

## **PT 358 Critical Human Rights and Humanitarian Advocacy/ Scholars at Risk**

Seminar Leader: Prof. Kerry Bystrom  
Email: k.bystrom@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: by appointment

### **Course Description**

8 ECTS-4 US credits. This seminar serves as an introduction to human rights and humanitarian advocacy, with a practical component. Half of the course (Mondays) focuses on the history and theory of human rights and humanitarian advocacy: what are the bases, overlaps and differences of human rights and humanitarianism? What is it to make claims for human rights, or to denounce suffering or rights violation, especially on behalf of others? How and when and why have individuals and groups spoken out, mounted campaigns, published reports and exposés? How do they address, challenge, and sometimes work with governments and international organizations like the United Nations, particularly through transnational advocacy networks? What allows some campaigns to succeed while others fail? As we look at humanitarian and human rights advocacy from the campaign to abolish the slave trade to the founding of Amnesty International and the advent of digital activism, this half of the course serves as an introduction to human rights work as a mode of legal, political and cultural practice.

The other half of the course (Wednesdays) involves hands-on work with the human rights organization Scholars at Risk (SAR) to support detained and disappeared Uyghur scholars in China. We will research events and individuals, communicate with families and lawyers and other advocates, write country and case profiles, propose strategies and tactics for pressuring governments and other powerful actors, and develop appeals to public opinion -- all while recognizing the ethical and political risks this work may involve.

This seminar is an Open Society University Network (OSUN) course that connects seminars in Bard Annandale (taught by Prof. Ziad Abu-Rish), Al-Quds Bard (taught by Prof. Jana Lozanoska) and American University of Central Asia (taught by Prof. Saniya Toktogazieva). A number of activities including the creation of an information archive and the coordination of advocacy campaigns will take place across these campuses. Working collegially and responsibly with network peers is an important part of the course.

### **Readings**

The following books are required for this class. Students should obtain their own copies or use the reserve copies in the library:

- Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free Empire's Slaves*, Houghton, Mifflin Harcourt, 2005
- Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International*, Cornell UP, 2006
- Jewher Ilham, *Jewher Ilham: A Uyghur's Fight to Free Her Father*, University of New Orleans Press, 2015.
- Richard A. Wilson and Richard D. Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, Cambridge UP, 2009.
- The Advocates for Human Rights, *Human Rights Tools for a Changing World: A step-by-step guide to human rights fact-finding, documentation and advocacy*, Jan 2015  
<<http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/change.pdf>>

Additional required readings will be available as PDF files in our dedicated Google Classroom [GC].

### **Platforms and technology**

Google classroom will be the main Learning Management System (LMS) for the class. Online lectures will take place via Zoom, as will occasional joint meetings with our partner classrooms. We will also have a cross-network Padlet space where we post responses to common readings and guest lectures, as well as create a repository of information about the Uyghur cases. It is important that you can connect to these platforms and you should plan to access them regularly. Your advocacy groups may additionally decide to work together via other social media platforms (WhatsApp etc).

### **Requirements**

- Come to every class meeting, having read the assigned material thoroughly and preferably more than once, and participate actively in our discussions
- Thoughtfully complete all informal assignments, including posting responses to readings and lectures on the course Padlet site
- Write two short (3-5pp) essays focused on important themes in the course
- Together with your colleagues at BCB and the other OSUN network campuses, design and carry out an action project for your SAR case and document this project in a final action portfolio/presentation

### **Attendance and Participation**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. After this, in order for an absence not to impact a student's participation grade, medical documentation must be provided to your professor and any assigned make-up work completed. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021:** Some students might need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. If you are unable to attend class in person because of COVID-related reasons, please notify me immediately and contact the Berlin Coronavirus Hotline (030 90 28 28 28) for quarantine and testing instructions. If you feel well enough, you should plan to join the class remotely by teleconference. In the case that you are unable to join by teleconference, I will assign make-up work.

Whether you are attending class in person or online, the success of this class is dependent not only on you actually being present but also on the quality of thought and energy you bring. Class sessions often include brainstorming and writing periods, in which you may work alone or with a partner, as well as group work ending with the creation of impromptu mini presentations. You may also be asked to select passages, formulate discussion questions or complete informal writing assignments in advance of the class. You will be asked to create posts for our network Padlet at least four times across the semester, once in a group and three times as independent posts responding to course readings or lectures as per a schedule we will generate together. You are expected to engage in all of these activities; failure to do so will impact your class participation grade.

### **Formal Assignments**

**Essays:** Students will write two critical essays of 3pp each. The first is due on Friday October 8. The second is due on Friday November 26. I will provide further information about each essay closer to the deadlines.

**SAR Advocacy Work and Portfolio:** Over the course of the semester, and in groups, you will research and produce an action or set of actions to support your imprisoned scholar, Ilham Tohti. Actions might include: writing draft letters of appeal and approaching government officials to adopt these letters; conducting social media campaigns to raise awareness about the scholar's situation; holding campus teach-ins or letter-writing parties; writing op-eds about the scholar and your own efforts to raise awareness about the case (for student or local paper or other); approaching other NGOs or associations to ask for their involvement on the case;

screening or creating short films or podcasts, or curating a film or arts festival, raising awareness about the scholar; etc. Each group must submit an action plan by Friday October 15. All actions must be completed by Friday December 10. In the last week of the semester, each group will hand in all written (and other) materials produced for the case and create a short video or presentation to be posted on Padlet summarizing your work. This constitutes your Final Action Portfolio, due on Tuesday December 15.

Final Reflection Paper: The advocacy plans and actions will be matched with a reflection on them. You should write a short (3 page) analysis connecting your advocacy campaign to some of the scholarship on advocacy you have encountered in the course. How have the readings contributed to, shed light on, interfered with, complicated, or simplified the work you have done with SAR? This paper is due on the final day of the semester, Friday December 17.

### **Academic Integrity**

In this course, we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. However, you are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. When you use another's ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by signaling it in the MLA parenthetical format (<http://www.mla.org/style>). Please come to see me if you have any questions about when and how to cite. Further note that even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, may result in referral to the Examination Board and failure for the entire course.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Essays or projects that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. If I agree to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, you will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Participation including informal assignments: 20% (10% first half of course, 10% second half of course)  
Paper #1: 20%  
Paper #2: 20%  
SAR advocacy group project and action portfolio: 30%  
Final Reflection: 10%

### **Course Schedule**

*\*\*Please note that this schedule is subject to change and it is your responsibility to keep up with the latest assignments and deadlines.\*\**

#### *Week One*

Monday August 30

Introduction

Reading:

- Keck and Sikkink, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics," UNESCO International Social Science Journal 59 (159), 1999, pp. 89-101 [GC]

Wednesday Sept 1

What's happening in the Uyghur region?

Reading:

- Ramzy and Buckley, "Absolutely No Mercy," <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html?action=click&auth=login-email&login=email&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

- Scholars at Risk, Obstacles to Excellence Report: Executive Summary and Introduction; Overview of Higher Education and Academic Freedom in Minority Regions chapters [GC]
- SAR pages about Scholars in Prison Project and our scholars here:  
<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/action/scholars-in-prison-project/>;  
<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/ilham-tohti-china/>  
<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/rahile-dawut-china/> “
- Uyghur Human Rights Project—What you can do”: <https://uhrp.org/what-you-can-do>

*Week Two*

Monday Sept 6

Humanitarianism and Human Rights

Reading:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights [GC]
- Advocates, Ch. 2 “Human Rights Background” [GC]
- Wilson and Brown, Humanitarianism Introduction, pp. 1-30

Weds Sept 8

Repression in the UAR

Reading:

- Hunerven, “Spirit Breaking: Capitalism and Terror in Northwestern China”  
[http://chuangcn.org/journal/two/spirit-breaking/?fbclid=IwAR366JS3gHvLUWkQ84gZsOk8sawKYzUGC6w2XCZu1MYRLD1\\_VytKCAEBSM](http://chuangcn.org/journal/two/spirit-breaking/?fbclid=IwAR366JS3gHvLUWkQ84gZsOk8sawKYzUGC6w2XCZu1MYRLD1_VytKCAEBSM)
- One of the following articles (as assigned in class):
  - Hess, “We are not terrorists: Uyghurs, Tibetans and the Global War on Terror” [GC]
  - Hojer, “What does it take ‘to migrate’? Uyghur perspectives from Kyrgyzstan” [GC]
  - Mabry, “Natives of the “New Frontier”: The Uyghurs of Xinjiang” [GC]

In-class informal assignment: In groups, prepare mini-presentations and then Padlet responses (max 350 words) to your assigned reading, addressing the following questions: 1) What are the topic, sources/methodology, and main arguments of the piece? 2) What are the most important and new pieces of information offered for the Uyghur scholar cases? 3) Does this piece raise any concerns or questions to follow up on? Please post your Padlet response by Thursday midnight and then read and respond to the corresponding Padlet post by the Annandale class by Friday midnight.

*Week Three*

Monday September 13

Genealogy of Humanitarian and Human Rights Advocacy

Readings:

- Hochschild, Bury the Chains, read pp. 1-8 (Introduction), skim 9-84 (Chs 1-5), read 85-163 (Chs 6-11)

Wednesday Sept 15

Scholars at Risk: Issues and Practices in an NGO

Guest speaker: Scholars at Risk staff member TBC (via Zoom link) \*\* starts at 4:15

Reading:

- Quinn and Levine, “Intellectual-HRDs and Claims for Academic Freedom under Human Rights Law,” International Journal of Human Rights 18 (7-8), 2014, pp. 898-920 [GC]
- Watch <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/introducing-scholars-risk/>

Informal assignment: do further research on the specific case of Ilham Tohti in order to prepare specific questions; please post any useful articles/links on our Google Classroom stream

*Week Four*

Monday September 20

Genealogy II

Readings:

- Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, pp. 165-296 (Chs 12-20)

Weds Sept 22 Advocacy work day

*Week Five*

Monday September 27

Genealogy III

Readings:

- Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, pp. 297-366 (Ch 21-23, Epilogue)

Wednesday September 29 Advocacy work day

*Week Six*

Monday Oct 4

Genealogy IV: "The Forgotten Prisoners" and Amnesty International

Reading:

- Benenson, "The Forgotten Prisoners," *The Observer* May 28, 1961 [GC]
- Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame*, Chs. 3 and 4

Wednesday Oct 6

Project Design and Management Workshop with Xenia Muth (TBC)

Informal assignment: Think up one goal for our advocacy and one idea for an action project you think the class could undertake to achieve this goal, and come in ready to present these items

Friday Oct 8: Essay #1 due

*Week Seven*

Monday October 11

Modern Transnational Networks and the Global-Local Nexus

Readings:

- Keck and Sikkink, "Human Rights Advocacy Networks in Latin America," *Activists Beyond Borders* Cornell University Press, 1998, pp. 79-120 [GC]
- Merry, "Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle," *American Anthropologist* 108 (1), 2006, pp. 38-51 [GC]

Wednesday October 13 Advocacy Work Day

Friday Oct 15: Class Action concept due

FALL BREAK (October 18 & 20)

*Week Eight*

Monday October 25

Guest speaker TBC \*\*starts at 4:15pm

Wednesday October 27 Contemporary Human Rights Advocacy Roundtable TBC \*\* starts at 4:30pm

*Week Nine*

Monday November 1 Narrative and Voice in Human Rights Activism and Law

Readings:

- Slaughter, "A Question of Narration: Voice in International Human Rights Law," *Human Rights Quarterly* 19(2), 1997, pp. 406-430 [GC]
- Schaffer and Smith, "Conjunctions: Life Narratives in Human Rights," *Biography* 27.1 Winter 2004, pp 1-25 [GC]
- Schaffer and Smith, "E-witnessing in the digital age" in *We Shall Bear Witness* ed Jolly and Jenson (2014), pp. 223-37 [GC]

Wednesday November 3 Advocacy work day

*Week Ten*

Monday November 8 The Ethics of Representing and Speaking for Others

Readings:

- Gready, "Responsibility to the Story," *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 2:2, 2010, pp. 177-190 [GC]
- Watch "Kony 2012" at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sq>
- Cole, "The White Savior Industrial Complex" *The Atlantic* 21 March 2012  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>

Wednesday November 10 Advocacy work day

*Week Eleven*

Monday November 15

Human Rights Reporting

Readings:

- *Advocates*, ch. 3,6 [GC]
- Dudai, "Can You Describe This? Human Rights Reports and What They Tell Us About the Human Rights Movement," in Wilson and Brown, *Humanitarianism* pp. 245-264
- De Waal, "Writing Human Rights and Getting it Wrong," *Boston Review*, 6 June 2016  
<http://bostonreview.net/world/alex-de-waal-writing-human-rights>

Wednesday November 17 Advocacy work day

*Week Twelve*

Monday November 22

Indifference, Denial, Blindness?

Readings:

- Cohen, "Government Responses to Human Rights Reports: Claims, Denials, Counterclaims," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18.3 (1996), pp. 517-543 [GC]
- Cohen, "Ch 6: Bystander States" in *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*, pp 141-167 [GC]

Wednesday November 24 Advocacy work day

Friday November 26: Paper #2 due

*Week Thirteen*

Monday November 29

Mobilizing Shame (and Its Limits)

Readings:

- *Advocates*, Ch 7[GC]
- Keenan, "Mobilizing Shame," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103 (2-3), 2004, pp. 435-449 [GC]
- Pruce and Budabin, "Beyond Naming and Shaming: New Modalities of Information Politics in Human Rights," *Journal of Human Rights* 15(3), 2016, pp. 408-425 [GC]

Wednesday December 1 Advocacy work day

*Week Fourteen*

Monday December 6

Forensics and Counter-forensics

Readings:

- Moon, "Human Rights, Human Remains: forensic humanitarianism and the human rights of the dead," UNESCO International Social Studies Journal 215-16, 2016, pp. 49-63 [GC]
- Weizman, "Introduction: Forensics," in Forensic Architecture, Forensics: The Architecture of Public Truth, Sternberg Press, 2014, 9-32 [GC]

Wednesday December 8 Advocacy work day

Friday December 10: Actions Completed

*Week Fifteen COMPLETION WEEK*

Monday December 13

No class (completion week)

Tuesday December 14: Final Portfolios due

Wednesday December 15

Course wrap-up and cross-campus presentations

Friday December 17: Final Reflection Papers due