

SE301 Making the Case: Human Rights Research and Reporting

Seminar Leader: Fred Abrahams
Email: f.abrahams@bard.berlin.edu
Times: Tue & Thu, 9-10:30am
Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

This workshop-oriented class teaches the practical skills of a human rights investigator: how to identify the subject of an investigation, design an investigative strategy, gather information, corroborate facts, and present findings. Topics include research design, interviewing victims and witnesses, interviewing officials, verifying information, conducting open source investigations, mitigating security risks, and promoting mental health. Students will develop their writing and presentation skills to communicate human rights findings in clear, concise and compelling ways. Guest speakers from the human rights movement will share their experiences and work.

Requirements

- Attend class having read or watched the assigned material.
- Participate in discussions.
- Submit assignments on time.
- A spirit of critical inquiry.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to always adhere to these standards. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

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. If additional absences are sought, please speak with the instructor in advance.

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. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments

Thoughtfully complete all written assignments as presented in the syllabus in a timely manner, plus the report review presentation.

Policy on Late Submission of Assignments

Assignments that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late submission, it must be handed in within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

1. Class Participation 30%

Students are expected to engage actively in class discussions and exercises by coming prepared, asking questions, offering comments, and contributing to a collaborative learning environment. Students should post a short comment on the readings, or respond to a classmate's comment, in Google classroom at least three times in the semester.

2. Report Review (10%): Students will assess one published human rights report, including: what the report covered, what methodologies it used, how it was organized, how it was presented, and what impact it had. In addition to a written assessment (5%), students will present their findings to class (5%).

3. Written Assignments (60%)

Various written assignments as explained in the syllabus.

Schedule

++ The class plan might change due to availability of outside speakers. Advance notice will be given. ++

Week One

Tuesday, September 3

Course introduction and syllabus review

Readings: [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

Thursday, September 5

Intro to Human Rights Research

- What is human rights research?
- Who does it?
- How to do it?
- What are the aims?
- What are the risks?

Readings: Two short to mid-length human rights reports; Forum-Asia, [Handbook on Fact-Finding and Documentation of Human Rights Violations](#), chapter 1; HURIDOCS, [What is Documentation](#), chaps 1-4.

Week Two

Tuesday, September 10

Human Rights Violations

- What is a violation?
- Who is a violator?

Readings: 2 human rights reports

Thursday, September 12

Human Rights Investigations

- What to investigate
- How to investigate
- Project design

Readings: 2 human rights reports; [Handbook on Fact-Finding and Documentation of Human Rights Violations](#), chapter 2; Dermot Groome, *Handbook of Human Rights Investigation*, chapter 2; HURIDOCS, [What is Documentation](#), chapters 5-9.

Week Three

Tuesday, September 17

Human Rights Interviews I

- Whom to interview
- How to interview
 - Setting
 - Informed Consent

Readings: UN OHCHR, [Manual on Human Rights Monitoring – chapter 11 on interviews](#).

Thursday, September 19

Human Rights Interviews II

- Fact-finding
- Corroboration

Readings: Diane Orentlicher, *Bearing Witness: The Art and Science of Human Rights Fact-Finding*; [Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death \(2016\)](#), chapter IV, section C and chapter V, section B.

Assignment due: Whom to interview exercise

Week Four

Tuesday, September 24

Human Rights Interviews III

- Mock interview (victim or witness)

Readings: Interview scenario

Assignment due: Interview questionnaire

Thursday, September 26

Human Rights Interviews IV

- Special groups: children, older people, people with disabilities
- Survivors of trauma

Readings: [WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies](#) and [Murad Code on the Conduct of Documenting Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#).

Week Five

Tuesday, October 1

Human Rights Interviews V

- Interviewing Officials
- Mock interview

Readings: Dermot Groome, *Handbook of Human Rights Investigation*, chapter 8.

Thursday, October 3 – Federal Holiday

Week Six

Tuesday, October 8

Human Rights Interviews VI

- Working with interpreters
- Recording and taking notes
- Remote interviews

Readings: [IICI Guidelines on Remote Interviews](#)

Thursday, October 10

Documenting Violations against Women

- Discrimination
- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence
- Gender-sensitive Research

Readings: Agnès Callamard, [A Methodology for Gender-Sensitive Research](#); OHCHR, [Integrating a Gender Perspective into Human Rights Investigations](#); WHO, [Researching Violence Against Women](#).

Week Seven

Tuesday, October 15

Documenting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Violations

Readings: 2 ESC human rights reports; *The Transformation of Human Rights Fact-Finding*, chapter 18

Thursday, October 17

Security I – Physical

Reading: Frontline Defenders, [Workbook on Security](#)

Week Eight – Fall Break

Week Nine

Tuesday, October 29

Open Source Investigations I

- Intro
- Discovery
- Preservation

Readings: Digital Witness, chapters 1-2; [Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations](#).

Thursday, October 31

Open Source Investigations II

- Verification
- Presentation

Readings: Digital Witness, chapter 9; Public Interest Advocacy Center and Berkeley Human Rights Center, [Investigating Perpetrators](#).

Week Ten

Tuesday, November 5

Other Digital Methods

- Remote sensing
- Data analysis

Readings: Digital Witness, chapters 10 and 14; Transformation of Human Rights Fact-Finding, chapter 17.

Thursday, November 7

Security II – Digital

Readings: Electronic Frontier Foundation, [Digital Security Plan](#)

Week Eleven

Tuesday, November 12

Speaker from human rights organization

Readings: TBD

Thursday, November 14

Writing for Human Rights I

- Types of reports
- Credible, clear and compelling reports
- Using testimony
- Sourcing
- Methodology sections
- Crafting recommendations

Readings: 2 human rights reports

Week Twelve

Tuesday, November 19

Writing for Human Rights II

- The press release
- Private and public letters

Readings: 2 human rights reports

Assignment due: A methodology section

Thursday, November 21

The Ethics of Human Rights Reporting

Readings: Digital Witness, chapter 11; Transformation of Human Rights Fact-Finding, chapters 4 and 7.

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, November 26

Stress and Resilience

- The hazards of human rights work
- Vicarious trauma
- Self-care

Readings: Digital Witness, chapter 12; Meg Satterthwaite, [Evidence of Trauma: the Impact of Human Rights Work on Advocates](#); First Draft News, [Journalism and Vicarious Trauma](#)

Thursday, November 28

Speaker from human rights organization

Readings: TBD

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, December 3

Report presentations

Thursday, December 5

Report presentations

Week Fifteen

Tuesday, December 10

Report presentations

Thursday, December 12

Report presentations

Week Sixteen – Completion Week

Visit to Berlin-based human rights organization