Introduction
Welcome to the course. PLSC 2840 explores the role that international law plays in promoting human rights. Why did states first commit to international human rights protections after the Second World War? Why did states voluntarily surrender their sovereignty by signing and ratifying human rights treaties that limit their freedom to act domestically? Does this international law influence governments’ human rights practices? Who enforces international human rights law? Is the United States (US) a leader or laggard when it comes to international human rights? Prerequisite: Sophomore standing

Course objectives are to develop your
- Understanding of the politics of international human rights law and its enforcement, both historically and during contemporary times
- Proficiency in using reliable sources to inquire about discrete research questions
- Skills in analytical argumentation and clarity of expression
- Capacity to manage time and organize ideas to complete assignments on time
- Ability to collaborate with peers in the acquisition of information and skills

Required readings available for purchase
Beth Simmons, Mobilizing for Human Rights: International Law in Domestic Politics; Kathryn Sikkink, The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions are Changing World Politics. Further required articles are available for downloading from Blackboard.

I strongly recommend that you print each of the online documents and attain print copies of the books. A growing body of research indicates that readers are more likely to skim electronic sources and take longer to complete electronic texts given electronic interruptions (Facebook feeds, beeping incoming emails) and the ergonomic discomfort and poorer resolution of e-texts. By contrast, readers of print text have been found to concentrate more effectively and annotate texts in ways that help them recall and retrieve information for later use (see discussion of “technology and learning” on p. 3 and the works cited at the end of this syllabus).

Schedule of Assignments
Reflections (individual) Complete in a Word document before coming to class Be prepared to post on Blackboard during class
Analyses (collaborative) In-class writing: be prepared to post on Blackboard
Research paper Hard copy draft due for in-class peer review at 10 am W 10/29 Paper due to be uploaded to Blackboard by 3 pm on Friday, 10/31
Debates November 10 (M), 12 (W), and 17 (M) 10-11:50 am
Final exam Submit to Blackboard by 10 am on Monday, 11/17

Attendance during all debates, including the final exam session, is required for course credit.
Grading
Reflections on readings  20 percent of course grade
Analyses of readings  20 percent of course grade
Research paper  25 percent of course grade
Debate  5 percent of course grade
Final exam  30 percent of course grade
Participation in discussion  Course grade adjustment (see below)

Calculation of the final course grade: Reflections and analyses are credit/no credit. Other assignments receive letter grades with DU grade points.
Letter grades correspond to the following values to calculate course grades:

A+ 4.33   A 4.0   A-  3.67   B+ 3.33   B 3.0   B-  2.67
C+ 2.33   C 2.0   C-  1.67   D+ 1.33   D 1.0   D-  .67   F = 0

Grading for reflections and analyses:
All completed on time: A+  90 percent completed on time: A
80 percent completed on time: B  70 percent completed on time: C
60 percent completed on time: D  Less than 59 percent completed on time: F

Participation and the final course grade
Frequent constructive contributions improve your course grade by ~.33 (B+ becomes A-).
Periodic constructive contributions have a neutral impact on your course grade.
Attentive silence results in a ~.33 deduction (B+ becomes a B).
Habitual absenteeism (more than two absences) results in a ~.66 deduction (B+ becomes a B-).
Inappropriate contributions and disruptive behavior result in your course grade being lowered by one full grade (B becomes a C).

What are constructive contributions? These include comments and questions that relate directly
to course material from assigned readings, lectures, and films or discussion of relevant current
events. Your contributions should reflect your understanding of course materials and related
ideas. The quality of contributions matters more than quantity, so avoid dominating discussions.

What is inappropriate and disruptive? The habitual expression of irrelevant points, claims from
dubious sources, or unsubstantiated opinions; persistent efforts to dominate discussion; and
tuning out of class by tuning in to electronic media or side discussions with a neighbor.

Cooperative Learning
Students will spend part of some class sessions collaborating in teams of 3 students on analyses
of course material, peer review of research papers, and debates. Research on cooperative learning
confirms that students learn more in structured collaborative activities than in either
individualistic or competitive arrangements. Even students who perform very well on their own
learn more as they articulate their ideas with others and take on leadership roles. To deter “free-
riding,” students will evaluate each other’s contributions to collaborative efforts. Student
evaluations indicate that collaboration enhanced understanding of course material and
performance on assignments. Functioning effectively as a team player and exercising leadership
are valuable skills in contemporary careers.
CLASS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Student conduct: Regular attendance and active engagement in assignments and discussions maximize learning. As we discuss course topics, feel welcome to question and disagree respectfully with the professor, your peers, and the assigned authors in a manner that facilitates the learning process for others and acknowledges the dignity of all individuals. University policy requires respect for values related to academic honesty, civility, and compliance with the law. You may consult University policies concerning the details of these values and the consequences for their violation at http://www.du.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/policies/

Technology and learning: I want you to learn as much as possible and earn a good grade. As a result, I ask that you bring print copies of assigned readings to class; take notes on paper; and restrict your use of laptops during class sessions to specific assignments that require online research, collaborative writing, or posting to Blackboard. Meanwhile, texting during class is appropriate only in emergency situations.

Why am I advocating such traditional approaches to learning? Research demonstrates that “students who read texts in print score significantly better on … reading comprehension … than students who read … texts digitally” (Mangen, Walgermo, and Brønnick 2013, 61). Research also shows that “students who use laptops in class spent considerably more time multitasking and that laptop use posed a significant distraction to both users and fellow students” (Fried 2008). Indeed “participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not” (Sana, Weston, and Cepeda 2013, 24). “Research on multitasking has uncovered clear evidence that human information processing is insufficient for attending to multiple stimuli and for performing simultaneous tasks” (Junco 2012a, 2236). This is true even for the “Net Generation” born after the 1980s (Kirschner and Karpinski 2010, 1237). As a result it is not surprising that “…using Facebook and texting during class were negatively predictive of overall semester GPA” (Junco 2012a, 2241). Finally, even when laptops are solely used to take notes and students are given the opportunity to review their notes after a week’s delay, “participants who had taken notes with laptops performed worse on tests of both factual content and conceptual understanding, relative to participants who had taken notes longhand” (Mueller and Oppenheimer 2014, 1, 8). As you learn to manage competing demands for your time outside of class, you may want to consider that “time spent on Facebook was strongly and significantly negatively related to overall GPA” (Junco 2012b, 187). Those who access Facebook while studying at home also have lower GPAs than those who stay “on task” (Rosen 2014, 948). Similar to the impact of multitasking during class, “…evidence from psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience suggests that when students multitask while doing schoolwork, their learning is far spottier and shallower than if the work had their full attention. They understand and remember less, and they have greater difficulty transferring their learning to new contexts” (Paul 2013). You must decide how to balance such trade-offs outside of class. During class, multitasking with your laptop, phone, or tablet will result in a reduction in your course grade.

Accommodations for students with special needs: If you have a disability protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Disability Services Program (303.871.2278 or dsp@du.edu) is a resource on campus that can help you to coordinate appropriate accommodations with
faculty in all of your courses. Please consult with me privately during office hours or via email before assignments are due if you anticipate that particular components of this course may pose obstacles for you. For information about the Disability Services Program at the University of Denver, see http://www.du.edu/studentlife/disability/dsp/index.html.

**Accommodations for religious observance:** University policy grants students excused absences from class for observance of religious holy days, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship. Please consult with me privately during office hours or via email prior to missing class or assignments. For more information about the University of Denver’s religious accommodation policy, see http://www.du.edu/studentlife/religiouslife/DU_religious_accommodations_policy.html

**Late assignments and make-ups:** Students with legitimate reasons for missing specified deadlines or participation during class assignments (not including reflections and analyses) may consult with the professor privately during office hours or via email to arrange an appropriate alternative concerning credit for their work. Credible excuses for all but emergencies are communicated prior to missed deadlines and classes or disappointing grades. Please use email or voice mail in the event of potentially contagious illness. Make ups of assignments requiring in-class participation entail alternative written assignments: Students are responsible to pre-arrange these make-ups or consult with the professor as soon as possible after an emergency. Make-ups are due at the time of the missed class session or within 72 hours of the professor’s communication of an alternative written assignment, depending on the circumstances of the absence.

*In the absence of a pre-approved exception or documented emergency, late penalties apply:*
  
  Same day after the specified deadline (until midnight): a one-step deduction (–). Each subsequent day after the deadline: another step down (A becomes a B+ when submitted the day after a deadline, and falls to a B- on the second day after a deadline).

**Formatting for all written assignments in this class**

The text must be double-spaced, with 1-1.25” margins and a 12 point font. Fonts must be easily legible, standard manuscript fonts: e.g. Times New Roman or Helvetica are good choices. For the purposes of all page lengths described throughout the syllabus, each “side” of a piece of paper counts as one page: e.g. an eight page paper can either be on four double-sided sheets of paper or on eight single-sided sheets of paper.

*All quotations require citations immediately after the quoted statement in the following format:*

“For the global legalist, the ideal dispute resolution mechanism for international law violations is the international tribunal, but in practice, the most exciting international litigation is taking place in American domestic courts” (Posner 2009, 207).

Citations of electronic sources should include an abbreviated in-text citation and a full bibliographic citation (below) in the following format:

“Conditions [in Greece] for undocumented immigrants and asylum-seeking children were particularly difficult. During the year local and international NGOs… found unaccompanied minors incarcerated along with adults in detention centers … under degrading, inhumane, and unsanitary conditions. … Unaccompanied immigrant children lacked safe accommodations and legal guardians and were vulnerable to homelessness and labor exploitation” (State Department 2010, 16).


For citations to articles, follow the formatting in the “technology and learning” discussion on p. 3 and the works-cited listing at the end of this syllabus.

Schedule of Readings and Discussions
All students are expected to come to each class prepared to discuss the reading assigned for that day: e.g., you should all read the first two chapters of Simmons’ book before coming to class on Monday, September 15. Readings are available in the two books available for purchase unless marked by an asterisk: these * readings are available on Blackboard.

Week 1  What are the origins of human rights in international law?
Monday  Please read the syllabus carefully, purchase books, and visit Blackboard.
9/8
Wednesday  No class meeting: instead, view the film, “Amistad” on your computer
9/10

Week 2  Why turn to international human rights law and prosecutions?
Monday  Simmons, Introduction and Chapter 2
9/15

Wednesday  Sikkink, Introduction
9/17

Week 3  Why do states commit to international human rights law? Or not?
Monday  Simmons, p. 57-90
9/22
Wednesday  Simmons, p. 90-111
9/24

Week 4  How did individual accountability develop in criminal and civil litigation?
Monday  Sikkink, Chapter 2
9/29
Wednesday  Sikkink, Chapter 3  
10/1  * Leval, “The Long Arm of International Law”

**Week 5**

**Monday**  
10/6  
How does the “justice cascade” spread around the world? Even to the US?  
Sikkink, Chapter 4

Wednesday  * Spiro, “Sovereigntism’s Twilight”  
10/8

**Week 6**

**Monday**  
10/13  
Why do states comply with international human rights law? Or do they?  
Simmons, Chapter 4

Wednesday  Sikkink, Chapter 5  
10/15

**Week 7**

**Monday**  
10/20  
Do international human rights law and prosecution deter abuses?  
Simmons, Chapter 5

Wednesday  Sikkink, Chapter 6  
10/22

**Week 8**

**Monday**  
10/27  
Do treaties and prosecutions prevent torture and punish perpetrators?  
Simmons, Chapter 7

Wednesday  Sikkink, Chapter 7  
10/29  
*Hard-copy drafts due at 10 am for peer review*

Friday  
10/31  
*Research papers due to be uploaded to Blackboard by 3 pm*

**Week 9**

**Monday**  
11/3  
Does international human rights law protect vulnerable populations?  
Simmons, Chapter 6

Wednesday  Simmons, Chapter 8  
11/5

**Week 10**

**Monday**  
11/10  
What do you find? Evaluating conclusions and debating your own  
Simmons, Chapter 9  
Student debates (2) and final exam question distributed
DESCRIPTION OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

**Participation in class discussions**
This course will proceed in a seminar style to the extent that our class size allows, meaning that the professor may lecture briefly, but much of class time should consist of discussion and activities where the professor is a facilitator. The success of seminar discussion depends on students’ ability to contribute to an informed discussion. Prepare yourself to make constructive contributions by jotting down questions and taking notes on central arguments and corresponding evidence from readings and films.

**Reflections on readings, films, and data (individual assignment)**
For most assigned readings: within one or two typed paragraphs on a single page, (1) **briefly** summarize the primary argument of the author (ideally in one sentence), (2) include one or two quotations that illustrate evidence or reasoning that supports the author’s central argument (with a proper citation), and (3) articulate at least one question for the class to discuss.

For films, discuss how events in the film relate to ideas from assigned readings, class discussions, or evidence presented by the professor or other students in the class, and include at least one question for the class to discuss.

For data, interpret results according to the professor’s instructions, relating your conclusions to other ideas or information from other course materials such as assigned readings, class discussion, and films.

Remember to run a spell-check and proofread your writing before coming to class so your reflection would be postable to Blackboard for all to see from the beginning of class sessions. Reflections are credit/no credit and must be submitted on time for credit, with grades determined by the percentage of reflections completed (see p. 2).

**Analyses of readings, films, and data (collaborative assignment)**
In cooperative learning teams of three, students will analyze information and ideas from assigned readings, films, or specified data and collaboratively write a brief essay or report during some class sessions. To be prepared to participate in these analyses, it is important that students come prepared to each class having read the assigned material for the day. Individually prepared reflections on readings should also help all members of each team participate constructively.
Analyses may be announced ahead of time, but they often occur without prior announcement. Analyses are credit/no credit and must be submitted on time for credit. The grade individuals receive depends on the percentage of analyses completed (see p. 2), and whether it is apparent that students participated in the analyses of their teams. Free riding on the efforts of team members will result in no credit for the free rider.

**Research paper**

*Each student will be responsible for investigating the human rights situation of one country in a research paper of 6 – 8 pages,* not including any tables of evidence, figures, charts, or the required annotated bibliography.

Students will seek evidence about the extent to which their state and its leaders have (1) ratified legally binding commitments to international (and regional) human rights protections, (2) been subject to any form of individual criminal or civil prosecutions and (3) respect human rights in practice. In terms of practices, students should provide a general context of national rights protection, but research may focus on a particular set of rights (life, torture, equal treatment, children’s rights…).

**Countries to be investigated**

France  
Germany  
United Kingdom  
USA  
Canada  
Mexico  
France  
Germany  
United Kingdom  
USA  
Canada  
Mexico  

**Reliable sources of evidence will include**

- Data available on official sites of inter-governmental international human rights organizations (both regional and global), e.g. Council of Europe, Organization of American States, UN
- Annual human rights reports of the US Department of State
- Reports of the NGOs Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch
- Governance indicators of the World Bank
- Scholarly journals or book chapters from respected academic publishers
- Public opinion surveys from the World Values Survey (many countries) or General Social Survey (US only)

Please consult a reference librarian in Penrose for assistance with your search for sources.

**Debates**

Each student will participate in one debate, arguing on behalf of or in opposition to one of the “hypotheses” discussed in the scholarly literature assigned for this class. Good contributions will draw on both assigned readings for this course and student findings from the research papers. Evaluation will be based on the quality of individual student contributions to the debate, within the context of others’ contributions. All advocates of a particular position must contribute constructively to earn credit.
Final exam
Students demonstrate their understanding of assigned course material and findings from student research in a comprehensive take-home essay exam that takes the form of a paper up to 8 pages. The exam question will be distributed on Monday, November 10.

Evaluation of research papers and the final exam are based on the extent to which they
1. demonstrate an understanding of relevant evidence and course material respectively (data from reliable sources; assigned readings, class discussions, and films)
2. organize discussions in a coherent manner
3. articulate ideas clearly, using the English language correctly
4. provide adequate acknowledgment of sources with appropriate citation
5. arrive in the specified format.

Works cited on technology and learning


