

Sociology of Human Rights: Global Perspective (SYA 4930-002)

Spring Semester 2009

Time: Tuesday, 7:10-10:00 PM

Location: GS 116

Professor: Dr. Mark Frezzo

Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 5:00-7:00 PM (in SO 391 C)

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Course Description

In recent years, sociologists have joined legal scholars, political scientists, and philosophers in debating the nature and scope of human rights. In keeping with their training, sociologists explore the *social conditions* under which human rights legislation is drafted, interpreted, enforced, and violated. In addition, sociologists examine how the conferral of rights affects the conduct of societies, communities, and individuals. In the process of explaining how rights—understood as claims made on governments and other institutions—“circulate” among different social actors, this course examines a series of questions. How has the concept of human rights evolved from the Enlightenment to the present day? How have inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social movements promoted human rights? What is the connection between human rights and democracy? What are the prospects for a rights regime on a global scale?

Course Objectives

This course introduces students to the sociology of human rights—a growing field in academia. In becoming conversant in the scholarly debates on human rights, students will acquire a technical vocabulary: first-generation rights (pertaining to liberty); second-generation rights (pertaining to equality); and third-generation rights (pertaining to solidarity). In addition, students will learn to apply the tools of sociology to the following phenomena:

- Historical conflicts over human rights
- Networks of IGOs, NGOs, and movements pushing for new rights
- Advocacy of human rights and processes of democratization
- Proposals for a human rights regime on a global scale

This course counts toward the core requirement for the Peace Studies Certificate. Although it offers a *sociological* approach to peace studies, the course does *not* presuppose prior knowledge of sociology. Students from all disciplinary backgrounds are welcome.

Note: For information on the Peace Studies Program, visit the following website: <http://www.fau.edu/peacestudies/>.

Course Requirements

The course will combine lectures, class discussions, and group exercises. It is important for you to attend class regularly, complete the reading, and participate diligently in classroom activities. The class discussions will be designed to cultivate your skills in public-speaking, argumentation, and critical thinking.

The coursework will involve ten in-class quizzes and two in-class exams. Administered at the beginning of the class sessions, the **reading quizzes** will consist of ten multiple choice questions. They are designed to encourage you to read attentively.

The **exams** will consist of ten essay questions (each requiring a 5-6 sentence answer). The exams will be designed not only to solidify your command of the course material, but also to cultivate your writing skills. I will explain the exam format at the beginning of the semester.

Your overall grade will be calculated as follows:

- **10 Reading Quizzes = 15% of the Final Grade**
- **Midterm Exam (February 24) = 35% of the Final Grade**
- **Final Exam (April 28) = 35% of the Final Grade**
- **Class Participation = 15% of the Final Grade**

Attendance for the entire class period is mandatory. I will pass around a sign-in sheet for both halves of the period. You are asked to notify me prior to absences. Class participation grades will include attendance, attentiveness, and intervention in discussions. Students who are reluctant to contribute to class discussions are encouraged to join discussions on the **Blackboard site**. Go to the following website and follow the login instructions: <http://blackboard.fau.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>

Throughout the semester, I will upload discussion questions, announcements, summaries, and other useful items to the Blackboard site. You are expected to visit the site on a weekly basis. In addition, you are encouraged to post your questions, comments, and reflections on the discussion boards. After each class session, I will post a summary on a discussion board marked “**Professor’s Blog.**” You are urged to read the blogs carefully—especially in preparing for the exams.

Before each session, I will send an e-mail reminder to the entire class. Since the Blackboard site allows professors to send e-mail messages only to FAU accounts, you are urged to check your FAU account frequently.

My **office hours** are as follows: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 4:00-6:00 PM. My office is located in SO 391 C. In addition, you are welcome to make an appointment to meet at another time. If you have any questions about the reading material or any other aspect of the course, you should not hesitate to visit my office. I encourage students to visit my office at least once per term.

Honor Code

In completing the assignments, you are required to uphold the FAU Honor Code. For an explanation of the Honor Code, visit the following website:

http://www.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/4.001_Honor_Code.pdf

Preparing for Class

In preparing for class, you should take the following steps. First, download the discussion notes from the Course Documents section of the Blackboard site. Second, use the discussion notes to guide yourself through the reading. Third, write down any questions or comments you may have. Be sure to bring the discussion notes to each session. After each session, be sure to review the Blackboard site for helpful information (including the Professor's Blog). You are encouraged to post questions or comments on the site. In keeping with the idea of a "learning community," you are invited to discuss your ideas with one another.

Course Readings

- Donnelly, Jack (2003). *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*.
- Ishay, Micheline (2004). *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era*.
- Tilly, Charles (2007). *Democracy*.

The books are available at the Campus Bookstore. You are urged to purchase your books at the *beginning* of the semester. The bookstore has a policy of returning unsold books in the middle of the semester. You may wish to share the costs of the books with one or two other students. Alternatively, you may wish to photocopy the readings. In any case, you are *required* to bring the appropriate reading materials—whether in book or photocopied form—to each class session. I will routinely refer to specific pages in the reading.

Course Schedule

Part One: Historicizing Rights

1. **Tuesday, January 6: What Is the Sociology of Human Rights?**
 - Discussion of Syllabus and Objectives
 - Introduction to the Study of Human Rights
2. **Tuesday, January 13: Human Rights in the Enlightenment**
 - Reading Quiz 1
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Ishay, 1-14 and 63-116
3. **Tuesday, January 20: Human Rights in the Industrial Revolution**
 - Reading Quiz 2
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Ishay, 117-172
4. **Tuesday, January 27: Human Rights in the 20th Century**
 - Reading Quiz 3
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Ishay, 173-244

5. **Tuesday, February 3: Globalization, Human Rights, and Social Movements**
 - Reading Quiz 4
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Ishay, 245-314
6. **Tuesday, February 10: Human Rights in the 21st Century**
 - Reading Quiz 5
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Ishay, 315-355
7. **Tuesday, February 17: Review for Midterm Exam**
 - Class Exercise
 - Review for Midterm Exam
8. **Tuesday, February 24: Midterm Exam**
9. **Tuesday, March 3: No Class (Spring Break)**

Part Two: Theorizing Rights

10. **Tuesday, March 10: Defining Rights**
 - Discussion of Exam Results
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Donnelly, 7-37
11. **Tuesday, March 17: Group Rights**
 - Reading Quiz 6
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Donnelly, 89-106 and 204-241
12. **Tuesday, March 24: A Global Human Rights Regime?**
 - Reading Quiz 7
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Donnelly, 127-154

Part Three: Human Rights and Democracy

13. **Tuesday, March 31: Defining Democracy**
 - Reading Quiz 8
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Tilly, 1-50
14. **Tuesday, April 7: Equality**
 - Reading Quiz 9
 - Professor's Introduction
 - Discussion of Reading: Tilly, 80-132

15. Tuesday, April 14: Democracy in the 21st Century

- Reading Quiz 10
- Professor's Introduction
- Discussion of Reading: Tilly, 161-205

16. Tuesday, April 21: Review for Final Exam

- Concluding Comments
- Course Evaluations
- Review for Final Exam

17. Tuesday, April 28: Final Exam

Teaching Philosophy

In designing and implementing courses in various domains of sociology, I follow four guidelines. First, I conceptualize the classroom as a learning community. Accordingly, I foster cooperation among students not only by carefully moderating class discussions to maximize inclusiveness, but also by designing small group exercises to maximize collegiality. Second, I treat students as sociologists. Accordingly, I encourage them not only to take their own ideas seriously (irrespective of their disciplinary backgrounds or previous experience), but also to approach problems with sociological rigor. Third, I believe that the most important aspect of teaching consists in the cultivation of critical-thinking skills. I design class discussions, group exercises, and exams with this goal in mind. I encourage relentless questioning in every course-related endeavor. Fourth, I believe that the purpose of sociology is to interrogate the contemporary period. It is my hope that students will come to think of themselves as active participants in the global public sphere.