

**Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba**  
**SOC 7160 – T04: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**CRN 25329, 3 credit hours, Winter 2016**  
**Tuesdays at 11:30 – 2:15, Isbister 335**

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course critically analyzes the idea and practice of human rights as a framework for social justice. We will analyze historic and current human rights struggles to better understand the potential, politics, challenges and limitations of the international human rights movement and framework. In doing so, the course will also examine some key controversies concerning the conceptualization and use of human rights as a mechanism to ensure social justice. Throughout, we will also explore social movement struggles for specific rights such as the right to a healthy environment, indigenous rights, the right to food, among others.

### **COURSE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT**

The course is divided into different units that provide opportunities to critically examine theoretical and practical dimensions of the human rights framework and the human rights movement.

In Unit One we will explore some key debates raised in the sociology and history of human rights. It is only by understanding the historical development of human rights and the specific content of those rights that we will be better able to analyze -- throughout the remainder of the course -- the promises, politics and limitations of current human rights struggles. Unit Two explores different cases of how human rights have been mobilized. In Unit Three we focus more closely on specific critiques of the human rights framework. Then in Unit Four we delve once again into analyzing different human rights struggles in various parts of the world.

This is a seminar course. There will be no lectures other than those given by guest speakers. Instead, students must read the assigned material and come to class prepared to engage in discussions of these readings. The seminars will be free flowing while at the same time involve focused and informed discussion. Throughout the course students will be asked to engage in the seminars by discussing what they found to be the most interesting and/or important arguments, themes and issues addressed in the readings. At times students may be given different readings so that we can cover more and different aspects of human rights. In these cases students will be asked to present the key arguments in their assigned readings.

Since this is a seminar course students either make or break the course. That is, it is your individual and collective engagement in discussion, your ideas, your critiques of arguments presented in the readings, your contributions in general that will make this course the best it can be. All students will have the opportunity to lead part of a seminar discussion.

## **REQUIRED READINGS**

The two following required books are available at the U of M bookstore :

Frezzo, Mark. 2015. *The Sociology of Human Rights*, Polity Books: Cambridge

Perugini, Nicola and Neve Gordon. 2015. *The Human Right to Dominate*, Oxford University Press: New York City.

Please note that since this is a seminar course students will be required to do a considerable amount of reading. As we progress through the course, the references to all other required readings will be communicated to you via UM learn (formally known as desire2learn (<https://universityofmanitoba.desire2learn.com/>)). *It is students' responsibility to check UM Learn regularly for any and all updates throughout the term.*

## **COURSE ORGANIZATION**

*NOTE: Some parts of this syllabus are subject to change. That is, the sequence of topics and topics themselves may change as we progress through the course.*

### **Unit One: The Sociology and History of Human Rights**

January 12: Introduction to the course

January 19: A sociological approach to human rights

Required reading: Frezzo, Mark. 2015. *The Sociology of Human Rights*, Polity Books: Cambridge (pp. viii – 149).

January 26: Historical controversies concerning human rights

References to the required readings will be posted on UM Learn (formally known as desire2learn).

### **Unit Two: Analyzing Different Cases of How Human Rights Are Mobilized**

(February 2, 9 and 23)

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo: Demanding human rights and justice in Argentina

Indigenous rights and the extractive industry

The global food crisis: social movements and the right to food

### **Unit Three: Specific Critiques of Human Rights**

(March 1 and 8)

Human Rights: A global mission to civilize 'others' and other key problems with the human rights framework

"Are women human?" A feminist critique of human rights

### **Unit Four: Persistent challenges in realizing human rights**

(March 15, 22, 29 and April 5)

Do refugees have rights?

Does nature have rights? Climate change and the right to a Healthy Environment

Are human rights compatible with capitalism? (Does Corporate Social Responsibility guarantee the realization of human rights?)

The Human Right to Dominate

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS (See below for a description of each of these.)**

Your grade will be determined as follows:

Contribution to discussion	30%
Questions	10%
Discussion/reflection paper one (Due 11:30am, Feb. 23,2016)	20%
Major reflection paper/think piece on human rights (Due 4:00pm, April 19, 2016)	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

**Contribution to seminar discussions (30% of final grade)**

Students' primary responsibility is to read the assigned readings, to think about the issues and arguments presented in the articles, and to come to class prepared to engage in informed discussion about the issues raised in the literature. Students are expected to participate fully in discussions of the assigned readings – this demands more than just quickly skimming the reading. You need to have a very good understanding of, and be able to engage with the authors' argument(s) and the evidence used to defend the argument.

Active and engaged participation in this class demands preparation and contribution.

**a/ Preparation:** Here are some tips to help you prepare. There are three stages to critical reading: 1/ writing a short summary of the article so that you understand and remember what you have read, 2/ providing a succinct critique in which you articulate your own ideas and reasoning about the issues raised in the reading, and 3/ formulating thoughtful questions based on the readings that you then raise in the seminar discussions.

**b/ Contribution:** Your contributions must be directly related to the topic(s) being discussed. It is the quality of your contributions to the class discussions that really counts. Contributions should demonstrate that you:

- have critically read the materials and are able summarize and engage with key arguments and points made,
- can raise thoughtful questions as a result of the readings,
- can link ideas from different readings done throughout the course, and
- your ability to interact with your fellow classmates in a respectful manner.

As part of the contribution to discussion all students will take a turn (either individually or together with one other student) to lead part of one seminar. This will involve providing a short introduction to the seminar topic for that week and engaging students in discussion.

Students must attend all classes. Your contribution grade will be determined based on attendance (you can't contribute if you are not in class) and the criteria discussed above. This means that it is not enough just to come to class. Instead, you need to actively participate in the discussion. I will assign a grade out of 10 for each week. Your final contribution grade will be a compendium of these weekly grades. Periodically I will provide you with your grade for contribution so that

you know how you are doing. The best way to get a good grade is to read all of the required material, come to class prepared to talk about them and take an active part in the discussion.

### **Questions (10% of final grade)**

To help foster discussion students will come to class with at least two written questions about the readings to be discussed during the weekly seminar. The questions must be sent to me through UM Learn (desire2learn) by 9:00am of each Tuesday that the class meets. Bring a copy of these questions with you to the seminar. Along with the questions you should also include the date, the title of the seminar, your student number and name. I will grade these questions as they represent 10% of your grade. Remember that a good question also includes a preamble.

### **Critical Discussion/reflection paper (20% of final grade)**

You are required to submit an 8-page (double-spaced) critical discussion/reflection paper of the readings assigned up to and including February 23, 2016. Please feel free to discuss this paper with me before starting on it if you still have questions after reading the description provided here.

The focus of the discussion/reflection paper is to explore the course readings. It is not a summary of the readings; nor is it simply your own ideas about the readings. **A discussion/reflection paper is like a think piece. Discussion papers must do two things: they must provide an assessment of the major arguments in the readings and they must frame those into an overall approach or argument about the readings.** The discussion papers should not be a cataloguish summary of each article, but rather you should weave your discussion of the articles into an overall argument or approach. A good discussion/reflection paper, therefore, must take a sophisticated approach in summarizing the salient points of the readings, relating the readings to each other. It should also critique the readings (note critique does not necessarily mean to criticize) by talking about how the approach in individual readings either helps us or does not help us understand the issues and by telling the reader how your opinion about the issues has been reflected in, is opposed to, or has been deepened or altered by the readings.

Know that for the discussion/reflection papers you are not expected to do any further reading in addition to the readings provided in the course. You are expected to spend some time thinking about the issues explored in the units, linking the ideas together, expressing your own ideas about the readings, and making cogent arguments in clear and eloquent language.

This first discussion/reflection paper is due at 11:30am on February 23, 2016. This paper must meet the following specifications:

- typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper,
- 8 pages in length (not including the bibliography and end notes if these are used)
- double spaced lines using Times New Roman 12 pt font
- be submitted through UM Learn (desire2learn)

You must include an additional page (the title page) that contains the title, your name, the prof's name, and the course number. Remember to number the pages.

### **Major reflection/ discussion paper (think piece) on human rights (40%)**

For the final assignment students will submit a major reflection/discussion paper on human rights. This is essentially a major think piece (see the description provided above for the first assignment) that allows you to reflect on the course material as a whole.

The due date to submit this final assignment is 4:00pm on April 19, 2016. The major reflection or research paper must meet the following specifications:

- Be typed on 8.5" x 11" white paper,
- 18 pages in length (You must include an additional page (the title page) that contains the title, your name and student number, my name, and the course number).
- Double-spaced lines using Times New Roman 12 pt font
- Remember to number the pages
- Submitted through UM Learn (desire2learn)

*Please note that it is not acceptable to submit a paper, or portions of a paper, that you have written for another class, as this is a form of academic misconduct.*

### **Due Dates**

All due dates are final. Late papers will be penalized 5% per day late. No papers will be accepted if they are submitted five days or more after the due date. Exceptions will be made only in the case of acceptable circumstance (i.e. serious illness) and acceptable documentation. In the event of such a case the request for an extension must be made before the due date. Unfortunately, computer failures do not fall in the category of acceptable circumstances.

### **Some basic rules established by the University of Manitoba and the Faculty of Arts**

**Grading Scale:** In assigning letter grades for the course, the following scale will be used:

A+	90% and over
A	80 - 89%
B+	75 - 79%
B	70 - 74%
C+	65 - 69%
C	60 - 64%
D	50 - 59%
F	less than 50%

### **Academic Integrity:**

University policy on academic integrity will be enforced. A full description of academic integrity matters, including plagiarism and cheating, can be found in Section 8 of the general Academic regulations and Requirements of the University of Manitoba.

The Faculty of Arts also reserves the right to submit student work that is **suspected of being plagiarized** to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism.

**Voluntary Withdrawal**

Please note that the last day for voluntary withdrawal from second term courses is **Wednesday, March 18, 2016**.

**Unclaimed Term Work**

Any term work that has not been claimed by students will be held for four (4) months from the end of the final examination period for the term in which the work was assigned. At the conclusion of this time, all unclaimed term work will become property of the Faculty of Arts and be destroyed according to FIPPA guidelines and using confidential measures for disposal.

**Absence from Class**

Students are requested to email the instructor ([Annette.desmarais@umanitoba.ca](mailto:Annette.desmarais@umanitoba.ca)) if they are going to be absent from class.

The university recognizes the right of all students to observe recognized **holidays of their faith**, which fall within the academic year. With instructor discretion, necessary arrangements can be made to ensure studies are not jeopardized. The instructor should be notified of a student's intended absence in advance and at least three weeks' notice of absence should normally be given where special arrangements are sought.