

Political Science 4565/5565  
**INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS**  
Spring 2022

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Ross <[rossa@ohio.edu](mailto:rossa@ohio.edu)>  
Office: Bentley Annex 255  
Office Hours: W 1:30-2:30 (or Tu 1-3 virtual)

Location: Central Classroom 313  
Meeting times: W 3:05 – 5:45

### **Course Description**

This course studies international human rights as an indispensable, but also imperfect, vehicle for moral and legal change. The course approaches human rights less as a set of fixed legal rules and more as a flexible toolbox for addressing injustice at home and abroad, paying attention also to the power that human rights organizations and institutions are increasingly able to wield. We begin with a survey of major international human rights standards before using a case study on the right to food to assess more deeply how human rights claims work and what kinds of policy solutions they are and are not equipped to produce. The second part of the course then uses the case of gender violence to assess debates about the universality of human rights across cultural settings and to reflect critically on how human rights can serve as a vehicle for justice in postcolonial societies. The final part of the course is focused on planning, executing, and evaluating student projects.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students should complete the course with an ability to:

1. discuss historical and current problems in international human rights;
2. evaluate competing perspectives on how and to what degree human rights law is enforced;
3. think critically about human rights institutions and organizations;
4. design and deliver a short essay that is organized coherently and logically, and that employs relevant evidence from assigned course readings;
5. [for research papers] (a) design, plan, and deliver a written project that is organized coherently and logically, and that employs relevant evidence and examples to advance an original thesis; and (b) cite and document a broad range of sources to support an argument using a consistent and formal method of citation and format;
6. [for action projects] design, plan, execute, and evaluate an action project that applies human rights concepts to a real-world campaign or initiative.

### **Course Requirements for POLS 4565**

Assignment details will be available in class and on Blackboard (hereafter “Bb”). All assignments except worksheets for in-class exercises will be submitted via Bb.

**Attendance and Participation:** Regular attendance and participation are essential requirements for this course. I expect students to arrive at class having completed and thought about the

assigned readings. The participation grade will be based on your attendance (see below) and the quality and quantity of your contributions in class. Visits to office hours count as part of your participation: please don't be a stranger!

**Right to Food Paper:** A 1,200 word paper (not including notes and references) based on the readings assigned for Weeks 2-4. The prompt is available on Bb; the paper is due on **Sunday, February 13 at 11:59pm.**

**Mid-term Exam:** There will be a mid-term exam on material covered from Week 1 to Week 7. It will be **available on Wednesday of Week 8.** You should arrange to have a stable internet connection for 120 minutes **between 8am and 11:59pm on March 2.** The exam asks for short, paragraph-length answers that explain key concepts using examples from course readings.

**Major Project:** You have a choice between an **Action Project** and a **Research Paper.**

**Option 1: Action Project:** Since much of our work in this course aims to understand human rights as a "toolbox," this assignment will have you use some human rights tool(s) and then reflect on your action. Options could include: a mock human rights report, a Wikipedia page entry or edit, a consciousness-raising or advocacy action on-campus, an open-source digital witnessing project, or a podcast. Whatever project you choose, your work will involve a series of steps, some graded and some credit/no credit:

Step	Assignment	Due date	Grading	% course grade
1. Selecting an action	Bb exercise	2/20	C/NC	2
2. Researching methods and tactics	Bb exercise	3/6	C/NC	2
3. In-class proposal	5 min. presentation	3/23 (in class)*	C/NC	1
4. Written proposal	300 word proposal	3/27	graded	10
4. Doing the action		3/27-4/17	graded	5
5. Reflection on the action	5-10 min. reflection	4/20 (in class)*	graded	5
6. Written self-assessment	900 word report	4/27	graded	15
<b>Total</b>				<b>40</b>

**Groups:** students may request to work in groups of two or three for the action project. A group format would entail an adjustment to the project's scope, presentation times, and word lengths, commensurate with the size of the group. Members of a group would also agree in advance to receive the same grade for the assignment, barring any extraordinary circumstances. Requests to work as a group would be due at the time of the first step listed above, 2/20.

**Option 2: Research Paper:** This option involves an original paper of 3,000-3,500 words (not including notes and references) on a topic relating to international human rights. This is a "scaffolded" project consisting of various preliminary assignments, some graded and some credit/no credit (C/NC):

Step	Assignment	Due date	Grading	% course grade
1. Selecting topic & locating material	Bb exercise	2/20	C/NC	2
2. Synthesizing & evaluating sources	Bb exercise	3/6	C/NC	2

3. In-class proposal	5 min. presentation	3/16 (in class)*	C/NC	2
4. Written proposal	300 word proposal	3/20	graded	7
4. Presenting the paper	5 min. reflection	4/13 (in class)*	C/NC	2
5. Finalizing the paper	Final written paper	4/27	graded	25
<b>Total</b>				<b>40</b>

### Course Requirements for POLS 5565

**Attendance and Participation:** Same as for POLS 4565 above.

**Right to Food Paper:** Same as for POLS 4565 above.

**Mid-term Exam:** Same as for POLS 4565 above.

**Research Paper:** An original paper of 4,000-4,500 words (not including notes and references) on a topic relating to international human rights. The steps for this assignment are the same as above, but the longer paper is worth more of your grade:

Scaffolding step	Assignment	Due date	Grading	% course grade
1. Selecting topic & locating material	Bb exercise	2/20	C/NC	2
2. Synthesizing & evaluating sources	Bb exercise	3/6	C/NC	2
3. In-class proposal	5 min. presentation	3/16 (in class)*	C/NC	2
4. Written proposal	300 word proposal	3/20	graded	7
4. Presenting the paper	5 min. reflection	4/13 (in class)*	C/NC	2
5. Finalizing the paper	Final written paper	4/27	graded	30
<b>Total</b>				<b>45</b>

\*In the event of any weather- or pandemic-related cancellations, or the like, we may need to make minor modifications to the schedule for in-class elements listed above.

### Grades

Overall grades will be calculated as follows:

4565		5565	
Participation/attendance	15 %	Participation/attendance	15 %
Right to Food Paper	20 %	Right to Food Paper	20 %
Mid-term exam	25 %	Mid-term exam	20 %
Action OR Research Project	40 %	Research Project	45 %
	<b>100 %</b>		<b>100 %</b>

### Required Texts

The following books are available for purchase at the Little Professor Bookstore on Court St. They are also available at the library reserves. Additional readings are available on Bb.

An-Naim, Abdullahi Ahmed. *Decolonizing Human Rights*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Ford, Richard Thompson. *Universal Rights Down to Earth*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011.

Jurkovich, Michelle. *Feeding the Hungry: Advocacy and Blame in the Global Fight Against Hunger*. Cornell University Press, 2020.

Merry, Sally Engle. *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

## Course Policies (A-Z)

**Academic Misconduct :** Students in this course are expected to follow the University's standards of academic integrity and honesty and are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism. One reference is here: <http://www.ohio.edu/communitystandards/academic/students.cfm>. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you may receive a grade deduction on the assignment, a failing grade for the assignment, or a failing grade for the class. You may also be reported to the Office of Community Standards and Student Responsibility for additional sanctions. Students may appeal academic sanctions through the grade appeal process. If you are unclear about accepted practices related to citations and quotations, please arrange a meeting with me in advance of your assignment deadline.

**Accessibility Accommodations:** Any student who suspects she/he/they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the class instructor privately to discuss the student's specific needs and provide written documentation from the Office of Student Accessibility Services. If the student is not yet registered as a student with a disability, she/he/they should contact the Office of Student Accessibility Services.

**Attendance:** I strongly encourage students to attend as close to every class as possible. To accommodate minor illness and other occasional events, I allow all students to miss up to three classes. I strongly recommend reserving these allowed absences in case you get sick later in the semester. If you miss class due to minor illness, traffic delays, student conferences, athletics events, family obligations, or the like, that missed class will count toward the allowed absences. Your participation grade will be reduced starting with the fourth missed class. The penalty will increase for each class missed, up to six absences. If you miss seven or more classes, you will get zero for your participation grade. Please arrive to class on-time to minimize disruptions to the class. Students are responsible for all course materials covered and announcements made during missed classes. If you are missing class due to major, on-going health problems (physical or mental), please discuss the situation with me as early as possible. See below for exceptions related to Covid-19; I will not allow classes missed due to self-isolation or quarantine to impact a student's grade.

**Blackboard:** I expect you to use the Bb system to submit assignments and to access readings, announcements, and other course materials. I will not use Bb to calculate or communicate your running average or overall grade in the class. If you encounter a broken link, a missing content item, or something else I need to fix, please let me know via email asap. If you are having general Bb problems, contact the Help Desk. It is your responsibility to ensure that your documents are properly uploaded and open-able by me. Uploading formats other than MS Word-created .docx and .pdf documents may cause problems; again, it is your responsibility to ensure that your document is intact and accessible to me. Bb will always give you a confirmation that your document was uploaded.

**Classroom COVID-19 Policies:** All members of the OHIO community [are expected to take certain precautions](#) in classrooms and elsewhere on campus to keep each other safe:

- Select a testing pathway as part of the [COVID-19 Testing Pathway Program](#). If you have not already made your pathway selection, please do so immediately. If you select the Weekly Testing Pathway, I expect you to adhere to your required testing schedule.
- Maintain physical distance as directed on signage in classrooms, vaccinated or not.

- All individuals are required to wear masks in indoor public spaces on campus, including classrooms.
- Complete a daily [COVID-19 symptom assessment](#) and do not come to class if you feel sick, even if you are vaccinated against COVID-19. If you need a thermometer, you can request one at the Guest Services desk on the fourth floor of Baker Center.
- If you test positive, feel sick or suspect exposure to COVID-19, it is your responsibility to follow the [OHIO COVID-19 Protocol](#).

If you do test positive or need to isolate or quarantine this semester, after you have taken care of yourself and followed all the steps in the [OHIO COVID-19 Protocol](#), please email me so that we can develop a plan for you to receive necessary course content. COVID-related illness, quarantine, isolation, and remain-in-room directives are legitimate university absences, and I will work with you to manage your academic requirements and connect you to resources. If you feel that your class performance is being impacted by COVID-19, please talk with me and/or contact COVID Operations by phone (740.566.8445) or email ([COVIDoperations@ohio.edu](mailto:COVIDoperations@ohio.edu)) Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and noon to 5 p.m. on weekends. The University has resources available to help with quarantine and isolation support, as well as access to COVID-19 testing, counseling services, food assistance, and more.

**Devices in class:** Please turn off the ringer on your phone *and* put it away during class time. Also put away laptops unless you are specifically using them to access electronic readings under discussion in-class. Thank you in advance for your cooperation on this.

**Email:** Check your OU email regularly for announcements or other communications. You may contact me via email at any time, but please try first to answer your question using the syllabus and the resources on Blackboard. I do my best to reply to student emails same or next day M-F, and Monday for messages sent Friday. If you want to discuss course themes and readings, or if you have a complex or sensitive question, please make use of office hours.

**Grading:** I do not offer make-up assignments, extra credit assignments, or opportunities to revise and resubmit assignments for a higher grade. If you have concerns about your grade or questions about my expectations, please schedule a meeting with me as early as possible in the semester. I use the following grading scale for letter grades: A = 93 and above; A- = 90-92; B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82; C+ = 77-79; C = 73-76; C- = 70-72; D+ = 67-69; D = 63-66; D- = 60-62; F = <60. I consider 90-92 to be excellent grades, 93 and above outstanding; I rarely award assignments grades above 95. I do not begin from 100 and deduct points, so achieving an A/95 (outstanding!) does not mean that you “lost five points.”

**Late Paper penalty:** Late papers will be penalized 6 points per day (e.g. a paper awarded an 88/B+ submitted one day late will receive an 82/B-), including weekend days, to a maximum of three days (after which the assignment will not be graded). No exceptions in cases of computer malfunction or loss of data. Late submission problems related to Bb must be verified by a screenshot of the submission confirmation or a report from the Help Desk. I cannot promise to provide comments on late papers.

**Syllabus/modality changes:** In the event of further disruptions related to COVID-19 or other emergency beyond the instructor’s control, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. If we need to suspend in-person instruction due to isolation or quarantine requirements (affecting either instructor or a disruptively large number of students), we will meet synchronously via Teams during the scheduled meeting time. Any changes will be communicated in class and/or via Bb/email.

The lectures, classroom activities, and all materials associated with this class and developed by the instructor are copyrighted in the name of Andrew Ross on January 10, 2022.

## **COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS**

### **PART I. INTRODUCTION AND KEY CONCEPTS**

#### **Week 1**

Ford, Introduction

#### **Week 2: International Law and Human Rights**

Donnelly, Jack. "Human Rights in Global Politics: Historical Perspective," Ch. 1 in: *International Human Rights*, 3–19. Fifth edition. Boulder: Westview Press, 2017.

An-Naim, Preface and Chs. 1-2

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948)

*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (Preamble, AA.1–40)

*International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (Preamble, AA.1–17)

### **PART II. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: CASE STUDY ON HUNGER**

#### **Week 3: Revisiting Social and Economic Rights: The Right to Food**

Jurkovich, Introduction and Chs. 1-3

Ford, pp. 86-96

Easterly, William. "Poverty is Not a Human Rights Violation"

Dossani, Sameer. "Amnesty International Responds to 'Poverty is Not a Human Rights Violation'"

#### **Week 4: The Right to Food cont'd**

Jurkovich, Chs. 4-5

#### **Week 5: Assessing the Gatekeepers: States, Institutions, and INGOs**

Brysk, Alison. "Global Good Samaritans? Human Rights Foreign Policy in Costa Rica." *Global Governance* 11 (2005): 445–66.

Hathaway, Oona A. "The Promise and Limits of the International Law of Torture." In: Sanford Levinson, ed. *Torture: A Collection*, 199–212. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Carpenter, R. Charli. "Governing the Global Agenda: 'Gatekeepers' and 'Issue Adoption' in Transnational Advocacy Networks." In: Deborah D. Avant et al., eds. *Who Governs the Globe?* 202–37. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

An-Naim, Ch. 3

### **PART III: HUMAN RIGHTS AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT**

**Week 6: The Practice of Standard-Setting: Gender Violence**

Merry, Chs. 1-3

*Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*

**Week 7: Gender Violence in Cross-cultural Contexts**

Merry, Ch. 4, 6

**Week 8: Mid-term exam**

\* spring break \*

**Week 9: “People-Centric” Human Rights Protection**

An-Naim, Ch. 4

Ignatieff, “Human Rights, Global Ethics, and the Ordinary Virtues”

Research Project Proposals

**Week 10: What are “Universal” Rights?**

Ford, Chs. 1-2 (skip pp. 86-96)

Action Project Proposals

**Week 11: Research and Action - Week 1**

Jurkovich, Conclusion

Ford, Conclusion

Action Project Check-ins

Research Project Check-ins

**Week 12: Research and Action - Week 2**

Merry, Conclusion

An-Naim, Ch. 5

**Week 13: Reporting Back - Week 1**

Student Presentations

**Week 14: Reporting Back - Week 2**

Student Presentations