rights with a mix of international, systems perspectives and domestically-focused research. The course is geared for those who want a broad knowledge of human rights throughout the world, but students will have the opportunity to pursue a case of their choice in the second part of the term. The knowledge of international and domestic constraints that students are exposed to in the first half of the course will help them grapple with the applications of human rights in the second term. The goal here is to introduce students to ways of thinking about human rights as a product and limitation of state action, and how human rights have become dominant in international politics since the end of World War II. The process of creating and implementing human rights is political. Students will also be exposed to how international ideals are applied on the ground by countries, non-state actors, and individuals. The course is also designed to force students to question their priors, and justify their arguments for or against action in the name of human rights. As such, students should feel welcome to express their views, and engage in lively discussions as appropriate.

**Readings:**

Readings are available via e-reserve at Robarts – access through Portal.

**Blackboard:**

This will be the primary way through which announcements and assignments will be distributed. You are REQUIRED to check this site regularly. ALL handouts and assignments will be

distributed through Blackboard. It is strongly suggested you set up an email notification in BB to make sure you are up to speed on course announcements.

You must have a utoronto.ca account to access this service (please go to Robarts Library if you do not already have an account). It is your responsibility to log into Blackboard to access the information posted regarding the course (portal.utoronto.ca).

### **Course Requirements:**

In this course, you will be evaluated on the basis of an in-class presentation, two five-page papers, a take home final, and your participation in class. The breakdown of your course grade is as follows:

Short paper	20%
Magna Carta/Davey paper (due Week 6)	15%
Research presentation	10%
Research paper (due Dec. 8, noon)	35%
Attendance and Participation	20%

All students' course grades will be given based on his/her performance on the assignments in the course, according to the above percentages. There are NO exceptions.

Your attendance in seminar is absolutely crucial to your success in this course. If you do not show up the week for which you have an In-class Presentation, you will receive a 0% for that assignment. Missing more than ONE seminar will result in a 0% for Attendance and Participation. You cannot make up missed class time.

All assignments are ***absolutely necessary***. You should not take the course if you do not think you can successfully complete these assignments.

### **Grade Appeals:**

Changes to student grades on assignments will only be considered if there is *demonstrable* clerical error in the calculation of a particular score. You must submit a written appeal, upon approval by the course instructor, in order to have a grade reevaluated.

**Rules and Regulations:** Please read the following carefully. By registering in this course, you agree to abide by the rules below:

- 1) All work must be submitted *on time*, prior to the *beginning* of class or before the stated deadline, via email in PDF format in order to avoid penalty. There are no exceptions. No assignments will be accepted on paper unless otherwise noted.
- 2) The penalty for work turned in after the stated deadline will be 4 points per day or fraction of a day. If you email your paper at the end of class, you will lose 2 points, and if you submit it by 5pm the day it is due, it will be marked down 4 points. If you turn in a paper the day after it is due, you lose 8 points, and so on. The late penalty includes holidays and weekends. No grace period, unless you have been granted an extension, as explained in #3.

- a. Late work will be collected upon agreement with instructor – DO NOT shove papers under doors.
  - b. Five-pager papers are exempt from the late policy. Any papers turned in after the beginning of class will not be accepted. *You will get a zero on this assignment unless you email it before the beginning of class.*
- 3) Extensions on course assignments are rarely granted, and only under unavoidable and unforeseeable extenuating circumstances. To seek an extension you must submit a hard copy of a one page explanation justifying your request prior to the due date to the instructor. This document should indicate how the circumstances surrounding your request were both unavoidable and unforeseeable. You must contact the instructor to schedule a meeting in which you will submit this document and make your case. In some instances, the instructor may request additional supporting documentation, in accordance with University policy before any extension is granted. Extensions will not be granted unless such a meeting has been held. Unless informed otherwise, doctors' notes are not required.
- 4) All at-home assignments are to be typed, 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1" (2.5 cm) margins. DO NOT fudge these measurements. Staple your assignment in the upper left-hand corner.
- 5) **ACADEMIC HONESTY: All written assignments must follow basic academic citation rules.** When you use other people's words and ideas, you must properly cite them, whether these words come from the readings, the Internet, or in class. Failing to do so constitutes plagiarism, and is a very serious academic offense. Please consult me if you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism. See also: [www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources](http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources). I WILL REPORT ANY AND ALL CASES OF SUSPECTED PLAGIARISM. "Not understanding" or "I did not mean to" will not be suitable defenses for cases of plagiarism. In order to promote an environment of academic integrity, these following procedures will hold for all written work submitted in class.
  - a. Students must attach a signed copy of the Academic Integrity Checklist to each paper assignment. The Integrity Checklist form is available on Blackboard. Please note that papers will NOT be accepted without this form. Accordingly, I will apply late penalties to your paper (see #2) until the Checklist is submitted.
  - b. Students are strongly advised to keep rough draft-work and hard copies of their essays and assignments. These should be kept until the marked assignments have been returned.
- 6) Photography, audio recording, and video recording of lecture and lecture materials (i.e. slides) are NOT permitted.
- 7) There are no exceptions to the absence from class rules stated above. If you do not think you can commit to attending the required number of classes this term, I advise against taking this course.
- 8) **Final grades are final.** Please do not try to negotiate your grade with the instructor. Grades are calculated according to the above percentages, assessing your performance on all of the class assignments. **THEY ARE NOT ARBITRARY.** You should ask for help *before* an assignment – I am always happy to answer your questions and make sure you understand what's expected of you. Making the effort before the grades are turned in will

always be more beneficial to you than making the case afterward for why you need two extra points.

### **Assignment Descriptions:**

#### Short paper: 20%

You will write a 2000 (+/- 10%) word paper in response to either the discussion questions provided below or in response to any question you have in mind. The papers are each in response to one day's readings. You will turn in your paper on the day those readings are due to be discussed (e.g. if you are writing an essay on the September 23 readings, you bring your essay to class that day). You cannot write a response paper after the fact; that is, you cannot turn in a paper after September 23 in response to readings assigned for September. These assignments will NOT be accepted after the beginning of the class meeting.

Graduate students: please write these as though you are writing a very short literature review.

That is, there is no late penalty on this assignment – they will not be marked if they are turned in after the beginning of class.

#### Magna Carta/Davey paper: 15%

After attending both of these events, you will write a 1000-1500 word paper discussing the readings to date in the course in light of two to three insights you have gained from *either* attending the Davey Forum or viewing the Magna Carta exhibit. Please note, your insights must be specific and easily recalled by someone who also attended/viewed. Also, write your essay on ONE of these two class events, NOT both.

#### Research presentation: 10%

You will create a Powerpoint (or similar) presentation for the class (no more than 10 minutes) that is based on the work you have done for your Research Paper. More details to follow.

#### Research paper: 35%

You will pick a research topic of your own (by Week 4). The topic is subject to approval by the instructor. The topic must address a current, major debate in the field of human rights and international relations that is of interest to people outside of and including the academy. Debates will be identified through the blogosphere (e.g. OpenRights, Regarding Rights, LSE Human Rights, various NGOs, scholars, etc.). The topic should allow you to formulate a research question (why or how), answer the research question, and demonstrate knowledge of the different perspectives (besides your own).

This assignment has multiple parts that ALL must be completed, or else you will get a 0% on the Research Paper. More details to follow.

*Week 4:* approved topic (via email). You will need to submit a paragraph proposal of the research question and a summary of your argument by 5pm October 8. You must receive an "approved" email; the longer you delay after the due date/time will result in a corresponding late penalty on your Research Paper

*Week 12:* Peer review via PeerScholar. This is required. If you do not peer review, you will receive an automatic 20% deduction on your paper mark (more importantly, you won't receive any peer feedback before your paper is due). More information to follow.

*December 8:* paper due via email by noon to instructor, PDF format only.

Participation: 20%

Mostly self-explanatory. In such a small class, if I do not know your name and what you have contributed to the seminar by the end of the course, this part of your grade will suffer. You should plan to speak up at least once per class meeting to maintain a B+ mark or higher in this category.

Try to come to class prepared with questions about the readings or themes, or ideas on how to start conversation (e.g. by answering one of the discussion questions in advance).

I reserve the right to have reading quizzes if it becomes clear that the class is not keeping up with the reading.

**Schedule of Topics and Readings:**

Week 1, 9/16: What Makes Us Human?

Welcome!

[Berns, Gregory](#). "Dogs are People, Too." *New York Times*. October 5, 2013.

[Wilford, John Noble](#). "Almost Human, and Sometimes Smarter." *New York Times*. April 7, 2007.

[Watters, Ethan](#). "We Aren't the World." *Pacific Standard*. February 5, 2013.

*Discussion Questions*

How can we define a human being?

Week 2, 9/23: The Politics of Human Rights

Goodhart, Michael. 2013. *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1, 3.

[Carpenter, R. Charli](#). 2012. "You Talk of Terrible Things so Matter-of-Factly in this Language of Science": Constructing Human Rights in the Academy." *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (2): 363-383.

*Discussion Questions*

How do we know when something is a right versus an ideal?

What is the role of human rights in international politics? How can we guarantee them domestically?

Does law enable or disable discussion? Why?

Week 3, 9/30: Davey Forum

Special class meeting, Keith Davey Forum (starts at 4:30), Isabel Bader Theatre, Victoria College. *Attendance is mandatory and will be monitored.*

Week 4, 10/7: A Brief History of Human Rights; Starting at the End?

*YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC MUST BE APPROVED BY EMAIL BY 5pm October 8.*

[Ishay, Micheline R.](#) 2004. "What are Human Rights? Six Historical Controversies." *The Journal of Human Rights* 3 (3): 359-371.

Hopgood, Stephen. 2013. *The Endtimes of Human Rights*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapters 1-2.

Hunt, Lynn. 2008. *Inventing Human Rights: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapter 4.

*Discussion Questions*

- What are human rights?
- Are human rights Western? Does it matter?
- To whom do human rights belong?

Week 5, 10/14: Defending Human Rights: Law and Courts

*Instead of our normal class meeting, we will be meeting Fort York to see "Magna Carta Canada." Please be there by 3:45pm to ensure you get your ticket.*

[Conrad, Courtenay R. and Emily Hencken Ritter.](#) 2013. "Treaties, Tenure, and Torture: The Conflicting Domestic Effects of International Law." *Journal of Politics* 75 (2): 397-409.

[Helfer, Laurence R. and Erik Voeten.](#) 2013. "International Courts as Agents of Legal Change: Evidence from LGBT Rights in Europe." *International Organization* 67.

Sikkink, Kathryn. 2011. *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions are Changing World Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton. Chapters 5-6.

*Discussion Questions*

- What does it mean to have "human rights law"?
- Should human rights be legalized globally? What is the reasoning behind it?
- What's the relationship between international and domestic legal developments? Is international-level development the same as domestic change?
- What is the role of courts? How are they different from other mechanisms?
- Can human rights ever be effectively enforced? Why or why not?
- What does law "do" that other instruments don't?

Week 6, 10/21: Defending Human Rights: Civil Society

*Magna Carta/Davey Paper due at the beginning of class.*

[Civicus.](#) State of Civil Society Report, 2015. Civicus Essay.

[Bob, Clifford](#). 2002. "Merchants of Morality." *Foreign Policy* 129: 36-45.

[Stroup, Sarah S. and Amanda Murdie](#). 2012. "There's No Place like Home: Explaining International NGO Advocacy." *Review of International Organizations* 7 (4): 425-448.

Wong, Wendy H. 2012. *Internal Affairs*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Introduction.

#### *Discussion Questions*

To what extent do NGOs represent collective interests? To what extent do they represent their own?

What is the power of networks or non-state actors? How can we think about their power vis-à-vis states?

To whom are NGOs accountable? Is this an important concern, and why?

What are the impediments to NGO success? What are the enablers?

Week 7, 10/28: Are Some States Just Nicer? Why Rights are so Hard to Protect

**Special Guest: Judith Logan, Reference Librarian**

Goodhart, Michael. 2013. *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 18.

Hafner-Burton, Emilie. 2013. *Making Human Rights a Reality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-3.

[Luban, David](#). 2007. "Liberalism, Torture, and the Ticking Time Bomb" in *Intervention, Terrorism, and Torture: Contemporary Challenges to Just War Theory*. Ed. Steven Lee. A.A. Dordrecht: Springer.

#### *Discussion Questions*

What is the basis of our "responsibility" to citizens of other states? Should some states take the lead where others cannot?

Why do some states actively protect human rights in their policies, while others do not?

What are the incentives that lead even liberal democracies astray from human rights goals?

Does security always trump human rights? When does it not?

Week 8, 11/4: Back to the Future, or Getting a Grip on What this All Means

[Fariss, Christopher J.](#) 2014. "Respect for Human Rights has Improved Over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability." *American Political Science Review* 108 (2): 297-318.

[Neumayer, Eric](#). 2005. "Do International Human Rights Treaties Improve Respect for Human Rights?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49 (6): 925-953.

[Hollyer, James R., and Peter B. Rosendorff](#). 2011. "Why Do Authoritarian Regimes Sign the Convention Against Torture? Signaling, Domestic Politics and Non-Compliance." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6: 275–327.

*Discussion Questions*

Is whether we have improving (or not) human rights all about measurement?

Is it "bad" that leaders who obviously do not respect human rights sign on to human rights treaties?

Week 9, 11/11:

Student presentations

Week 10, 11/18:

Student presentations

Week 11, 11/25:

Student presentations

Week 12, 12/2:

Peer review week.

Extra office hours TBA.

**Dec 8: papers due via email to instructor, noon.**