Nearly every element of human rights is the subject of significant controversy, whether in the academy or in public discourse. Human rights as an academic subject tends to transcend the conventional disciplinary boundaries found in the social sciences and humanities. Even when considered more narrowly in the context of a single field - politics - human rights implicates core concerns within differing subfields, including international relations, political theory, and comparative politics. More generally, human rights often seems, even to its advocates, to be a galling example of the gap between rhetoric and reality. To others, the worth of human rights, or even the existence of human rights, are open questions, and the substance of human rights is contested by those that otherwise agree in general terms about their worth and existence.

There are, then, many contested questions that must be faced by those interested in human rights. This course does not seek to settle them once and for all. This course does seek to arm students with as much knowledge as possible, to allow them to think independently about these questions. This course addresses two main topics, corresponding to the two halves of the course. The first concerns the content and character of human rights. The second concerns the possibility of enforcement of human rights through international institutions. The texts for this course have been ordered by the George Mason Bookstore. Other readings on this syllabus will be available either through the course website or through the George Mason Library Website. Books available at the bookstore:


**Course Requirements:**

1) Attendance to class and well-informed participation in class. Mondays will typically be devoted to lectures, and Wednesdays will be more balanced between lecture and discussion. Discussion will be driven by your questions about the material. In addition, I expect members of the class to answer questions even during lecture, so be prepared to speak about the readings in each class.
2) Three papers. The first paper will be 900-1100 words long, and will be due February 10. The second and third papers will be 1800-2200 words each, and will be due March 14 and April 20. You will receive topics two weeks before the due date.
3) Weekly Assignments. A brief assignment will be handed out each Wednesday, focused on the readings assigned for the following week, to be completed and turned in the following Monday at the beginning of class.
4) Final Exam. The final exam is scheduled for the final exam period. The exam will consist of four essays, of equal weight for the purposes of grading. One essay will address specifically the material treated in the last two weeks of the course. The final exam will be closed-book, with no notes allowed.
Syllabus Draft: 1/15/16

Course Schedule:

Week One: Course Introduction: Locke, Political Rights, and Revolution
What are rights? What is the character of natural right, and what rights do we retain after we leave the state of nature, according to Locke? What is at stake in thinking of rights as political rights, or natural rights? How do these modes of thinking about rights inform our conception of human rights?

- **Wednesday, January 20 Lecture:** Locke, Political Rights, and Revolution.

Week One Reading Assignments:
- *Declaration of Independence*.

Week Two: Kantian Ethics and Natural Law: Two Foundations in Advance of Human Rights
Debates about human rights are often grounded in debates about moral philosophy. What is the categorical imperative, as described by Kant, and why might one see an iteration of the categorical imperative as foundational for human rights? What, if anything, is authoritative about nature, such that one might think about rights in terms of ‘natural law’?

- **Lecture, Monday, January 25:** Kantian Ethics as a Foundation for Human Rights.
- **Lecture, Wednesday, January 27:** Natural Law: Can Nature Tell Us How To Live?

Week Two Reading Assignments:
- Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*.
- Forsythe, chapter one.
- Moyn, prologue and chapter one.

Week Three: Growing Pains: Human Rights in the Mid-20th Century
What is the place of politics in our conception of human rights? Does politics sustain human rights, or threaten to usurp the priority of human rights? Is national self-determination best thought of in terms of human rights? If so, how – if not, why not?

- **Lecture, Monday, February 1:** Without the Sword: Human Rights in the Absence of Politics
- **Lecture, Wednesday, February 3:** Human Rights, Self-Determination, and the Politics of Decolonization

Week Three Reading Assignments:
- Moyn, chapters two and three.

Week Four: Theories of Human Rights after 1948
Should human rights be conceived with respect to what is possible, or with respect to what is ideal? What does the capabilities approach add to our understanding of human rights? What do the capabilities share in common, beyond the mere term ‘capability’?
o **Lecture, Monday, February 8:** What Do We *Mean* by Human Rights? Two Important Distinctions.

o **Lecture, Wednesday, February 10:** Human Rights and Human Development.

### Week Four Reading Assignments:
- Forsythe, chapter two.

### Week Five: Poverty and Human Rights
In what sense, if at all, is severe poverty a human rights violation? What duties fall upon those in a position to render aid, if we presume that severe poverty is a human rights violation?

- **Lecture, Monday, February 15:** Human Rights and Global Distributive Justice
- **Lecture, Wednesday, February 17:** Are Corporations Responsible for Fostering Human Rights?

### Week Five Reading Assignments:
- Forsythe, chapter eight.

### Week Six: Critical Approaches to Human Rights
How (if at all) is the public/private distinction relevant to human rights? Can the distinction be morally or philosophically justified? Is moral philosophy even the right mode of justification? How stable (or useful) is philosophy as a ground for human rights? Are there alternatives?

- **Lecture, Monday, February 22:** Is the Public-Private Distinction Harmful to Human Rights?
- **Lecture, Wednesday, February 24:** Whither Moral Philosophy? Identity, Sentimentality, and Human Rights.

### Week Six Reading Assignments:
**Week Seven: Human Rights and Foreign Policy**
Should states pursue human rights goals through their foreign policy? Would this be effective? Is it even possible? Or is it dangerous? Quite apart from ethical claims, separate from politics, is there a long-term congruence between values such as human rights and the national interest?

**Week Seven Reading Assignments:**
- Moyn, chapter four.
- Forsythe, chapter six.
  - **Lecture, Monday, February 29:** Human Rights During the Cold War: When Did Human Rights Become Human Rights?
  - **Lecture, Wednesday, March 2:** Stanley Hoffmann: "Moving Beyond Machiavellian Statecraft."

**Week Eight: Human Rights and International Institutions**
What is the role of the United Nations in fostering human rights, and how has it changed? Why has criminal justice seemed to offer a model for enforcing human rights, and what difficulties emerge with the use of this model? What alternatives exist to the criminal justice model?

- **Lecture, Monday, March 14:** International Law and International Institutions
- **Lecture, Wednesday, March 16:** NGO's: Mobilizing Public Opinion

**Week Eight Reading Assignments:**
- Moyn, chapter five.
- Forsythe, chapters three, four, five, and seven.

**Week Nine: Human Rights in Latin America during and after the Cold War**
How did the end of the Cold War shape American and Soviet behavior in Latin America? How did the rise of non-state actors shape the observance of human rights in the last half of the 20th century in Latin America?

- **Lecture, Monday, March 21:** Human Rights Violations in the Southern Cone and Central America
- **Lecture, Wednesday, March 23:** Fighting Back: Institutions Fostering Human Rights in Latin America

**Week Nine Reading Assignments:**
Week Ten: Human Rights and the Asian Values Debate
What are the “deep, underlying values” identified by Taylor as shared among cultures? Do you believe these values can serve as the ground for a conception of human rights? Is the moral primacy of the individual as essential element of human rights?

- Lecture, Monday, March 28: Can Universal Conceptions of Human Rights Account for Culture?
- Lecture, Wednesday, March 30: What Were The Students Protesting in Tiananmen Square?

Week Ten Reading Assignments:
- Xiorong Li, “Asian Values’ and the Universality of Human Rights,” in Hayden, 397-408.
- Ezra Vogel, Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China (HUP, 2011):
  - "Beijing Spring, April 15–May 17, 1989" (chapter 20, 595-615).

Week Eleven: Politics and International Intervention in Rwanda and Somalia
How did the history and geography of each of these countries shape their respective human rights crises? What is the significance of the use of chapter VII of the UN Charter in the international interventions in Rwanda and Somalia? What do these crises reveal about the ability of UNSC intervention to foster human rights?

- Lecture, Monday, April 4: Somalia and the Perils of Intervention.
- Lecture, Wednesday, April 6: Rwanda and the Perils of Avoiding Intervention.

Week Eleven Reading Assignments:
- Samantha Power, “Bystanders to Genocide”, Atlantic Monthly, September 2001

Week Twelve: Human Rights, the U.N., and the Former Yugoslavia
What is meant by ‘the principle of self-determination’? What is at stake in thinking of rights in terms of peoples? What alternative loci are there for rights, other than peoples? More generally, what is the status of group rights?

- Lecture, Wednesday, April 13: Rights of Peoples and Rights of Groups: Do They Augment or Detract From Human Rights?
Week Twelve Reading Assignments:

Week Thirteen: Kosovo: Lessons Learned?
What was the legal status of the intervention in Kosovo? What is at stake in the distinction between legality and legitimacy? How does increasing acceptance of the legitimacy of human rights claims shape our ideas about conventional state sovereignty?

- Lecture, Monday, April 18: Assessing the Morality of the Kosovo Intervention
- Lecture, Wednesday, April 20: Legality and Legitimacy

Week Thirteen Reading Assignments:
- Moyn, epilogue.

Week Fourteen: The Responsibility to Protect
How do the authors of Responsibility to Protect define sovereignty? What are the implications of this definition for human rights? If adopted in full by the international community, how, specifically, would the Responsibility to Protect help foster the protection of human rights?

- Lecture, Monday, April 25: Sovereignty and Non-Intervention: Enduring Truths or Archaic Norms?
- Lecture, Wednesday, April 27: R2P as Recapitulation of the Just War Ethic.

Week Fourteen Reading Assignments:
- Wednesday, April 27: Forsythe, chapter nine.

Week Fifteen: The Syrian Crisis
How will the next generation of human rights scholars analyze recent events in Syria? How would the Responsibility to Protect doctrine shape decisions about intervention in Syria?

- Lecture, Wednesday, May 2: The Syrian Crisis: What is to be Done?
Week Fifteen Reading Assignments:

Grading Breakdown:
Class Participation and Weekly Assignments: 10%
Paper One: 10%
Paper Two: 20%
Paper Three: 20%
Final Exam: 40%

**Academic Ethics:** GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

**Electronic Devices:** Laptops and similar devices may be used for taking notes or for consulting assigned texts in electronic format. Please do not use cellular phones or similar devices in the classroom.

**Email:** Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use it to communicate with their department and other administrative units, and check it regularly for important university information including messages related to this class.

**Disability resources:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services at 703.993.2474 or ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

**Important deadlines for this semester:** Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.
Last Day to Add: January 26, 2016
Last Day to Drop: February 19, 2016
After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the Dean and is only allowed for non-academic reasons.