

# Human Rights in Asia

**IDS 4930/ANT4930/ASH3931**

Fall Semester 2025

University of Florida

International Studies Program

Bob Graham Center for Public Service

## Course Information:

Instructor: Timothy Karis, PhD  
Meeting times/locations: Tuesday 1:55-2:45PM (MAT0117), Thursday 1:55-3:50PM (LIT 0219)  
Office location: Pugh Hall 232  
Office hours: Tuesday 11:00AM-1:00PM (by appointment), Wednesday 12:00-1:00PM (by appointment), Thursday 12:00-1:00 PM (drop-in)  
<https://calendly.com/dr-karis-office-hours/>

## Course Description:

Since the end of World War II, the framework of human rights has dominated international discourse about social justice. This class critically investigates and applies the framework of human rights with reference to Asian countries and cultures, analyzing the tensions related to the application of universalist ideals onto culturally diverse localities. We will begin with the origins of different national and global standards of human rights, including perspectives from relevant Asian belief systems. Next, we look to Asia's 20<sup>th</sup> century history of political violence, identifying how basic rights can become eroded and how societies continue to memorialize past atrocities and seek justice and accountability. Finally, we will examine the contemporary experiences of ethnic minorities in Asia facing legal obstacles and persecution, both at home and as workers abroad. The class draws upon case studies from Cambodia, China, Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Jordan, and elsewhere.

## Course Objectives:

By the end of the semester, students will better understand:

- The historical trajectory of international human rights discourses
- Perspectives on human rights from non-Western sources
- The tensions between universal rights, cultural relativism, and national sovereignty
- Historical periods of mass violence in Asia and the peacemaking process
- The challenges faced by ethnic minorities in securing equal rights and self-determination

## Course Texts:

1. Ung, Luong. (2006). *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*. New York: Harper Perennial
2. All additional readings will be made available on the class Canvas site

## Student Responsibilities:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in the course are consistent with university policies. See <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/> for more information regarding the University Attendance Policies. Students are expected to complete all readings and assignments and to attend all class sessions, barring an emergency. Accumulating more than three unexcused absences will significantly impact your participation score. Please arrive on time and well prepared. The class will include discussion, lectures, and film screenings. Your active participation figures in your final grade, so please put forth your best effort to contribute to class discussions. Please always maintain respect for your classmates even when discussing sometimes controversial subjects. Please refrain from using your phone for any activities unrelated to our class, including reading and sending text messages. You should regularly check the class Canvas site for readings, announcements, and information about assignments and class activities.

## Academic Honesty:

Please do not engage in plagiarism or any other behaviors that would violate the University of Florida Academic Honesty Policy. You can find a copy of the University of Florida Academic Honesty Policy using the link that follows. It is the student's responsibility to read, understand, and abide by the policy: <https://archive.catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1617//advising/info/student-honor-code.aspx>

## Student Evaluation:

Your grade will be based on three essay assignments, two film response papers (out of three opportunities), and your class participation and attendance. Individual assignment prompts will be distributed in class and posted to Canvas. You will have at least 10 days to complete each of the longer essay assignments, and at least 7 days to complete the film responses. Please find University grades and grading policies here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>. The course grading breakdown is as follows:

Essay 1 (4-5 pages)	20%
Essay 2 (4-5 pages)	20%
Essay 3 (4-5 pages)	20%
Film response paper 1 (2-3 pages)	15%
Film response paper 2 (2-3 pages)	15%
Class participation	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Grading Scale:

<b>A</b>	<b>94-100</b>
<b>A-</b>	<b>90-93</b>
<b>B+</b>	<b>87-89</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>84-86</b>
<b>B-</b>	<b>80-83</b>
<b>C+</b>	<b>77-79</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>74-76</b>
<b>C-</b>	<b>70-73</b>
<b>D+</b>	<b>67-69</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>64-66</b>
<b>D-</b>	<b>60-63</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>&lt;60</b>

## Writing Requirements:

When composing your essays, you are free to cite your sources according to either the APA or MLA formatting requirements – just be sure to remain consistent. The best essays will reference key course readings and ideas while demonstrating original thinking in answering the question(s). Your essays will be evaluated using the following grading rubric:

1. (40 points) - The extent to which the response demonstrates an understanding of key concepts and thoughtfully and thoroughly answers the questions.
2. (40 points) - The depth of the analysis, including reference to specific citations and examples and attention to the connections between cases.
3. (20 points) - The overall quality of the work, including evidence of effort, logic and reasoning, and conformity to the formatting guidelines.

Please remember that the UF Writing Studio also offers excellent guidance for students looking to improve their writing skills. The studio's online tutors, instructional tutorials, and other resources can be found at: [writing.ufl.edu/writing studio](http://writing.ufl.edu/writing%20studio).

## Accommodations:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

## Course Evaluations:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner can be found at the following web address: <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>.

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## Course Schedule:

**Week 1 – 8/21:**                      **Syllabus Review – Course Introduction**

**Week 2 – 8/26-8/28:**              **Introducing Human Rights**

### Readings:

1. United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: see <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
2. Ramacharan, R. and Ramcharan, B. (2018). "Crafting Universal Values: The UDHR Model, Context, and Process" in *Asia and the Drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

**Week 3 – 9/2-9/4:**                      **Genealogies of Human Rights**

### Readings

1. Clapham, A. (2007). "Looking at Rights" in *Human Rights, A Very Short Introduction* (excerpt)
2. Shestack, J. (2003). "The Philosophic Foundations of Human Rights" in *Journal of Human Rights* (excerpt)

**Week 4 – 9/9-9/11:**                      **Non-Western Perspectives on Human Rights**

### Readings

1. Ignatieff, M. (2001). "The Attack on Human Rights" in *Foreign Affairs*
2. Chan, J. (1999). "A Confucian Perspective on Human Rights for Contemporary China" in *The East Asian challenge for Human Rights*

**\*\*\*\*ESSAY #1 POSTED 9/11 – DUE 9/21\*\*\*\***

**Week 5 – 9/16-9/18: Human Rights in Cambodia**

Readings

1. Ledgerwood, J. & Un, K. (2003). "Global Concepts and Local Meaning: Human Rights and Buddhism in Cambodia" in *Journal of Human Rights*
2. Khamboly et al. (2007). *A History of Democratic Kampuchea, 1975-1979* from *The Documentation Center of Cambodia*

**\*\*\*\*\*ESSAY #1 DUE ON CANVAS BY 11:59 PM ON 9/21\*\*\*\*\***

**Week 6 – 9/23-9/25: The Khmer Rouge and Cambodian Society**

Readings

1. Ung, L. (2006). *First They Killed My Father*, pp. 1-110

**Week 7 – 9/30-10/2: The Khmer Rouge and Cambodian Society, cont.**

Readings

1. Ung, L. (2006). *First They Killed My Father*, pp. 111-238

**\*\*\*In-class film #1: *Enemies of the People* (2011)**

**Week 8 – 10/7-10/9: Human Rights on Trial in Cambodia**

Readings

1. Sion, B. (2014). "Conflicting Sites of Memory in Post-Genocide Cambodia" in *Humanity Journal*
2. Un, K. (2013). "The Khmer Rouge Tribunal: A Politically Compromised Search for Justice" in *The Journal of Asian Studies*

**Week 9 – 10/14-10/16: Human Rights and National Memory in Indonesia**

Readings

1. Cribb, R. (2001). "Genocide in Indonesia, 1965-1966" in *Journal of Genocide Research*
2. Melvin, J. and Pohlman, A. "A Case for Genocide: Indonesia, 1965-1966" in *The Indonesian Genocide of 1965*

**Week 10 – 10/21-10/23: Human Rights and National Memory in Indonesia, cont.**

Readings

1. Hearman, V. (2015). "Missing Victims of the 1965-1966 Violence in Indonesia: Representing Impunity On-screen in *The Act of Killing*" in *Critical Asian Studies*
2. Zurbuchen, M. (2002). "History, Memory, and the 1965 Incident in Indonesia" in *Asian Survey*

\*\*\*\*\*ESSAY #2 ASSIGNMENT POSTED ON 10/21 – DUE 11/9\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*In-class film #2: *The Act of Killing* (2012)

**Week 11 – 10/28-10/30: Human Rights in Myanmar**

Readings

1. Craig, C. (2014). "Burma's Fault Lines: Ethnic Federalism and the Road to Peace" in *Dissent*
2. Wade, F. (2017). *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other,'* excerpt (~40 pp)

**Week 12 – 11/7-11/9: The Rohingya People and Human Rights**

Readings

1. Wade, F. (2017). *Myanmar's Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim 'Other,'* excerpt (~40 pp)

\*\*\*\*\*ESSAY #2 DUE ON CANVAS BY 11:59 PM ON 11/9\*\*\*\*\*

**Week 13 – 11/14 – 11/16: Muslim Minorities in Asia and Islamophobia**

Readings

1. Reading on regional Islamic identities and rights TBD
2. Daniyal, S. (2020). "UP's 'Love Jihad' Law Attacks Muslims, Infantilises Hindu women – and curbs Dalit Rights" in *Scroll*

**Week 14 – 11/21-11/23: Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities in China**

Readings

1. Human Rights Watch (2018). "Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims"
2. Clarke, M. (2010). "Widening the Net: China's Anti-Terror laws and Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region" in *The International Journal of Human Rights*

**\*\*\*In-class film #3: China's Problems with the Uyghurs (2015)**

**Week 15 – 11/28-11/30: Thanksgiving Holiday – No Class**

**Week 16 – 12/2-12/4: Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities in China, cont.**

#### Readings

1. Smith Finley, J. (2021). "Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang" in *Journal of Genocide Research*, 23(3), 348-370.

**Week 17 – 12/2: Rights for Asian Migrants Abroad; Course Wrap-Up**

#### Readings

1. Khan and Haroff-Tavel (2014). "Reforming the Kafala" in *Asia and Pacific Migration Journal*, pp. 293-309.

**\*\*\*\*\*ESSAY #3 POSTED ON 12/2 – DUE 12/12 ON CANVAS BY 11:59 PM\*\*\*\*\***

#### **Resources for Students:**

##### Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu), 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.

#### Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.