International Studies in Human Rights

Monday: 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.  Fall Semester 2013
G65.1048
Draper Master’s Program in Humanities and Social Thought
New York University

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Course Description:

This purpose of this class is to introduce students to international human rights and the movement’s relationship to the field of comprehensive peace education. As a multi-disciplinary field, peace education takes a holistic approach to conflict and education. Essentially, peace education is the creation and transmission of knowledge needed to achieve and maintain peace. It is also about developing the critical and reflective capacities to apply knowledge in order to control, reduce, and eliminate various forms of violence. Using a peace education approach, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related normative global standards will be used as the primary conceptual frameworks to guide our inquiries.

Throughout the course, we will also distinguish between “negative peace” and “positive peace.” Negative peace refers to the practices to limit and prevent war and collective violence. We’ll take a very holistic approach to violence because many of the major human rights violations can be considered as forms of violence. More often than not, the response to serious violations is enacted from a negative peace perspective in order to quell the immediate violence. Unfortunately, negative peace practices do not necessarily get at the root causes of the violations nor do they strive for substantive social change. Positive peace is more concerned with establishing life-long and life-enhancing human rights values that are a necessary pre-condition for a culture of peace. Positive peace not only attempts to understand the base causes of violence, but it’s goal is fundamental social transformation.

Mirroring this negative/positive approach to peace, the course is set up as a dialectic of tragedy and hope. There are six, two-week themes in the course which cover economic human rights, health and human rights, due process rights, women’s human rights, crimes against humanity, and genocide. For each theme we will stay focused on the particular issue for two weeks. The first week we will explore the tragic dimensions of the issue at hand and note any negative peace strategies at work on the situation. The following week we will stay focused on the theme, this time stressing hope and exploring how human rights and peace workers respond to the situation with front line NGO work, as human rights educators, and as media workers within the human rights movement. The second week will highlight the positive peace approach.

Focusing on human rights as positive peace, students will study the major themes and events in the contemporary human rights movement. Students will be exposed to the international standards, the historical generations of human rights, and the basic conceptions and distinctions of human rights. Students will learn about international human rights organizations, how local NGOs “respond” to violations, and the role of peace education (both formal and non-formal) in promoting human rights and a culture of peace. Throughout the course, students will also be exposed to the issues surrounding human rights and representation and the various representational strategies such as
reports on violations, personal narratives, journalism, documentary film, photo reportage, web sites, and other medias. And finally, students will have the opportunity to explore research interests concerning human rights and peace education.

COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS:

September 9: Introduction to Human Rights as Positive Peace


September 16: Historical Perspectives on Human Rights


Web Site: We will also view and discuss the web site: *The Peoples Decade for Human Rights Education*. http://www.pdhre.org

September 23: Economic Human Rights


September 30: The Response to Economic Human Rights


Educational Resources on Contemporary Slavery: http://www.antislavery.org
Oct 7: Health and Human Rights


October 14: Fall Break: No Class

October 21: The Response to Health and Human Rights


In-class Film Screening: *Pandemic: Facing AIDS.* Directed by Rory Kennedy. 2003. HBO.


October 28: Mass Imprisonment in America


Web Site: 360 Degrees: Perspectives on the U.S. Criminal Justice System: [www.360degrees.org](http://www.360degrees.org)

In-class film screening: Books Not Bars & Educational Resources from Books Not Bars:

November 4: Prisons and Torture


In-Class Film Screening: The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib. 2006. Directed by Rory Kennedy. 2006. HBO

November 11:  Women’s Human Rights


Web Site Review:  www.rapeis.org

November 18:  The Response to Women’s Human Rights

Investigative Report: The Lady Jaguars

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/04/14/sports/the-lady-jaguars.html


November 25:  War Crimes & Crimes Against Humanity


Film Screening: Calling the Ghosts: A Story About Rape, War, and Women.  1996.  Directed by Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelincic.

December 2:  The Aftermath of Collective Violence


In Class Film Screening: Long Night’s Journey Into Day. 2000. Directed by Frances Reid.

December 9: Genocide: The Killing Fields


December 16: The Response to Genocide: Human Rights Education.


Required Books: Books available at the NYU Bookstore. The reading packet is available at Advanced Copy Center, 552 LaGuardia Place (between Bleeker & West 3rd Street.)


COURSE ACTIVITIES, ASSIGNMENTS/PROJECTS & EVALUATION CRITERIA:

During the semester there will be one term paper due on the final class related to the common readings and the presentations. In addition to the final writing assignment, students will participate in two oral presentations (of their choosing) in relation to the weekly themes. Students will also be evaluated on class attendance, preparation, informed participation, and thoughtful engagement. If a student misses a class, they should provide the professional courtesy of notification and email me their thoughts on the week’s readings and screenings.

Each week, a small group of students will be responsible for presenting the common readings. The oral presentations should (1) provide a detailed explanation and summary of the readings, (2) a critical analysis of the material, (3) an original thought contribution as to how the ideas in the readings affect human rights, and, (4) the presenter/s should pose several provocative questions to the class about the material to open up the discussion. Team presentations should be a coordinated effort but teams may also choose to divide readings by individuals. The goal of the oral presentations is to allow students to lead a class discussion and to influence the class in an extended manner. The overall group presentations should not exceed one hour to allow time for collective discussion.

In the spirit of cooperative learning and participatory teaching, student presenters are also welcome to use various workshop techniques during their presentations such as dividing the class into small discussion groups. Small group situations are often very constructive for discussion questions pertaining to the readings. Presenters should designate one participant in each group as a discussion leader/facilitator and someone as a reporter who will articulate conclusions reached and the reasoning that led to the conclusions. Additional class projects are also welcome but presenters should consult with me beforehand. Presenters should also type up a page or two about their presentation for the class. Handouts in the past have included additional information on related NGOs, scholarly references, or web sites where students might seek further information about the weekly theme.

With the common readings and the presentations, the class will begin a number of conversations about international human rights. Most likely, we will not be able to finish our talks on these diverse subjects. Therefore, the final paper should provide an opportunity to extend these discussions or to explore an issue
that was unresolved. The paper will also provide students a chance to question, qualify, or refute the course themes.

The term paper: (15 - 20 pages) This paper is due on Monday, December 17th at the latest. However, you may hand in your paper at any time before this date to ease your writing load at the end of the term.

For your final paper, here are some ideas to consider: In light of the course and the readings pertaining to human rights, you can articulate your own question and write a critical paper accordingly. You may also wish to develop specific class presentations further.

Since our class also covers human rights education, students may also design a learning unit related to human rights themes for use in a formal or non-formal educational setting. With the learning unit, you should think about and try to describe the educational setting, the core questions, the learning content, the skills to be taught, the objectives and requirements, a timetable or schedule, teaching methods, and criteria for evaluation. The more you can spell out these various components, the more practical the lesson becomes. I also have models of curriculum and learning units and I will hand out related units during in the semester.

As for experimental papers, you should feel free to write with a great deal of subjectivity and from an experiential perspective. However, please feel free to write a standard objective academic paper. Many students are more interested in drafting out ideas for their thesis in a standard academic mode. Others are writing several papers at the same time, and it can be easier to write in a standard format when there’s the pressure of time. But for experimental ideas, you might think about writing a reflective journal, very subjective, about how your perspectives have changed and developed through this course experience. As a means of tying this into the class, you should use references from the readings or class activities. You should also note how the process of writing has influenced your ideas and reflections. This is not a course assessment but rather an opportunity to integrate your own work with your class experience.

For papers or projects that don’t quite fit into these themes, you might want to make an appointment with me to discuss your ideas. If you have several ideas, perhaps I can help you narrow down your choices. In human rights, research, reflecting, and writing are all integral components for developing critical consciousness. So the papers/projects are a vital part to our learning process. But most of all, I hope the final projects can deepen your understanding of human rights and help you grow as an emerging scholar.