

WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

Policy Studies 450/Women's Studies 490

Instructor: Shawna E. Sweeney
Department of Policy Studies
UMass Dartmouth
Policy Studies: <http://www.umassd.edu/cas/policystudies/welcome.cfm>

Office: 128 Chase Rd, Rm 005
Office Hours: M & F 2:30pm-3:45pm
E-mail: ssweeney@umassd.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers an in-depth, comparative examination of human rights issues that affect women's lives and the ways women's experiences of human rights violations are gendered. The primary objective of this course is to explore how the attainment of women's rights in the economic, social, and political realms vary significantly by cultural, geographic, and national boundaries, and the strategies that women use to challenge and overcome obstacles. In particular, the student will gain a greater awareness of both the similarities that women share in different socio-cultural backgrounds, and experiences of women in less developed nations that separate them from their Western counterparts. The voices and concerns of women who have been marginalized by their governments and by international human rights law will be represented in this class.

We will investigate a range of pertinent themes and issues, including international human rights conventions; gender-based violence; cultural relativism versus universalism; religious fundamentalisms and the oppression of women; harmful traditional practices; women's political and civil rights; the impact of authoritarianism and democratization on women's status; economic globalization and women's economic and labor rights; the shortcomings of the international human rights regime in protecting women's human rights; and other pertinent issues. We will also consider how women's movements and social activism at the national and international levels have been successful in coaxing national governments and international organizations to respond to these issues.

COURSE POLICIES AND CLASS STRUCTURE

I expect regular student attendance and participation in class discussions. I also expect students to read assigned materials before class and to be fully prepared to discuss the materials in class. The course readings, assignments, and films have been selected to generate broad in-class discussions. Students should feel free to ask questions and to express their opinions. Student debate of the issues is encouraged since the exchange of ideas is an important tool for learning. However, students should respect each other and not belittle opinions and ideas.

It is important to note that the course schedule is not set in stone. I will try to keep the class on schedule. However, I may want to have the freedom to take extra time to emphasize topics that

students find more interesting or that I find more important. In the event that a topic is of particular interest to students, we may decide to spend more time discussing and exploring this topic than the time allocated in the course schedule.

The student is also responsible for passing in required assignments on time. Late assignments (those without a legitimate excuse) will be penalized by *a half a letter grade* for each week the assignment is overdue.

Cheating or plagiarizing on any assignment in this course will lead to an “F”. If in doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism, please review the University’s policy on Academic Dishonesty at

<http://www.umassd.edu/studenthandbook/academicregs/ethicalstandards.cfm>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance and Participation (15%)**: Both combined are worth 15% of the course grade. This includes regular attendance, thoughtful student discussion of the class readings, as well as grades received on informal in-class assignments that I have assigned during the semester. Refer to the course schedule.

Since this is a small class, your active participation in class discussions is important. In order to achieve an ‘A’ for an attendance and participation grade, students must attend class regularly, participate thoughtfully in class discussions, and show that they have read the class materials. Excessive absences will result in a lower grade. To be specific, I will allow three absences over the course of the semester to allow for illnesses and other problems that may keep students from attending class. After those absences are used, students will be assigned zeros for all absences. Documented, extended illness on the part of a student will constitute an exception to this rule, as will any documented excuses related to University sponsored activities.

An attendance sheet will be provided at the beginning of each class. *Students are responsible for signing the attendance sheet.* If you do not receive an attendance sheet in class, it is your responsibility to sign in after the lecture.

2. **Short Papers (20% each)**: Two short papers that are worth 20% each (40% of the final grade). I will give you a choice of two or three topics or general questions around which to organize your essay. Papers should be 5 – 7 double-spaced, typed pages each, excluding bibliography. Please number your pages. Submit a copy of your paper in class on the due date. Papers are due on March 27th and May 6th. Refer to the course schedule.

3. **Research Project (45%)**: Students must choose one of two major research projects listed below. The final project is due in class on May 12th.

Project 1: Early in the semester, I will assign you a particular country to research on women’s rights issues. Students are expected to become knowledgeable on the current status of women in their country, as well as its history, economic and social conditions, and demographics of women.

Since this is a research paper, you are expected to utilize multiple sources (books, web sites, journal articles, etc...). You should check journal indexes and online research materials for

articles, reports, and statistics on the current assessment of women's lives in your assigned country. Gather some data on several indicators of women's status, and legal rights and opportunities in the country (e.g., literacy rate and educational attainment, political representation, economic equality, rights in the family, maternal mortality rates, etc...) for different time points and determine whether there have been any improvements in women's status.

You should also determine whether your country has ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the kinds of reservations the country has issued to this convention.

Visit <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> for the text of the CEDAW and a list of state parties to the convention, as well as country reports and information on state reservations to the CEDAW.

For the final project, you are responsible for writing a significant research paper that provides an overview of the current economic, political, and social status of women in your assigned country. The paper should offer concrete recommendations to promote women's rights. Important questions the paper should address include: Has there been any improvement (or decline) over time in women's status? How do you assess the state's efforts in promoting women's rights? How effectively has the country enforced key provisions of CEDAW and other relevant international conventions? Has there been an improvement in women's status since ratification of the CEDAW? What do you see as major problems or global political/policy issues of particular concern to women in your country? What are the most persistent obstacles to the emancipation of women?

The final paper should be 12 – 15 pages in length (excluding bibliography and title page), double-spaced, and typed in 12-point font size.

* A handout describing this assignment in greater depth will be distributed early in the semester.

Project 2: Early in the semester, students will select (with the instructor's approval) a contemporary woman's rights issue/problem that they are interested in learning more about. Examples of topics include religious fundamentalist threats to women's rights, domestic violence, sexual slavery and trafficking, reproductive rights, HIV/AIDs, honor killings, rape, the rights of the girl child, FGM, women's political representation, among others.

You may choose to provide a broad global overview of the issue/problem that you've selected. You may also focus on a few countries in a particular world region, such as East Asia or the Middle East. For example, if you are interested in researching religious fundamentalist threats to women's rights, you may want to focus on a few select countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.

The final paper should be 12 – 15 pages in length (excluding bibliography and title page), double-spaced, and typed in 12-point font size.

* A handout describing this assignment in greater depth will be distributed early in the semester.

Students are expected to (informally) discuss the results of their findings during the last two weeks of class.

Both research projects require significant library and Internet research.

Important Worldwide Web Sites:

There is a wide range of web sites on important issues related to women's rights. Students should acquaint themselves with these sites at some point early in the semester. They may be helpful in writing your short papers and in developing your research project. Some of the best web sites are:

Advocacy, Educational, and Research Groups:

- ◆ International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRRAW): www.iwraw.igc.org
- ◆ Women's Human Rights Resource Data Base: www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/Diana/edu.htm
- ◆ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): <http://www.ipu.org>
- ◆ Center for the Advancement of Women: <http://www.advancewomen.org>
- ◆ Institute for Women's Policy Research: <http://www.iwpr.org>
- ◆ Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO): <http://wedo.org>
- ◆ Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era: <http://www.dawn.org.fj/>

National and Global Organizations:

- ◆ Amnesty International, Women's Pages: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/index.do>
- ◆ Human Rights Watch, Women's Page: <http://www.hrw.org/women/>
- ◆ U.S. State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*:
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/index.htm>
- ◆ U.S. State Department Office of International Women's Issues: <http://www.state.gov/g/wi>
- ◆ U.S. Department of Justice Violence Against Women Office:
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/>
- ◆ International Labour Organization (gender link): <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/gender.htm>
- ◆ World Bank Data Base of Gender Statistics: <http://genderstats.worldbank.org/home.asp>
- ◆ United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE):
<http://un.org/womenwatch/>
- ◆ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW):
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/>
- ◆ United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>
- ◆ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM): <http://www.unifem.org/>
- ◆ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Women's Rights:
<http://www.unhchr.ch/women/>

* Another good source of information is Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (2003).

Grading Summary:

Attendance and Participation	15.0%
2 Short Think Papers	20.0% (total of 40% of the final grade)
Research Project	45.0%

COURSE READINGS:

There are two required books for the course, which is available for purchase in the campus bookstore. A copy of each book has also been placed on reserve at the library.

Majorie Agosin, Editor, *Women, Gender, and Human Rights* (2001)

Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (2003)

* You will also be responsible for selections from the following books that are placed on reserve.

□ Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper, Eds., *Women's Rights Human Rights International Feminist Perspectives* (1995)

□ V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan, *Global Gender Issues* (1999)

* You are also responsible for reading selected chapters from my doctoral dissertation as well as journal articles and research materials. These readings are listed under the course schedule. A few web-based articles you are responsible for reading can be downloaded directly from the Women's Human Rights Resource Database (WHRR) at: www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/diana/index.htm. These readings are noted as WHRR in the course schedule.

Course Schedule

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

MON 1/30 Introduction to the course

READINGS: Syllabus

WED 2/1 & Becoming Human: the Historical Origins and Development of Women's Human
FRI 2/3 Rights

READINGS:

Agosin, pp. 1 –43

THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

MON 2/6 Defining women's human rights; the role of the United Nations in advancing
WED 2/8 women's claims to rights; and international women's rights conferences
FRI 2/10 &
MON 2/13

READINGS:

- (1) Agosin, pp. 43 – 69, pp. 191-204 & pp. 246-264
- (2) Peters and Wolper, *Women's Rights Human Rights*, Chaps. 1, 2, 3 & 13 (ON RESERVE)
- (3) Shawna Sweeney, "The Internationalization of Human Rights Norms and Women's Rights Attainment", Doctoral Dissertation (HANDOUT)
- (4) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 16-17)

* Visit <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> for the text of the CEDAW and a list of state parties to the convention.

CULTURAL BARRIERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAWS PERTAINING TO WOMEN

WED 2/15 Divisive issues: cultural relativism and religious fundamentalisms
FRI 2/17
TUES 2/21
WED 2/22 &
FRI 2/24 **READINGS:**

- (1) Agosin, pp. 234 – 245
- (2) Peters and Wolper, *Women's Rights Human Rights*, Chaps. 18 & 19 (ON RESERVE)
- (3) Shawna Sweeney, "Political Secularism and Women's Rights Attainment," Doctoral Dissertation (HANDOUT)
- (4) Radhika Coomaraswamy "Different but Free: Cultural Relativism and Women's Rights as Human Rights" (HANDOUT)
- (5) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 14-15)

** **Film:** *Osama*

NO CLASS - FEBRUARY 20TH - PRESIDENT'S DAY

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

MON 2/27 Recent international efforts to categorize violence against women as a human
WED 3/1 rights violation
FRI 3/3 &
MON 3/6

READINGS:

- (1) Agosin, pp. 83 – 122 & pp. 267 – 282
- (2) Peters and Wolper, *Women's Rights Human Rights*, Chap. 15 (ON RESERVE)
- (3) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 26-29)

* **Assignment:** Pick four countries from the U.S. State Department “2004 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices” (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/index.htm>). Your countries should not be in the same geographic region. Examine Section 5 of this report for both countries to determine whether domestic violence is a problem. What types of legal mechanisms exist to prosecute spousal abuse? Do women have the right to legal recourse against spouses and partners? Does the government take action to address domestic abuse? Write a short summary (approximately one to two paragraphs) of your main findings, and what you learned from this exercise. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

WED 3/8 Dowry Deaths and Honor Killings

FRI 3/10

MON 3/13 &

WED 3/15 **READINGS:**

- (1) Agosin, pps. 69 – 82
- (2) Peters and Wolper, *Women's Rights Human Rights*, Chap. 4 (ON RESERVE)
- (3) Winter, Bronwyn, Denise Thompson, and Sheila Jeffreys. “The UN Approach to Harmful Traditional Practices.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 4:1 (April 2002) 72 – 94 (ON RESERVE)
- (4) Angela K. Carlson-Whitley, “Dowry Death: A Violation of the Right to Life Under Article Six of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” *University of Puget Sound Law Review* 17. ([Downloadable from WHRR](#))

* Visit Amnesty International’s web page and skim the report entitled “Pakistan Honor Killings of Girls and Women,” (<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/engASA330181999>)

** **Film:** *Title to be announced*

FRI 3/17 & Female genital mutilation (FGM) & gender-based asylum claims
MON 3/27

READINGS:

- (1) Agosin, pp. 140 - 144
- (2) Binaifer A. Davar, “Rethinking Gender-Related Persecution, Sexual Violence, and Women’s Rights: A New Conceptual Framework for Political

Asylum and International Human Rights Law,” *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 6 (Downloadable from WHRR).

(3) Peters and Wolper, *Women’s Rights Human Rights*, Chap. 23 (ON RESERVE)

(4) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 54-55)

SHORT PAPER #1 DUE ON MARCH 27TH

NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK (MARCH 18-26)

WED 3/29 Rape, sexual violence, and Women & HIV/AIDS

FRI 3/31 &

MON 4/3

READINGS:

(1) Agosin, pp. 125 - 140, pp. 205 – 233, & pp. 312 – 322

(2) Peterson and Runyan, *Global Gender Issues*, pp. 113 – 130 (ON RESERVE)

(3) Peters and Wolper, *Women’s Rights Human Rights*, Chaps. 21 & 24 (ON RESERVE)

(4) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 48-49, pp. 58-59 & pp. 98-101)

WED 4/5 Sexual slavery and trafficking

MON 4/10 &

WED 4/12

READINGS:

(1) Peters and Wolper, *Women’s Rights Human Rights*, Chap. 22 (ON RESERVE)

(2) Vanessa von Struensee, “Globalized, Wired, Sex Trafficking in Women and Children,” (Downloadable from WHRR - search by author’s last name)

(3) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 56-57)

* Visit the Human Rights Watch web page link entitled “Campaign Against the Trafficking of Women and Girls” (<http://www.hrw.org/about/projects/traffcamp/intro.html>)

CLASS MEETS – APRIL 7TH AT WOODLAND COMMONS FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS SYMPOSIUM

FRI 4/14 The rights of the girl child

READINGS:

Agosin, pp. 152 – 169

NO CLASS MONDAY, APRIL 17TH (PATRIOT'S DAY)

WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE FAMILY AND SOCIAL & REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

WED 4/19 The struggle for reproductive and familial rights
FRI 4/21 &
MON 4/24

READINGS:

- (1) Agosin, pp. 144-151
- (2) Peters and Wolper, *Women's Rights Human Rights*, Chaps. 16 & 17 (ON RESERVE)
- (3) Rebecca J. Cook and Bernard M. Dickens, "Human Rights Dynamics of Abortion Law Reform," *Human Rights Quarterly* 25.1 (2003): 1 – 26 (ON RESERVE)
- (4) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 22-23, pp. 31-43 & pp. 84-85)

* **Assignment:** Pick four countries from the U.S. State Department "2004 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/index.htm>). Your countries should not be from the same geographic region. Examine Section 5 of this report for both countries to determine women's social status and legal rights in the family. What types of rights do women have in these countries? Do women have equal inheritance, property, and divorce rights? Does the law discriminate against women in any of these areas? Do women have the right to an education? What about the right to obtain a passport or to travel abroad? Does the government make efforts to enforce women's rights? Write a short summary (approximately one to two paragraphs) of your main findings, and what you learned from this exercise. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

GENDERED DIVISIONS OF POLITICAL POWER INTERNATIONALLY: POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

WED 4/26 Rights to political participation and issues of equality

READINGS:

Convention on the Political Rights of Women
<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/22.htm>

FRI 4/28 Women's political mobilization & participation from a comparative perspective
MON 5/1 &
WED 5/3

READINGS:

- (1) Peterson & Runyan, "Gendered Divisions of Power," Chap. 3 in *Global Gender Issues*, pp. 69 – 112 (ON RESERVE)
- (2) Shawna E. Sweeney, "The Role of Democracy in Explaining Cross-National Variations in Women's Rights Attainment," Doctoral Dissertation (HANDOUT)
- (3) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 91-97)

* **Assignment:** Pick four countries from the U.S. State Department "2004 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/index.htm>). Your countries should not be in the same geographic region. Examine Section 3 (Respect for Political Rights) of this report to determine whether women's political rights are guaranteed by law in both countries. Do women have the right to vote? Do they have the right to run for political office? Are women represented in positions of leadership and in the national legislature? Are there any significant restrictions on women's political rights? Write a short summary (approximately one to two paragraphs) of your main findings, and what you learned from this exercise. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

ECONOMIC AND LABOR RIGHTS & EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

FRI 5/5 Women's economic and labor rights & educational opportunities
 MON 5/8 &
 WED 5/10

READINGS:

- (1) Peterson & Runyan, *Global Gender Issues*, pp. 130 – 162 (ON RESERVE)
- (2) Peters and Wolper, *Women's Rights Human Rights*, Chaps. 26 & 28 (ON RESERVE)
- (3) Joni Seager, *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* (pp. 75-83, pp. 86-90)

Assignment: Pick four countries from the U.S. State Department "2004 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/index.htm>). Your countries should not be in the same geographic region. Examine Section 5 of this report to determine whether women's employment rights are guaranteed by law. Do women receive equal pay for equal work? Do women face discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace? Are women barred from working in the military and the police force, and in occupations classified as dangerous? Do women experience equality in hiring and promotion practices? Does the government effectively enforce the laws pertaining to women's employment rights? Write a short summary (one to two paragraphs) of your main findings, and what you learned from this exercise. Be prepared to share your findings in class.

RECOMMENDED:

Claire Apodaca. 1998. "Measuring Women's Economic and Social Rights Achievement." *Human Rights Quarterly* 20: 139-172 (ON RESERVE)

SHORT PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS ON MAY 5TH

FRI 5/12 STUDENT RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Students will present the findings of their research in class.

MON 5/15 WRAP UP OF CLASS

RESEARCH PROJECTS DUE IN CLASS ON MAY 15TH