The history of the theory and practice of human rights offers significant insights on the accomplishments, promises, paradoxes and shortcomings of justice, the protection of individual liberties and the challenges of local and international lawmaking. *The Politics of Human Rights: Myths, Legacies and Paradoxes* will explore historical debates on the creation and application of national and international legislation that has shaped our modern understanding of political citizenship, civil rights and the justice system. Comparative analyses will serve to highlight different approaches to justice according to cultural context and their impact on the execution of justice in everyday life. Double standards in the application of the law will recur in our discussions and investigations of the polemical history of human rights throughout different times and geographies. The seminar will address the versatile and sometimes obscure aspects of the justice system, analyzing the myth of impartiality as well as the value of improving justice.
making by the official institutional bodies as well as the grassroots. Interpretation and analysis of interdisciplinary documents and material from the field of political history, ethics, international relations and film will set the basis of our weekly discussion and reflections on the politics of human rights.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Students will gain a critical understanding of the history of human rights based on close reading and debate of the assigned resources.
2. Students will develop rigorous and original interpretation of the material and sources of their own choice through writing assignments, including a critical review and a final paper.
3. Students will present in class on a topic relevant to their research paper and will offer constructive feedback to their classmates.
4. Students will master relevant literature from the fields of political and cultural history, ethics and international relations.

**Grade Breakdown:**

**Seminar Paper Proposal 10% (Due Date: Session V)**
Submit a proposal of your research topic clearly stating the question you seek to address in either the senior thesis or the seminar paper. You should plan to meet at least twice in office hours to discuss the intentions of your project and the progress of your analysis and writing. Individual presentations in class will also contribute to refine your topic and direction of research.

**Mid-Term Review Essay 20% (Due Date: Session VIII)**
Students will critically review one or two essential works in the historiography of their chosen topic (either related to their research projects or to one of the session’s readings). The essay should explore the present state of the topic’s historiography, the shortcomings and the prospects of the subject under debate.

**Final Seminar Paper 50% (Due Date: Session XII)**
A 25-30 page paper either on the original research topic of students who will submit a senior thesis, or a theoretical/historical/interpretive/or policy seminar paper. Students will discuss their writing projects during office hours and will submit a short proposal of their final essays by Session IX (2-3 pages). See guidelines for proposal and final essay submission below.

**Class Participation 20% (Consistent Discussion and Introduction to One Session)**
Students will contribute to the weekly discussion of readings and projects. Each student will choose one session in the semester and prepare a 10 minutes presentation raising central questions related to the readings of the chosen session. In addition, students will present and discuss the progress of their research and final paper writing during the last two sessions of the semester. Constructive criticism and feedback should contribute to the evolution of students’
projects. Weekly postings on our course website reacting to a general thematic question will also count towards the participation grade.

**Evaluation Criteria**

**Argument**

20%

- Clear Exposition of Thesis (10%)
- Convincing Defense of the Argument (10%)

**Structure of the Discussion**

30%

- Review and Reference of Existent Literature on the Topic (15%)
- Insightful Use and Clear Interpretation of Evidence/Data (15%)

**Style**

10%

- Clarity and Eloquence (5%)
- Formal use of language (5%)

**Originality**

20%

- Offers a Critical and Provocative Analysis of the Topic (10%)
- Discusses Paradoxes, Unaddressed Dimensions of the Topic (10%)

**Responsibility/Punctuality**

20%

- Shows Reflection and Progress of the Chosen Topic (10%)
- Submits Work by Established Deadline (10%)
Schedule of Readings and Seminar Topics

Session I: Human Rights in Historical Perspective
The Present Debate in Human Rights
Human Rights: Theory and Practice
Human Rights as Discursive Field

Readings


Session II: The Morality of Justice and Rights
The Concept of Rights
Deconstructing the Notion of Justice

Readings


Session III: Non-Violence, Anti-Colonialism and the Reinvention of Rights
The Concept of Non-Violence
Non-Violence Philosophy’s Transformation of Human Rights Discourse

Readings
Gandhi, “Principles of Non-Violence”, Gandhi on Non-Violence (New Directions, 2007)


**Session IV: Errors of the Law? (I): The Case of Jim Crow Laws**

**Readings**


**Session V: Post-colonialism, National Reconstruction and Human Rights**

Cultural Identities and Human Rights
The Institutionalization of Human Rights
Building New Societies after Conflict

**Readings**


**Submission of Paper Proposals**

**Session VI: Errors of the Law? (II): The Case of the Stoning of Soraya**

**Readings**


Armina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1999)

Mark Ellis, “Islamic and International Law: Convergence or Conflict?” in *Islamic Law and International Human Rights Law*, Mark Ellis et al. (Oxford University Press, 2012)

(Suggested)


Selection of Scenes from *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (Cyrus Nowrasteh, 2009)

**Session VII: Human Rights in the Age of Globalization**

The Enforcement of Human Rights
Deconstructing Humanitarianism

**Readings**


**Session VIII: Errors of the Law? (III): Death Row and Erred Convictions in America**

**Readings**


Selected scenes from *The Life of David Gale* (Alan Parker, 2003)

**Session IX:**  *Prosecuting the Authorities*
Police Corruption/Abuse of Power
Heads of States under Examination

**Readings**


**Session X:**  *Errors of the Law? (IV): Rights for Prisoners of War?*
Who Defends Prisoners of War?
 Freedoms under Interrogation Processes

**Readings**


Selected Scenes from *Zero Dark Thirty* (Katherine Bigelow, 2012)

**Session XI:**  *Reproductive Rights: The Polemic of the Century*
The Concept of the Rights of the Unborn
Religious versus Secular Revisited

**Readings**

Cristopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion* (Routledge, 2010)


**Session XII: Polemics of Defense: The Case of Jacques Vergès**

The Ethics of Lawyers

Freedom of Conscience?

**Readings**


Screening of *Terror’s Advocate* (Barbet Schroeder, 2007)

Selections from the film *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)