The Role of Civil Society: Grassroots Movements and NGOs

SDIS 3320 (4 Credits / 60 class hours)

International Honors Program (IHP):
Human Rights: Foundations, Challenges, and Advocacy

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description
The latter half of the twentieth-century gave rise to a large and diverse sector of civil society organizations working at multiple scales, utilizing a variety of approaches to achieve human rights based change. Though the aims, intentions, and impact of these organizations is contested, the constellation of actors working towards human rights under the umbrella of civil society has become a defining feature of contemporary human rights practice. This course is designed to provide students with an understanding of the diverse configurations of these civil society organizations: NGOs, legal advocacy organizations, grassroots community-based organizations, social movement networks etc., as well as familiarity with the differing strategies of change they employ.

In order to add focus and depth, the course is tied together under the cross cutting theme of struggles for women’s rights and gender justice. This course is taught by Local Faculty, each of whom are directly involved in struggles for gender equity through their work with civil society organizations. Course Faculty draw from their experiences as advocates, grassroots organizers, and lawyers utilizing different strategies of resistance to effect change. By experiencing first-hand a broad spectrum of civil society organizations within the sphere of women’s rights, students will be challenged to come to their own conclusions of how to bridge the gap between human rights rhetoric and reality. This is a practicum course composed of classroom-based sessions with Local Faculty as well as field-based activities such as workshops, site visits, and guest lectures in each program site.

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Course Objectives

• Examine the role of country-specific NGOs and grassroots organizations working on gender as agents of advocacy and change in national and international contexts.
• Develop a broad perspective on varied practices of civil society and the differing forms, strategies, tactics, and outcomes they utilize to achieve change.
• Analyze local experiences of patriarchy and gender-based oppression framing struggles for gender justice, as well as the social and political climates that facilitate or impede the work of civil society organizations in different contexts.
• Gain in depth exposure to the lived experiences of activists engaged in women's rights struggles to understand the stakes involved in this sphere of work.
• Cultivate skills relevant to organizing and advocacy work through field-based assignment, including: group facilitation, public presentation, and group collaboration.

Course Methodology

Designed as a practicum, the course will combine classroom-based sessions with Local Faculty and an array of field-based activities designed to broaden the group’s exposure to civil society practices. Field activities include guest lectures and panels with scholars and practitioners of gender justice, and site visits to women’s organizations working in both urban and rural settings. In each country visited, field activities culminate in a final case study assignment. For this assignment, students divide into small groups and examine a different contemporary women’s rights issue or case being addressed by local organizations. Following the site visit, students work collaboratively on a participatory presentation or ‘teach-in’ to share their analysis and experience with the rest of the group.

Local Faculty Bio’s

Afua Atta-Mensah
Local Faculty, NYC

Afua Atta-Mensah is Executive Director, at Community Voices Heard (CVH) an East Harlem located membership-based organization working for social, economic, and racial justice for low-income New Yorkers. Afua, who is a Harlem resident, holds a law degree from Fordham Univ. School of Law, and a BA in Sociology and African American History from Trinity College. From Ghana, West Africa to the United States, Afua has worked to empower women, improve the quality and quantity of fair and equitable housing, defend women’s rights and galvanize support for programs benefiting low-income families. She was awarded the Fulbright Fellowship in support of her work at the International Federation of Women Attorneys advocating on behalf of indigent women in Ghana. She represented these women in court, helped draft proposed legislation to criminalize marital rape, and was a visiting university lecturer. She also taught a course on women’s rights in the context of Ashanti-tribal law at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Before coming to CVH, Afua was the Urban Justice Center’s Director of Litigation for the Safety Net Project. During her tenure, the project filed a federal lawsuit that pressured former Mayor Michael Bloomberg to abandon a proposal to demolish Public Housing playgrounds and community centers so developers could build high-priced apartment towers. Under Afua, the Safety Net Project also challenged mayoral candidates to stay overnight with host families in public housing to experience firsthand the deplorable conditions public housing residents are exposed. That innovative strategy brought a media spotlight and the government’s attention residents plight. As CVH’s Executive Director, Afua is currently leading a grassroots fight against a city proposal to rezone a huge portion of East Harlem for residential towers and "infill" public housing property with new development. Additionally, CVH is demanding that Mayor de Blasio’s
administration first allocate $200 million to fix and upgrade existing public housing buildings and increase the number affordable units for families making $23,000 and less.

**Anshu Gurung**  
**Local Faculty, Nepal**

Anshu Gurung is a human rights practitioner with over 15 years experience advocating for human rights in Nepal. Anshu has worked with an array of international and grassroots organizations including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations (UN), and the National Coalition Against Racial Discrimination. During this period Anshu has worked to advance the struggle for the rights of marginalized people in different areas of the country. She was recently the National Program Coordinator for the Promotion of Indigenous Peoples’ and Tribal Rights at the ILO, and before that she worked on initiatives to promote indigenous and minority participation in the constitutional reform process. Anshu has a MA in Sociology from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, and Bachelors of Law, from the Nepal Law Campus in Kathmandu.

**Hadeel Abdel Aziz**  
**Local Faculty, Jordan**

Hadeel Abdel Aziz is a founding member and the Executive Director of the Jordanian NGO Justice Center for Legal Aid (JCLA). Hadeel has two BA degrees in Management and Law; she is the first Jordanian to be certified as a judicial administrator by Michigan State University. She has over 20 years of practical experience mainly focused in judicial reform, court automation and access to justice projects. Over the eight years her work she has been specifically dedicated towards building a sustainable model for access to justice in Jordan, managing a national organization that has 24 legal aid clinics distributed across Jordan offering legal services to thousands every year.

**Fernanda Glaser**  
**Local Faculty, Chile**

Maria Fernanda Glaser Danton was born in Santiago. She received a degree in Psychology by the University of Santiago, the year 2002. Afterwards, she worked in rural communities of the Coquimbo region, dedicated to issues of gender, mental health and women’s access to land. In the year 2008, she was granted a Conicyt scholarship by the Fulbright Commission. She travelled to the U.S. to study her doctorate at the Global Gender Studies program of SUNY, Buffalo. During her stay in the U.S., she researched the image of Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral and its relationship with the political and visual culture of Chile. Today, she works at the National Institute for Human Rights, where she serves as a social scientist in the northern city of La Serena.

**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.

**Assignments**

*Case Study -- Teach-In*  
*(20 Points per Country)*
In each country, Local Faculty have designed a set of case studies where students split into small
groups and focus on different gender justice initiatives. The case study entails undertaking an in-
depth look at a particular topic over a few days, and will culminate in a 30 minute group teach-in.
Case studies may involve a small group visit to women’s organizations, conversations with NGO
workers, rigorous study of a contemporary legal case, and/or a multiple-day excursion to a rural
village.

During the case study, student groups will collaborate to gather information, develop a
conceptual analysis of the topic at hand, and then convey what they learned to their peers
through a group facilitated teach-in. Each group will have 30 minutes total for their Teach-in, and
is encouraged to be creative with the design and format of their session. Case Studies begin with
a briefing by the Local Faculty where students are given background information on case study
options and are split into research groups. In each country, students will be split into different
groups at random. There is one case study in each country program, besides the launch in NYC.

Each case study counts equally as (20%) of your overall grade in the course. Case study Teach-
in’s are graded by Local Faculty based on a shared rubric. In addition, students provide peer
feedback for each case study group. See full assignment description at the end of the syllabus.

Case Study – Written Assignment (10 Points per Country)

In addition to the group Teach-in, each case study group is expected to develop a short written
piece (approximately two to three pages double spaced) that is submitted to Local Faculty. The
piece should be written for a public audience, using a format used by civil society practitioners,
such as an Op-Ed, Policy Brief, Advocacy Materials, Legal Brief etc. However, the exact format of
the written assignment can vary by group and by country. Each group should discuss the format
of their written piece with Local Faculty before submitting the assignment.

Assignment Percentages of Course Grade

Case Study – Teach In
   - Case Study – Teach In Nepal = 20%
   - Case Study – Teach In Jordan = 20%
   - Case Study – Teach In Chile = 20%

Case Study – Written Assignment
   - Case Study – Written Assignment Nepal = 13%
   - Case Study – Written Assignment Jordan = 13%
   - Case Study – Written Assignment Chile = 13%

Course Organization and Required Reading

I. New York City, USA

Session 1: Strategies of Social Change: Service, Advocacy, and Organizing

radical democracy: How to organize for power in your community. (Vol. 19). John Wiley & Sons. Pp. 3-
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Community Organizing Handouts from Community Voices Heard (CVH)

II. Nepal

**Session 2: Human Rights and the Role of Civil Society in Nepal**


**Session 3: Ethnic and Indigenous Marginalization and Social Exclusion in Nepal**


**Session 4: Gender and Social Inclusion in Nepal**


III. Jordan

**Session 5: Civil Society & Women’s Rights in Jordan: History and Context**


**Session 6: Islamic Feminism(s)**


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**Session 7: Law and Practice: Legal Impediments to Women’s Empowerment, and Role of Civil Society Organizations**

Al-Sharari, S. & Al Khatib, S. “The Legal Framework and Women Status in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”, Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education


**IV. Chile**

**Session 8: The role of the familial narrative in the modern nation-state of Chile**


**Suggested Readings:**

Jane Jaquette’s collection *The Women’s Movement in Latin America*

Meredith Turshen’s *Engendering Relations of State to Society in the Aftermath*

**Session 9: The familial narrative in the body politic of Chile: race, sexuality and the colonial legacy.**


**Suggested Readings:**


**Session 10: Learning to survive: indigenous women’s adaptation to climate change, food security and the struggle against state violence.**


Suggested Readings:


**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 “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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83%</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-76%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-73%</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-69%</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-66%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 64</td>
<td>F</td>
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</table>

**Expectations and Policies**

- **Show up prepared.** Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- **Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements.** This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- **Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer.** These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.…
- **Comply with academic integrity policies** (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Respect differences of opinion** (classmates’, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Student Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.
HRCS: The Role of Civil Society
Assignment Description: Case Study – Teach In
60 points total, 20 points per country assignment

In each country, Local Faculty have designed a set of case studies where students split into small groups and focus on different gender justice initiatives. The case study entails undertaking an in-depth look at a particular topic over a few days, and will culminate in a 30 minute group teach-in. Case studies may involve a small group visit to women’s organizations, conversations with NGO workers, rigorous study of a contemporary legal case, and/or a multiple-day excursion to a rural village.

During the case study, student groups will collaborate to gather information, develop a conceptual analysis of the topic at hand, and then convey what they learned to their peers through a group facilitated teach-in. Each group will have 30 minutes total for their Teach-in, and is encouraged to be creative with the design and format of their session. Case Studies begin with a briefing by the Local Faculty where students are given background information on case study options and are split into research groups. In each country, students will be split into different groups at random. There is one case study in each country program, besides the launch in NYC.

Each case study counts equally as (20%) of your overall grade in the course. Case study Teach-in’s are graded by Local Faculty based on a shared rubric. In addition, students provide peer feedback for each case study group.

**TEACH IN – Assessment Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity / Creative Pedagogy</td>
<td>- Is the presentation creative in its format?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Is the audience engaged?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Do the creative elements support the analysis and communicate key ideas?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depth of content</td>
<td>- Did the session convey a depth of understanding about the topic covered?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Did the group draw from multiple sources or perspectives?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Did the presentation do justice to the complexity of the case?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Analysis</td>
<td>- Is the presentation connected to program readings or theory with a developed analysis about the topic studied?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Did the group demonstrate ingenuity and critical-thinking in their understanding of the case?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The purpose of the assignment is not to assess or criticize the work of an organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participatory / Discussion</td>
<td>- Did the group use a participatory format to engage the audience?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Did the participatory element of the presentation develop or deepen the content of the session?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Did all group members play a role in the presentation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>- Is the presentation well-organized in its structure?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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| - Were the presenters clear and comprehensible in their verbal communication of the material? Was the group's body language appropriate for the style of the session? |
| - Were written or visual elements of the presentation clear and well-presented? |
| - Were presenters responsive and strategic in their facilitation of activities or discussions? |
HRCS: The Role of Civil Society
Assignment Description: Case Study – Written Assignment
40 points total, 13 points per country assignment

In addition to the group Teach-in, each case study group is expected to develop a short written piece (approximately two to three pages double spaced) that is submitted to Local Faculty. The piece should be written for a public audience, using a format used by civil society practitioners, such as an Op-Ed, Policy Brief, Advocacy Materials, Legal Brief etc. However, the exact format of the written assignment can vary by group and by country. Each group should discuss the format of their written piece with Local Faculty before submitting the assignment.

Due Date:
Submit a printed copy of your written assignment to Local Faculty on the date of your group’s Teach-in.

Assessment criteria determined by Local Faculty, see descriptions provided by Faculty upon arrival in each country.