INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICS
Professor Luis Eduardo Zavala de Alba

Yale University
Summer Session
B
July 12th – August 13, 2021

Subject area: Political Science (PLSC 167) M,W,F 9-11:15

Description

The protection of human rights is generally recognized to be a fundamental aim of modern international law and politics. Consideration of Human Rights issues has reached into all organs and bodies of the United Nations. This course develops a coherent theory and practice of the international human rights bodies and their implications in international politics but as well the so-called Governance in Human Rights.

The nationalistic, xenophobic, misogynistic, and explicitly anti-human rights agenda of many populist political leaders requires human rights proponents to rethink many longstanding assumptions. There is a need to re-evaluate strategies and public policies, while reaffirming the basic principles on which the human rights movement is founded. The innovative nature of international human rights procedures may account for the long-standing incoherence and inconsistency. The most significant factors, however, are likely to be the sudden development and unprecedented nature of international human rights law, remedies, and public policy in human rights, varying from domestic legal systems, and the different views of judges and committee members about the role of international bodies in affording relief to victims of state abuse.

Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis has revealed weaknesses that human right can help to fix even in the way public services are delivered and inequalities that impede access to them. Human rights help us to respond to the immediate priorities and develop prevention strategies for the future, including full access to the highest attainable standards of mental and physical health.

International human rights law and politics is the first area of international law where individuals may bring actions against states in international tribunals, but the imbalance in respective power and juridical status between states and individuals affects the procedures and the perceived role of the human rights institutions in affording remedies and implementing public policies at international level. There is a need for collaboration with a broader range of actors, to be more persuasive and less didactic, and to be prepared to break with some of the old certainties. Academics should pay attention to the unintended consequences of their scholarship, and everyone in the human rights movement needs to reflect on the contributions each can make.

For the reasons provided above, understanding the nature, mechanisms and logic of human rights governance in international law and politics, the way they emerged and how they are exercised is the main goal of the present course.
Topics

Week 1
July 12th – July 16th

1st Class (July 12th)

Introduction to International Human Rights and Politics

- Presentation/Introduction
- Methodology and Rules of Assessment about Final Essay
- The Burning Issue: The DNA of Human Rights (Video)
- The Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and Analytical Framework
- Require Readings (Canvas)

2nd Class (July 14th)

Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

- Is human dignity the ground of human rights?
- Kantian perspectives on the rational basis of human dignity
- Max Scheler and human dignity
- Individual and collective dignity

Required readings:
Kerstein, Samuel J., Kantian dignity: a critique
Atterton, P., Dignity and the Other: dignity and the phenomenological tradition

3rd Class (July 16th)

- Equal dignity in international human rights
- The development of international human rights
- The evolution of human rights institutions

Required readings:
Sheeran S.- Rodley, N., The broad review of international human rights law
Osiatynski, W., The historical development of human rights
Verdirame, G., Human Rights in political and legal theory
Landman, T., The Political Science of Human Rights
Week 2
July 19th – July 23rd

4th Class (July 19th)

**International Human Rights Law**
- Sources of international human rights law
- Doctrine
- Jurisprudence
- Auxiliary sources: Soft law
- Opinio Iuris, Ius Cogens

Required readings:

Forsythe, D., Hard times for human rights
Alston, P. and Goodman, R., International Human Rights
Stavrinides, Z., Human Rights Obligations under the United Nations Charter

5th Class (July 21st)

**Public Policy and Human Rights**
- Political Science and Public Administration
- Implementation of Public Policy
- National Human Rights Institutions and Human Rights Action Plan

Required readings:

6th Class (July 23rd)

**United Nations System**
- The International Bill of Human Rights
  - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  - The United Nations International Covenants
- The Human Rights Council
- The High Commissioner for Human Rights

Required readings:
Smith, R., Textbook on International Human Rights
Week 3
July 26th - July 30th

7th Class (July 26th)
- The impact of United Nations on International human rights
- COVID-19 and Human Rights
- Required readings: Presentation

8th Class (July 28th)
- International Human Rights Law and Humanitarian Law
- The International Human Rights Law of Migrants and Refugees
- Guest Speaker. Perspective from human rights activist
- Required readings: Presentation

10th Class (July 30th)
Midterm Exam

Week 4
August 2nd – August 6th

11th Class (August 2nd)
Universal Periodical Review (UPR)

12th Class (August 4th)
Class on Torture: Freedom from Torture, Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Video “The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib” (HBO Documentary Films)
- Basic normative framework
- Difference between torture and inhuman and degrading treatment
- The right to integrity and the crime of torture in the Inter-American system
- The treatment of detainees

Required readings:
Pffiffer, J., Torture as a Public Policy,
Shelton, D., Remedies in International Human Rights Law
13th Class (August 6th)

**Regional Protection of Human Rights**
- The advantages of regional systems
- Europe
- The African Union
- Inter-American system

Required readings:

**Week 5**
August 9th – August 13th

14th Class (August 9th)

**Human Rights Obligations of Non-State Actors**
- Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
- Common objections and new approaches

Required readings:

15th Class (August 11th)

**International environmental law and human rights**
- Human Rights and the environment
- Are we violating the Human Rights of the World’s Poor?

Required readings: presentation

16th Class (August 13th)

**International Human Rights and the Implementation of Human Rights Public Policies**
- The role of the NHRI’s
- Public Administration, Public Policies and Human Rights
- Human Rights Governance
- Human Rights and Democracies

Required readings: Presentation


Format of the course
Students are expected to do the readings assigned in the handbook (Canvas) before the class. During the sessions, the professor will act as a guide through the discussion of the topics based on the readings, as well as on personal experiences and opinions of all the students.

Assessment
Grading will be provided by two main evaluations:
- Midterm exam about the contents of the course, including the readings and discussions in class.
- Final Project: A paper about 15-20 pages of a Human Rights Public Policy Memo shall be handed out. The professor will give instructions during the course.

Plagiarism
All students will be expected to follow the common policy about the correct use of sources and data. They will be required to cite all quotes and paraphrases in their written production based on MLA or APA style, as well as recognize intellectual property and ideas from other authors during their oral participation in class.
All the material provided during the course will be correctly cited.