

PURCHASE COLLEGE, SUNY

POL/WOM 3125.45 - WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

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SPRING 2002

Room: SS 1027

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Office Hours: T, Th. 3:00-4:00, and by appointment

Description

This course focuses on the definitions of human rights and the ways women's experiences of human rights violations are gendered. It examines the roles of custom and law, international human rights conventions, the shortcomings of the international human rights structures in protecting women's rights, and strategies that women have employed to promote their rights, with an emphasis on the International Women's Convention.

Activities:

The course combines lecture, seminar and workshop styles. The earlier class sessions will be based on brief lectures and discussions of the literature written by feminist scholars who challenge the norms employed in defining human rights in international law. In addition to the theoretical debates, women's efforts and achievements in affecting the international debates and structures of human rights will be addressed. The students comprehension of the literature, lectures and all class discussions will be measured through two in-class exams.

For the seminar component, each student will choose a country that ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and examine the kinds of reservations employed, how the reservations on certain articles prevent upholding the Convention, and the periodic government reports submitted to the UN Committee that oversees the implementation of CEDAW. Students will present their findings and analyses to the class, discuss each other's work, and compare different governments' approach to the Convention.

For the workshop component, students will establish small groups (2-3 persons) and develop activity plans that would promote women's rights in the U. S. or in another country of their choice.

Course Requirements and Policies:

Since this is a discussion-oriented course, class participation is crucial. *Attendance* is treated as a prerequisite of class participation. Absenteeism and tardiness for more than two class meetings will result in an unfavourable evaluation of class participation. The deadlines for the papers are not negotiable; late submissions will result in a deduction of 10 points from the deserved grade for each late (calendar) day. *No incomplete grades* will be granted. Presentation dates will be firm, and missing a presentation will result in a 20-point deduction from the deserved grade of the project. Cheating on the exams and all forms of plagiarism will result in failure for the

course and disciplinary action. The weight of each component for the final grade and their dates/deadlines are as follows:

Class participation		15 %	every day
Exam I	20 %		March 6
Exam II		20 %	April 24
CEDAW project			
preliminary report & bibliography			March 20
presentation			to be announced
written paper		25 %	April 24
Group project			
declaration of title & partners			April 3
presentation			May 1
paper		20 %	May 8

However, if a student does poorly at the beginning but makes up for it by doing well on the later work, extra weight will be assigned to the later performance.

BOOKS

The following books are available at the Campus Book Store, some other required readings and sources for research papers either are available at the library reserve desk or can be accessed through the on-line reserve listing (E-res) for the course.

Required:

Glendon, Mary Ann. *A World Made New*. New York: Random House, 2001.

Peters, Julie, and Wolper, Andrea, eds., *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Rights of Women: A Guide to the Most Important United Nations Treaties on Women's Human Rights. New York. International Women's Tribune Centre, 1998.

Seager, Joni. *The State of Women in the World Atlas*. New edition. London: Penguin Press, 1997.

Women and Human Rights: The Basic Documents. Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University. 1996.

Recommended:

Women and Human Rights Step by Step. Washington, D.C.: Women, Law and Development International, and Human Rights Watch, 1997.

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

1/23 a. Introduction: The Purpose and Structure of the Course

b. What are human rights and human rights conventions?

Rights of Women, “Introduction” and Section 1.

PART I. INTERNATIONAL BILL OF RIGHTS

1/30 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Its Development, Content, and Politics

Glendon, Preface, Chapters 1-10; Appendix 7

Appendices 1-6 (skim through)

2/6 a. The Two Covenants and the Divisive Issues: Negative vs. Positive Rights; Individual vs. Group Rights; Relativism vs. Universalism

ICCPR, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights(1976)

ICESCR, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights(1976)

Glendon, Chapters 10-12 and Epilogue

Rao, Arati. “The Politics of Gender and Culture in International Human Rights Discourse,” in Peters and Wolper.

Mayer, Ann Elizabeth. “Cultural Particularism as a Bar to Women’s Rights: Reflections on the Middle Eastern Experience,” in Peters and Wolper.

Meeting at the library for on-line services (3:00 pm)

PART II. THE ARTICULATION AND PROMOTION OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS

2/13 The Violations of Women’s Rights: Types and Scopes

Seager, *The State of Women in the World Atlas*.

Chapters 4-12 , 29-32 in Peters and Wolper

Rights of Women (skim through to identify issue areas and type of violation)

Recommended: *Human Development Report, 2001* (check GDI, GEM and Tables 5-8, 21-27).

2/20 Why a Separate Convention for Women’s Rights?

CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. In *Rights of Women*, pp. 137-143 or in *Women and Human Rights: The Basic Documents*, pp. 59-68.

Charlesworth, Hilary. “Human Rights and Men’s Rights,” in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 13.

Kaufman, Natalie Hevener, and Lindquist, Stefanie A. “Critiquing Gender-Neutral Treaty Language: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women,” in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 14.

Sullivan, Donna. "The Public/Private Distinction in International Human Rights Law," in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 15.

- 2/27 Issues of Underdevelopment, Forms of Oppression, and Feminisms
 Arat, Z. "Women Under Layers of Oppression: The (Un)changing Political Economy of Gender," in Manochehr Dorraj, ed., *The Changing Political Economy of the Third World*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995: 265-293 (on reserve)
 Jaggar, Alison M., and Rothenberg, Paula S., eds., *Feminist Frameworks*. 3rd ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993: 113-126. (on reserve)
 Chapters 26-28 in Peters and Wolper
 Film: Selbi
- 3/6 International Women's Movement, Development of CEDAW, and its Limitations.
 Bunch, Charlotte, "Transforming Human Rights from a Feminist Perspective," in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 1.
 Friedman, Elisabeth. "Women's Human Rights: Emergence of a Movement," in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 2.
 Stamatopoulou, Elissavet. "Women's Rights and the United Nations," in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 3.
Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (on reserve)
Basic Documents, CEDAW Committee, General Recommendations 12-19, 21
The Optional Protocol to CEDAW (on reserve)

Exam I

[Spring Recess, 3/9-17]

- 3/20 Implementing the CEDAW
Rights of Women, Sections 2-3.
 Mertus, Julie. "State Discriminatory Family Law and Customary Abuses," in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 16.
 Freeman, Marsha A. The Human Rights of Women in the Family: Issues and Recommendations for Implementation of the Women's Convention," in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 17.
 Toro, Maria Suarez. "Popularizing Women's Rights at the Local Level: A Grassroots Methodology for Setting the International Agenda," in Peters and Wolper, Chapter 20.
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (on reserve)
Outcome Document (on reserve)
 Film: Where the Credit is Due

PART IV. SPECIAL ISSUE AREAS

- 4/3 Violence against Women and Women's Health and Reproductive Rights
 Chapters 21-25 in Peters and Wolper
 Basic Rights, pp. 153-181, 230-246.
 Film: Silence and Complicity

PART V. CEDAW PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

4/10 TBA
4/17 TBA
4/24 **Exam II** - CEDAW Project Reports due

PART VI. GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

5/1 Group project presentations
5/8 Open Session – Group Project reports due

GUIDELINES FOR THE PROJECTS

I. The CEDAW project:

On the CEDAW web page, examine the list of the countries that ratified the Convention and choose one. Check if there are any reservations, date of report submissions, and if the state reports are posted. If the reports are not available on line, you should try to obtain hard copies from the UN.

Check if the country of your choice has signed or ratified the Optional Protocol.

Read about the various issues in *Rights of Women* and skim through the book by Peters and Wolper to be informed about how some of these issues are addressed in selected countries. You can use the country/region specific chapters and the cases that apply to your country as additional information sources. However, an important component of your research will involve library research. Check journal indexes for articles on the current assessment of women's lives in the country of your choice. Check if there are some women's organizations in the country which prepare alternative (shadow) reports. How do they assess the state's efforts and the progress? Gather some data on several indicators of women's status and opportunities in the county (e.g., literacy, school enrollment, maternal mortality rates, political representation) for different time points (at least one time point should be before the Convention was ratified) and check if there have been any improvements. *Human Development Report (HDR)*, an annual publication of the United Nations, would be useful as a data source. The most recent issue of the *HDR* will be on reserve.

What is your assessment of the success of the country in implementing the Convention? What are the areas of progress? Where do you see major problems? What are persistent obstacles? What would help in speeding up the progress? How effective is CEDAW in improving women's lives in that country?

The written paper should be about 12-15 pages in length (double-spaced typed, in font size 12, and with one-inch margins on all sides). Proper citation rules and bibliography styles should be followed. 10 percent of the grade will be for the style.

II. The Group project on designing an activity:

Rights of Women will be your basic source for guidelines. Sections 4 and 5 would provide some ideas about possible projects, but you should feel neither limited to them nor obliged to design a big project. Anything that would help promoting women's rights in any community or informing women about their rights would be valuable. You may find something that is immediately applicable (e.g., within Purchase College) as more attractive, but a hypothetical one that is designed for a larger population in the U. S. or another country is welcome as well. However, note that ultimately the project should be realistic and feasible.

Your project design should include information on the following:

- I. the issue and the goal
- II. the target population
- III. a time table
- IV. description of the activity or activities
- V. means of announcement
- VI. the cost (material, regular staff salaries, consultants, honoraria, travel, etc.)
- VII. sources of funding (in addition to considering some fund-raising projects, you should consider government and foundation grants)
- VIII. expected obstacles and ways of combatting them

Note that how well all of the above items are researched, thought out, and presented will be more important in the performance evaluation than the complexity of the project.

The written report should be about 6-8 pages and follow the style rules that are set for the CEDAW project.