

## RC Core 100.004 Human Rights Activism

Fall, 2011

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Tu Th 3-5 PM 28 Tyler

Office hours by appointment

My RC office: 120 Tyler

### Required Reading/Watching:

**Texts/YouTube Videos** on our C-TOOLS SITE under “Resources”

*Please bring either your laptop or a print-out of the assigned texts to class each day. See “Electronics Policy” below.*

### Books:

Glendon (2001) *A World Made New*

Robinson (2001) *The Debt*

Yunis: *Banker to the Poor*

Beah (2007) *Long Way Gone*

### Films (to be shown in class)

Banished (Sept. 20)

Cut from Different Cloth (Oct. 6)

Hecho in Los Angeles (Oct. 13)

Rabbit-Proof Fence (Oct. 27/Nov. 1)

### Introduction

In this course you will learn about violations of human rights that occur around the world, including our own country. We will look at human rights documents ratified by the United Nations, read about the international meetings convened by Eleanor Roosevelt that hammered out the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, analyze case studies of human rights abuses from various countries, and consider questions that are currently debated in the human rights community: How are human rights defined? Whose definition gets heard? How should individuals and nations be held accountable for human rights violations? What happens when human rights and culture collide? What does it mean to be an ally to people whose human rights have been abused? How can we help hold governments accountable for human rights violations in our own country and around the world? Readings, discussion, writing, group projects, videos, guest speakers, and activism will be our learning tools. You will actively participate in a human rights organization of your choice and integrate activism with classroom learning. You will learn to use writing as a tool of activism as well as a way to consider intellectual questions, express educated opinions, and use your creativity and skill to honor the human beings whose rights need protection. The instructor is a member of U-M’s Human Rights Consortium, a former Chair of the Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission, and an activist on human rights issues.

## Course Goals

- To become familiar with the history of the idea of human rights and the major human rights documents and institutions
- To learn about a variety of human rights violations in the U.S. and other countries
- To understand some of the opportunities and limitations of human rights enforcement
- To express informed opinions about some of the controversies in the field of human rights
- To actively participate in an on-campus human rights organization
- To practice college level writing in forms that are useful in human rights activism

## Writing Assignments

In each assignment you will learn a specific type of writing that is useful in human rights activism while at the same time, practice essential skills in college writing: clarity, specificity, getting to the point, addressing an audience, constructing an effective argument, researching and documenting your facts, using personal appeals, and so on.

1. Narrative/Testimony (3-4 pages, in two or more drafts). A detailed, personal description of how you came to be interested in human rights activism. You may write in the first or third person.
2. Journals (2-3 typed pages). Topics will be assigned. Please consider that I am your audience -- a real person interested in your ideas and insights. Journal entries should be carefully organized and edited for clarity, insight, depth, and of course, grammar.
3. Letter to the Editor (two or three paragraphs on a carefully researched HR issue of your choice, for a specific audience and venue that you define (example: Michigan Daily; your hometown newspaper, etc.)
4. Letter to a Government Official (one page in two or more drafts) on a HR issue of your choice. I encourage you to actually send this letter, so both the content of your letter and the recipient's stand on the issue must be carefully researched. Many activist websites have "canned" letters that you can just sign and send. Let's use these as models, but write our own letters from scratch.
5. Speech (4-5 pages in two or more drafts.) A formal, written, carefully researched speech on a current HR issue for a specific audience (for example: Seniors at your former high school; adults at your religious institution; potential donors to a HR cause; RC students who think fighting for human rights is "too idealistic", etc.)
6. Op-Ed piece (600-750 words in two or more drafts) on a HR issue that we have discussed in the course. An "op-ed" means an opinion piece that appears opposite the editorial page in a newspaper. Newspapers publish op-eds from established columnists or local people, including college students, who write well on compelling issues. Op-eds always have a specified length, and to be submitted, must be accompanied by your name, address, and contact phone number.
7. Reflection (2-3 pages, one draft). Your final piece of writing is an account of your journey through this course: what you learned, how you learned it, what challenged you, what questions remain, etc.

### **Individual Conferences**

You are REQUIRED to schedule two individual writing conferences with me at points in the semester when talking about your writing and ideas will be the most helpful to you. The first conference should happen before the Fall Study Break, and the second should come before Thanksgiving. You are very welcome to schedule additional conferences with me at any time if you like. Remember to bring a hard copy of the piece of writing you want to work on.

### **Assessment of writing assignments**

Your writing assignments will not be graded in the usual way; I feel that letter grades often stifle the critical thinking, creativity and risk-taking that are necessary to the writing process. Instead, I will comment extensively on your work and talk to you about it in conference. To ensure your careful reading and thinking about the course texts and discussions as well as your attention to the writing process, I will mark your pieces with ++ (you've impressed me); + (okay, but some deeper thinking, more accurate editing, and/or more significant details would improve it); or RW – a mandatory re-write after careful consideration of my comments and an individual writing conference if we both think it would be helpful. Lots of good writers get RWs, so don't be discouraged if you do. You may endlessly revise (and I will endlessly comment on) assignments marked RW or +. Please don't revise your ++ assignments, despite the fact that I will give you additional questions and comments to think about.

### **Group Presentations**

At the end of September you will join a small group and begin planning a class presentation of a current human rights issue of your group's choice. Each presentation will last about 45 minutes, and will include:

- A brief explanation of the human rights issue and how it affects a specific group of people
- An analysis of the causes of the abuse
- A discussion of a controversial question about the issue (Example 1: In an attempt to eliminate modern-day slavery in the Sudan, people have been paid to bring slaves to safety. Does this practice help emancipation or does it encourage slavery to continue? Example 2: Who is at fault for the trafficking of Thai children – the parents who accept payment for their daughters; people from the US, Europe, and wealthy Asian countries who engage in “sexual tourism;” the system of global capitalism that commodifies everything, including human bodies; all three; or none of the above?)
- Discussion of what is being done and/or should be done about the human rights abuse

Excellent presentations will **look at the issues from the point of view of the people affected by them**, and use such learning tools as:

- videos and/or photos that give us a concrete idea of the people and culture where the abuse is occurring
- an experiential activity for the class to participate in and learn from

- a Q&A period in which group members answer questions from the rest of the class

*Please practice your presentation together and test all electronics before class. Have a plan B in case of technological glitches. Technology (projector, DVD, VHS, etc.) must be ordered well in advance (see me). I encourage you to make these presentations educational, inspirational, and above all, fun. Food that goes with your theme, interesting activities, unique modes of presentation, perhaps a visitor who can give a brief, first-hand account, etc. will help make your issue memorable.*

### **Community Action**

By the third week of the course you should be involved in a campus human rights organization of your choice (see below). You will be asked to report to the class on your organization at various points in the semester, telling us what they are doing, your specific contribution to the organization, and any questions or issues that have come up for you regarding the way the group works, the activities they sponsor, the issues they address (or don't address), etc. The starred (\*\*/\*\*) organizations below have been recommended to you by previous HR students. Check them out on U-M's "Maize Pages" <http://studentorgs.umich.edu/maize> If you find another HR organization you wish to join for the purposes of the course, please ask me first.

### **Some UM Student Human Rights Groups:**

\*\*Human Rights Through Education (HRTE)

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004072>

\*\*Migrant and Immigrant Rights Awareness (MIRA)

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004023>

\*\*Students Organizing for Labor and Economic Equality (SOLE)

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004199>

\*\*The-f-word (feminism)

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004939>

\*\*ATRAVES at the University of Michigan (health in a Nicaraguan *barrio*)

<http://hosted.verticalresponse.com/386635/b14a63e62b/1615000809/1f0c841355/>

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10006065>

\*Amnesty International at the University of Michigan

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10003649>

\*ACLU American Civil Liberties Union University of Michigan Undergraduate Chapter

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004018>

Brewing Hope (Fair Trade coffee)

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004003>

Habitat for Humanity at the University of Michigan

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004343>

ONE Campaign (to eliminate world poverty)

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004642>

Environmental Action

<http://studentorgs.umich.edu/group/10004360>

## **Portfolios**

On the last day of class you will hand in a “portfolio” – that is, a cardboard or three ring binder – containing ALL the drafts of ALL the writing you have done in this course. Submitting all your work together will help you to reflect on your progress as a writer and thinker this semester, and to see, in tangible form, the amount of work you have put into the course. This display of your writing will also help me evaluate and grade your work as a whole.

## **Grading**

Your grade and RC evaluation will be based on the quality and depth of your writing and thinking, your attendance and involvement in class, the quantity and quality of your contributions to class discussion and your group project, and your active participation in a human rights organization of your choice.

*To get an A in the class, your writing and attention to feedback must be outstanding; your frequent additions to class discussion must be inclusive of your peers and helpful in moving the conversation forward; your attendance in class and at two mandatory individual conferences must be stellar, your attitude and response to criticism must be mature; and your pro-active engagement in your group presentation and a campus human rights organization must be substantial.*

## **Plagiarism**

This unusual “sin” is taken very seriously at U-M. In the grand scheme of things (human rights abuses; WWII) it is minor, but in fact, plagiarism can cause you to fail a class or, in the worst case scenario, result in your dismissal from the University. Please don’t be tempted to cut and paste paragraphs from the Internet, copy stuff from books, hand in essays you’ve written for another course, or accept your mom’s re-write of your pieces – for any class. Plagiarism is surprisingly easy to detect without any special software. I’d rather see poor writing than suspicious passages. For details about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please ask me in conference and/or see “A Note on Plagiarism” written by and for the U-M English Department:

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/advising/plagNote.asp>

## **Electronics Policy**

In keeping with the professional nature of our classroom, your laptop must be used solely for class-related activities: taking notes, accessing on-line materials that we are discussing in class, or looking up a fact or example that adds to class discussion. Social media, i-pods and other personal electronic devices must remain off while class is in session. During the break, of course, you may phone, text, e-mail and check Facebook to your heart’s content.

## **Attendance Policy**

It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet at the beginning of every class. This is my only record of your attendance. Because all classes are discussion-intensive, attendance and active participation are a must. Arrival no later than ten minutes past the hour is expected. More than two absences (with the exception of religious holidays)

and/or continual late arrival may result in a significant lowering of your grade. Please try to inform me by e-mail if you know you will be absent. I never require written excuses; if illness or an emergency significantly inhibit your participation, be sure to let me know what's happening. *Whenever you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out from other class members what happened in class, what texts were assigned, what announcements were made, etc. Please do not ask me for this information.*

### **Calendar**

*Any changes, as well as assignments for the next week (such as additional reading, reading journal assignments, etc.) will be written on the board at the beginning of class.*

Tues. Sept. 6 Introduction and overview of course.

Thurs. Sept. 8 State of the world's human rights. Discussion: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Start Narrative/Testimony.

Tues. Sept. 13 The (relatively) new idea of human rights. Discussion: first half of Glendon: *A World Made New*.

Thurs. Sept. 15 Discussion: second half of *A World Made New*.

**Due:** First Draft Narrative/Testimony. Peer Review

Tues. Sept. 20 The right to basic physical, social and psychological needs – U.S. Video: *Banished*.

Thurs. Sept. 22 The right to basic needs – U.S. continued. Discussion: *The Debt*.

**Due:** Second Draft Narrative/Testimony

Tues. Sept. 27 The right to basic needs – U.S. – continued. Discussion: Reparations for Native Americans.

Thurs. Sept 29. The right to basic needs – Global South. Form groups for class presentations

Tues. Oct. 4 The right to basic needs – Global South, cont. Discussion: *Banker to the Poor*.

Thurs. Oct. 6 Women's rights. Video: *Cut from different cloth*

Tues. Oct. 11 Women's rights, continued. NGOs for Afghan Women's Rights. Writing Letters to the Editor and government officials.

Thurs. Oct. 13 Right to fair wages and working conditions. Video: *Hecho in L.A.*

**Due:** First Draft: Letter to Government Official and Letter to the Editor

## FALL BREAK

Thurs. Oct. 20 NO CLASS (I will be at a conference) Please use the time to meet with your group to plan your class presentation.

Tues. Oct. 25 Right to fair wages and working conditions. Equal Exchange.

**Due:** Second Draft: Letter to Government Official and Letter to the Editor

Thurs. Oct. 27 Rights of Indigenous Peoples. First half of video, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

Tues. Nov. 1 Rights of Indigenous Peoples, cont. Second half of video: *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Discussion, Indigenous Rights document.

Thurs. Nov. 3 Student Presentations (Groups 1 and 2)

Tues. Nov. 8 Student Presentations, cont. (Groups 3 and 4)

Thurs. Nov. 10 Rights of the child. Discussion: *Long Way Gone*

Tues. Nov. 15 Rights of the child, cont. Causes of child soldier problem

Thurs. Nov. 17 Defending human rights. Speech writing for a peer.

Tues. Nov. 22 **Due:** First Draft: Speech. Peer Review

## THANKSGIVING BREAK

Tues. Nov. 29 Classes and careers in human rights. Writing an Op-Ed.

**DUE:** Second Draft of Speech.

Thurs. Dec.1 **Due:** First draft Op-Ed. Peer Review

Tues. Dec. 6 Oral presentations (Speeches)

Thurs, Dec. 8 More oral presentations

**Due:** Second Draft of Op-Ed.

Tues. Dec. 13 End of semester celebration!

**DUE:** Portfolios. (Your end-of-semester reflection should be included in your portfolio)