

**POL412H1S – Human Rights and International Relations  
Winter 2026**

Instructor: David Zarnett  
[david.zarnett@utoronto.ca](mailto:david.zarnett@utoronto.ca)

Office hours: By appointment  
Location: By phone or on Zoom  
Course website: Quercus

**Course Description:**

Over the last few centuries, the idea of human rights has influenced the practice of international politics in numerous ways, for better and for worse. This course examines this phenomenon in two main parts. In the first part of the course, we will investigate what human rights are. We will focus on exploring how state and non-state actors have used the idea of human rights to pursue certain objectives, including empire building, the weakening of strategic rivals and the pursuit of material self-interest. This section of the course will look at a variety of historical and contemporary cases. In the second part of the course, we will take a close look at transnational human rights campaigns. We will focus on the mobilization of supporters for distant causes, the organizational design of a campaign, the identification of effective policy solutions, and the methods used to pressure governments to act.

**Course Objectives:**

This course has four main objectives:

- 1) To provide students with an opportunity to develop a nuanced understanding of what human rights are;
- 2) To provide students with an opportunity to develop a historically informed account of the various roles that human rights have played in global politics;
- 3) To provide students with an opportunity to engage in a fair and open-minded way with some of the most pressing questions and controversies surrounding human rights in global politics today;
- 4) To provide students with an opportunity to develop important transferable skills useful for a variety of different professions, including academia, advocacy, consulting, government, and law, among many others.

## **Marking Scheme & Course Requirements**

Evaluation for this course will be based on the following four components. To learn more about each assignment, including guidelines to follow and how you will be graded, please visit the Quercus course page, under the menu “Assignments.”

<b>Assignment Name</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
Course Engagement	25%	Throughout the semester
In-Class Unit #1 Essay Test	25%	February 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 (Week #6)
Campaign Analysis Video Essay	25%	March 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 (Week #9)
In-Class Unit #2 Essay Test	25%	March 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 (Week #12)

## **Course Materials**

There are no readings or textbooks that need to be purchased. All readings can be accessed on the Quercus course page, under the “Pages” menu.

## **Assignment Submission & Plagiarism Detection:**

All assignments that will be graded must be submitted on time via Quercus. Students are strongly advised to keep draft work and hard copies of their assignments until the marked assignments have been returned and grades posted online.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University’s plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool’s reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University’s use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

## **On the Use of Generative AI (i.e ChatGPT)**

In this course, the use of ChatGPT and other related tools for all assignments is prohibited. If its use is detected in any form, its use may constitute an academic offense.

## **Late Penalties**

The penalty for late assignments is 5% per day. If the assignment is not submitted within one week (7 days including the weekend) after the due date, a mark of zero will be assigned. Late work must also be submitted directly to Quercus.

## **Extensions:**

To be fair to all students in the course, extensions on assignments will only be granted for health, family emergency or Accessibility related reasons. If you become ill and it affects your

ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number).

For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>.

For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see: <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

### **Re-Grading Policy**

If you believe that an individual item of term work has been unfairly marked, you may ask the person who marked the work for re-evaluation. You have up to 2 weeks from the date of return of the item of term work to query the marking.

Any appeal of a mark provided by the course instructor may only be made for an item worth at least 20% of the course mark. Such appeals must be made in writing to the Undergraduate Director within 2 weeks after the work was returned, explaining in detail why the student believes that the mark is inappropriate. The appeal must summarize all previous communications between the student and previous markers of the work. You must submit the original marked piece of work plus a clean, anonymous copy along with the assignment/essay topic.

If the department believes that re-marking is justified, the department will select an independent reader. You must agree in writing to be bound by the results of the re-reading process, or abandon the appeal.

Where possible, the independent reader will be given a clean, anonymous copy of the work. Without knowing the original assigned mark, the independent reader will determine a mark for the work. The marking of the work should be considered within the context of the course of instruction for which it was submitted. If the new mark differs substantially from the original mark, the department will determine a final mark, taking into account both available marks.

### **Office Hours**

Office hours will be done through appointment and held in-person, over Zoom or the phone. If you would like to speak, please email me and we can set up a convenient time to connect.

### **Email Policy:**

You can contact me anytime via email and I will get back to you within 24 hours from Monday to Friday. I will not be checking email on the weekend. While I am happy to correspond via email, please note that discussions with me are often a more productive use of time.

## **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:**

The University and this course treat cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

Potential offences in papers and assignments include:

- using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor;
- making up sources or facts;
- obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment.

On tests and exams cheating includes:

- using or possessing unauthorized aids;
- looking at someone else's answers;
- misrepresenting your identity, or falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including (but not limited to) doctor's notes.

If you have concerns about plagiarism, please come speak to me directly. As you prepare your analytical essays, please make sure to review this link for useful guidance:

<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

## **Accessibility:**

I am committed to creating a course environment that is accessible for all students. If you require accommodation for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please feel free to discuss this with me and get in touch with Accessibility Services as soon as possible:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services/>

## **Harassment & Discrimination**

The University of Toronto is a diverse community and as such is committed to providing an environment free of any form of harassment, misconduct, or discrimination. In this course, I seek to foster a civil, respectful, and open-minded climate in which we can all work together to develop a better understanding of key questions and debates through meaningful dialogue. As such, I expect all involved with this course to refrain from actions or behaviours that intimidate, humiliate, or demean persons or groups or that undermine their security or self-esteem based on traits related to race, religion, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability, receipt of public assistance or record of offences.

## **Mental Health & Wellbeing**

Mental health is a growing concern among students. If you are in need of some assistance, please feel free to come speak to me. The University has also a number of services available to help you with your emotional wellbeing. Visit Health & Wellness for more information:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/>

## Educational Supports

If you require any assistance with the course material and assignments, please come speak with me and I will do my best to help you. For additional support, you may want to visit one of U of T's writing centres (<https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/>) as well as U of T's Centre for Learning Strategy Support (<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/centre-for-learning-strategy-support/>).

## Course Schedule & Readings

### **Week #1 (January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – Course Introduction and a Brief History of Human Rights in International Relations**

- Sam McFarland, “The Slow Creation of Humanity,” *Political Psychology* Vol. 32 No. 1 (February 2011), pp. 1-20.
- Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), chapter 1.
- Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” *Harvard International Law Journal* Vol. 42 No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 201-245.

### *Unit 1: What Are Human Rights?*

### **Week #2 (January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – What are Human Rights?**

- Frans de Waal & Stephen A. Sherblom, “Bottom-up Morality: The Basis of Human Morality in our Primate Nature,” *Journal of Moral Education* Vol. 47 No. 2 (2018), pp. 248-258
- Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (McClelland & Stewart, 2016), Chapter 2 (pp. 22-44).
- Lynn Hunt, “Revolutionary Rights,” in Pamela Slotte & Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (eds.), *Revisiting the Origins of Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 105-118.
- Micheline Ishay, “What are Human Rights? Six Historical Controversies,” *Journal of Human Rights* Vol. 3 No. 3 (2004), pp. 359-371.

### **Week #3 (January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – Human Rights as a Tool for Empire Building**

- Alice Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1985-1914,” *American Historical Review* Vol. 103, No. 2 (April 1998), pp. 419-442.
- Roxanne Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 23-49.

### **Week #4 (January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – Human Rights as a Tool for Undermining Political Rivals**

- Davide Rodogno, “Humanitarian Intervention in the Nineteenth Century,” in Alex Bellamy & Tim Dunne (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 19-37.

- Alan Kuperman “Darfur: Strategic Victimhood Strikes Again?” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* Vol. 4 No. 3 (2009), pp. 281-303.
- Clifford Bob, *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), chapter 8.

#### **Week #5 (February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026) – Human Rights as a Tool to Pursue Material Self-Interest**

- Jay Goodliffe & Darren Hawkins, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Rome: Explaining International Criminal Court Negotiations,” *Journal of Politics* Vol. 71 No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 977-997.
- Jason Brennan & Phillip Magness, *Cracks in the Ivory Tower: The Moral Mess of Higher Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 134-156.

#### **Week #6 (February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – In-Class Unit #1 Essay Test**

**\*\*\*\*\*Reading Week (February 16<sup>th</sup> – February 20<sup>th</sup>) – NO CLASS**

#### ***Unit #2: Transnational Human Rights Campaigns***

#### **Week #7 (February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026) - An Introduction to Human Rights Campaigns**

- Margaret Keck & Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), chapter 2 (pp. 39-78)
- Jo Becker, *Campaigning for Justice: Human Rights Advocacy in Practice* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2012), chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 12-55).
- Charli Carpenter *et al.*, “Explaining the Advocacy Agenda: Insights from the Human Security Network,” *International Organization* Vol. 68 (Spring 2014), pp. 449-470.

#### **Week #8 (March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026) – Mobilizing Support for a Distant Cause**

- Robert Cialdini, “The Science of Persuasion,” *Scientific American* (February 2001), pp. 76-81.
- Alan Schussman & Sarah Soule, “Process and Protest: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation,” *Social Forces* Vol. 84 No. 2 (December 2005), pp. 1083-1108.
- Kyla Jo Mcentire, Michele Leiby & Matthew Krain, “Human Rights Organizations as Agents of Change: An Experimental Examination of Framing and Micromobilization,” *American Political Science Review* Vol. 19 No. 5 (August 2015), pp. 407-426.

#### **Week #9 (March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – Building an Effective NGO and Transnational Coalition**

- Wendy Wong, *Internal Affairs: How the Structure of NGOs Transforms Human Rights* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), chapter 3.
- Aryeh Neier, *The International Human Rights Movement: A History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), chapter 9.
- Clifford Bob, “Overcoming Indifference: Internationalizing Human Rights Violations in Rural Mexico,” *Journal of Human Rights* Vol. 1 No. 2 (June 2002), pp. 247-26

**\*\*\*\*\* Campaign Analysis Video Essay Due Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>**

### **Week #10 (March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – Developing Effective Policy Solutions**

- Dursun Peksen, “Better or Worse? The Effect of Economic Sanctions on Human Rights,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 46 No. 1 (2009), pp. 59-77.
- James Franklin, “Shame on You: The Impact of Human Rights Criticism on Political Repression in Latin America,” *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 52 (2008), pp. 187-211.
- Amanda Murdie, “R2P, Human Rights and the Perils of a Bad Human Rights Intervention,” *Global Responsibility to Protect* Vol. 9 (2017), pp. 267-293.

### **Week #11 (March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026) – Pressuring Government**

- Brad Simpson, “Solidarity in an Age of Globalization: The Transnational Movement for East Timor and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Peace & Change* Vol. 29 Nos. 3&4 (July 2004), pp. 453-482.
- Daniel Bergan, “Does Grassroots Lobbying Work? A Field Experiment Measuring the Effects of an e-Mail Lobbying Campaign on Legislative Behavior,” *American Politics Research* Vol. 37 No. 2 (March 2009), pp. 327-352.
- Maria Stephan & Erica Chenoweth, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict,” *International Security* Vol. 33 No. 1 (Summer 2008), pp. 7-44.

### **Week #12 (March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026) – In-Class Unit #2 Essay Test**