Instructor:
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The field of human rights has long been dominated by the discipline of law, which has significantly advanced the normative evolution and study of human rights. However, there is an increasing space and need for systematic scholarly research that draws from a variety of disciplines to analyze the social, economic and political conditions within which the promotion and protection of human rights is made possible. This course is intended to provide students of human rights with the necessary conceptual frameworks and methodological tools to approach issues in the field of human rights in just such a scholarly and critical fashion.

During the first half of the semester, we will review key theoretical concepts relevant to the field, and discuss various disciplinary approaches to and methodologies for conducting human rights research. This will include an examination of the historical development of the modern human rights regime; foundational concepts and institutions in the field of human rights; critiques of human rights and human rights scholarship; and the dominant paradigms and methods of research in the field, including legal, historical, anthropological, sociological, economic and political science approaches. While the primary emphasis of the course will be on social science methodologies and empirical research, the seminar is open to students engaging in any type of human rights scholarship. Readings will be chosen partly in response to the interests of the students actually in the seminar.

The second half of the semester will provide an opportunity for participants to develop and workshop a research prospectus on a human rights topic in which they are interested. The instructor will work closely with each student throughout the course of the semester to develop a research topic, to apply for grants to fund summer research, and to design a thesis-sized research project. In-class workshops will entail presentations and discussion of participants’ ideas and research design in a small, informal and interdisciplinary setting.

The Human Rights Scholars Seminar is open to students in any concentration with a strong interest in human rights-related research. Preference will be given to juniors planning on writing a senior thesis related to human rights, or students intending to engage in a substantive human rights research project.

Course requirements:
During the first half of the course, you will be expected to participate actively in discussion of the assigned readings. There will be three short required essays (1,000
words each – on weeks of your choosing) to further engage with the readings. These essays should, aside from responding to the readings of your choice, do two things: relate the reading(s) to your own research interests; assess and/or constructively critique the disciplinary approach or methodology adopted by the author(s).

In the second half of the semester, two students per week will present a draft research prospectus for a topic in which they are interested. You will not be expected to present a fully developed research prospectus; instead this draft prospectus should identify a topic and question in which you are interested, and suggest tentative approaches to and strategies for answering this question. There will be (short) assigned readings relevant to the topic of presentations for each week. Those not presenting will be expected to read and provide constructive feedback on the presented draft prospectus. Each presenter will also be assigned a discussant, who will be expected to provide detailed comments on the draft prospectus.

At the end of the semester, you will be required to submit a finalized research prospectus, which should include a clear and manageable research question and a strategy for answering this question. You will not be expected to substantively answer this research question during the semester. Rather, the prospectus is intended to provide you with a clear plan for engaging in substantive research and writing over the summer and the following year.

Grades will be determined on the basis of:
  • Three reaction papers - 10% each
  • Discussion participation – 30%
  • Research proposal presentation – 10%
  • Final research prospectus – 30%

Course Website:
The course website is at:
http://isites.harvard.edu/k101413

All required readings will be posted on the course website or will be available on reserve at Lamont library. Discussion questions intended to help frame and focus the readings will be posted on the course website one week ahead of time.

**Schedule of Classes:**

**Part I: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations of Human Rights Scholarship**

**January 28 – Introduction**

No readings
**February 4 – Historical Development of Human Rights**


**Skim:** “Chapter 1: Early Ethical Contributions.”


**February 11 – The Boundaries of Human Rights Scholarship: Conceptual, Disciplinary and Practical**


**Recommended Further Reading:**


**February 18 – Critiques of Human Rights**


February 25 – Dominant Paradigms in Human Rights Scholarship I


March 4 – Dominant Paradigms in Human Rights Scholarship II


March 11 – Dominant Paradigms in Human Rights Scholarship III


*In Class Exercise on Content Analysis and Framing – To Be Distributed*
March 18 – *Spring Break* – NO CLASS

**PART II: DESIGNING A HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH PROJECT**

**March 25 – Research Prospectus Presentations**

Presenter: Jesus Moran  
Discussant: Brianna Goodlin

**Readings:**


**April 1 – Research Prospectus Presentations**

Presenter: Gina Kim  
Discussant: Jasmine Wyatt

**Readings:**


**April 8 – Research Prospectus Presentations**

Presenter: Brianna Goodlin  
Discussant: Mason Marek

**Readings:**


**April 15 – Research Prospectus Presentations**

Presenter: Elise Baranouski  
Discussant: Gina Kim

**Readings:**

April 22 – Research Prospectus Presentations

Presenter: Mason Marek
Discussant: Jesus Moran

Readings:


April 29 – Research Prospectus Presentations

Presenter: Jasmine Wyatt
Discussant: Elise Baranouski

Readings:


May 8 – Final Prospectus due by 5 p.m.