

Saint Mary's University
Department of Political Science
POLI 4510.1(2), Winter 2012

HONOURS SEMINAR: THEORIZING HUMAN RIGHTS

Course Director: Dr. S. Gaon
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Class Time: Thursday 4:00-6:30 pm.
Class Location: Atrium 217

University Class Cancellation HOTLINE: 491-6263

Office hours:

Tues & Weds. 3:00 - 6:00 pm (OR BY APPOINTMENT)

Course Description and Objective:

The Honours Seminar is an upper level, 3-credit course that aims to provide honours students with advanced skills in and exposure to one of the sub-fields of the discipline of Political Science. In this year's seminar, which is in the field of political theory, we will focus on what Hannah Arendt first identified as the theoretical and political "perplexities" of human rights. While human rights are understood as general and universal – as transcending the political community and as naming the essence of "Man" as such – they are only effective when they are identified in particular legal terms that are specific to concrete political units. For if universal human rights are not politically institutionalized, how can they be called "rights"? On the other hand, if the essence of human nature must be interpreted through particular cultural frames before it can be mobilized legally, then in what sense are these rights truly "universal"? From this point of view, both the concept of "rights" and the concept of the "human" merit critical attention. The objective of this course is to provide upper level students with increased critical reading and argumentative writing skills, to familiarize you closely with the writers and concepts being studied, and to introduce you to an advanced level of academic scholarship.

Required Material:

- CUSTOM COURSE KIT. Call Kinko's 423-5500 to order your copy in advance of pick up. (Kinko's is located at 1469 Brenton Street, off Spring Garden Road.)

Format Assignment & Grading:

The class meets once a week on Thursday afternoons. Class time will typically be taken up with lectures by the instructor, seminar discussions and student presentations. To ensure that classes are as productive as possible for all participants, students are expected to arrive fully prepared to discuss the required readings. Regular attendance and the completion of all assignments are mandatory for a passing grade. This course is both reading and writing intensive.

IF YOU ARE UNSURE HOW TO DOCUMENT YOUR WORK, OR IF AT ANY POINT YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS AT ALL ABOUT LECTURES, ISSUES DISCUSSED IN CLASS, OR ASSIGNMENT EXPECTATIONS, PLEASE DO CONSULT WITH ME – AFTER CLASS, BY PHONE, BY EMAIL OR DURING REGULAR OFFICE HOURS. I WILL DO MY UTMOST TO RESPOND PROMPTLY TO YOUR CONCERNS.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

- Four critical response papers (15% each) 60%
- Final essay 30%
(includes 5% for oral presentations)
- Participation & preparedness 10%

Critical response papers: You are required to present and submit four critical responses to required readings during the term. Detailed assignment instructions and due dates will be determined in class. Each response must be 750-1000 (maximum) words (roughly 2-3 pages). Each week students writing on the assigned text will provide brief, informal presentations of their responses. Please note: length requirements *will* be enforced.

Any assignment that lacks adequate documentation, and/or that strays unreasonably beyond the length requirements in either direction, will be penalized.

Final Essay: At the end of the term each student will prepare a 2000-2500 word essay (roughly 6-8 pages) on an assigned topic. These assignments are due on Tuesday April 3rd, but students will be given an opportunity to present their draft essay theses informally in class for discussion and feedback. These round-table discussions will take place on March 22nd. Oral presentations of draft essays are worth up to 5% of the grade for the paper.

Handing in Papers:

- Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the specified date.
- All papers must include a COVER PAGE with your NAME, the COURSE SPECIFICATIONS, an assignment TITLE, and a final WORD COUNT (**NB.** “Assignment #1” is *not* an adequate title).
- All assignments must be TYPED, DOUBLE-SPACED, STAPLED, and in 12-POINT FONT with one inch MARGINS all around (double-sided printing *is* encouraged).
- You are expected to follow the Departmental APA a STYLE GUIDE consistently for all citations, references and footnotes or endnotes, and you must provide a full bibliographical entry for every resource that has been used.
- KEEP COPIES of all your work. If your assignment is lost or misplaced, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot immediately produce a copy upon request.

Late Policy: Late papers will be *not* be accepted except in extreme and documented cases. Requests for extensions **must** be submitted in advance of the due date and must be accompanied by appropriate documentation.

Participation: Active participation (including attendance) in seminars is essential. Participation marks of up to 10% of the final grade will be based on the quality of your preparedness for class and your engagement in and contributions to class discussion. In order to receive full marks for this component of the grade, students should be prepared to contribute meaningfully and regularly to class discussion.

COURSE OVERVIEW
(READINGS AND DATES *MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE*)

JANUARY 5: Introduction to course and assignments

JANUARY 12: Anthony Pagden, “Human Rights, Natural Rights, and Europe’s Imperial Legacy.”

JANUARY 19: Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question.”

JANUARY 26: Wendy Brown, “Rights and Losses” (from *States of Injury* Ch. 5).

FEBRUARY 2: Claude Lefort, “Politics and Human Rights” (from *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, Ch.7).

FEBRUARY 9: Hannah Arendt, “The End of the Rights of Man and the Decline of the Nation State” (from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Ch. 9)

FEBRUARY 16: Daniel Heller-Roazen, “Justifying Humanity” (from *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations*, Ch. 13). “You Don’t Like the Truth: Four days inside Guantanamo.”

FEBRUARY 20-25: READING WEEK (no classes)

MARCH 1: Michel Foucault, “Right of Death and Power over Life.” (From *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, Part 5).

MARCH 8: Giorgio Agamben, “Introduction,” “The Politicization of Life,” and “Biopolitics and the Rights of Man” (from *Homo Sacer*, pp. 1-12; 119-135).

MARCH 15: Jacques Rancière, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?”

MARCH 22: Slavoj Žižek, “Against Human Rights.” Presentations of draft papers/ Round-table discussions. **Draft essays due (for oral presentation).**

MARCH 29: Class cancelled for honours theses presentations event

Tuesday April 3: Final essays are due at 12:00pm (noon) in the Departmental Office (MN 406).

A NOTE ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility are the five pillars of academic integrity at Saint Mary's University. Any form of dishonesty, cheating, falsification or plagiarism is considered an extremely serious academic offence and will not be tolerated in this course. Students found to have committed an act of plagiarism or to have cheated will automatically and without consultation receive an 'F' and, upon final determination, a notification of plagiarism may be added to the student's official file by the Registrar's Office as per University regulations.

Reference to or appropriation of any other person's work, regardless of whether it is directly quoted or is merely paraphrased, must be acknowledged by proper citation. When in doubt, seek the advice of the instructor before submitting the work. Submission of the same piece of work for credit in more than one course is also not permitted. (Adapted from the Saint Mary's University, *Academic Calendar*, 2011-12, pp.21-22).

It is the responsibility of each student to be aware of what constitutes academic fraud and plagiarism according to the definitions of the University, and to understand the consequences such acts carry. If unsure, consult the instructor and also the *Academic Calendar*, Regulation 19, on "Academic Integrity

MARKING SCHEME:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<i>Excellent</i>		<i>Satisfactory</i>	
A+	90-100	C+	67-69.9
A	85-89.9	C	63-66.9
A-	80-84.9	C-	60-62.9
<i>Good</i>		<i>Marginal</i>	
B+	77-79.9	D	50-59.9
B	73-76.9	<i>Fail</i>	