



**HISTORY 4861G (570)**  
**The Holocaust and Human Rights**  
**Fall/Winter 2025 - 2026**

Instructor: Dr. Nicolas Virtue  
Email: [nvirtue2@uwo.ca](mailto:nvirtue2@uwo.ca)

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**Course Information**

**Calendar Description:**

This course explores the roots of the contemporary human rights movement in the era of Nazism-Fascism and the Holocaust, from the interwar period to the decades after 1945 and the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Topics include the role of faithbased organizations as advocates for human rights.

**Prerequisite(s):** 1.0 course in History at the 2200-level or above, or permission of the department.

**Antirequisite(s):**

**Extra Information:** 3 hours.

**Course Weight:** 0.50

**Breadth:** Category A

**Subject Code:** History

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

HISTORY 4861G

# THE HOLOCAUST AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Instructor: **Nicolas Virtue** ([nvirtue2@uwo.ca](mailto:nvirtue2@uwo.ca))

Office Hours: by appointment

This course explores the roots of the contemporary human rights movement in the era of Nazism-Fascism and the Holocaust, from the interwar period to the decades after 1945 and the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The course takes a broad scope, interweaving histories of human rights thought, law, and advocacy with the history of humanitarian interventions, genocide and perpetrator studies, Holocaust memory, and public history. Topics include the roles of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders in the Holocaust, the role of faith-based organizations as advocates for human rights, the Holocaust's contested relationship to the rise of contemporary human rights discourse and legislation, the relationship between Holocaust education, commemoration, and human rights, and the instrumentalization of Holocaust memory and imagery in contemporary human rights claims.

This is a seminar-based course that demands active participation. Students will be expected to read and discuss on average three article-length readings each week. Each student will be responsible for leading one seminar discussion during the term. Written work focuses on the communication of Holocaust and human rights knowledge to the public.

Mode of instruction: in person.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- engage in informed debate over the relationship between the Holocaust and historical human rights instruments and movements
- read and comprehend academic historical writing, drawing connections to historiographical debates and current events
- employ historical knowledge to inform and evaluate the legitimacy of contemporary human rights claims
- evaluate and critique public presentations of history
- communicate and express their ideas clearly, convincingly, and confidently in oral and written form
- develop a lesson plan and lead a seminar discussion

## COURSE TEXTS

All required reading for this course will be made available online through the OWL course site.

## COURSE EVALUATION

Seminar Participation	35%	weekly
Seminar Leadership	15%	individually assigned week
Film Report	20%	February 13
Exhibit Proposal	30%	April 9

### Seminar Participation (35%)

It is expected that students will come to class each week having completed the assigned readings and prepared questions or points they would like to discuss. Students will be graded for their participation during ten seminar meetings (excluding the week when they serve as seminar leader). Students will be graded out of 10 for each seminar, according to the following rubric:

0/10 — student failed to attend class

3/10 — student attended class but did not participate or contribute

5/10 — limited participation with little evidence of preparation or comprehension of material

7/10 — some participation, demonstrating preparation and comprehension of reading material

8/10 — active participation, comprehending and connecting readings to broader topics/ideas

10/10 — expert-level understanding of readings, taking initiative to stimulate discussion

**Note:** Students who miss a seminar for medical or compassionate reasons will have the opportunity to submit a 2-page written reflection commenting on the assigned readings to earn credit for the missed seminar.

### Seminar Leadership (15%)

Every student is expected to serve as a seminar leader at one point during the term, most likely as part of a two- or three-student team. Taking individual topic and scheduling preferences into account, the instructor will assign student leaders to seminars from Weeks 2 through 10. Seminar leaders will be responsible for developing a lesson plan and guiding discussion of the assigned readings for their week. Tasks will involve: 1) compiling a one- or two-page backgrounder with essential facts and discussion questions to be distributed during class; 2) sharing a historical primary source or contemporary news report that relates to the seminar topic; and, 3) moderating class discussion during the seminar.

## Film Report (20%)

Students will write an essay of **1,500 to 2,000 words** reflecting on a fictional feature film of their choice whose main subject relates to the Holocaust. The essay should provide a brief summary of the film, it should evaluate the film's historical accuracy (by referencing course readings from Weeks 1–6 and, if necessary, through additional research), and it should report on the film's reception by the public, critics, and Holocaust or Human Rights educators to assess the film's instructional value and contribution to Holocaust memory. Students should confirm their film selection with the instructor in advance of the due date. Western Libraries provides free streaming access to the [Criterion-on-Demand](#) catalogue, which offers several relevant titles. Footnote citations should follow [Chicago Manual of Style](#) conventions.

## Exhibit Proposal (30%)

To conclude the course, students will prepare a proposal of **2,000 to 3,000 words** for a museum exhibit connecting some aspect of the Holocaust to the subject of human rights. Drawing on content covered in Weeks 1–7 and taking into consideration the ethical, educational, and political challenges discussed in Weeks 8–11 of the course, the aim is to design a museum exhibit that effectively communicates historical understanding of the Holocaust through a human rights lens. More detailed instructions will be provided in class.

## CLASS POLICIES

Students should familiarize themselves with the College-wide and Departmental policies outlined in the pages appended to this syllabus. These appendices include useful information and links about late penalties, academic offenses, student absences, support services at King's, etc. In addition to these general policies, please note the following class-specific policies.

### Essay Course Requirement

Because this is an Essay course, **all written work must be submitted** in order to pass the course (even if late penalties would reduce an essay grade to zero). This policy applies to the Film Report and Exhibit Proposal.

### Late Essays

This course adheres to the History Department's policy regarding written work submitted after the deadlines indicated in the course schedule: **late essays receive a 5 percent penalty for the first day after the deadline; 1 percent for each subsequent day**, including weekends; essays submitted after the seventh day following the deadline will receive a grade of 0.

### Attendance and Absences

Attendance will be taken during each seminar. Students with excused absences on dates of assessment will be offered extensions (for essays) or (in the case of seminars) alternative written work. **Academic consideration for the Seminar Leadership component of the course requires submission of formal supporting documentation.**

### AI/ChatGPT

Within this course, **generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are permitted exclusively for information-gathering and preliminary research purposes.** If AI tools are used, students must acknowledge use and state how the tool was used. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.

### Turnitin Analysis

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

## SCHEDULE (WINTER 2026)

Week 1 (January 6)	INTRODUCTION
In our first meeting, we will introduce the course by going over the layout, assessments, and expectations. The assigned readings provide brief introductions to Holocaust and Human Rights studies, providing essential background for the following weeks. Be prepared to discuss major historical themes and historiographical trends.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DUE (Thursday, January 8, at 11:55pm): Seminar Leader Topic Preferences</b></li> </ul>	
Week 2 (January 13)	NAZI REVOLUTION AND PERSECUTION
This week's readings focus on the legal persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, and the responses of German Jews, during the 1930s.	
Week 3 (January 20)	INTERWAR RIGHTS AND RELIEF
This week's readings survey rights talk and action in the interwar period, focusing on the League of Nations and the Catholic Church. We also look at how international state actors reacted to the flight of Jewish refugees from Germany before the Second World War.	
Week 4 (January 27)	PERPETRATORS, VICTIMS, AND GRAY ZONES
This week we look at the radicalization of Nazi persecution during the Second World War, which culminated in the mass killing of Jews and other victim groups in eastern Europe. The readings focus primarily on explaining the motives and conduct of perpetrators.	
Week 5 (February 3)	WARTIME RELIEF AND RESCUE
This week's readings examine the efforts (or lack thereof) of different groups (Allies, Axis, and neutral) to rescue Jews during the Holocaust.	
Week 6 (February 10)	GENOCIDE AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY
Shifting our attention to the postwar period, these readings focus on the development and impact of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DUE (Friday, February 13, at 11:55pm): Film Report</b></li> </ul>	
Reading Week (February 16–20)	

Week 7 (February 24)	THE HUMAN RIGHTS REVOLUTION
<p>Centring around the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, this week’s readings flesh out some of the key personalities involved in the “human rights revolution” of the 1940s and highlight the historiographical debate on the role of the Holocaust and Holocaust memory in the birth of the modern human rights movement.</p>	
Week 8 (March 3)	HOLOCAUST MEMORY AND EXCEPTIONALISM
<p>This week’s readings survey the development of Holocaust memory since 1945, and they explore how Holocaust memory and the contested exceptionality of the Holocaust have influenced recent public debates in Canada and Germany.</p>	
Week 9 (March 10)	MUSEUMS, THE HOLOCAUST, AND HUMAN RIGHTS
<p>Building upon last week’s topic, these readings consider some of the challenges faced by museums and educators seeking to integrate the public history and commemoration of the Holocaust with Human Rights Education.</p>	
Week 10 (March 17)	PHOTOGRAPHING GENOCIDE
<p>This week’s readings debate the ethics and impacts of using Holocaust photography and imagery for education and advocacy.</p>	
Week 11 (March 24)	INSTRUMENTALIZING THE HOLOCAUST
<p>This week’s discussion explores controversial cases in which the Holocaust, its imagery, or its memory have been deployed or instrumentalized by groups or individuals making human rights claims.</p>	
Week 12 (March 31)	EXHIBIT PRESENTATIONS
<p>Students will present and discuss their proposed museum exhibits for the final assignment.</p>	
Week 13 (April 7)	EXHIBIT PRESENTATIONS
<p>In our final meeting, students will present and discuss their proposed museum exhibits.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DUE (Thursday, April 9, at 11:55pm): Exhibit Proposal</b></li> </ul>	

# KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

## GENERAL COURSE POLICIES

### 2025-2026

#### **1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences**

##### **Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)**

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

##### **Academic Consideration for Student Absence**

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at [https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses\\_enrollment/exams\\_and\\_tests/S\\_MC-Feb-2025.pdf](https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/S_MC-Feb-2025.pdf).

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

[https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/academic\\_consideration\\_Sep24.pdf](https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf)

Friday Make-Up Exams may only be written with the instructor's consent.

##### **Absences from Final Examinations**

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under [Special Examinations](#)).

### **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

## **2. Support Services**

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University

College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-support-services/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:

[https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/)

Academic Support Services at King's University College:

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

### **GBSV Support:**

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing [Care@kings.uwo.ca](mailto:Care@kings.uwo.ca) or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by [email](#) or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html)

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

### **3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices**

**Use of Electronic Devices:** Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

**Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom:** King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

### **4. Statement on Academic Offences**

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools)

are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

### **5. Copyright of Course Material**

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

### **6. Use of Recordings**

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

### **7. Policy on Attendance**

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.