

PT 358 Critical Human Rights Advocacy/
Scholars at Risk

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

8 ECTS-4 US credits. This seminar serves as an introduction to human rights advocacy, with a practical component. Half of the course (Mondays) focuses on the history and theory of human rights. 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 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) Network Collaborative Course (NCC) that connects seminars in Bard Annandale (taught by Prof. Ziad Abu-Rish) and the American University of Central Asia (taught by Prof. Saniya Toktogazieva) as well as refugee and host community learners studying with the Hubs for Connected Learning Initiatives (taught by Prof. Kerry Bystrom). A number of activities including the creation of a research 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.
- 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*, January 2015
<<http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/change.pdf>>

Additional required readings will be available through our Brightspace site (see below).

Platforms and technology

The NCC as a whole will use a shared Brightspace page with integrated Zoom, Panopto and Padlet for coursework. The Bard College Berlin section will have a dedicated portal within the NCC site that contains the Berlin section assignments and readings. It is important that you can connect to Brightspace and access all connected sites regularly.

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 completing the research archive posts and 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 2022: In order to attend the course in person, students must be tested, recovered or vaccinated. All not yet fully vaccinated students must present negative tests no older than 48 hours to me before entering the seminar room at the start of each class. Additionally, 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.

Some students might need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic.

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 twice the semester, to help create a shared research archive for the class (please see instructions on the relevant Padlet site) as well as additional posts as needed. 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 7**. The second is due on **Friday November 25**. 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, to raise awareness about the scholar; doing relevant legal research; etc. All actions must be completed by **Friday December 9**. 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 final video or presentation that will be presented to the other campus sections in our closing joint session on **Wednesday December 14**. The materials and presentation together constitute your Final Action Portfolio. Please note that in addition to the final presentations for the other campuses, all sections will meet jointly once across the semester to discuss their advocacy campaigns; here each group will share a short presentation of their planned campaign for critique and engagement from other class sections.

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 16**.

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 (Padlet etc): 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 29

Introduction

Reading:

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

Wednesday August 31

What’s happening in the Uyghur region?

Reading:

- Human Rights Watch and Mills Legal Clinic of Stanford Law School, “Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots”: China’s Crimes Against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims, April 2021, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/04/china0421_web_2.pdf
- 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>
- Kanji and Palumbo-Liu, “The Faux Anti-Imperialism of Denying Anti-Uighur Atrocities”: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/14/the-faux-anti-imperialism-of-denying-anti-uighur>

Week Two

Monday Sept 5

Human Rights Overview

Reading:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights [Brightspace]
- Advocates, Ch. 2 “Human Rights Background”
- Additional readings TBC

Weds Sept 7

Repression in the XUAR

Reading:

- Hunerven, “Spirit Breaking: Capitalism and Terror in Northwestern China” http://chuangcn.org/journal/two/spirit-breaking/?fbclid=IwAR366JS3gHvLUWkQ84gZsOk8sawKYzUGC6w2XCZu1MYRLDJ1_VytKCAEBSM
- One of the following articles (as assigned in class):
 - Hess, “We are not terrorists: Uyghurs, Tibetans and the Global War on Terror” [Brightspace]
 - Hojer, “What does it take ‘to migrate’? Uyghur perspectives from Kyrgyzstan” [Brightspace]

- Mabry, “Natives of the “New Frontier”: The Uyghurs of Xinjiang” [Brightspace]

Week Three

Monday September 12

Genealogy of 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 14

Scholars at Risk: Issues and Practices in an NGO

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

Readings:

- 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/>
- Articles on Ilham Tohti
 - Ian Johnson, “The don’t want moderate Uighurs,” *New York Review of Books*, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2014/09/22/trial-ilham-tohti-they-dont-want-moderate-uighurs/>
 - “Ilham Tohti: Uighur activist’s daughter fears for his life,” *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50842514>
 - “Thousands of articles restored from downed website of Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti” *Radio Free Asia*, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/website-10082020162512.html>

Thursday-Friday September 15-16

Optional related workshop: Tactics for Human Rights Advocacy in Restricted Spaces: Legal and Cultural Approaches

Humboldt University

Week Four

Monday September 19

Genealogy II

Readings:

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

Weds Sept 21

Guest speaker TBC

Week Five

Monday September 26

Genealogy III

Readings:

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

Wednesday September 28

Joint advocacy session #1: insights from former students (via Zoom link) ** starts at 4:15

Friday September 30

Informal Assignment: First Padlet Post should be uploaded to Research Archive by midnight

Week Six

Monday October 3 NO CLASS—Federal Holiday

Wednesday October 5

Genealogy IV: “The Forgotten Prisoners” and Amnesty International

Readings:

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

Friday October 7: Essay #1 due

Week Seven

Monday October 10

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 [Brightspace]
- Merry, “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle,” *American Anthropologist* 108 (1), 2006, pp. 38-51 [Brightspace]

Wednesday October 12 Advocacy workshop part 1

Saturday October 15 Advocacy Workshop part 2 (make-up class for Wednesday October 19)

Week Eight

Monday October 17 Advocacy workshop part 3

Wednesday October 19 No class

Informal Assignment: Second Padlet Post due by midnight on Friday October 21

FALL BREAK Monday October 24 and Wednesday October 26

Week Nine

Monday October 31

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 [Brightspace]
- Schaffer and Smith, “Conjunctions: Life Narratives in Human Rights,” *Biography* 27.1 Winter 2004, pp 1-25 [Brightspace]

- Schaffer and Smith, “E-witnessing in the digital age” in *We Shall Bear Witness* ed Jolly and Jenson (2014), pp. 223-37 [Brightspace]

Wednesday October 27 Advocacy Work Day/ Guest Speaker TBC

Week Ten

Monday November 7

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 [Brightspace]
- 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 9 Joint advocacy session #2 (via Zoom link) ** starts at 16:15

Each group must prepare a 3-4 minute presentation including one slide to present to the other class sections starts at 16:15

Week Eleven

Monday November 14

Indifference, Denial, Blindness?

Readings:

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

Wednesday November 16 Advocacy Work Day/Guest Speaker TBC

Week Twelve

Monday November 21

Mobilizing Shame (and Its Limits)

Readings:

- Keenan, “Mobilizing Shame,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103 (2-3), 2004, pp. 435-449 [Brightspace]
- 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 [Brightspace]

Wednesday November 23 Advocacy Work Day/Guest Speaker TBC

Friday November 25: Paper #2 due

Week Thirteen

Monday November 28

Forensic Approaches

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 [Brightspace]
- Weizman, "Open Verification," *E-flux*, June 2019

Wednesday November 30 Advocacy work day

Thursday December 1 Einstein Forum event—info TBA

Week Fourteen

Monday December 5

Course wrap-up discussion

Please read back through the syllabus carefully, and choose one reading or guest lecture that has been particularly meaningful to you and be ready to share and discuss it with the rest of the class (from readings be sure to include on actual passage from the text, from lectures a quotation or specific example/insight); please also be ready to share one thing you think was a success of the campaign work and one thing you would want to change to make the campaign stronger

Wednesday December 7 Advocacy Work Day

Friday December 9: Actions Completed

Week Fifteen

Completion Week

Wednesday December 14 Joint advocacy session #3: Final Presentations

Prepare a short presentation (5 minutes per group/15 minutes per class) sharing the outcomes of each class project

Final Portfolios due

Friday December 16: Final Reflection Papers due