

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

Seminar Leader: Prof. Kerry Bystrom

Course Times: MW 15:45-17:15

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Office Hours: W 10:30-12:00

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 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. Thomas Keenan), 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
- 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. 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 pp) 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

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 2020: 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 make plans to join the class remotely by teleconference. In the case that you are unable to join by teleconference, I will assign make-up work.

Please note: 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. You may also be asked to select passages, formulate discussion questions, complete informal writing assignments or prepare informal mini-presentations in advance of the class. As noted above, you will also be asked to create posts for our network Padlet at least three times across the semester. 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 2. The second is due on Friday November 27. 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. 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 raising awareness about the scholar; etc. Each group must submit an action plan by Friday October 9. All actions must be completed by Friday December 5. In the last week of the semester, each group will hand in all written (and other) materials produced for the case. Additionally, each student must write a short (3 pp) reflection paper (connecting your actions to at least one major theoretical question raised by course and engaging with at least 2 course readings). This together constitutes your Final Action Portfolio.

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: 25%

Paper #2: 25%

SAR advocacy group project and action portfolio: 30%

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 31: 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 2:

Guest speaker: Scholars at Risk staff member (via Zoom link)

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
- Look through SAR *Free to Think* 2018 report:
<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2018/>
- Watch <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/introducing-scholars-risk/>
- Subscribe to SAR's Academic Freedom Monitoring Report:
<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/academic-freedom-media-review-archive/>

Informal Assignment: Group #1 posts questions/response to the speaker on our shared Padlet

Week Two

Monday Sept 7

Humanitarianism and Human Rights

Reading:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights GC
- Advocates, Ch. 2 "Human Rights Background"
- Wilson and Brown, *Humanitarianism* Introduction, pp. 1-30

Weds Sept 9

Threatened Scholar Guest Speaker (via Zoom link)

Readings TBC

Informal Assignment: Group #2 posts questions/response to the speaker on our shared Padlet

Week Three

Monday September 14

Genealogy of Humanitarian and Human Rights Advocacy

Readings:

- Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, read pp. 1-8 (Introduction), skim 9-84 (Chs 1-10), read 85-163 (Chs 6-11)

Wednesday Sept 16

SAR and the Uyghur Cases: Background dossier and/or bibliography

Informal Assignment: All students are required to post on Padlet by Wednesday 12:00 both 1) a summary (approx. 350 words) of the main points relevant to our case from one reading and 2) one continuing question about the context or cases you'd like to explore further

Week Four

Monday September 21

Genealogy II

Readings:

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

Weds Sept 23

Guest speaker TBC, readings TBC (via Zoom link)

Informal Assignment: Group #3 posts questions/response to the speaker on our shared Padlet

Week Five

Monday September 28

Genealogy III

Readings:

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

Wednesday September 30

Film Screening and Discussion: 10 Conditions of Love

Informal Assignment: Group #1 posts questions/response to the speaker on our shared Padlet

Friday Oct 2: Essay #1 due

Week Six

Monday Oct 5

Modern Human Rights Work: The Case of Amnesty International

Reading:

- "The History of Amnesty International" GC
- Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame*, Chs. 1 and 2

Wednesday Oct 7 advocacy work day

Friday Oct 9: Action plans due

Week Seven

Monday Oct 12

Amnesty International II

Readings:

- Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame*, Chs.3-4

Wednesday October 14

Guest speaker TBC, readings TBC (via Zoom link)

Informal Assignment: Group #2 posts questions/response to the speaker on our shared Padlet

FALL BREAK (October 19, 21)

Week Eight

Monday October 26

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 28 Advocacy work day

Week Nine

Monday November 2

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 4

Guest speaker TBC, readings TBC

Informal Assignment: Group #3 posts questions/response to the speaker on our shared Padlet

Week Ten

Monday November 9

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
- 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/>

- Watch “Kony 2012” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>

Wednesday November 11 advocacy work day

Week Eleven

Monday November 16

Human Rights Reports

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

Wednesday November 18 advocacy work day

Week Twelve

Monday November 23

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 25 advocacy work day

Friday November 27: Paper #2 due

Week Thirteen

Monday November 30

Mobilizing Shame (and Its Limits)

Readings:

- Advocates, Ch 7
- 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 2 advocacy work day

Friday December 5: Actions completed

Week Fourteen

Monday December 7

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: Forensis,” in *Forensic Architecture, Forensis: The Architecture of Public Truth*, Sternberg Press, 2014, 9-32 GC
- Weizman, “Open Verification,” *e-flux architecture* 18 June 2019
<https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification/>

Wednesday December 9

Wrap up and advocacy/action presentations

Completion Week (December 14.16)

Final Portfolios due Monday December 14