Foundations of Human Rights
HMRT 30600

Autumn Quarter 2015
Tuesdays / Thursdays, 1:30 – 2:50
Location: HM (Harper Memorial), Room 150

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Adam Etinson

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar will provide graduate students with an advanced introduction to the study of human rights. As a graduate seminar, this will be a small class (capped at 15 students), and a strong emphasis will be placed on in-class discussion and debate. The course will examine cutting-edge research on the origins of human rights (Section I), the philosophy of human rights (Section II), the nature of human rights as rights (Section III), and will also explore critical perspectives on the human rights movement (Section IV). The course has a strong philosophical bent, but is meant to be accessible to graduate students from a variety of disciplines.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(35%) Class Participation: All students will be expected to come to class prepared with a discussion question about the assigned readings for the day. The question can be critical (i.e., it may raise an objection against an assigned author), interpretive (i.e., it may raise an issue of interpretation in an assigned text), or thematic in nature (e.g., the question may interrogate a broad idea or theme that emerges from the readings). Since there won’t be enough time for every student to ask their question in any given class, the instructor will call on students to raise questions at random. The purpose of this exercise is to allow students to play an active role in lectures, and also to generate engaged classroom discussion. Student participation will be evaluated on the basis of (i) the quality of a student’s prepared questions, and (ii) a student’s effort and engagement in class discussions.
more generally. As far as general participation goes, my advice is: don’t be shy. If you have something on your mind, we are all interested in hearing it.

(65%) Final Writing Assignment (Due by end of day, December 15th – Email submission preferred): As a final written assignment, students have the option of (a) writing a final paper that puts any two sections of the course into dialogue with one another, or (b) writing a mock thesis prospectus that draws on some set of readings from the course. Students must convey their choice to the instructor by midterm, i.e., November 6th.

(a) For those students who choose to write a final paper (Limit: 3250-4500 words), the instructor will offer some suggestions of particular essay questions that might be fruitfully pursued, although if a student would like to propose an original topic that will be absolutely fine as well, so long as the instructor is consulted beforehand. The list of questions will be given out by midterm (November 5th). The general idea is for students to think about how research on different topics (and in different fields) in human rights might interrelate. For instance, we might wonder how, if at all, new research on the history of human rights should affect our theoretical understanding of, say, the nature and grounds of human rights. In general, research papers will be assessed on the basis of (i) lucidity, (ii) effort, (iii) relevance to the chosen question, (iv) independence of thought, and (v) comprehension of the relevant readings.

(b) The mock thesis prospectus (Limit: 3250-4500 words) is primarily designed to give graduate students who are already working on a human rights related topic the chance to think about how to integrate some of the material from this course into their own work. It also has the benefit of giving MA and PhD students who will have to develop an MA or PhD thesis prospectus anyways a trial run. The prospectus should give the instructor (a) a clear sense of the question the thesis will address, (b) a statement of the proposed thesis, (c) an explanation of how it will be argued, ideally including the use of an example or an argument, and (d) a preliminary bibliography that will be used for reference, including a concise overview of that literature and explanation of how your research will add to it. If requested, the instructor will give students guidelines both for writing papers and prospectuses sometime during term.

Note: Papers and prospectuses submitted late will be penalized by 1/3 grade per day (e.g. A- instead of A if the paper is one day late).

COURSE MATERIALS

There are three books that are required purchases for this course. In all three cases, we’ll be reading 30% of the book or more. Copies of these books will be available at the Co-op bookstore, on Woodlawn Ave. As for all other readings, these will be made available electronically on chalk. As a general practice, students will be expected to bring a copy of the day’s assigned reading to class.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

There are a few books that appear infrequently in the syllabus but that would nevertheless be a useful purchase for any student intent on continuing to study human rights at the graduate level. These include the following:

**NON-REQUIRED TEXTS:**


**SYLLABUS**

I. HISTORY

SEPTEMBER

29 **THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION (1948)**

(1) *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) – Available online.

OCTOBER

1 **ABOLITIONISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS I**


6 **ABOLITIONISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS II**


8 **THE HOLOCAUST AND THE 1970s**


II. THEORY

13 **JOHN RAWLS ON HUMAN RIGHTS I**


15 **JOHN RAWLS ON HUMAN RIGHTS II**


20 **PERSONHOOD AND HUMAN RIGHTS**


22 **DEBATING THE “POLITICAL” APPROACH I**


27 **DEBATING THE “POLITICAL” APPROACH II**


29 TASIoulAS ON HUMAN RIGHTS I


November

3 TASIoulAS ON HUMAN RIGHTS II


5 QUESTIONS OF METHODOLOGY


10 GUEST LECTURE: ANAND GROVER (FORMER UN RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO HEALTH)

[Readings TBD]

III. HUMAN RIGHTS AS RIGHTS

12 RIGHTS AND GOALS


17 CLAIMABILITY

**Supplementary Reading**


### 19 Feasibility


### IV. Critical Perspectives

#### 24 Humanitarianism as a Pretext for War


#### December

#### 1 Posner’s Critique of International Human Rights Law


#### 8 Human Rights and Power

10 ETHNOCENTRISM


*Supplementary Readings*

(a) Adam Etinson, “Some Myths About Ethnocentrism” (DRAFT)