This course examines the contemporary elaboration and dissemination of human rights in the post-World War II period as law, discourse, and practice. This includes an analysis of its institutional grounding in United Nations institutions and non-governmental organizations and its changes over time. The course covers the historical opposition of the American Anthropological Association to human rights and its recent statement of support. It examines the opposition between culture and rights along with current theoretical efforts to negotiate an intermediate space. Current anthropological work focuses on the way human rights concepts and institutions are mobilized in particular political struggles in various parts of the world and how concepts of culture and rights are deployed in the global production and localization of human rights ideas. Specific areas of focus include indigenous rights, women's rights, transitional justice, and human rights monitoring by NGOs and treaty committees, including technologies of knowledge production and the use of indicators and benchmarks. The course discusses approaches to transnational, deterritorialized, and multi-sited ethnography as well as the gaps between human rights law and implementation.

There will be a mid-semester paper of 10 pages and a final research paper of 25 pages. Students are expected to write a one-page reaction to the readings for each class to be posted on Blackboard by midnight the night before the class, with two classes excused. Students are expected to complete the readings and to be prepared to discuss them. By request, the workload will be tailored for law students receiving fewer credits than FAS students.

Readings:


**September 6: Introduction: Concepts of Human Rights and the Contemporary Human Rights System**


**September 13: Human Rights and Culture: Anthropological Perspectives**


**September 20: The Human Rights Regime and International Law**


**September 27: The Human Rights Treaties**

Read the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*  
*International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR)  
*International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR),  
and several of the other treaties. Each has general comments and reporting guidelines.  
There are country reports for each treaty. Read as much of these materials as you can to  
get a sense of what the treaties cover and what the reports are like. There is a description  
of the process in my 2006 book, below, chapters 2 and 3.


**October 4: Enforcing Human Rights**


**October 18: Universalism and Relativism: The Question of Cultural Difference**


There is a full book with this argument as well, *The Clash of Civilizations*.


**October 25: Anthropologists Debate Human Rights and Culture**


AAA statement on human rights on [www.aaanet.org](http://www.aaanet.org)


**November 1: Human Rights in Practice**

Mark Goodale and Sally Engle Merry, eds. 2007. *The Practice of Human Rights*. Cambridge Univ. Press.

**Paper due to** my mailbox in Anthropology, November 4. Consider the following questions:

How are human rights made? What are the processes by which a right is created, legitimated, and established? What kinds of processes are necessary to make a human right recognized and implemented?
November 8: Vernacularization of Human Rights


Recommended: the four case studies in the Global Networks special issue, 2009 (9:4).


November 15: Local Interpretations of Human Rights


November 22: Transitional Justice and the International Criminal Court


November 29: Trafficking and Human Rights


December 6: Measuring Human Rights


December 13: Project Presentations