HUMAN RIGHTS IN LAW AND SOCIETY

Legal Studies 409
Tues / Thurs, 11:00am – 12:15pm
Computer Science 1257

Lecturer: Ben Power
Office Hours: Tuesday, 1:30pm – 3:00 pm (or by appointment)
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Email: bpower@wisc.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course provides an interdisciplinary introduction to the subject of human rights. It is underpinned by three broad questions: What are human rights? How do they change political outcomes? And are they a useful means of approaching new social and political challenges?

We begin exploring these questions in part I of the course, outlining the institutions which make up the architecture of contemporary human rights. In part II we explore the ideas which underpin this architecture, which are rooted in history yet still resonate today. Part III focuses on the United States, using race as a lens to probe why human rights have attained less stature in this country than in others. Part IV explores when and how human rights “work”, building on research from the social sciences. The final section explores whether the concepts and institutions which make up human rights provide a useful means of addressing issues like technological change.

This is a three-credit course. The class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the fall semester, and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc.) for about three hours out of the classroom for every class period. The rest of this syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.

Classes will be conducted as seminars, with a mixture of discussion and lectures each week. This makes it doubly important that you are prepared for each week, since these are not lectures – you will be expected to participate in almost every seminar.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Identify broad categories of human rights, and label specific rights within each of these categories;
- Identify and describe the role of human rights in global affairs since 1945;
- Summarize debates over the philosophical and normative basis of human rights;
- Construct arguments about the potential and limits of human rights concepts to create social and political change; and
- Evaluate the effect of human rights in a specific historical context, as well as refine analytical writing skills, by completing a research paper over the course of the semester.
ATTENDANCE
Attendance at all seminars is required. I understand that life sometimes gets in the way of coursework, but if you must skip a class, please contact me beforehand.

I also ask that you make every effort to get to class on time, and if you have a schedule clash that will make this difficult, let me know at the start of semester. Missing the bus once or twice is fine; repeated lateness interrupts the class and is disrespectful, and will result in a lower participation grade.

OFFICE HOURS
My office hours will be on Tuesdays from 1:30-3:00 pm, in room 7131 of the Sewell Social Sciences building. Please feel free to come by during my office hours to discuss course issues or questions, career questions, or anything else – no need for an appointment. If that time does not work for you, reach out and we’ll find another time. Feel free to email me, or just come up and chat before or after class.

CANVAS
I will post all of the readings for the course on Canvas at least one week before each seminar. Do check the site regularly, since I will also put up links to relevant news and events through the semester – there is never a shortage of relevant human rights stories. PowerPoint slides will be posted right after each seminar.

LAPTOPS, ETC.
I strongly prefer that you do not use laptops or cell phones during class. There is a wealth of research demonstrating that taking notes via computers is detrimental to learning, some of which is summarized by The New York Times here. It is also inherently distracting to other students in class.

However, I do understand that some of you may need to use laptops for the course, or have a very strong preference for doing so. I therefore leave the choice up to you. If you choose to use a laptop, I will ask that you sit in a dedicated part of the classroom so that you do not distract others. Anytime that technology appears to be disrupting someone other than yourself, I will ask that you cease using the internet and may ask you to move seats. I may also request that you close your computers during some discussions.

Disengaging from the course by focusing on your laptop or phone is the only way you will get zero marks for participation in any given class.

ACCOMMODATIONS
Students with particular needs that might affect participation or coursework should inform me about those needs within the first three weeks of the semester, so that I can reasonably accommodate those needs. I will rely on the McBurney Disability Resource Center to determine what reasonable academic accommodations a student may require.

Students who request relief for religious observances also should notify me within the first three weeks of the semester.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There are five assessment tasks in this course, each of which is mandatory.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation &amp; homework</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-home midterm</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final midterm</td>
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Class Participation

You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings, to ask questions, and to participate. One element of participation is contributing to discussion in seminars. But participation does not simply mean “speaking in class”. While effectively articulating your own thoughts is important, it is equally critical that you listen attentively to the ideas of others so that you can respond with a question or a new connection. In addition, the readings are carefully chosen to help guide your thoughts on the subject material: the best comments are those which have been clearly informed by, or directly engage with, the readings.

Be aware that starting in the second week of class, I may cold-call on students to get everyone involved. If classroom discussion is something you are uncomfortable with, please speak with me as soon as possible – I am happy to discuss strategies for enhancing your comfort with course material.

From time to time, we may also have short in-class quizzes that will contribute to your participation grade in a small way. These will be primarily designed as a means for you to ensure that you are on track with the course material, not as an intentionally difficult form of assessment.

A final form of participation is sending me news articles or other material that you find interesting and relevant to the class (and please explain why!). This form of participation is voluntary, but it is a good way to engage if you find it difficult to speak in class. I’d love to hear from you on the issues you care about most!

Homework

Throughout the semester, I will give you brief assignments that form part of your participation grade. Please be prepared to spend up to an hour per week on these assignments, in addition to your reading – they won’t occur every week, but be ready for them when they pop up.

- Event Report. As part of your homework you are expected to attend one lecture or other event, on or off campus, relating to the themes of the class. Further, you must write a one-page report (single-space) on the event, and report back to the class. The report should: 1) briefly describe the event, and 2) link it to the themes of the class. You can do the report at any time. However, the last day to turn in the report is Thursday, November 29.

I will announce relevant events in class. But you should also seek events in the following sources:

- Law school events calendar: [http://law.wisc.edu/events/](http://law.wisc.edu/events/)
- Campus events calendar: [www.today.wisc.edu](http://www.today.wisc.edu)
Midterms
The goal of all the assessment in this course is to encourage you to think critically about human rights. I am primarily interested in your capacity to build constructive arguments, and less concerned with the ability to memorize facts and figures. Both midterms will therefore focus on synthesizing information from seminars and readings into broader arguments.

The first midterm will be a take-home exercise, which you will have three days to complete. I will give you the question at **4pm on Friday, October 12**, and the exam will be due at **4pm on Monday, October 15**. The idea is to give you time to think through your response and build a strong argument, rather than test whether you can recall specific treaty provisions from memory.

The second midterm will be conducted in-class during the final seminar of the semester, on **Tuesday, December 11**. **There will be no final exam for the course**, even if a timeslot for a final is allocated by the university system.

Paper
The capacity to build a clear and compelling written argument is one of the most important things you can take from your time at UW. I will ask you to choose a topic for the paper early in the semester, which you will refine over the next couple of months. The final paper will be 11-12 pages long, and you will be required to use either of the Chicago or Harvard referencing formats (not MLA).

We will work on how to construct an effective paper throughout the semester, including a peer-review exercise on **Tuesday, November 20**. The final paper will be due at the start of class on **Tuesday, November 27**. This may be a slightly earlier deadline than other papers you have to write: but by working on the paper through the course of the semester, I am confident you will have sufficient time to finish it by then.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism, and any other forms of academic dishonesty, are not acceptable. Please speak with me if you have any questions about how to appropriately use and cite other resources: I’m always very glad to answer such questions.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison has established a range of penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty, both accidental and purposeful. These penalties include reduced grades for an assignment or the entire course, including fail grades – or even suspension or expulsion from the university. All instances of suspected plagiarism are reported to Legal Studies administration, and may be reported to the Dean of Students.