

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

Seminar Leader: Prof. Kerry Bystrom  
Course Times: MW 15:45-17:15  
Email: k.bystrom@berlin.bard.edu  
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 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 involves hands-on work with the human rights organization Scholars at Risk (SAR) on one of their cases of detained or threatened scholars. We will research specific 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 connected to a Bard Annandale course taught by Prof. Thomas Keenan, and a number of activities including our advocacy work will take place across both campuses. Through the Consortium on Forced Migration, Displacement and Education the seminar will also engage in joint work with the SAR advocacy class at Sarah Lawrence College taught by Prof. Janet Reilly.

**Readings**

The following books are required for this class and 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*
- Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International*
- Richard A. Wilson and Richard D. Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*

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

**Requirements**

- Come to every class meeting, having read the assigned material thoroughly and preferably more than once, and participate actively in our discussions (including virtual discussion with peers on other campuses)
- Write a reading précis and present your assigned reading in the corresponding seminar
- Attend and write a response paper to the colloquium "Truth, Freedom and the Academy"
- Working together with your colleagues, prepare and produce a mid-term dossier and a final action portfolio for your Scholars at Risk case

### **Attendance**

Syllabi should note that attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course.

In accordance with the Student Handbook, a failing grade for the course will be given if absences reach 30% of the course meetings. Students should consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Please note: This class is a seminar and is therefore dependent not only on you actually being in class but 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. Sometimes this will be done virtually with fellow students in classrooms in the USA. You are expected to engage in all of these activities; failure to do so will impact your class participation grade. It is crucial that you prepare adequately for each class and bring hard copies of the text(s) we will be discussing with you to the seminar meeting.

### **Assignments**

The **Critical Reading Précis and Presentation** asks each student to take responsibility for leading the class discussion of a critical reading. You should prepare a short (10 minute) presentation to the class going over the main argument(s) and methodology of your assigned reading including key points for debate or discussion, as well as setting out a question or set of questions that you feel the article raises for our ongoing discussion about human rights and humanitarian advocacy and/or our specific SAR project. The goals are both to help everyone in the class come to a richer understanding of the reading and to facilitate real and substantive reflection on its implications for our joint study and activism. On the day you are scheduled to do a presentation, you should also turn in a 1-2 page written précis laying out the main points and questions of the article. Please note that a written précis is *not* the same as your notes for a presentation, but a more polished written summary of the reading.

Additionally each student will prepare a **Response Paper (2-3 pages) to the academic freedom conference that will take place on the evening of Friday 27 September**. The paper should identify what you feel to be a key question or argument raised during the proceedings regarding academic freedom and show further reflection on this question or argument, by addressing it via a relevant example from your own context(s) and/or putting it in dialogue with our reading and discussions.

Your work specifically related to SAR will have two parts:

First, you will produce, in groups or as the class as a whole, a **Mid-Term Dossier** or summary of the situation you have chosen to work on (including timeline of events, relevant historical context, background on the individual's scholarship, and summary of current situation). This "dossier" serves a few functions. It can be given to NGOs, government officials, and others you might approach about the case. It can be submitted to SAR so that the organization can draw from it in their Universal Periodic Review or other reports. And it collects or acts as "clearinghouse" for information that could be relevant to your own "actions" in the second half of the class. You will present your dossier to me and to Scholars at Risk staff around mid-term.

Once you have created the dossier, you will then produce an action or set of actions related to your case and both document and reflect on these actions. 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-wide letter-writing parties,

which can be either writing postcards/notes to the scholar in prison or his/her family, or writing letters to authorities, seeking the scholar's release and/or improved prison conditions; 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; creating short films raising awareness about your efforts; compiling digital archives and visualizations; assisting SAR with formal submissions to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review; etc. In the last week of the semester, each student will hand in all written (and other) materials produced for the case and write a reflection paper (approx. 3 pp) 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: 20% (10% first half of course, 10% second half of course)

Précis and Presentation: 20%

Response Paper for Conference: 10%

SAR mid-term dossier: 20%

SAR final action portfolio: 30%

### **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 Sept 2: Introduction/What are Advocacy NGOs?

Reading:

- Keck and Sikkink, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics," *UNESCO International Social Studies Journal* 159, 1999 GC

Wednesday Sept 4:

Humanitarianism and Human Rights

Reading:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights GC
- Advocates for Human Rights, *Human Rights Tools for a Changing World*, 2015, Ch. 2  
"Human Rights Background": <http://TheAdvocatesForHumanRights.org/Change> GC

- Richard and Brown, Introduction, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, pp. 1-30

*Week Two*

Monday Sept 9

Guest speaker: Scholars at Risk staff member (via Blue Jeans 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
- Watch <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/introducing-scholars-risk/>

Weds Sept 11

Guest Speaker Dr. Aysuda Kölemen (Turkey)

Readings: TBC

*Week Three*

Monday September 16

Historical Campaigns and the Roots of Contemporary Advocacy I

Readings:

- Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, pp. 1-8 (Introduction), 85-163 (Chs 6-11)

Wednesday Sept 18

Historical Campaigns and the Roots of Contemporary Advocacy II

Readings:

- Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, pp. 167-296 (Chs 12-20)

*Week Four*

Monday September 25 No class (make-up=conference)

Weds Sept 25

Historical Campaigns and the Roots of Contemporary Advocacy III/Academic Freedom conference prep

Readings:

- Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, pp. 299-366 (Ch 21-23, Epilogue)
- Bystrom and Coundouriotis, "Humanitarianism's Way in the World" GC
- Stone, "A Brief History of Academic Freedom," pp. 1-9 in *Who's Afraid of Academic Freedom?* GC

Friday Sept 27 **ACADEMIC FREEDOM CONFERENCE @ ICI, 17:00-21:00** (details TBC)

*Week Five*

Monday September 30 **Conference response papers due**

Conference follow-up/work day

Wednesday Oct 2

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

*Week Six*

Monday Oct 7

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), 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 Oct 9

Work day

*Week Seven*

Monday Oct 14

The Ethics of Representing and Speaking for Others

Readings:

- Benthall, selections from "Images and Narratives of Disaster Relief," *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2010 [1993]), pp. 177-191 GC
- Mutua, "Savages-Victims-Saviors: the Metaphors of Human Rights," *Harvard International Law Journal* 42 (1), 2001, pp. 201-209 GC
- Dawes, "Storytelling (I)" in *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007), pp. 164-187 GC
- Gready, "Responsibility to the Story," *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2(2), 2010, pp. 177-190

Wednesday October 16

work day

*Week Eight*

Monday October 21

Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation

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, eds, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 245-264
- Bornstein, "The Report: A Strategy and a Nonprofit Public Good," *Humanity* 10(1), 2019, pp. 109-131 GC
- Cohen, "Government responses to human rights reports: claims, denials and counterclaims," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18 (3), 1996, 517-543
- De Waal, "Writing Human Rights and Getting it Wrong," *Boston Review* (2016) <<http://bostonreview.net/world/alex-de-waal-writing-human-rights>>

Wednesday October 23

work day

**Fall Break (Oct 28-Nov 1)**

*Week Nine*

Monday November 4

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 November 6 **Dossiers due/Meet with Sarah Lawrence class**

*Week Ten*

Monday November 11

Confronting Public Indifference

Readings:

- Thrall, Stecula and Sweet, "May we have your attention please? Human Rights NGOs and the problem of global communication," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 19(2), 2014, pp. 135-159
- Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams, Routledge, 1993, pp. 16-22 GC

Wednesday November 13 work day

*Week Eleven*

Monday November 18

Forensics and Counter-forensics

Readings:

- Moon, "Human Rights, Human Remains: forensic humanitarianism and the human rights of the dead," *UNESCO International Social Studies Journal* 2016, pp. 49-63 GC
- Weizman, "Introduction: Forensics," in *Forensics*, pp. 9-32 GC
- Weizman, "Open Verification," *e-flux* < <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification/> >

Wednesday November 20 work day

*Week Twelve*

Monday November 25

Case Study: TBC

Wednesday November 27 work day

*Week Thirteen*

Monday December 2

Case Study: Amnesty International

Readings:

- "The History of Amnesty International" GC
- Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006), Chs. 1 and 2

Wednesday December 4 work day

*Week Fourteen*

Monday December 9

Case Study: Amnesty International II

- Hopgood Chs 5, 6, 7

Wednesday December 11

Conclusion: Student Action Presentations

*Week Fifteen*

Monday December 16-Friday December 20 completion week: please note classes may be rescheduled in this period

**Action Portfolios due as PDFs by Monday December 16 at midnight**