



HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES 1000F (570)
Discovering Human Rights
Fall/Winter 2026 - 2027

Instructor: Dr. Pietro Pirani

Email: ppirani2@uwo.ca

Course Information

Mode of Instruction: in-person

Calendar Description:

This course is a preliminary exploration of the interdisciplinary field of Human Rights Studies that examines historical and contemporary human rights and their impact on people's lives around the world. Topics include legal and religious conceptions of rights, debates over rights, and their practical applications in law, policy and workplaces.

Prerequisite(s):

Antirequisite(s):

Extra Information: 2 lecture hours, 1 tutorial hour.

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category A

Subject Code: HUMANRS

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.



**HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES 1000F (570)
DISCOVERING HUMAN RIGHTS
FALL/WINTER 2026-2027**

Instructor: Prof. Pietro Pirani

E-mail: ppirani2@uwo.ca

Office: TBA

Office hours: Mondays from 11:30 to 12:30 a.m. or by appointment on Zoom

Course Information

Mode of Instruction: In-person

Location of Class: See Brightspace

Calendar Description: This course is a preliminary exploration of the interdisciplinary field of Human Rights Studies that examines historical and contemporary human rights and their impact on people's lives worldwide. Topics include legal and religious conceptions of rights, debates over rights, and their practical applications in law, policy and the workplace.

Extra Information: 2 lecture hours, 1-hour tutorial.

Course Weight: 0.50

Course Description

This course provides students with a broad, introductory foundation for the further study of issues

related to human rights and human diversity. In particular, students will be introduced:

1. to key concepts associated with the further study and practice of human rights.
2. to three key factors that help explain why all human beings can *have* human rights, yet so many people *do not enjoy* important human rights in Canada and around the world: disagreements about the meaning of human rights, the state sovereignty system, and cultural relativism.
3. to the range of entitlements that have been associated with human rights.
4. to some of the main approaches that are used to advance human rights in Canada and around the world, including international law and organizations, state foreign policy, and citizen and NGO activism.
5. to examples of situations where human rights and human diversity have functioned in a complementary fashion and where they have created conflict. Students will develop this knowledge through assigned readings, lessons, discussion groups, and a short-written assignment.

Course Learning Outcomes

In addition to the specific content, the course has been designed to provide opportunities to work on several learning objectives. As an introductory survey course, HUMANRS1000F advances the following program-level learning outcomes. Students who engage in all aspects of this course should be able to:

1. Recognize and recall the foundational concepts and ideas for further human rights and diversity study.
2. Analyze and critically reflect upon critical issues raised in the course, as demonstrated by articulating informed opinions and supporting them with evidence drawn from the content of the course.
3. Interpret and apply concepts, ideas, and issues addressed in the course through discussion group exercises and by analyzing news articles to identify aspects of the story that illustrate these concepts, ideas, and problems and explain why this is so.
4. Gather, review, interpret, analyze, synthesize, and critically reflect upon information from a variety of interdisciplinary scholarly and other sources (e.g., NGO reports, treaties, news media) to develop and defend a position on an issue that illustrates a purported conflict between human rights and human diversity concerns, as demonstrated by completing the short essay assignment.
5. Demonstrate that they are on the path to becoming self-directed life-long learners by working with minimal supervision, following instructions with a high degree of accuracy, performing tasks at a high level of quality, and exceeding minimal performance requirements, as demonstrated through all the assignments.

Class format

This course is taught over 12 weeks, comprising one two-hour lecture and one-hour tutorial per week. Students are expected to participate actively in class and complete the weekly assigned readings.

This course begins on September 9 and continues until December 8, honouring all important dates as outlined in University-approved guidelines and academic policies (<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/academic-dates-and-events/>).

You are expected to interact regularly with other students and with me, your instructor, throughout the course. The course is designed to structure and guide self-paced elements while offering interactive opportunities for community learning. This work may occur in smaller groups or through class meetings. We will all be responsible for our learning progress and contributing to our learning community's growth by participating in all course activities and assessments. We will be ready to engage and connect meaningfully. We will be present, professional, respectful and prepared to contribute to our group. Welcome to *Discovering Human Rights*!

Intellectual property statement:

- Recording lectures or tutorials without the explicit consent of the Professor or TA is grounds for academic discipline.
- Course content created by a faculty member is considered the faculty member's intellectual property; it should not be distributed, shared in any public domain, or sold by a student or other third party without the prior written consent of the faculty member.

Academic Integrity, Remote Proctoring

- Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf
- Class-specific policy on AI: Within this course, using artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT is not permitted for written work submitted for evaluation. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.

Course Outline

Week	Topic	Readings	
September 11	Introduction to the course		
Unit 1: Basic Concepts and Barriers to Realizing Rights			
September 18	Human Rights: Meaning & Key Concepts	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 2, Sections 1-3, 7 Chapter 4, Sections 1-4 OWL DeLaet, "Contested Meaning of Human Rights", pp. 11-25	
September 25	Universalism and Cultural Relativism	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 3	September 22-24: Tutorial: Introduction
October 2	State Sovereignty, International Law, & Human Rights	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 1, Sections 1-8 Chapter 2, Section 8 OWL Dickerson, Flanagan, and O'Neill: "Sovereignty, State, and Citizenship", pp. 27-38	Sept. 29-Oct. 1: Tutorial: Discussion 1 <i>Does empirical diversity compel us to accept cultural relativism?</i>
Unit 2: Major Categories of Rights			
October 9	Civil & Political Rights 1: Human Rights & Liberal Democracy	OWL Dickerson, Flanagan, and O'Neill: "Power, Legitimacy, and Authority", pp. 13-26 "Constitutionalism", pp. 75-78, 81-82 "Liberal Democracy", pp. 216-226, 237-239	Oct. 6-8: Tutorial: Discussion 2 <i>Should the international human rights regime be imposed on countries?</i>
October 16	NO CLASS (FALL READING WEEK)		

October 23	Midterm in class		
October 30	Civil & Political Rights 2: Equality & the Nation-State	OWL Dickerson, Flanagan, and O'Neill: "The Nation", pp. 39-48	Oct.27-29: Tutorial: Discussion 3 <i>Nearly six-in-ten countries worldwide are now democratic compared to 3-in-ten countries in 1946. Do you think that the process of democratization is inevitable?</i>
November 6	Economic and Social Rights	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 2 Chapter 11, Section 3	Nov. 2-5: Tutorial: Discussion 4 <i>Should states never be permitted to violate some civil and political rights?</i>
November 13	Collective Rights: Self-Determination and Development	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 12	
Unit 3: Approaches to Closing the Implementation Gap			
November 20	International Governmental Organizations	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 5	Nov.17-19: Tutorial: Discussion 5 <i>Does international society have a moral duty to end conflicts causing humanitarian catastrophes like Syria and Ukraine?</i>
November 27	States' Foreign Policies	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 2, Section 10 Chapter 7, Sections 1-5	
December 4	Nongovernmental Actors: INGOs	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 9	

	State Domestic Policy	Text (Donnelly and Whelan) Chapter 2, Section 6
	Domestic NGOs	OWL Reserves - Smith, "Civil Society: Interest Groups and Social Movements in Politics", pp. 346- 355 - Alex Neve, "Schellenberg case illustrates the cruelty and injustice of China's death penalty". - Chivers, "Barrier by Barrier: The Canadian Disability Movement and the Fight for Equal Rights"

Required Texts

- Donnelly. *International Human Rights (Sixth Edition)* (available at the Bookstore). The textbook is available on the Western Bookstore website (\$50.59, price can vary)
- Throughout this course, we will address issues in Canada and worldwide. You should, therefore, develop a general knowledge of current events. Examples of newspapers and news journals with good international coverage include *The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *The Economist*, *The Guardian Weekly*, and *The New York Times*. Depending on where you live, local newspapers such as *The London Free Press* are good sources for learning about issues in your community. Most newspapers can also be readily accessed online and in the University's libraries.

Evaluation

Assessment	Weight	Due Date
Group Presentation and Participation (GP&P)	20%	
Midterm	25%	October 23
Essay	25%	November 21
Final exam	30%	TBA
Total	100%	

Group Presentation (GP) (10%)

A group presentation should familiarise you and your classmates with a section's essential themes and concepts. It would help if you assumed that the rest of the class had read the articles/chapters and built on that shared knowledge. A group that merely summarises the readings will receive a lower grade. A group that **analyses** and **applies** the tasks will receive a higher grade.

Students are asked to form teams of 2 and **give** one 10-minute presentation during the semester's tutorial.

Two groups will **explore** one of the seven analytical themes discussed. For each debate, one group will answer the question affirmatively and the other negatively. The activity is academic; therefore, your presence in either one of the two groups may not necessarily represent your point of view. The activity is meant to provide pro-and-con arguments to the rest of the class for the general discussion.

Each student **MUST** join a group by September 21, 2026. After that date, OWL will randomly assign unassigned students to a group.

To join a group, please visit your **tutorial website** on Brightspace → Communications → Groups.

Discussion topics and schedules will be available in the Syllabus tab on OWL on September 11.

Group Presentation Guidelines

A group presentation should familiarise you and your classmates with the essential themes and concepts from a particular section. It would help if you assumed that the rest of the class had read the articles/chapters and built on that shared knowledge. A group that merely summarises the readings will receive a lower grade. A group that **analyses** and **applies** the readings will receive a higher grade.

You are encouraged to be creative. You can use video clips from news programs or movies to illustrate a particular point. You should involve the class in activities that exemplify the themes/topics. The class period belongs to you.

Sixty per cent of your grade will be based on your presentation. Forty per cent of your grade for the group presentation will depend on the level of class discussion you have been able to stimulate. I will be looking for three features:

- **Clarity:** Does the presentation analyze the themes and concepts clearly and concisely? Is the material in a framework that helps the other students and me understand the authors' arguments?
- **Creativity:** Do you present the material promptly and excitingly? Are the examples recent and relevant?
- **Correctness:** How well did you understand the concepts and themes? Did you include the essential elements?

Participation (P) (10%)

10% of your final mark will be based on class participation during the tutorial.

- The purpose is to familiarise you with each lesson's essential themes and concepts. Discussions are about more than exchanging information; they require you to extend current thinking, introduce alternatives, and facilitate new understandings for yourself and your classmates. You should expect that the rest of the class has read the articles/chapters and built on that shared knowledge.
- It cannot be stressed enough that you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that session.

Midterm (25%)

The midterm will be written in class during regular class hours on Friday, October 16.

1. The midterm will cover ALL COURSE NOTES and COURSE READINGS from **Week 1 to Week 5**.
2. The midterm will have **50 questions**.
3. Students will only be able to access the test once and will have 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete it.
4. Ten sample questions will be posted at the end of **Week 5** to give you an idea about the nature of the questions on the midterm.
5. Please note, Friday Make-Up Exams may only be written with the instructor's consent.

Argumentative essay (25%)

The argumentative essay is an essential part of the course. It is designed to help you learn more about human rights and improve your writing and research skills.

The essay's topic may be selected from any material we will cover in class.

Instructions for the essay

- Must be an argumentative essay, which means you must provide information about the topic and present an argument with supporting and opposing ideas on a contentious issue. For more information on how to write an argumentative paper, check out <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/685/05/>
 - **Please note** that **descriptive essays** which largely “re-tell the story” **cannot** qualify for a grade greater than **C+**.
 - Must be a **minimum of 1200 words** to a **maximum of 1500 words** – including parenthetical notes, but **excluding** works cited and cover page
 - **Note:** Under length, Deficiency Penalty = –10
 - Should have a **separate Cover Page** which has your name, your student number, this course’s number and title, and **my name**
 - Must be typed in **12pt** font in Times New Roman
 - Must be written in **formal academic English**, obeying formal British or American or Canadian grammar, spelling, and language rules – check out: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/>
 - **Please note: Marks will not be deducted for occasional errors in grammar or spelling; the mark primarily reflects the student’s ability to analyze, organize and review** a topic in the review format. However, **significant or consistent style problems will lower the final grade**
 - Must have an introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion, and bibliography/works cited
 - Must have page numbers
 - Must be **double-spaced**
 - For this paper, use a **citation style of your choice**. For guidelines: <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/essayhelp/index.html>
 - Note: No Citations Penalty = –10%
 - **Must have a Works Cited list in alphabetical order**
 - **Good academic sources: journal articles and books** through UWO’s online journal retrieval systems
 - **At least four scholarly journals or book sources**
 - **No textbooks** are considered as part of your academic sources and should be used sparingly for only limited factual or statistical data
 - **Due Date:**
 - November 21st, 2026
 - A Marking Sheet shows other expectations for your paper.
 - The paper **MUST** be submitted **electronically** in **Word** format. Any other formats will not be accepted. The essay must be submitted to the drop box on OWL by 11:59 p.m. on the due date. There will be a penalty of 2% per day for late papers. If you are late, please get in touch with me before the deadline. No essay will be accepted more than one week after the deadline. The only reason for missing a deadline is an illness or a personal crisis. In both cases, you must document the reason for the late submission.
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Final Exam (30%)

The exam will be held during the University-scheduled exam period. The exam format will be discussed in the review class at the end of the term. The materials you will be tested on in the exam will be discussed and explained in class. The exam will cover ALL LECTURES, LECTURE NOTES and LECTURE READINGS.

Submitting Assignments

Assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Late assignments will be penalized at 2% per day unless the professor has granted an extension. Students must contact the professor to request an extension and provide a valid reason.

KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE GENERAL COURSE POLICIES 2026-27

1. Academic Accommodations (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 at [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

2. Academic Consideration for Student Absences

Students must be approved to write a makeup exam or for an extension of the assignment deadline. If you need to miss an exam or the deadline for the assignment, please follow these instructions.

There are two ways to seek academic consideration:

(i) Academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate grounds), they should contact the Academic Advising Office. As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration.

For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) is the appropriate documentation. The SMC is available at <https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/pdfs/student-medical-certificate.pdf>

- King's students: The Academic Advising Office website is located in DLH 104. The Academic Advising website is <https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising>.
- If your home faculty is Huron or at Western, please submit your documentation to your faculty's academic counselling office.
- Requests must be made as soon as possible, and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

You may submit requests for academic consideration through the **Student Absence Portal**, linked on this website:

<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/academics/academic-advising/academic-consideration-requests-and-student-absence-portal>.

(ii) Academic consideration through an undocumented absence

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per half-course (0.5) weight.

- Note that instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline to confirm this which assessment has been designated as requiring documentation for consideration (that is, exempt from undocumented absences).
- Undocumented absences can not be used as the basis for academic consideration for December or April exams.

If an instructor has built flexibility into their assessments (e.g., "complete 8 of 10 quizzes"), this flexibility will already address consideration needs and thus academic consideration may be denied.

For further information on the academic consideration policy, please see

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

c) Absences from Final Exams

If you miss the Final Exam, **contact your Academic Advising Office** 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 (i.e., you are scheduled to write 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](#)).

d) Religious Accommodations

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and their 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.

3. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:
<https://mykings.ca/intranet/app/#/student-supports-and-services/accessibility-services>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/campus-life/student-supports/>

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

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options on how to obtain help:
<https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental-health/index.html>

Academic Support Services at King's University College: <https://kings.uwo.ca/academics/academic-supports/>

4. Statement on Gender-Based Sexual Violence

King's and Western are committed to reducing incidents of gender-based sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: [Mental Health and Wellness at King's](#).

You can reach supports at King's by emailing 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 (health@uwo.ca) or by calling 519-661-3568. Additional support services can be found <https://www.uwo.ca/health/gbsv/support/index.html>

5. 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://kings.uwo.ca/sites/2025/assets/files/campus/Kings_Code_of_Student_Conduct.pdf

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.

6. 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

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.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 to check which tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammar-checking tools) are permitted in each course.** Note that although some courses may permit the use of such tools, it does not mean use of such tools 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.