

SE301 Making the Case: Human Rights Research and Reporting

Seminar Leader: Fred Abrahams
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Times: Tue & Thu, 9-10:30am
Office Hours: after class; or 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.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

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.

Assessment

All assignments and their due dates are listed in the syllabus

Assignments

Thoughtfully and thoroughly complete all 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 essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. 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 essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. 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, the methodologies it used, how it was organized and presented, and the impact it had. Students will submit a written assessment (5%) and present their findings to class (5%).

3. Written Assignments (60%)

Various written assignments as explained in the syllabus.

Schedule

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

Week One

Tuesday, September 1

Course introduction and syllabus review

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

Thursday, September 3

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 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 8

Human Rights Violations

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

Readings: 2 human rights reports

Thursday, September 10

Human Rights Investigations

- What to investigate
- Project selection

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 15

Project design

- The research plan

Assignment I: Based on a scenario, prepare a research plan – due Sept 22

Thursday, September 17

Sources of data

- The investigative web

Readings: Two human rights reports

Week Four

Tuesday, September 22

Human Rights Interviews I

- Whom to interview
- How to interview
- Informed Consent

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

Assignment II: Based on scenario, prepare an interview question guide – due September 28

Thursday, September 24

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.

Week Five

Tuesday, September 28

Human Rights Interviews III

- Mock interview (victim or witness)

Readings: Interview scenario

Thursday, October 1

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 Cf Documenting Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#).

Week Six

Tuesday, October 6

Human Rights Interviews V

- Interviewing Officials
- Mock interview

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

Assignment III: questions for officials – due Oct 13

Thursday, October 8

Human Rights Interviews VI

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

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

Week Seven

Tuesday, October 13

Open Source Research I

- Intro
- Discovery
- Preservation

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

Thursday, October 14

Open Source Research II

- Verification
- Presentation

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

Week Eight – Fall Break

Week Nine

Tuesday, October 27

Other Digital Methods

- Remote sensing
- Data analysis

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

Thursday, October 29

Documenting Violations against Women

- Discrimination
- Domestic violence
- Sexual violence
- Gender-aware 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 Ten

Tuesday, November 3

Documenting Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Readings: 2 ESC human rights reports; The Transformation of Human Rights Fact-Finding, chapter 18; OHCHR Manual on Human Rights Monitoring, [Chapter 20](#).

Thursday, November 5

Security I – Physical

- Profile
- Preparation
- Plans
- Policies

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

Week Eleven

Tuesday, November 10

Security II – Digital

- Risks
- Tools and Techniques

Readings: Amnesty International, [The Pegasus Project](#); Electronic Frontier Foundation, [Digital Security Plan](#); Tactical Tech, [Security in a Box](#).

Thursday, November 11

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

Assignment IV: Write a methodology section – due Nov 19.

Week Twelve

Tuesday, November 17

Writing for Human Rights II

- Press releases
- Private and public letters

Readings: 2 human rights reports

Thursday, November 19

Guest Speaker

Readings: TBD

Week Thirteen

Tuesday, November 24

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 26

Guest speaker

Readings: TBD

Week Fourteen

Tuesday, December 1

Report presentations

Thursday, December 3

Report presentations

Week Fifteen

Tuesday, December 8

Report presentations

Thursday, December 10

Report presentations

Week Sixteen – Completion Week