Human Rights in Argentina

Description

This course examines both philosophical topics on human rights and the politics of human rights in Argentina, specifically during the military dictatorship (1976-1983) and the democratic transition. It is our understanding that any discussion on applied topics on human rights should include as well an account of their philosophical underpinnings. Thus, the course combines philosophical, historical, and empirical analysis. Each week, you will attend one lecture on a philosophical topic on human rights and the other on the history and politics of human rights in Argentina. The philosophical discussions should clarify concepts and ideas—such as the notion of human rights, the definition of genocide, the theory of transitional justice, the role of memory, and the social value of motherhood—that are relevant in the analysis of human rights history in Argentina after 1973.

Philosophical topics include conceptual analysis of the idea of rights, human rights and natural rights; debates about universalism vs. relativism; conventional vs. revisionist history of human rights in the international arena; analysis of the idea of genocide; theories of transitional justice; the relation between history and memory; and gendered accounts of the violations of human rights.

Historical topics include a survey of Argentine political history; the scope, structure and consequences of Argentine state violence; the role of other social actors in the violation of human rights; the lexicon and discourses of violence and how they shaped the body politic; transitional justice (trials, truth commission, amnesties, pardons and reparations); the role and morphology of collective memory; and the place of gender and identity in human rights violations in Argentina.
**Reading Material:** All required readings are available to students electronically on the Campus Virtual.

**Course Requirements:**
(1) Knowledgeable, constructive and active participation in class discussions (20%). It includes a group oral presentation on the visits to the ex-Esma and the memorial park. For each meeting, you are expected to have read the assigned texts carefully, and to be ready to discuss it. Always bring the assigned readings to class.

(2) Midterm examination. It consists of 10 multiple-choice questions that require a succinct justification (30%).

(3) Final term examination. A two-page in-class exam on two topics one philosophical the other historical (50%).

Failure to comply with any of the assignments will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade a day. This grade penalty will only be waived in the case of documented medical emergencies. All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.
We will hold you responsible for understanding this, so if you have any doubt about what constitutes plagiarism, or what it means to turn in an exam that is entirely your own work, you should talk to either of us in advance. Plagiarism (or similar academic dishonesty) is a grave offense, and it shall be treated accordingly. The presentation of another person’s work as one’s own will be reported to the university administration.

**Attendance policy:** Class attendance is mandatory. Students must attend at least 80% of classes and academic visits related to the course. Students are allowed only three (3) absences and one (1) late arrival to class (subsequent late arrivals count as absences). Visits are an integral part of the program, therefore not attending or arriving late to a visit will be treated in the same way as an absence or late arrival to class. If students miss class for a medical reason, they must present a medical waiver in order for the class to be counted as an excused absence. Medical waivers will only be valid if they are issued on letterhead, include the doctor’s signature and stamp, are issued immediately before or on the date of the absence and indicate diagnosis and indicated treatment. Please note, when students miss a class they are still responsible for the material covered. It is their responsibility to ask a classmate for class notes and then, after reading them over, see the professor in a timely manner with any questions on the material.

**Class Schedule and Readings**

**WEEK 1**

**Lecture 1: What Are Human Rights?**

*Individuals are carriers of human rights in virtue of being human regardless of the states in which they happen to live. This lecture is a conceptual exploration of that idea, its moral distinctiveness and scope of application.*

**Readings:**


French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen [3 pages]

UN Declaration of Human Rights [8 pages]

UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide [4 pages]
Lecture 2: Argentine Political History 1930-1970

An overview of the major political events between 1930 and 1976 including the first coup d’État and the role of the armed forces; the origins of Peronism and Peron’s governments; subsequent coups in 1955 and 1966; the National Security Doctrine in Latin America.

Readings:
Jerry Davila, Dictatorship in South America (Blackwell Publishing, 2013), pp. 55-61 [6 pages]

WEEK 2
Lecture 3: The History of Human Rights

This lecture examines the historical development of the idea of human rights, the path towards the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its evolution to the contemporary idea of human rights in the international context.

Readings:

Lecture 4: Revolutionary Violence

The surge of political violence between 1970 and 1976. Perón’s return to Argentina and the emergence of paramilitary organizations. The role of armed organizations, montoneros and ERP. The disassociation between civil society and the guerilla groups. The militarization of politics. Armed organizations’ self-evaluation of their political actions and the uses of violence.

Readings:
Jerry Davila, Dictatorship in South America (Blackwell Publishing, 2013), pp. 61-81 [20 pages]
WEEK 3
Lecture 5: Genocide: What Is It?

An introduction to the idea of genocide, how it differs from other mass atrocities, how it fits the historical developments in Argentina during the 70s, and a global comparison with other cases of genocide.

Readings:

Lecture 6: State Violence in Argentina

Strategies, motives and organization of state power holders and other social and political actors including the church, corporations and foreign powers during the military dictatorship (1976-1983). The emergence of human rights movements during the military repression. Human rights violations during the Malvina’s war. Children of the “disappeared.”

Readings:

WEEK 4: MID-TERM EXAM
Lecture 7: Transitional Justice (and Mid-Term Exam)

A theoretical analysis of the different forms of transitional justice—trials, truth commission, amnesties, pardons and reparations—their political and cultural conditions, and their relation to the rule of law, and the democratic order.

Readings:
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, chap. 1

**Lecture 8: Terror on Trial**


**Readings:**

**WEEK 5**
**Lecture 9: Memory and History**

*An examination of the relation between memory and history as well as vengeance and forgiveness. The role of personal testimonies in the construction of a collective memory. The relevance of memory to historical interpretation. Kantian vs. utilitarian approaches to justice and memory.*

**Readings:**
Susana Kaiser, *Postmemories of Terror*, chap. 1

**Lecture 10: Collective Memory in Argentina**

*The role of memory in the construction of the collective conscience and identity. The struggle for the shaping of memory, new generations coping with the legacies of terror, the politics of memory. “Never Again”: the two evils theory and the two prologues. The disputes around the construction of Museo de la Memoria, ex ESMA and the Parque de la Memoria.*

**Readings:**
Emilio Crenzel, “Between the voices of the State and the Human Rights Movement: Never Again and the Memories of the Disappeared in Argentina” in *Journal of*

WEEK 6
Lecture 11: Gender and Human Rights (philosophical and historical lectures will be delivered together)

Philosophical part:
*The gendering of history. The transformation of motherhood from a personal hunt to recover their children, that is, a private case of entrenched, private loyalty into a political movement of resistance.*

**Readings:**

Historical part:
*The role of gender and motherhood during military repression. Testimonial accounts of female political prisoners. Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, the grandchildren and the right to identity.*

**Readings:**

Lecture 12: FINAL EXAM