



Program Title	The International Politics of Human Rights
Department	Political Science
Program Location(s)	Switzerland & Austria
Program Term	Summer 2027
Course(s)	POSC 474, HIST 205, HIST 494, HUMA 670
Program Director(s)	Michele Calderon
E-mail(s)	Mcalderon@towson.edu

Catalog Course Description

POSC 474 SPECIAL TOPICS POSC (3)

An examination of current topics in political science. The content of the course will depend upon mutual faculty and student interest. May be repeated for a maximum of 9 units provided a different topic is covered.

HIST 205 ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES IN HISTORY (3)

Ethical dilemmas and debates treated in historical perspective. Topics may include war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, political corruption, medical experimentation, or scientific experiments. Core: Ethical Issues & Perspectives.

HIST 494 TRAVEL AND STUDY (3-6)

Countries and topics to be selected by the departments and instructors sponsoring the program. For complete information, write the chair of the department early in the fall of the academic year preceding the term of intended study. May be repeated for a maximum of 6 units provided a different topic is covered. Prerequisites: junior/senior status and consent of instructor.

HUMA 670 SPECIAL TOPICS IN GLOBAL HUMANITIES (3)

Topics will vary according to instructor. May be repeated for a maximum of 9 units provided a different topic is taken each time. Prerequisites: degree-seeking status and consent of program director.

Program Description and Objectives

This study abroad course explores the global human rights framework and its connection to democracy through visits to key international organizations in Geneva, Switzerland, and Vienna, Austria. Students will examine foundational international human rights doctrines, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Students will learn about the work of the United Nations to protect human rights. By engaging with UN agencies in both cities, students will analyze how international institutions promote human rights, enforce accountability, and uphold democratic values worldwide.

Democracy is built on the fundamental belief that every individual possesses inherent rights.

This principle underpins democratic governance, ensuring that individuals are protected from oppression, have a voice in political decision-making, and can pursue economic and social well-being. Without a commitment to human rights, democracy cannot function effectively, as political freedoms, rule of law, and equal participation all depend on the recognition and enforcement of these rights. The United Nations was founded in the aftermath of World War II to safeguard human rights and promote democracy worldwide, establishing a framework through which nation-states work together to uphold fundamental freedoms, prevent oppression, and foster inclusive governance.

This course examines UN institutions, treaties, and mechanisms that uphold human rights globally, emphasizing their role in supporting democratic governance.

Students will travel to Geneva, Switzerland, and Vienna, Austria, to engage directly with international organizations dedicated to human rights.

- In Geneva, visits to the United Nations (UN) will provide insight into foundational human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
- In Vienna, students will explore UN agencies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to understand how they promote human rights in diverse fields, from security to sustainable development.

Throughout the course, students will critically analyze how democracy and human rights reinforce one another, examining challenges to human rights enforcement and the role of international institutions in addressing them.

Course Learning Outcomes

- Throughout this study abroad course, students will:
 - Explore the relationship between democracy and human rights, considering how democratic governance supports human dignity and political freedoms
 - Demonstrate strong understanding of the chronological depth and geographical diversity encompassed in the formation of international human rights law
 - Reflect on the challenges and limitations of international human rights enforcement in a globalized world
 - Evaluate how different UN agencies in Geneva and Vienna promote human rights, thereby strengthening democracy

Throughout the course, students will critically analyze how democracy and human rights reinforce one another, examining challenges to human rights enforcement and the role of international institutions in addressing them.

- **Course Outcomes and Learning Objectives: Political Science Department**

The goal of the Department of Political Science is to provide students with an understanding of politics that prepare them for further study in graduate or professional education or that prepare them to enter the world of domestic or international public service or business. To meet this goal, the department seeks to accomplish the following four general student learning objectives:

- *Substantive Knowledge about Politics:* Describe the structure and nature of politics in international relations.
- *Critical Thinking Skills:* Identify historical, cultural, and socio-economic assumptions that underlie understandings about politics and explain how they affect one's perspective and actions.
- *Affective Meanings of Politics:* Explain the importance of politics in the attitudes and beliefs about current issues that affect local, national, and international affairs.
- *Skills for Learning and Life:* Present articulate and persuasive arguments about politics in written and oral communications.

- **Course Outcomes and Learning Objectives: History Department**

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of issues that affect people across multiple regions.
- Students will understand how historians learn about the past through an examination of written and non-written sources. Demonstrate ability to "place historical documents in context, and discuss the importance of authorship, audience, and purpose.

- Students will articulate and challenge relevant assumptions, concepts, theoretical constructs and factual information of this discipline of History.
- Students will develop their ability to write a historical paper that is well argued, well organized, and that includes proper use of the English language and documentation of primary and secondary sources.
- **HIST 205 fulfills the learning outcomes for the Core Curriculum Category 14 “Ethical Issues and Perspectives.”** Students who successfully complete this course are expected to be able to:
 - Gather and analyze evidence from a variety of sources pertinent to the issue under study, including materials that might support opposing points of view
 - Evaluate the logic of persuasive rhetoric in arguments for all major positions on a topic and formulate cogent counter-arguments to each one
 - Articulate an understanding of the ethical dimensions of significant issues or dilemmas under study
 - Construct and assess possible solutions to problems or dilemmas within an informed ethical and societal context
 - Communicate arguments and conclusions effectively and clearly
- **Course Outcomes and Learning Objectives: Global Humanities M.A.**
 - Understanding and appreciating the particular insights and interventions that humanistic inquiry can make into major global issues, across disciplines and historic periods.
 - Understanding the relevance of and potential practical applications of the humanities in historic and contemporary global culture and the challenges and benefits posed by global exchange.
 - Producing substantive insight into complex problems by means of interdisciplinary inquiry, practical collaborative projects, and/or community outreach.
- In addition, students will develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are core components of Intercultural Competence¹. At the end of the study abroad/away experience, students are expected to be able to demonstrate:
 1. **Cultural awareness** – Student identifies own cultural rules and biases and understands the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, beliefs, and practices.
 2. **Empathy** – Student recognizes different components of other cultural perspectives, including verbal and nonverbal communication, and strives to negotiate a shared understanding based on those differences.
 3. **Openness** – Student asks key questions about other cultures and is open to initiate and develop meaningful interactions with culturally different others.

Required/Recommended Course Materials

REQUIRED:

- Glendon, Mary Ann. *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: Random House, 2002.
- Articles posted on the course Blackboard site.

RECOMMENDED:

- Clapham, Andrew. *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Course Assessments and Requirements

Pre-Departure Essay: The Foundations of International Human Rights

Due: On Blackboard the night before departure

¹ Adapted from “Intercultural Knowledge & Competence VALUE Rubric” by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009, <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>. This derivative work is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

In this course, we will examine how international institutions define, interpret, and implement human rights. Before arriving in Geneva, which is home to many of the world's most important human rights organizations, you will analyze the foundational texts of the international human rights system.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) together form the *International Bill of Human Rights*. These documents articulate core rights and reflect different visions of how human rights should be understood and enforced.

Part I: Analytical Essay (750–1000 words)

Read the documents posted in Blackboard > Materials > Pre-trip Readings.

Analyze the core principles of these three documents. Your essay should address the following:

- What are the historical foundations of each document?
- What is the difference between a *declaration* and a *covenant* in international law?
- What rights are emphasized in each document?
- How do the ICCPR and ICESCR expand upon or differ from the UDHR?
- What tensions arise between civil-political rights and economic-social rights?
- How do these documents reflect the relationship between human rights and democracy?

Your response should synthesize key themes from the readings, reference specific provisions or examples, and critically evaluate how these documents shape international human rights today.

Part II: Pre-Trip Reflection (250–300 words)

Drawing on your analysis, reflect on the following:

- What role should international institutions (such as the United Nations or the International Committee of the Red Cross) play in protecting human rights?
- Which type of rights (civil-political vs. economic-social) do you think are most difficult to implement in practice, and why?
- What questions do you hope to explore during our visits in Geneva and Vienna?

Sources & Citation Requirements

- You are required to cite the following primary documents:
 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
 - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
 - International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- You must include at least two additional scholarly or credible sources (e.g., academic articles, books, or reputable institutional reports).
- All sources must be cited using Chicago Style (Notes and Bibliography format):
 - Use footnotes for citations
 - Include a bibliography at the end of your essay
- When referencing the UDHR, ICCPR, or ICESCR, you should cite specific articles where appropriate.

Formatting Guidelines

- 12-point font, double-spaced
- 750–1000 words (Part I) + 250–300 words (Part II)
- Chicago-style footnotes and bibliography required

Events and evening debriefs

Participation in all scheduled events and debriefs is mandatory and is worth 25% of the overall grade.

Nightly Journal Reflections

Each evening, students will submit a written journal entry via Blackboard responding to the prompt below. Entries should demonstrate careful observation, engagement with course concepts, and analytical depth.

Prompt:

- **Empirical observation:** What did you see, hear, or learn today that relates to human rights? Be specific (institution, policy, historical example, or lived experience).
- **Legal connection:** Identify *one specific article* of the UDHR that applies to today's experience. Briefly explain the legal meaning of that article.
- **Analytical application:** How does today's experience illustrate, challenge, or complicate that right in practice? Consider institutions, enforcement, or political constraints.
- **Critical reflection:** What does this case reveal about the gap between human rights law (norms) and human rights practice (implementation)?

If the day does not involve explicit human rights institutions, reflect on the day's activities and analyze how related social, economic, or environmental conditions connect to human rights principles.

Entries should be approximately 400–600 words and may be handwritten or typed. If handwritten, students must upload a clear photo of their entry each evening.

Students are encouraged to use their journal reflections to identify questions, tensions, or issues that may serve as the basis for their final research paper.

Post-Trip Reflective Essay (750-1000 words)

Write a reflective essay analyzing what you learned about human rights over the course of the study abroad program.

Due: Two weeks after the return flight date

Submit as a single document (Word or PDF) to Blackboard

Your essay should:

- Reference specific experiences from the trip (e.g., site visits, guest lectures, institutional tours)
- Connect those experiences to key human rights concepts discussed in the course
- Demonstrate critical reflection, not just description (i.e., explain how your understanding changed, deepened, or was challenged)

Possible guiding questions:

- How did visits to institutions such as the United Nations or ICRC shape your understanding of human rights?
- What tensions or contradictions did you observe between human rights theory and practice?
- How did the experiences in Geneva compare to those in Vienna?

Research Paper (1250-2000 words)

Students will write a research paper on a specific issue related to human rights.

Due: Two weeks after the return flight date

Submit as a single document (Word or PDF) to Blackboard

Topic Selection

Students choose their own topic. It must address a clear and focused research question and be relevant to themes, institutions, or issues encountered during the study abroad program. Topic selection requires instructor approval. Students must submit their proposed topic via Blackboard by June 12. Feedback and approval will be provided through Blackboard.

Research Paper Proposal

Students must submit a brief proposal (1 paragraph) prior to the final paper that includes:

- A proposed research question
- A preliminary thesis or argument

Research Paper Requirements

The research paper must:

- Present a clear, arguable thesis
- Be organized with an introduction, body sections, and conclusion
- Incorporate at least 5 academic sources (peer-reviewed articles, books, or credible policy reports)
- Engage with course concepts and readings
- Where appropriate, connect to specific institutions, site visits, or experiences from the study abroad program
- Be double-spaced, use 12-point font, and follow Chicago citation style (notes-bibliography) – see Cook Library resources for help.

Grade Calculation

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Pre-trip essay	11:59 pm night before flight to Geneva	10
Participation in events and evening debriefs	ongoing	25
Nightly journal reflections	ongoing (2 points per daily post)	24
Research paper proposal	11:59 pm night before flight from Vienna	6
Post-trip reflective essay	11:59 pm two weeks after scheduled flight home	15
Research paper	11:59 pm two weeks after scheduled flight home	20

Grades are determined as follows:

Participation in events and evening debriefs

Arriving on time and engaging in each scheduled activity is expected. Participation includes active involvement in site visits, guest lectures, group discussions, and evening debriefs throughout the program. Students are expected to contribute thoughtfully, ask questions when appropriate, and demonstrate engagement with course themes related to international politics and human rights.

Participation will be evaluated holistically based on consistency of engagement, preparedness, and quality of contributions.

Nightly Journal Reflections (2 points per entry; 12 entries required)

Journal reflections are evaluated as follows:

- **Below Expectations (1 point):** Work is primarily descriptive, with limited reflection or connection to intercultural learning and course concepts.
- **Meets Expectations (1.5 points):** Work demonstrates clear reflection, identifies cultural differences and similarities, and connects experiences to course themes such as human rights and international institutions.
- **Exceeds Expectations (2 points):** Work demonstrates deep, critical reflection; integrates course concepts with lived experiences; and shows strong intercultural awareness and analytical insight.

Nightly journal reflections should go beyond summarizing daily activities and instead focus on meaningful engagement with site visits (e.g., United Nations agencies, NGOs), cultural observations in Switzerland and Austria, and personal responses to these experiences.

Research Paper Proposal

Pass/fail grade based on submission before the deadline. Students who submit on time will receive full credit (6 points). Students who submit late will receive zero points.

Pre-trip and Post-trip Paper Grading Rubric

The pre-trip and post-trip papers are evaluated using the following rubric, with each component graded on a scale of 100. The final grade is the average of all components.

1. **Clarity of Argument/Position** – Presents a clear and well-structured introduction, effectively explains the position, and demonstrates strong analytical reasoning
2. **Organization** – Uses appropriate headings and ensures each section contains relevant and logically arranged content
3. **Quality of Evidence** – Incorporates a sufficient number of academic and high-quality non-academic sources, correctly formatted in Chicago Style
4. **Strength of Argument and Defense** – Supports claims with well-reasoned evidence and persuasive analysis
5. **Writing Quality** – Demonstrates clarity, coherence, and strong writing mechanics

Course-Specific Policies

Student-Teacher Expectations: As representatives of Towson University, students are expected to uphold professional and respectful conduct while studying abroad.

Late Assignments: Late assignments are not accepted unless the student has a written excused absence consistent with the TU Class Attendance / Absence Policy: <https://catalog.towson.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/class-attendance-absence-policy/>

Students requesting to submit a late assignment must email documentation to me two weeks prior to the scheduled absence when known in advance or, in other cases, as soon as possible.

Citation Style: It is imperative that you cite all sources in your written assignments (including discussion boards and exams). We use Chicago Style in this course. See the Cook Library website for help with proper citations: <https://libraries.towson.edu/get-help/citing-sources>.

Failure to properly cite sources constitutes plagiarism and is a matter of academic integrity.

Academic Integrity: In order for you to benefit from the course—and to be fair to all students—the instructor will not tolerate academic dishonesty, in any form. The following constitute violations of the Student Academic Integrity Policy:

- Plagiarism: Presenting someone else's work as your own
- Fabrication and falsification: Inventing or altering information for academic work
- Cheating: Using unauthorized materials in academic work
- Complicity in academic dishonesty: Assisting someone else in committing an academic violation
- Abuse of academic materials: Making resource materials inaccessible to other students
- Multiple submissions: Submitting substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) for credit more than once without authorization of the instructor(s)

For a more extended explanation of these violations, visit this

site: www.towson.edu/about/administration/policies/03-01-00-student-academic-integrity-policy.html

Please contact me if you are uncertain of the definition of these academic violations and their potential consequences.

Required University Policies

Student Disability Policy: This course is in compliance with Towson University policies for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessibility & Disability Services (ADS), 7720 York Road, Suite 232, 410-704-2638 (Voice) or 410-704- 4423 (TDD). Students who suspect that they have a disability but do not have documentation are encouraged to contact ADS for advice on how to obtain appropriate evaluation. A memo from ADS authorizing your accommodation is needed before any accommodation can be made. See: <https://www.towson.edu/accessibility-disability-services/gettingstarted/>.

Counseling Statement: The Towson University Counseling Center (TUCC) provides free and confidential counseling services. For more information about TUCC, please visit its website at <https://www.towson.edu/counseling/services/>. To make a same-day appointment or for after-hours crisis assistance, please call 410-704-2512.

Title IX: Towson University (TU) is committed to ensuring a safe, productive learning environment on our campus that does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or intimate partner violence [Policy 06.01.60]. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff, but keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator. It is a goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions and in one-on-one meetings. However, it is required to share information with the Title IX Coordinator regarding disclosures, but know that the information will be kept private to the greatest extent possible. If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure confidential, please seek assistance from the TU Counseling Center 410-704-2512 to schedule an appointment, and locally within the community at TurnAround, Inc., 443-279-0379 (24-hour hotline) or 410-377-8111 to schedule an appointment. See: <https://www.towson.edu/inclusionequity/titleix/>.

Course Outline

Date	Activity	Assignments
During the month of May	Three pre-departure meetings	- meet each other – answer questions about the trip – discuss the syllabus – lecture on intro to int'l human rights
Night before departure for Geneva	Pre-trip essay	See Blackboard for readings – read all documents in the pre-trip readings folder Research and write pre-trip essay and reflection
TBD	Programming in Geneva, Chamonix, Vienna	See itinerary for specifics. Participation in all scheduled activities is expected. Nightly journal reflections expected on all days of the study abroad
Two weeks after flight to Baltimore	Reflection and research paper	Research and write the paper and reflection

Attendance and Absence Policy

Students are required to attend ALL scheduled program activities including but not limited to class time, guest lectures, academic visits, field trips/excursions, group learning activities, general or program specific orientation meetings, group meetings, research, service-learning activities, community projects, volunteer time, homework, research, academic assignments, other academic activities, and cultural activities or visits conducted in-person, online, synchronously, or asynchronously prior to, during, and/or after the 'in location' program dates. It is expected that students will be on time for and actively participate in all scheduled program activities. Failure to participate in any program activity or lateness will result in a course grade reduction. Students unable to participate in a program activity due to medical reasons must notify the Program Director immediately.

Student Conduct and Accountability

Participants should be respectful of cultural differences and promote a positive learning environment while studying abroad or away. Students must conduct themselves in an orderly manner, always respecting all other program participants, the Program Director (s), representatives at local institutions/schools, provider representatives, guest lecturers, guides, drivers, local community members, and the TU Study Abroad & Away Office staff. Disruptive or disrespectful behavior will be addressed and may result in disciplinary action.

Students should practice sound judgment regarding their personal behavior to ensure their own health and safety, and the health and safety of others and are expected to take accountability for their actions and behavior during the program.

All students participating in Towson University faculty-led study abroad/away programs remain subject to the [TU Code of Student Accountability](#) and all relevant academic policies. Violations of the TU Code of Student Accountability may result in actions including but not limited to reductions in course grades, removal from the study abroad/away program, referral to the TU Office of Student Conduct and Civility Education, and/or disciplinary action upon return to TU. The Program Director, in consultation with the Towson University Study Abroad & Away Office and other university representatives as appropriate, has the right and responsibility to suspend or remove from the program any participant if it is deemed such action will be in the best interest of the individual and/or group. In such instances, no refund or credit will be awarded to the suspended participant.

Any breaches of the code will be reported to the TU Study Abroad & Away Office by the Program Director immediately. The following framework is a program-level process designed to address concerns promptly while ensuring appropriate referral to university units when required. The levels indicated may or may not be implemented sequentially.

Level 1: Formal Warning – Academic/Behavioral Correction

Minor misconduct, unprofessional behavior, missed obligations, or failure to follow program rules.

Actions:

- Meeting with the Program Director to review expectations.
- Verbal warning documented by the Program Director.
- Possible reduction in course grade (e.g., professionalism or participation).
- Other actions/sanctions as appropriate.

Level 2: Formal Warning – Program Participation at Risk

Repeated Level 1 behavior or a more serious incident affecting safety, learning, the host environment, other program participants, host staff or community members, or implementation of the program.

Actions:

- Required Zoom meeting with the Program Director and Study Abroad & Away Office to review actions that must be taken by the student to remain in the program.
- Written warning and agreement signed by the student, Program Director, and the Study Abroad & Away Office acknowledging expected behavior and actions that must be taken by the student to remain in the program and repercussions for failure to comply.
- Consultation by the Study Abroad & Away Office with the Office of Student Accountability & Restorative Practices and/or other units on campus as appropriate.
- Possible reduction in course grade, and/or inability to participate in specific program activities, and/or placement in alternate housing at student's expense (as applicable).
- Other actions/sanctions as appropriate.

Level 3: University-Level Disciplinary Action

Serious misconduct, legal violations, harassment or discrimination, endangerment, or any behavior explicitly prohibited by the TU Code of Student Accountability.

Actions:

- Notification to the Study Abroad & Away Office, AVP for International Initiatives, Provost's Office, and other units/university officials as appropriate.
- Official referral to the Office of Student Accountability & Restorative Practices for university disciplinary proceedings.
- Possible removal from the program with no academic credit or program fee refund. Student will be responsible for all program costs and any additional expenses associated with their removal from the program.

- Other actions/sanctions as appropriate.

This system operates in conjunction with, not in place of, the TU Code of Student Accountability. All students retain the rights and responsibilities outlined in TU policies, including due process, notice, and the opportunity to participate in accountability procedures. Program-level actions supplement TU's formal processes to ensure student safety, academic integrity, and responsible conduct while participating in study abroad or away programs.

Program Non-Participants

Individuals not enrolled in the program (other than approved accompanying family members/companions of the Program Director) are not permitted to participate in any of the scheduled program activities, utilize program arranged transportation, or stay in the program housing. All facilities reserved for the group are to be used solely by members of the group.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Towson University is committed to providing equal opportunity and access for students with disabilities by removing barriers to participation and providing reasonable accommodations. If you are not registered with ADS and would like more information, please contact the office at 410-704-2638 or tuads@towson.edu or visit the [ADS website](#). To request accommodations based on a disability, please submit a copy of your accommodations summary from the TU Accessibility and Disability Services Office to your Program Director and the Towson University Study Abroad & Away Office at least three months prior to the program start date so similar arrangements can be made for you on the program if possible. Note: Program activities vary and accommodations made in other countries may differ from those at TU so cannot be guaranteed. Please speak with your Program Director, an Accessibility & Disability Services Specialist, and/or the Towson University Study Abroad & Away Office with any questions or concerns related to accommodations.

Withdrawal

After admission into the study abroad or away program, the student is responsible for the full program fee. Should the student wish to withdraw from the program for any reason after admission, only recoverable expenses may be refunded. Non-recoverable expenses may include, but are not limited to, costs paid to a study abroad provider, travel agency, or other third party by TU on the student's behalf; housing; transportation; non-refundable deposits; activity fees; honorariums; guest lecture fees.

Towson University withdrawal/drop/add deadlines do not apply. The student must submit their intention to withdraw in writing (email is acceptable) to the TU Study Abroad & Away Office.