

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA • ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
187:004:001 CHINA'S HUMAN RIGHTS: CONCEPTS & CONDITIONS
SPRING 2008 (MEETS 26 FEB – 3 APRIL) • TU/TH 1:05-2:20 PM, 109 EPB

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office hrs. Wednesdays 1-3, alternate Mondays 2-4

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OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The People's Republic of China has long come under criticism on human rights grounds. The Communist Party of China holds a monopoly on power; the judiciary has limited independence; the country leads the world in executions; access to the Internet is constrained by what has become known as the "great firewall;" and China's growing economic interests around the world, especially in Africa, have drawn the country into further controversy over international human rights. These are just a few of the issues coming under especially intense scrutiny as China prepares to host the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

At the same time, China has evidenced significant progress in recognizing and protecting rights of its citizens as well as in engaging the rest of the world in discussions of human rights. Over the past decade, the very term "human rights," long disparaged in China as a bourgeois construction, has become an accepted topic of public discourse. In March 2004, the PRC amended its constitution to read "The State respects and protects human rights." Jobs, education, health, housing, the rule of law, occupational safety and labor rights, freedom of expression, minority rights, religious freedoms, elections and representation and the rights of women and children are among the many topics of ongoing concern.

This course is designed to provide students with a broad introduction to human rights issues in China, as well as with background and tools to understand them in global, historical, cultural and political context. We'll start by examining basic concepts, ideas about "universalism" versus "cultural relativism" in approaches to human rights, and perspective on economic, social and cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. We'll then focus on selected topics of importance to China both domestically and internationally. Overall, the course aims to help foster more complex ways of thinking about China, human rights and global issues, and to equip you with knowledge and resources to continue to study such complicated subjects for yourselves.

COURSE FORMAT AND ORGANIZATION

This is a one-semester-hour International Studies "module" lasting five weeks (not including spring break week). The first four weeks of classes, in lecture-discussion format, will introduce a succession of subtopics and overarching themes; the last week will summarize, review, and conclude with an in-class final examination. Our Tuesday and Thursday classes will begin *promptly* at 1:05 p.m.; please be on time.

Weeks one and two offer a general introduction to the global, cultural, political and economic context of human rights discussions internationally and with reference to China. Week three focuses more closely on issues of propaganda, mass media and journalism; while week four examines controversies related to cultural and religious traditions, beliefs and practices, both indigenous and imported.

REQUIREMENTS

General expectations for all students include 100 percent attendance, adequate preparation, constructive participation, completion of reading and writing assignments on deadline, and fulfillment of the final examination.

By College of Liberal Arts and Sciences guidelines, each semester hour of course credit entails *at least* two additional hours of work outside the classroom per week; so for this 1 s.h. course compressed into five weeks, you should average *at least* an additional six hours of work a week beyond class time—primarily on completing required readings and response papers.

All course resources, including required readings, are accessible via the class ICON website. It is the student's responsibility to check this site regularly and keep up with all class obligations.

Attendance: The intensive format means that, barring extraordinary arrangements, *missing even a single class means you might not pass.*

Readings: Assigned readings complementing lectures and providing a basis for class discussion during the first four weeks will draw selectively on documents, scholarship and journalistic accounts concerning human rights internationally and in the Chinese context. They include PDF files to download from the ICON site as well as web links—and you are strongly advised to *print out* all these materials, highlight as you read, and bring the day's readings to class. You must complete required readings *prior to* the class for which they are due. Allow plenty of time to fulfill the reading response papers, below.

Reading responses: For each set of required readings, you are required to turn in a response paper. Guidelines for these should be downloaded from the ICON site.

With the exception of the first paper, for which special questions will be distributed in class, the format for responses is as follows:

For *each* reading in the set, provide a *summary* of highlights (e.g., major points, themes, arguments), followed by two to four suggested *discussion questions*.

The summaries should range in length from one or two sentences in the case of the very shortest readings, to 250 words, or half a page single-spaced, for longer items. Provide two discussion questions for shorter readings, and up to four for longer ones.

Your suggested questions should be substantive, relevant and thought-provoking—they may concern issues you already have coherent ideas about, or address matters that puzzle or confuse you; but in any case, they should lend themselves to discussion and debate rather than to obvious or simplistic answers.

These papers must be *typed*, and submitted as *hard copy*, to be handed in at the start of the class session for which the readings are due (you also should make a second copy for yourself). *No late papers will be accepted.*

Final examination: This will be an in-class final, held during the last class session, and will include a short-answer section and an essay section. A review guide with study questions will be distributed a week prior.

GRADING

We do this for the love of it, of course—not for such crass rewards as grades. Nevertheless, your work will get graded. Expectations of all students are high; your own demands on yourself should be the highest of all. Letter grades may be interpreted as follows: A=exceptional work, B=very good work, C=average work, D=unacceptable work, F=failing. Components are:

- ➔ Attendance—25 % of grade; flawless attendance=A; missing one class=D; missing more than one class without a *documented* legitimate excuse=F.
- ➔ Reading responses—25 % of grade.
- ➔ Final exam—25 % of grade.
- ➔ Other elements such as class preparedness, constructive participation, following instructions, completing readings, meeting deadlines, etc.—25% of grade.

HOUSEKEEPING

- ***Please use your uiowa.edu e-mail account*** (or if you use a different account, make sure it is linked to the *uiowa* address). Check the ICON site regularly.
- ***Meet your deadlines.*** You are urged to begin your work somewhat earlier than at the last minute; no-printer-available protestations are avoidable and thus unacceptable. No extensions will be granted except for truly extraordinary circumstances, which must be documented.
- ***Plan ahead and pay attention to detail.*** You are expected to take time and care with all assignments, and to revise, edit and proofread your writing conscientiously.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES & INFORMATION

- ➔ ***Attendance is not optional.*** Except in cases of death in the family, serious illness, or other genuine emergencies or crises, you must attend all class meetings. *If you must miss a class for a legitimate reason, you must supply documentation.* In case of an unavoidable absence, notify the instructor in person or by e-mail *in advance*; if extenuating circumstances make advance notice impossible, you must provide notice as soon as possible.
- ➔ ***Common courtesy.*** Otherwise known as common sense, or what you learned in kindergarten. Arriving to class late/leaving class early is disruptive and inappropriate behavior. If other classes or obligations overlap with times scheduled for this course, rearrange the other matters or drop this course.
- ➔ ***Unethical conduct.*** Plagiarism (i.e., expropriating the words and ideas of others without due attribution) and cheating of any sort are grounds for a failing grade in the course. For details on definitions and consequences of academic misconduct, see http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml
- ➔ ***Special accommodations.*** Special academic arrangements for students with disabilities are handled with the cooperation of Student Disability Services, Burge Hall lower level, tel. 335-1462. Students who feel they need special accommodations for any aspect of the course are urged to contact SDS and to speak with the instructor early in the semester. The Student Disability Services website is <http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/>

- **Sexual harassment.** Sexual harassment is reprehensible and will not be tolerated by the School, College or University. For definitions, assistance, and the full University policy, see <http://www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/>
- **Weather weirdness.** If severe weather is indicated by the UI outdoor warning system, class members will seek shelter in accord with University policy.
- **Administrative issues.** The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs such academic matters as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, issues concerning academic fraud or academic probation, and how credits are applied for various graduation requirements. For more information, see www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/index.shtml ; for specific guidelines on “off-cycle” courses, including add-drop matters, see <http://www.registrar.uiowa.edu/calendars/academic.aspx#offsprfall>
- **Complaints.** Show up during office hours, make appointments, and/or contact me by e-mail with thoughts and concerns. If you feel uncomfortable bringing a concern directly to the instructor, you may consult International Studies academic coordinator Martha Greer; Downing Thomas, associate dean of International Programs; Helena Dettmer, associate dean for academic affairs of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; the University Ombudspersons; and/or other relevant authorities. For procedural information, see http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml.