The Role of Civil Society: Grassroots Movements and NGOs

SDIS 3320 (4 Credits / 60 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Human Rights: Foundations, Challenges, and Advocacy

Course Description
This course focuses on the practical aspects of advocacy and the protection of human rights by non-governmental organizations, and their interaction with grassroots, popular movements for rights. Through visits to local organizers of such groups, students learn how advocacy and activist movements are launched and developed, as well as what strategies are used to navigate legal, political, and public arenas. The course contrasts the role, agendas, and the effectiveness of grassroots organizations with those of governmental, private sector, and supranational stakeholders. Students will meet with local activists and officials who advocate for various human rights agendas to learn about successful and unsuccessful campaigns and to evaluate the use of inquiries, documentation, public outreach, legal action, and other approaches to protecting rights. This course does not meet in a classroom.

Course Objectives

- To examine the role of country-specific NGOs and grassroots organizations as agents of advocacy and change in national contexts.
- To identify the strategies used by local and national organizations to build popular support and assert their voices at the policy level.
- To develop a comparative perspective on the varied civil society actors operating in the name of human rights, and their relative power within the framework of neoliberalism
- To cultivate skills in analysis, assessment, communications with local representatives of organizations, and working in teams.

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Course Methodology
The course will rely on a combination of pedagogical methods; lectures, field study, discussion, critical inquiry, presentation and reflection. The purpose is to create a community where students freely offer ideas, comments and questions and share the responsibility for learning. The course seeks to make optimal use of the time in each country through guest lectures, site visits, homestays, individual explorations of human rights and immersion in the culture and society. In particular, students will identify organizations that provide interesting case studies and work closely with local representatives, directly or through interlocutors.

Learning Outcomes
- Demonstrate familiarity with local organizations and advocacy groups in each country context that are involved with human rights issues
- Articulate successful strategies used by key organizations to impact policy, as well as obstacles encountered.
- Compare the various social and political climates in the host countries that facilitate or impede the role of NGOs alongside grassroots movements
- Identify common agendas and differences between local grassroots groups, NGOs and international organizations in strategy, tactics, mission, and outcomes.

Course Requirements
Required readings, compiled on eReserves through SIT, will be available before the launch of the program. Supplementary readings and sources, listed at the end the syllabus, are provided for further reference and to better understand the course content. Students are expected to complete the required readings before each class unit and to use them in fulfilling assignments. Students should explore local resources, such as newspapers and television, and take the initiative in seeking out other material.

Participation (20 points)
Students are expected to actively participate in the scheduled visits and to complete the required readings, preferably before site visits. Faculty will recommend specific resource articles from each country’s list to help frame weekly site visits. Participation for this class entails on-site engagement of our organizational hosts as well as student debriefs of the visits. This means that you actively contribute to the intellectual growth of the group by thoughtfully engaging with faculty and classmates, as well as engaging the assigned reading. You are expected to reflect on material conveyed by guest lecturers and integrate information and experiences from field visits, other courses, observations, conversations with homestay families and daily life in the city.

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Written Assignments

Human Rights Activism Project (Paper = 30%, Presentation = 10%) 40%
- See detailed description attached to Comparative Issues syllabus
- This project counts towards your grade for this course as well as for Comparative Issues

Human Rights Op-Ed piece 40%
- Details attached at end of syllabus.

Course Organization and Required Reading

New York City, USA

A Critical Perspective on Advocacy


Chile Resource Articles


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Jordan Resource Articles


Nepal Resource Articles


Warren, K.B. (2012) Troubling the Victim/Trafficker Dichotomy in Efforts to Combat

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Human Trafficking: The Unintended Consequences of Moralizing Labor Migration  *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 19:1 pp105-120

--- *Chitwan excursion*


Oxfam (2011) Improving food security for vulnerable communities in Nepal www.oxfam.org/grow


**Recommended reading**


**Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

The faculty will grade you on the basis of points and will return written assignments with comments. The range of points will indicate how your work compares with the rest of the class. At the end of the term, your cumulative point score will be calculated to determine your final letter grade for the course. Point grades for individual assignments are not directly correlated to final letter grades, which will reflect your work on assignments in all countries.

It is useful for faculty and students to view final grades in this way. An “A” represents truly outstanding work, exemplifying rigorous analysis, superior insights, and precise presentation. A “B” signifies highly competent work that completes the assignment very well, with considerable thought, reasonable analytical results and an effective presentation. A

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“C” represents acceptable, work, satisfying the basic requirements, but lacking distinction, original analytical insights or organization. A “D” grade indicates poorly or partially completed work, reflecting a lack of initiative, inconsistent analytical conclusions and/or a disorganized presentation. Pluses and minuses for the four letter grades indicate better or poorer work. There is no “A+” grade.

Student Expectations

Class Participation
Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all lectures, discussions, educational excursions and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.

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SDIS 3320: The Role of Civil Society: NGOs and Grassroots Movements
Fall 2014
Assignment: Op-ed piece
40 points

Few human rights issues entail absolute answers, and yet, neutrality is rarely an option if
rights violations are to be redressed. The interpretation of laws, the impacts of political and
economic forces, moral and ethical considerations, culture and history are all factors in
discerning what is right (or what is wrong) with human rights today. Thus, the resolution of
human rights crises hinges on our ability to engage in productive dialogue about the issues at
stake: to parse evidence, to contextualize it appropriately, and to present it publicly in cogent
arguments that support a clear position that we take as individuals. As Dr. Martin Luther
King, Jr. quoted, “A time comes when silence is betrayal.” Breaking that silence is the first
gesture towards change and ultimately, justice.

For this assignment, choose a human rights issue covered on our program that has peaked
your interest, e.g. the status of refugees, the rights of indigenous peoples, environmental
justice, etc. Write an op-ed style piece of between 700-1,150 words that engages your topic
for a general audience, and that you would feel confident submitting for actual publication.
An effective article will:

- Make a single point, and state it at the beginning
- Prove why this human rights issue is one the public should care about
- Offer specific recommendations articulated within the international and domestic human
  rights frameworks you have become familiar with this semester (laws, policies, conventions,
  existing social movements, etc)
- Illustrate your argument with details and stories you have gathered in the field
- Speak assertively in your personal voice
- Acknowledge opposing arguments, without lapsing into tedious rebuttals
- Use the active voice.

For more tips on writing, visit http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped

For inspiration and to read some well written op-ed style human rights pieces, you might
look at:
http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices
https://www.opendemocracy.net/openglobalrights
http://www.jadaliyya.com/
http://blog.amnestyusa.org/

Submit your finished piece on e-mail to the Program Director, Chris Westcott at
chris.westcott@ihp.edu

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