

LEH 301
Politics, Culture & Human Rights
Spring 2007
Professor Polly Hall

Course Introduction:

This course explores the impact of cultural ideals and practices on political institutions, and on political conflict and cooperation among nationalities, races, classes, genders, and tribal, ethnic, and religious groups. It introduces you to an intricate interplay between politics and culture surrounding the issue of human rights. We will specifically examine universal (or political) principles declared in various human rights covenants and see how particular (or cultural) traditions resist the adoption of some of these principles. A thematic focus of the course will be on the tension between sovereignty and human rights in world politics. In Part I, we will explore the moral and ethical dimensions of human rights as well as the connection between human rights and politics. The development of human rights as international law will be examined. Further, the intricate interplay between universality and relativity in terms of human rights. In Part II, we move from theory to practice and look at the different dimensions of human rights, politics, and culture in detail. We first explore civil and politics rights and the role of sovereignty on human rights practice. Human rights in the context of collective rights as opposed to individual rights will be examined. The relationship between sovereignty and economic and social rights as human rights will be discussed. In this section of the course, we will also explore whether or not human rights as an international construct integrate the special concerns of women, or whether women's rights are differentiated from human rights. In Part III, we explore approaches to seek just for abuses of human rights. There are various actors that are involved in this process, and so we will examine justice from a top down perspective, from the punitive justice approach, from the response of restorative justice, and finally from the bottom up approach with the various actors that play critical roles.

Course Process:

This course is completely on-line, and it is expected that students will be self-directed to follow the course on their own and complete all assignments in a timely manner. There are weekly reading assignments that should be completed so as to permit the student to participate in on-line discussions throughout the week when these are assigned (due 3 times during the course of the semester), as well as to provide them enough opportunity to complete the related written assignments (due 3 times during the course of the semester) in a timely manner as well.

The course runs from Monday-Friday, and so all assignments are due in full by the Friday of the week assigned. Written assignments, the mid-term paper, and the final paper are to be submitted either through the course's Digital Dropbox or via e-mail to the instructor (pollyhall@optonline.net) by their due date. All work must be saved in Microsoft Word or Rich-Text-Format style. Word Perfect will NOT be accepted. Please see appropriate personnel in the Lehman Computing Technical Center for assistance on how to save and send documents through Blackboard if you need further assistance. Penalties will be

enforced for late assignments, and contributions to on-line discussions will not be accepted after the Friday they are assigned.

Course Text: Debra L. DeLaet. The Global Struggle for Human Rights: Universal Principles in World Politics. Available in the Lehman College Bookstore as well as via most on-line bookstores.

Course Requirements:

Written Assignments: There are three written assignments assigned for this semester. Each of the written assignments are worth 10% of your final grade (for a total of 30% towards your final grade). A 3-4 page, double-spaced with 1-inch margin, 12 point font paper is due for each written assignment. You should read the relevant reading assignment prior to completing the written assignment. As this course fulfills a writing requirement, you will be graded on composition, grammar, and content of your written work. Please ensure you thoroughly respond to all of the questions asked for any written assignment.

Written Assignment #1:

After reading Chapter 1 of DeLaet, please visit the three websites that are cited at the end of the chapter (available via the Web Resources section of the Blackboard course website) and read further about the philosophy and historical development of the concept of human rights. Then, based on your readings, write a 3-4 page paper addressing the following questions: What are the strengths and weaknesses associated with defining human rights? To what extent does the fact that it is difficult to define human rights in a universally accepted manner reduce the validity of the concept? What philosophical justifications for human rights were most helpful to you in understanding and relating to the concept?

Written Assignment #2:

After reading Chapter 5 of DeLaet, visit your local video store and rent a copy of the 1966 film entitled *Battle of Algiers*. After watching the film, connect its plot and story to concepts you have come across in the course to date, including but not limited to human rights, self-determination and sovereignty. Write a 3-4 page paper connecting these concepts to the movie. Use concrete examples both from your readings and from the film.

Written Assignment #3:

Explore some of the websites under the Web Resources section of our Blackboard course website, and find an issue related to human rights that is of interest to you. In a 3-4 page paper, provide a summary of the issue, including its history, existing conditions, and related human rights policies. Highlight some of the efforts that governments, organizations, and individuals are taking to combat the issue of concern to you. Ensure you properly cite all sources used for your paper.

On-Line Discussions: There are three on-line discussions assigned for this semester. Each of the on-line discussions are worth 10% of your final grade (for a total of 30% towards your final grade). Please visit the Discussions section of the Blackboard course website at least 5 times throughout the week the on-line discussions are assigned and contribute at minimum 5 substantive and well-developed comments or responses to the question under consideration, entering into a debate and discussion with your fellow classmates. You should read the relevant assigned reading assignment prior to undertaking the on-line discussions. Since these discussions need to be completed not later than Friday of the week assigned, please ensure you complete the reading early in the given week to ensure you provide your fellow classmates with ample time to enter into dialogue with you. Ensure you provide justification and reasoning for any statements you make in your contributions on-line.

On-Line Discussion #1:

Based on your readings of DeLaet's Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, please engage in a discussion with your classmates on the following questions: What are the strongest arguments for a relativist perspective on human rights? What are the strongest arguments for a universalist perspective on human rights? Even if one accepts the proposition that human rights are universal, disagreement remains over whether or not universal human rights are fundamentally individual or collective. If universal human rights exist, are they fundamentally individual or collective? Why? When addressing these questions, please ensure you provide examples from the readings that help you develop your position on these questions.

On-Line Discussion #2:

Based on your reading of DeLaet's Chapter 7, please respond to the following: Feminists argue that it is essential to challenge discrimination, inequality, and violence in the private sphere as a means of promoting equal human rights for women and sexual minorities. Do you agree? Why or why not? How might such an approach advance human rights? Are there any ways in which such an approach might undermine other human rights?

On-Line Discussion #3:

In light of your reading of DeLaet's Chapter 10, your understanding of human rights from this course, and with appreciation of current world issues, please engage in a thoughtful and reflective discussion with your classmates on the following question: is individual justice or collective justice more important in the aftermath of human rights abuses? In other words, is it more important to hold an individual war criminal accountable, thereby bringing justice to his or her direct victim, or is it more important to promote reconciliation at the societal level, even if doing so means avoiding prosecutions of individual war criminals?

Mid-Term Paper: 20% of final grade. Due on or before March 30, 2007

This assignment and case available under the Course Materials section of the Blackboard course website. After reading and analyzing the short case study, you will be asked to do some role play. Imagine that you are the Director of Human Rights Watch, a major human rights NGO based in New York. HRW has been invited by the UN Security Council to submit a memo that spells out its position on the following crisis in the light of human rights and humanitarian law and policy, and come up with specific recommendations. This assignment calls upon you to write that memo. Your memo, not to exceed 8 double-spaced with 1-inch margins using 12 point font, should be clear and analytical and address these issues in an organized manner. It must refer to specific provisions of the International Bill of Rights or other legal instruments where applicable. It must show a nuanced appreciation of the human rights implications of the facts outlined above and recognize the various trade-offs. Visit the websites available under the Web Resources section of the Blackboard Course Website to help you complete this paper. Ensure you properly cite all sources used for your paper.

Final Paper: 20% of final grade. Due on or before May 25, 2007

The final paper is based on a case study entitled "See No Evil: The U.S. Response to the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda." This case study and the complete assignment are available under the Course Materials section of the Blackboard course website. After reading and analyzing the case study, please organize your responses to the ten discussion questions found on the final page of the case study document, and write a 10-15 page paper which thoroughly and thoughtfully addresses the ten questions. You should utilize the websites from the Web Resources section of the Blackboard course website to help you analyze this case and respond to the discussion questions. Ensure you properly cite your sources in your paper.

Course Evaluation/Grading:

Written Assignments	10% per assignment	30%
On-Line Discussions	10% per assignment	30%
Mid-Term Paper		20%
Final Paper		20%

The quality of your on-line contribution and of your written work will be evaluated as described above. The following is a guideline for how the course will be graded:

A (>94-): timely participation and completion of assignments; excellence in written work (excellent organization; logical development of clear and substantive arguments; negligible spelling mistakes; no grammatical mistakes; on-time completion).

B (>84-): timely participation and completion of assignments; good written work (good organization; clear and substantive argument; minor spelling mistakes; negligible grammatical mistakes; on-time completion).

C (>74-): passive participation and untimely completion of assignments; adequate written work (adequate organization; attempts at argumentation; some substance; some spelling and grammatical mistakes; on-time completion of the majority of required work)

D (>64-): passive participation and untimely completion of assignments; inadequate written work (delayed completion of almost all assignments with little or no organization, attempts at argumentation or substances, with significant spelling and grammatical mistakes)

F: lack of obvious participation, less than 75% of assignments completed.