Course overview. International human rights is a powerful idea in our time, but also the focus of numerous controversies: it not only embodies a set of ideals but also functions as a political tool, which different forces try to bend to their own ends. The result of this struggle is a process of norm contestation and norm change that the course seeks to understand. The course looks at selected intellectual controversies and political puzzles surrounding human rights theory and practice. It explores the central institutions of the human rights regime. It discusses how human rights norms change, and it analyzes some of the challenges of contemporary human rights advocacy.

Requirements. The course grade will be based on two take-home examinations and two essays. The four assignments will be weighted equally in the final grade. The essays should be 5-7 pages long and may be of the following kinds:

(a) An explorations paper, which takes a look at a topic of interest to you, based on published works and/or websites. We have in mind topics which are not adequately covered in the course reading, and on which you would like more information. We want to learn what information you have gathered, but we also want to know why you think the issue is important, what conclusions you have provisionally drawn from the information you have gathered and, as appropriate, what you think are the biases or inadequacies of the sources that you used.

(b) A policy paper, which recommends a policy in some issue area or in some country for some actor (a government, NGO, multinational organization, etc.). A policy paper should be addressed to a specific actor (e.g., president, secretary of state, members of the legislature), should propose policies that are feasible for that actor, and should appeal to that actor’s motives and interests. You may wish to run your ideas past the instructor or a TF first in order to be sure that you’re addressing the various aspects that a policy paper needs to address, such as a specific policy actor, consistency with that actor’s motives, and feasibility.

(c) A critical book review. A critical essay addresses two books (or other items equivalent in length to a book) not on the course list, chosen in consultation with the instructor or TFs. Such an essay should avoid summarizing the material in the books, and should offer an independent consideration of the issues the books discuss and a critique of the authors’ analyses.
Due dates are as follows: first essay due September 29; midterm handed out October 15 and due October 20; second essay due November 17; final exam handed out December 8 and due December 15.

**Human Rights Advocates in residence.** As you pursue your outside projects you may wish to get in touch with some of the Human Rights Advocates who are in residence this semester at the Center for the Study of Human Rights. They are Anbu Sengoarasi Aganezhmaivanan (India: Women’s rights, agriculture, special economic zones); Carolina Delgado (U.S.A.: Labor rights and migration, agriculture, women); Roger Luhiriri (DR Congo: Health and women’s rights, armed conflict); Peter Mulbah (Liberia: Environmental Justice); Amalia Pulungan (Indonesia: IFI, armed conflict); Alejandro Rivera (México: LGBT, HIV/AIDS, youth). For more information see [http://hrap.hrcolumbia.org/participants.htm](http://hrap.hrcolumbia.org/participants.htm).

**Readings and Materials.** The following books are available for purchase in paperback at Labyrinth Books.


Library copies of these books are on reserve at the Lehman Library Reserve Desk and at Barnard. All other assigned readings, including journal articles and book chapters, are available for download on Courseworks (www.courseworks.columbia.edu), except for readings for which URL links are provided in the syllabus; those readings can be accessed by clicking on those links from the syllabus page of Courseworks.

Please subscribe to the Human Rights Watch weekly digest. To subscribe, go to the organization’s main webpage (www.hrw.org) and look in the lower right-hand corner for “Email Newsletters.” Select “Weekly Digest” and enter your email address.

The teaching fellows will offer weekly discussion sections. Attendance and participation in these sessions will not be a component of your course grade. Nevertheless, you should attend these sessions. They offer an opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion about topics covered in lecture and in the assigned readings. Teaching assistants will also offer weekly office hours.
TOPICS & READINGS

September 3. INTRODUCTION AND COURSE OVERVIEW

PART I. FOUNDATIONS

September 8 & 10. INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS IDEA


September 15 & 17. HUMAN RIGHTS AS LAW

- Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights*, Chs. 8, 14

September 22. THE UDHR AND COVENANTS: WHAT DO THEY SAY?


September 24 & 29. HOW DOES THE HUMAN RIGHTS REGIME WORK? – INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

- Priscilla Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity* (New York: Routledge, 2001), Chs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 13


**October 1 & 6, CULTURAL UNIVERSALISM AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM**

Lecturer, October 1: Felix Gerlsbeck

Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights*, Chs. 4-7

Joanne R. Bauer and Daniel A. Bell, eds., *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Chs. 1-3, 5-9


**October 8, 13, 15 & 20, AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY**

Guest lecturer, October 15: Steven Shapiro, Legal Director, American Civil Liberties Union


“Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,” in 25+ Documents
William Korey, NGOs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (NY: Palgrave, 1998), Chs. 14, 18

PART II. CONTESTING AND EXPANDING RIGHTS

October 22 & November 5. GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL JUSTICE
Lecturer, November 5: Jeffrey Lenowitz

October 29. BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS: AN IMPACT-TRACKING APPROACH
Guest lecturer: Joanne Bauer (SIPA ’88), New York Representative, Business and Human Rights Resource Centre
Review the website, http://www.business-humanrights.org

November 10. WHAT OBLIGATIONS DO PRIVATE ENTERPRISES HAVE?
Amnesty International, http://www.amnestyusa.org/business; review sections on the UN Norms for Business and on Alien Torts Claims Act (ATCA); look at some of the campaigns Amnesty has designed and how they are focused
National Labor Committee, http://www.nlcnet.org/, read one of their current reports
United Nations Global Compact, http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html, read the ten principles

October 27 and November 12 & 19. WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS, CHILDREN’S RIGHTS, AND SEXUAL RIGHTS

Guest lecturer, October 27: Charlotte Bunche, Director, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University

Guest lecturer, November 19: Scott Long, Director, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Program, Human Rights Watch


November 17, 24 & 26. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS AND COLLECTIVE RIGHTS

Lecturer November 17: Anil G.C., Ph.D. candidate, Department of Political Science, Columbia University

S. James Anaya, Indigenous Peoples in International Law (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Ch. 3, 4


Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Chs. 2-4

December 1 & 3. ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS


“Gender, Climate Change and Human Security,” by Women’s Environment and Development Organization, May, 2008,

Human Rights Dialogue, Series 2, No. 11 (Spring 2004): Environmental Rights,

Romina Picolotti and Jorge Daniel Taillant, eds., Linking Human Rights and the Environment (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), Chs. 1, 2, 5

December 8. ACTIVIST DILEMMAS

