Human Rights & World Politics

GOV S365W (80240)
Summer Session 2, 2026

Course Delivery: We will deliver this course asynchronously online only.

ASSISTANT INSTRUCTOR

Rachel Jeon
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TEACHING ASSISTANT

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HOW TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON

Good communication is foundational for success. We will communicate with you in two ways. First. **email** is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence. All course-related email communication will be sent to **your official UT Austin email address**. Under UT Austin's current student email system, this is your UT Microsoft 365 email account, usually in the form of **yourEID@my.utexas.edu**. Please make sure that this account is activated and that you check it regularly.

Because UT has recently changed its official student email system, you should not assume that messages will be sent to a personal email account, a prior UTmail or Gmail address, or another email address you may have used previously. **You are responsible** for monitoring your official UT Austin email account for course announcements, individual messages, travel/program updates, deadline reminders, and other time-sensitive information.

We will also use Canvas for course announcements and materials. Be sure to sign up for **Canvas notifications**, which will also be sent to that email address via the Announcements function in Canvas. You are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements.

You should **check your e-mail regularly and frequently**—we recommend **daily**, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. **Before emailing questions** about some aspect of how the course operates, **review this syllabus AND the Canvas page**. They will likely contain the answer that you seek.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Human rights feature prominently in contemporary world politics. Today there exists a large and highly legalized international human rights regime consisting of the United Nations (UN) and several regionally based human rights systems. Focusing on the UN, this course introduces you to the legal, political, and policy dimensions of international human rights. In so doing, it addresses the: (1) origins

and future of the international human rights system; (2) legal and institutional infrastructures and processes that exist at domestic and international levels for the promotion and protection of human rights; (3) main actors involved in human rights advocacy, including states, international organizations, activists, nongovernmental organizations; (4) interests of these actors as well as the tactics that they employ to advance their interests; and, (5) the challenges of assessing the effectiveness of human rights advocacy and how these challenges can be met by employing basic precepts of quantitative and qualitative social science research.

In terms of substance, students should be able to answer the following questions by the semester's end: What are international human rights, and why are they codified in law? Why do states ratify international human rights treaties? How is compliance with international human rights law promoted through the UN? Is the international human rights system legitimate? How do international human rights law and institutions figure into human rights advocacy? Is international human rights law effective? If so, under what conditions is it effective? And, finally, how do we *know* if it works? Considering the significant resources and efforts that are devoted to international human rights institutions and advocacy each year, these are clearly very important questions. And yet, you may be surprised to discover that much remains to be learned about the efficacy of international human rights law and advocacy. Understanding why that's the case leads us to the transferable skills that this course emphasizes.

In exploring why we have limited knowledge about the effectiveness of international human rights law, we will consider various challenges to studying international human rights law from an *empirical* as opposed to a *normative* perspective. You should emerge from this course with a better understanding of the mechanics of social scientific research, enhanced critical thinking capabilities, and improved writing skills. The course will increase your knowledge about international human rights, but more importantly, it is designed to help you develop your critical thinking, writing, and research skills. These are precisely the skills that employers and postgraduate admissions committees look for in applicants. I urge you to be more deliberate in your efforts to acquire and improve these skills as well as in your efforts to emphasize the skills you possess on your resumes, cover letters, LinkedIn pages, etc.

TRIGGER WARNING

One cannot discuss "human rights" without also discussing the "wrongs" that human inflict on one another. Course readings and classroom discussions may, therefore, expose students to subjects that make them uncomfortable or cause discomfort. We will examine these subjects in the context of intellectual inquiry of the sort encountered at the university level.

COURSE MATERIALS

All course materials are freely available to you through Canvas. Materials for each class meeting are contained in a module designated for that class meeting as either PDFs or external URL links. If you have difficulty opening a URL link in Canvas, simply click the blue box labelled "Open Site in New Window."

HOW THE COURSE WORKS

Learning Guides:

The learning guides located in the modules on Canvas are designed to help you read in a more targeted and instrumental fashion. Use the learning objectives, key concepts (for those learning guides that

contain them), and learning questions to help you identify and skim those sections of the material that do not relate directly to the course and meaningfully engage those sections of the material that do.

In engaging the learning questions, be sure to write out answers *in your own words*—don't just copy sentences from the material verbatim. Otherwise, it's highly likely that you won't understand the material fully and won't be able to perform well on the tests and assignments, particularly when test questions or assignments ask you to apply the material –as they will. For the key concepts (for those learning guides that contain them), you should be able to define and state the significance of each. Significance generally lies in a concept's relationship to something else, its wider implications, or both. A concept can be significant for multiple reasons and for different reasons in different contexts.

The reading should be done in a timely fashion, i.e., *before* you watch the lecture recording. Doing so will ensure that you are primed for the lecture material, and it will enhance your ability to take high quality notes. Because learning is an iterative process, this is the model that I propose you follow in this course. Read over the learning guide. Then, do the reading. Answer the learning questions and be sure that you understand the key concepts. Watch the lecture recordings and take notes. Periodically review your notes throughout the semester and try to understand how the material from past classes relates to the current material. Identify points that you don't fully understand and ask the Assistant Instructor questions at office hours to clarify these points.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

- Modules 0-4 are available from 12:00am on Monday, July 13.
- Quizzes 1-4 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, July 19.

Module 00: Introduction to the course.

Read the syllabus.
Complete the survey quiz.

Module 01: The concept of human rights.

Reading assignment:
Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 9-16 (only).

Module 02: Human rights as Western constructs.

Reading assignment:
Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), pp. 75-92 (only).

Module 03: Preconditions for the international human rights system.

Reading assignment:

Beth A. Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights: International Law in Domestic Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 23-36 (only).

Module 04: The puzzle of international human rights treaties.

Reading assignment:
Ann Marie Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 21-27 (only).

WEEK 2

- Modules 5-9 are available from 12:00am on Monday, July 20.
- Quizzes 5-9 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, July 26.
- Writing Assignment 1 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, July 26.

Module 05: Political origins of the international human rights system.

Reading assignment:
Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, pp. 36-49 (only).
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, available online here.
UN Charter, available online here.

Module 06: Political development of the international human rights system.

Reading assignment:
Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, pp. 49-56 (only).

Module 07: Amnesty International and the invention of human rights advocacy.

Reading assignment:
Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience*, pp. 3-20 (only).

Module 08: Politics of treaty creation: Amnesty International and the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Part 1.

Reading assignment:
Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience*, pp. 37-55 (only).

Module 09: Politics of treaty creation: Amnesty International and the CAT. Part 2.

Reading assignment:
Clark, *Diplomacy of Conscience*, pp. 55-69 (only).

WEEK 3

- Modules 10-14 are available from 12:00 am on Monday, July 27.
- Quizzes 10-14 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, August 2.

- Writing Assignment 2 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, August 2.

Module 10: Making and shaping treaty obligations.

Reading assignment:
Rhona K.M. Smith "Human Rights in International Law" in Goodhart (ed.), *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 58-66.

Module 11: Shaping and escaping treaty obligations.

Reading assignment:
Smith "Human Rights in International Law," pp. 58-66.

Module 12: The ratification puzzle: Why do states ratify international human rights treaties, 1?

Reading assignment:
Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, pp. 57-67. You are not required to read the entire chapter.

Module 13: The ratification puzzle: Why do states ratify international human rights treaties, 2?

Reading assignment:
Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, pp. 67-80.

Module 14: The puzzle of reservations: Why do state parties qualify their treaty commitments?

Reading assignment:
Kelebogile Zvobgo, Wayne Sandholtz, and Susie Mulesky, "Reserving rights: Explaining human rights treaty reservations," *International Studies Quarterly* (2020) 64, 785-797.

WEEK 4

- Modules 15-19 are available at 12:00am on Monday, August 3.
- Quizzes 15-19 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, August 9.
- Writing Assignment 3 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, August 9.

Module 15: UN treaty bodies: Composition and function.

Reading assignment:
Jane Connors, "The Human Rights Treaty Body System," in Simon Chesterman, David M. Malone, and Santiago Villalpando (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Treaties* (Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 377-96.

Module 16: UN treaty bodies: The law and politics of state reporting.

Reading assignment:
Walter Kälin, "Examination of state reports," in Helen Keller and Geier Ulfstein (eds.), *UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 16-72 (targeted reading).

Module 17: UN treaty bodies: The law and politics of individual communications.

Reading assignment:
Claire Callejon, Kamelia Kemileva, and Felix Kirchmeir, *Treaty Bodies' Individual Communication Procedures: Providing Redress and Reparation to Victims of Human Rights Violations* (Geneva Academy, 2019), pp. 6-25.

Module 18: What do we know about human rights treaty compliance?

Reading assignment:
Jacqueline Hicks, "Drivers of compliance with international human rights treaties," K4D Helpdesk Report (25 August 2021), 13 pages.

Module 19: The compliance puzzle: Why do states comply with international human rights treaties. Part 1?

Reading assignment:
Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, pp. 112-35.

WEEK 5

- Modules 20-23 are available from 12:00am on Monday, August 10.
- Quizzes 20-23 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, August 16.
- Writing Assignment 4 must be submitted by 11:59pm on Sunday, August 16.

Module 20: The compliance puzzle: Why do states comply with international human rights treaties. Part 2?

Reading assignment:
Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, pp. 135-55.

Module 21: Treaty compliance and domestic mobilization in action.

Reading assignment:
Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights*, pp. 236; 245-55.

Module 22: Measuring international human rights. Part 1.

Reading assignment:
Todd Landman, "Measuring Human Rights: Principles, Practice and Policy," 26 *Human Rights Quarterly* (2004): pp. 906-21.

Module 23: Measuring international human rights. Part 2.

Reading assignment:
Landman, "Measuring Human Rights: Principles, Practice and Policy," pp. 921-31.

REQUIRED LEARNING ASSESSMENTS

You must submit all required assignments in order to receive a passing grade for the course, i.e., you don't submit one of them, you fail the entire course. You must submit 20 quizzes and submit no more than two writing assignments.

Weekly Module Quizzes:

Every module has a quiz. There are 23 quizzes. Each week, quizzes open on Monday at 12:00am and close the following Sunday at 11:59pm. You may only submit quizzes during the week in which they are due. Your quiz grade will be the average of your **top twenty quiz grades**, and it will count as **30 percent** of your final course grade. This means you can skip up to three quizzes with no penalty. The **academic misconduct quiz** is required, but it does **not count** as one of the 20 quizzes.

You may consult the readings as well as your own personal notes when taking the quiz. Because quizzes are **meant to test *your individual* knowledge** rather than constitute a group effort, you may use your notes (content that you created), but **you may not use group-generated documents, the internet, nor any sort of artificial intelligence (AI) software when taking the quiz.** See *Sec. 11-402 Academic Dishonesty*. Use of group-generated documents, the internet, nor any sort of artificial intelligence for individual assignments will be treated as acts of academic dishonesty and treated accordingly. See the academic integrity policy section in the syllabus for more detail.

Writing Assignments:

You **choose two of the four** writing assignments you want to submit. Each writing assignment must be submitted according to its specific due date. Each writing assignment will count as **35 percent** of your final course grade We will **not grade** more than two assignments per student. If you submit more than two assignments, you will receive the grades assigned on the first two assignments. All writing assignments **can be viewed from the start of the course** so that you can choose which two you want to submit.

Remember, because writing assignments are **meant to test *your individual* knowledge** rather than constitute a group effort, you may use your notes (content that you created), but **you may not use group-generated documents; the internet, nor may you use any sort of artificial intelligence (AI) software.** See *Sec. 11-402 Academic Dishonesty*. Use of group-generated documents for individual assignments will be treated as acts of academic dishonesty and treated accordingly. See the academic integrity policy section in the syllabus for more detail.

Learning Assessment Policies

What if I require SSD Accommodations?

We strive to create a supportive learning environment for all students and to ensure that all students enjoy equal access and opportunity in the course of their educational experiences at UT-Austin. Some students require accommodations in order to achieve these objectives. Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 471-6259 (voice) or 512-410-6644 (Video Phone) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.

You are nevertheless **required to meet with the Assistant Instructor to discuss your accommodations within the first week of course** or immediately after your accommodations have been approved if that occurs **mid-session** so that we can be sure to meet your accommodations needs and facilitate your learning experience in the class. Accommodations will not be provided until you have met with the Assistant Instructor. Of course, you are not required to disclose any information about your disability. Your SSD information will be kept confidential. Help us help you.

In some instances, a student has not gone through the formal process of documenting their disability with the University. If you find yourself in this situation, visit this website (Links to an external site.).

If you require note-taking accommodations, notes can be collected from a student in the class and provided to you. The Assistant Instructor will coordinate this. The Assistant Instructor is your primary point of contact regarding notes.

Grading Policies:
Final course grades will be calculated according to the University's +/- system. Do we round up? It depends. To illustrate, a 93.5 (for example) would be rounded up to an A, whereas a 93.4 would be an A-. **Expect five points to be deducted for every day that an assignment is late.**

94-100 A
90-93 A-
87-89 B+
84-86 B
80-83 B-
77-79 C+
74-76 C
70-73 C-
67-69 D+
64-66 D
60-63 D-
59 and below F

How might I get feedback on my performance in the course?
Glad you asked! We highly recommend that you seek out feedback on your assignments. The TA is responsible for grading the writing assignments and the final exam. Quizzes are graded automatically in Canvas, but you should also take questions about quizzes to the TA. Here's what to do.

We ask that you first invest some time in evaluating your work. Our own writing can read quite differently a day or more after it was written. [That's why it's a great idea to get an early start on writing assignments.] So, for writing assignments, before meeting with the TA we ask that you take some time to re-read and self-assess your work against the general feedback provided to the class on Canvas. Consider the paper's strengths and weaknesses. Think about how you would characterize your paper. What parts of it are excellent, very good, just good, satisfactory, or unsatisfactory? Which of those terms would you use to characterize its overall quality? You can share this self-assessment with the TA in an email. Your assessment will be used to inform your discussion with the TA.

Why do this? We learn by reviewing our own work in a meaningful way. This process is meant to facilitate your own active role in your educational experience. By critically assessing your own work, you are better prepared to engage in a more substantive conversation with the TA. This process is not meant be an onerous burden or obstacle to getting feedback. Rather, it is meant to help you learn how to improve your analysis and writing skills.

If you want to review your final exam, email the Assistant Instructor and TA within 72 hours of the grade being posted to Canvas. Direct any questions about the quizzes to the TA.

What if I want to contest my grade?
The TA will grade the writing assignments and final exam according to a key and will consult with the Assistant Instructor during the grading process.

Before lodging a grade complaint for a writing assignment, we ask that you first follow the process described in the previous section, entitled "How Do I Get Feedback on my Work?" Before lodging a grade complaint for an exam, you must first meet with the TA to review your exam. In either case, contact the TA via email within seven days of grades being posted to Canvas. The TA will meet with you and may exercise discretion to alter the grade.

If you thereafter remain dissatisfied with your exam or writing assignment grade, you may lodge a formal grade complaint in writing by emailing the Assistant Instructor within 24 hours of meeting with the TA. Understand that the Assistant Instructor will re-grade the writing assignment/exam **in its entirety** and may assign a higher **or** lower overall grade than that originally assigned by the TA. Students who remain dissatisfied with a final course grade may elect to pursue action at the College-level. More on that here (Links to an external site.).

Do you offer extra credit or make-up work?
No. Work hard. There will be none, nada, zilch. This is my line in the sand. Understand that when you ask a professor to offer you extra credit or make-up work you are asking *them* to do *extra work* to help you, someone who clearly didn't do the requisite work or who failed to achieve a particular grade.

What if I'm really struggling in the course or with life more generally?
We've all been in a tough spot a time or two in our lives, so we get it. We really do. First step, let us know you're struggling. We don't need all the details. Just reach out for help. The Assistant Instructor and TA are here to help you. Visit our online office hours as soon as you experience difficulty. Do not delay! Come by and discuss the material with us. Solicit feedback on drafts of your assignments. Request feedback on assignments on which you performed poorly. We want to see you succeed. Help us help you in a timely fashion!

If you experience a personal or family emergency (e.g., COVID-19 issues, death in the family, protracted sickness, serious mental health issues, etc.) that prevents you from participating in the course, contact Student Emergency Services in the Office of the Dean of Students (Links to an external site.). They will work with you to communicate with your professors (including me) and let them know of your situation. Taking this step makes it easier for professors to accommodate students in distress. If you do not have off-campus access to a computer and/or Wi-Fi, please contact Student Emergency Services (Links to an external site.) for support.

The University also provides resources to help if you experience a mental health crisis (e.g., depression, anxiety, etc.). Call the confidential **Counseling and Mental Health Center** (Links to an external site.) Crisis line at 512-471-CALL (2255). Call from wherever you are even if you aren't sure you're in a full-blown crisis but sincerely need help. Staff are there to help you. You're paying for these services. Please use them if you need them.

IMPORTANT (MUST-READ) ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

Academic Integrity: See Canvas for more details.
Academic integrity is foundational to this course and to scholarly work at The University of Texas at Austin. Students are expected to complete their work honestly, acknowledge the work and ideas of others, follow course and assignment instructions, and avoid any action that gives or attempts to give them an unfair academic advantage.

UT Austin's Institutional Rules define academic misconduct to include, but not be limited to, copying, using or possessing unauthorized materials, receiving or providing unauthorized aid, substituting for another person, falsifying or fabricating information, data, or citations, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration or collusion, submitting essentially the same work for more than one assignment without permission, failing to follow course or assignment requirements, and other conduct that results in or attempts to result in an unfair academic advantage.

Students are responsible for understanding both University rules and the specific expectations for each assignment in this course. When an assignment permits collaboration, outside assistance, or the use of particular tools or sources, those permissions will be stated in the assignment instructions. If an assignment does not explicitly permit a form of collaboration, assistance, or tool use, students should ask before using it.

Suspected academic misconduct may be referred to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students for investigation and resolution under University procedures. Sanctions for academic misconduct may include no credit or reduced credit for an assignment, resubmission or retaking of an assessment, a reduced or failing course grade, academic integrity probation, and/or other University sanctions.

UT Austin's Honor Code states: "I pledge, as a member of the University of Texas community, to do my work honestly, respectfully, and through the intentional pursuit of learning and scholarship."

Course Artificial Intelligence Policy: AI Use Is Prohibited
The use of artificial intelligence tools is prohibited for all work submitted for a grade in this course unless I give explicit written permission for a specific assignment. This prohibition includes, but is not limited to, using tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, GrammarlyGO, or other generative AI systems to brainstorm, outline, draft, revise, paraphrase, summarize, translate, generate citations, answer quiz or exam questions, prepare discussion posts, produce presentation text, create captions, or complete any other graded work.

You may, however, use it to create quiz questions to test your knowledge of the reading.

All work submitted for a grade must reflect your own thinking, research, analysis, writing, and preparation. This policy applies to all graded assignments, including preparation check-ins, quizzes, reflections, written assignments, presentations, captions, discussion posts, exams, and any other work submitted for course credit.

The prohibited use of AI tools will be treated as unauthorized aid and will result in referral for academic integrity proceedings through Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students for a possible academic integrity violation.

If you are unsure whether a tool or form of assistance is allowed, you must ask before using it. Using a prohibited tool first and asking afterward does not excuse the violation.

Accommodations for Religious Holidays and Students with Disabilities:
The Assistant Instructor will manage all accommodations. By UT Austin policy, you must notify us of your pending absence at least 14 days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, (512) 471-6259, http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/.

Classroom Behavior:
This applies with equal force in the online world. It's important that we have a classroom atmosphere that optimizes teaching and learning, and we all share the responsibility for creating a civil and non-disruptive forum. Students are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner that does not disrupt learning, this includes any discussion from class that continues on any listserv or class discussion list.

Intellectual Property Policy:
This course was created by Dr. Rhonda Evans, and as such, it is her intellectual property. Students are, therefore, not permitted to disseminate by any means any of the course content created by Dr. Evans, including lecture recordings, power point presentations and slides, or other learning materials. Students who do so without permission may face legal action in a court of law.

Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited:
No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (exams or writing assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course."

TITLE IX REPORTING AND TEXAS SB212

Reporting Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's relevant policies.

Beginning 1 January 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 **requires all employees of Texas universities**, including faculty, to **report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking** that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported.

We are Responsible Employees and MUST (we are legally required to) report any Title IX related incidents that are disclosed to us in writing, discussion, emails, or one-on-one exchanges. Before talking with us, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX-related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee.

If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/.