RC Core 100.005  Human Rights Activism
Fall, 2006
Dr. Helen Fox  hfox@umich.edu
Tu Th 3-5 PM  66 Greene
Office hours by appointment. I usually meet students
at Amer’s on Church or in one of my offices:
120 Tyler (East Quad) or
1128 Angell Hall (Sweetland Writing Center)

Required Reading:
(All books available at Shaman Drum Book Store on State St.)
3. Our C-Tools site. Certain readings will be assigned from the Resources page at various points in the semester.
4. Choice of one of four books on human rights abuses from the 1st list below (Note: You will report on these books as part of a small group, so please don’t go ahead and choose/order your book before we decide which group is responsible for what).
5. Your group’s choice of one of four books on human rights activism (See 2nd list below).

Books on human rights abuses (for group presentations)
4. Choice of TWO Monographs from Human Rights Watch on a current topic
(Examples: Congolese Street Children; Iraqi Insurgency; Mexican Rape Survivors; US Doctors involved in Torture at Guantanamo and Afghanistan. These four documents are on CTOOLS Resources. Check Human Rights Watch website for others.)

Books on human rights activism
Some UM Student Human Rights Activist Websites

SOLE: Students Organizing for Labor and Economic Equality  
http://www.umich.edu/~sole/

STAND: Students Taking Action Now: Darfur  
http://uuis.umich.edu/maizepgs/view.cfm?orgID=10004732

COKE COALITION  
http://www.umich.edu/~coke/index.htm

ENACT: Environmental Action  
http://www.umich.edu/~enact/

Justice for Bhopal:  
http://uuis.umich.edu/maizepgs/view.cfm?orgID=10004072

Men Against Violence Against Women:  
http://uuis.umich.edu/maizepgs/view.cfm?orgID=10003898

Students Assisting Migrant Farmworkers:  
http://uuis.umich.edu/maizepgs/view.cfm?orgID=10004504

Students for Life:  
http://uuis.umich.edu/maizepgs/view.cfm?orgID=10004188

Students for Choice:  
http://uuis.umich.edu/maizepgs/view.cfm?orgID=10004186

U-M Amnesty International:  
http://www.umich.edu/~amnesty/

Introduction

In this new course, students will consider questions that are currently debated in the human rights community: How are human rights defined? Whose definition gets heard? Is the idea of human rights new and “Western,” or is it ancient and cross-cultural? How should individuals and nations be held accountable for human rights violations? What does it mean to be an ally to those whose human rights have been abused? How can we help hold governments accountable for human rights violations in our own country and around the world? Readings, discussion, writing, videos, guest speakers, and activism will be our learning tools. Students will actively participate in a human rights organization of their choice, and integrate their activism with classroom learning. Students will learn to use writing as a tool of activism as well as a way to consider intellectual questions, express their opinions, and use their creativity and skill to honor the human beings whose rights need protection. The instructor is a member of U-M’s Human Rights Consortium, a former Chair of the Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission, and an activist on human rights issues.

Course Goals

1. To become familiar with the history of the idea of human rights and the major human rights documents and institutions
2. To learn about a variety of human rights violations in the U.S. and other countries.
3. To understand and express informed opinions about some of the controversies in the field of human rights
4. To actively participate in an on-campus human rights organization
5. To practice college level writing in forms that are useful in human rights activism

Writing Assignments

In each writing assignment you will learn a specific type of writing that is useful in human rights activism while at the same time, you will be practicing essential skills in college writing: clarity, specificity, getting to the point, addressing an audience, constructing an effective argument, researching and documenting your facts, using personal appeals, and so on.

1. Narrative/Testimony (3-4 pages, in two or more drafts). A detailed, personal description of how you came to be interested in human rights activism. You may write in the first or third person.

2. Reading Journals (2-3 typed pages). Topics will be assigned. Please consider that I am your audience -- a real person interested in your ideas and insights. Journals should be carefully organized and edited for clarity, insight, depth, and of course, grammar.

3. Letter to the Editor (two or three paragraphs on a carefully researched HR issue of your choice, for a specific audience and venue that you define (example: Michigan Daily; your hometown newspaper, etc.)

4. Letter to a Government Official (one page in two or more drafts) on a HR issue of your choice. I encourage you to actually send this letter, so both the content of your letter and the recipient’s stand on the issue must be carefully researched. Many activist websites have “canned” letters that you can just sign and send. Let’s use these as models, but write our own letters from scratch.

5. Speech (4-5 pages in two or more drafts.) A formal, written, carefully researched speech on a (different) HR issue of your choice, for a specific audience that you define (for example: Seniors at your former high school; adults at your religious institution; etc.)

6. Op-Ed piece (600-750 words in two or more drafts). An “op-ed” means an opinion piece that appears opposite the editorial page in a newspaper. Newspapers publish op-eds from established columnists (e.g. Thomas Friedman; Rosa Brooks) or local people, including college students, who write well on compelling issues. Op-eds always have a specified length, and to be submitted, must be accompanied by your name, address, and contact phone number.

7. Reflection (2-3 pages, one draft). Your final piece of writing is an account of your journey through this course: what you learned, how you learned it, what your frustrations were, what questions remain, etc. It should appear as the first piece in your writing portfolio that you hand in on the last day of class.
TIPS ON WRITING FOR THIS CLASS

In high school you may have learned a specific style of writing that worked for all - or most - of your writing assignments. But in college, as in the real world, there is no one-size-fits-all style of writing. In considering how to write any piece, you should ask yourself, “Who wants to know what for what purpose - and who cares?” You’ll see how these four questions (who? what? why? so what?) intertwine as you think about them in depth:

1. Your Audience: Who are you writing this piece for? What tone and style would they connect with? What arguments might speak to them? Would they be convinced by carefully researched facts, or will personal experiences or stories (also) draw them in? Will they respond to a dry, dispassionate tone, or would this strike them as dull or uncaring? Do they have nit-picky expectations about grammar, spelling, typos, and references?

2. The Point: What exactly are you trying to say? What does your audience need to know? At what point in the piece do they need to know it? Do they need a few essential facts or background to understand what your piece is about? Would they think you are wandering, or repeating yourself unnecessarily? Or is your particular audience expecting a more abstract, undefined, or poetic piece without a crystal clear point?

3. The Purpose: Aside from the obvious, why are you writing this piece? Are you writing to persuade your audience of something? to inform them? to simply express your emotions? to ask or inspire them to do something?

4. Who cares? To what extent do you want to meet your audience’s needs and expectations? Is expressing yourself for yourself more important to you? Do you want to push the boundaries of what’s expected or desired by your audience? Could you reach your audience even better if you tried something really different?

Writing is both a solitary activity and a social one. Take some time to create an environment that brings your ideas into focus and inspires you to express them well (music? silence? frequent breaks for tea or snacks? hard or soft chair? special pen or laptop to jot down those first elusive thoughts? daytime or late at night?). Once you have settled down and written your draft -- it sometimes takes me an hour or more per page as a professional writer -- read it aloud to yourself and listen to its music. Work over those spots that sound weak or discordant. Then read your draft to a willing listener or two, and ask them to say where they are confused or what they want to know more about. Use the Sweetland Writing Center for help with any stage of the writing process: http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/undergrads/
And use my written feedback on your pieces constructively!
Individual Conferences
You are REQUIRED to schedule two individual writing conferences with me at points in the semester when talking about your writing and ideas will be the most helpful to you. The first conference should happen before the Fall Study Break, and the second should come before Thanksgiving. You are very welcome to schedule additional conferences with me at any time if you like. Remember to bring the piece of writing you want to work on.

Assessment of writing assignments
Your writing assignments will not be graded in the usual way; I feel that letter grades often stifle the critical thinking, creativity and risk-taking that are necessary to the writing process. Instead, I will comment extensively on your work and talk to you about it in conference. To ensure your careful reading and thinking about the course texts and discussions as well as your attention to the writing process, I will mark your pieces with ++ (you’ve impressed me); + (okay, but some deeper thinking, more accurate editing, and/or more significant details would improve it); or RW - a mandatory re-write after careful consideration of my comments and an individual writing conference if we both think it would be helpful. Lots of good writers get RWs, so don’t be discouraged if you do. You may endlessly revise (and I will endlessly comment on) assignments marked RW or +.

Group Presentation
In four groups, students will choose a book (or two monographs) on human rights abuses (see 1st list, above), read it, and then get together outside of class to prepare an interesting presentation on the topic of the text lasting about 30-40 minutes that will educate the rest of the class. The presentation should be more than a verbal book report. I encourage you to involve the class in activities, discussion questions, or other small group work; you can use media, such as part of a film -- if you should find one on your topic through Mirlyn (advise me, and I’ll order it and the video equipment for the day of your presentation), or you can dream up other creative ways of helping us consider the issues deeply. Be sure to give us necessary background on your topic. In what country is it taking place? At what point in history? What are the HR abuses being claimed or described? What controversies should we consider? What is being done about the issue?

Community Action
By the fourth week of the course you will be involved in a human rights organization of your choice by joining a group on campus. Please see the list of websites (above) for information on many of these organizations. You will be asked to report on your organization to the class at various points in the semester, telling us what they’re doing, your role in the action, questions or issues that have come up for you regarding the issues or methods used, etc.
Portfolio Assessment
There are no exams in this class; instead, you will demonstrate your intellectual engagement and learning through your active engagement in class activities and the progress in your writing. A portfolio of all your drafts of all your pieces, securely fastened in a cardboard binder, will be due on the last day of class. The first piece in your portfolio will be your final reflection, followed by each draft (clearly labeled DRAFT #1; DRAFT #2; FINAL DRAFT, etc.) of the rest of the pieces in the order they were assigned. A table of contents would be handy. If you missed a reading journal because of an absence (or your computer ate your homework) you might mention that it’s missing (and why) in your table of contents.

Grading
Your grade and RC evaluation will be based on the quality and depth of your writing and thinking, your attendance and involvement in class, the quantity and quality of your contributions to class discussion, and your active participation in a human rights organization of your choice.

To get an A in the class, your writing and attention to feedback must be outstanding; your frequent additions to class discussion must be inclusive of your peers and helpful in moving the conversation forward; your attendance in class and at two mandatory individual conferences must be stellar, and your pro-active engagement in your group presentation and a campus human rights organization must be substantial.

Plagiarism
This unusual “sin” is taken very seriously at U-M. In the grand scheme of things (human rights abuses; WWII) it is minor, but in fact, plagiarism can cause you to fail a class or, in the worst case scenario, result in your dismissal from the University. Please don’t be tempted to cut and paste paragraphs from the Internet, copy stuff from books, or accept your mom’s re-write of your pieces - for any class. Plagiarism is surprisingly easy to detect without any special software. I’d rather see poor writing than suspicious passages. For details about plagiarism and how to avoid it, please see the Shapiro Undergraduate website: www.lib.umich.edu/ugl/guides/plagiarism/html

Attendance Policy
It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet at the beginning of every class. This is my only record of your attendance. Because all classes are discussion-intensive, attendance and active participation is a must. Arrival no later than ten minutes past the hour is expected. More than two absences (with the exception of religious holidays) and/or continual late arrival may result in a significant lowering of your grade. Please try to inform me by e-mail if you know you will be absent. I never require written excuses; if illness or
emergency significantly inhibit your participation, be sure to let me know what’s happening.

**Calendar**
*(Subject to modification, depending on students’ interests and needs. Any changes, as well as assignments for the next week (such as additional reading and reading journals) will be posted on the blackboard at the beginning of class.)*

**Week 1 (Sept. 5, 7)** Introductions, working together.
**QUESTIONS:** Where did the idea of human rights come from? What are some human rights abuses occurring in the world today? Why do we care?
**ACTIVITY:** Research, discussion, in-class writing.
**READING:** Ishay: *History of Human Rights* 15-116
**WRITING:** Start Narrative/Testimony

**Week Two (Thurs. Sept. 14)** *NOTE: NO CLASS SEPT. 12 - I will be in Warsaw, consulting for OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) on Human Rights Education.*
**QUESTIONS:** What rights have been agreed upon by “the international community”? Where did their liberal and secular perspective come from?
**ACTIVITY:** Discussion.
**READING:** International Human Rights Documents and Background on Some International Laws (CTOOLS RESOURCES)
**WRITING:** Due Sept. 14: First Draft Narrative/Testimony

**Week Three (Sept. 19, 21)**
**QUESTIONS:** How did communal or group rights come to be included in international human rights documents? How did the world wars accentuate the idea of human rights?
**ACTIVITY:** Groups choose books on Human Rights Abuses; start preparing in-class presentations for Oct. 3 and 5.
**READING:** Ishay: *History of Human Rights* 117-243; Human Rights Abuses book (for group project)
**WRITING:** Reading Journals to be assigned

**Week Four (Sept. 26, 28)**
**QUESTIONS:** How did networks of activists get started, historically? What are some ways that U-M students have taken action on human rights abuses?
**ACTIVITY:** Reports on human rights organizations on campus. Join the HR organization of your choice and start attending meetings. Peer Review, Personal Experience/Narrative.
**READING:** Keck and Sikkink: *Activists Beyond Borders* Intro-78. Your book on HR Abuses for your group project.
**WRITING:** Due Sept. 26 Second Draft Narrative/Testimony
Reading Journals to be assigned.

**Week Five (Oct. 3, 5)**
QUESTIONS: What are some examples of HR abuses in the U.S. and abroad? How are these wrongs framed and contested?
ACTIVITY Group Presentations on HR Abuses (two sessions)
READING: None.
WRITING: Reading Journals to be assigned

Week Six (Oct. 10, 12)
QUESTIONS: Are human rights universal? Or are they relative to culture? How does international pressure change human rights practices?
ACTIVITY: Reports on your campus HR organizations and their work.
READING: Keck and Sikkink: Activists Beyond Borders 79-120 and 165-198.
WRITING: Due: First Draft: Letter to the Editor and Letter to a Government Official

Fall Study Break

Week Seven (Thurs. Oct. 19)
QUESTIONS: How has globalization affected ideas of human rights?
ACTIVITY: Video: Sweating for a T-Shirt 24 min. #29616-H
READING: None.
WRITING: Reading journal to be assigned.

Week Eight (Oct. 24, 26)
QUESTIONS: How can students change unfair policies of international corporations?
ACTIVITY: Case Study: SOLE -- U-M Apparel. Speaker TBA
READING: Ishay: 246-313.
WRITING: Second Draft Letter to the Editor and Letter to a Government Official
Due Oct. 24.

Week Nine (Oct. 31, Nov. 2)
QUESTIONS: How do activist groups gain power and moral authority? What are some of the challenges of success?
ACTIVITY: Case Study: U-M Coke Coalition. Speaker.
READING: Coke Campaign Websites and TBA
WRITING: Reading Journal to be assigned.

Week Ten (Nov. 7, 9)
QUESTIONS: What makes an effective human rights argument? How is a speech different from (or similar to) a written piece?
ACTIVITY: Peer Review of Speech (first draft)
READING: Your book on HR Activism.
WRITING: Due Nov. 7: First Draft of Speech.

Week Eleven (Nov. 14, 16)
QUESTIONS: How are human rights protected and violations prosecuted?
ACTIVITY: Discussion of your group’s chosen books on HR Activism (two sessions)
READING: Your book on HR activism.
WRITING: Reading Journal to be assigned.

Week Twelve (Tues. Nov. 21)
READING: Websites TBA
WRITING: Reading Journal TBA

Thanksgiving Holiday

Week Thirteen (Nov. 28, 30)
QUESTIONS: What makes an effective written argument for a newspaper audience? How might this be different from a speech?
ACTIVITY: Peer Review Op-Ed piece Nov. 28. Updates on your HR organization and its work. Decide on Special HR Issue for next week.
READING: Research your own HR issue for your Op-Ed piece.

Week Fourteen (Dec. 5, 7)
SPECIAL HR ISSUE: To be decided by students.
ACTIVITY: ditto
READING: ditto

Week Fifteen (Tues. Dec. 12)
QUESTION: How can we continue to be effective allies to people and groups suffering human rights abuses?
ACTIVITY: Discussion. Evaluation of the course.
READING: TBA.
WRITING: Portfolios DUE. Your final reflection should appear as the first piece in your portfolio.