

Dr. Shannon Monaghan
Office Hours: Thursdays 1:30-2:30pm or by
appointment
One Bow Street, Suite 250, Office 225
shannonmonaghan@fas.harvard.edu

Human Rights as History
Spring 2018
11am and 12pm

Expository Writing 20: Human Rights as History

I. COURSE OVERVIEW AND UNIT SUMMARIES

The U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights has thirty articles, among them the more familiar — “life, liberty, and security of person” — and the less familiar — the right to a family, to cultural life, to rest and leisure. We often presume that human rights need no justification or explanation. But what are human rights? Are they really universal?

We begin our course by looking at the “strange triumph of human rights” in the aftermath of the violence of the Second World War. After analyzing the development of this idea over time, we’ll think about how human rights are (or are not) protected. We’ll draw on *A Problem from Hell*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by the former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power, who argues that powerful countries have a moral responsibility to prevent genocide. Power addresses examples such as the Rwandan genocide (where the U.S. failed to intervene) and the Balkan Wars (where NATO did intervene). But other experts say that intervention just makes suffering worse. How do we understand this debate in a historical context?

In the final unit, we will dig into several ongoing and highly contested issues in human rights, like the “right to be forgotten,” which would force Google to erase certain unwelcome search results; the race-, religion-, and gender-infused debate over whether Muslim women should be allowed to wear headscarves in public spaces in France; Ta-Nehisi Coates’s argument in *The Atlantic* for reparations to the descendants of black American slaves; the growing debates over transgender rights and restroom access; the role of the Nuremberg legacy in the success (or failure) of trying war crimes today; and even Harvard’s own complicated relationship to slavery in the United States. For their final project, students will analyze one of these human rights issues through its rich and complex history, illuminating both the past and the present.

My pitch to you: This is a **writing course** about the **history of human rights**, and for it you will write a ton. But really this is a course about how to think in an organized way about an interesting topic: how to break down information into manageable parts, and assemble those parts in a process of effective written communication. Remember, writing is not just a noun (the product). It’s also a verb (the process). While you will indeed produce plenty of writing-as-noun in this class, Expos is really about writing-as-verb. That process is something that you can take with you and adapt over time, no matter where you go after this class (or after Harvard).

Unit I: The Origins of Human Rights (Close reading: 1,250 – 1,500 word paper)

In this unit, we will begin to appreciate why the contested development of the idea of human rights — where do they come from? How are they different from minority rights, and what is their relationship to the atrocities of the Second World War and the subsequent birth of the United Nations? We will focus on reading closely, on asking sharply analytical questions, and on neatly structuring our thoughts so as to write and argue clearly.

Reading:

Lynn Hunt, “The Paradoxical Origins of Human Rights” (in *Human Rights and Revolutions*)
 Mark Mazower, “The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933-1950,” *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 2 (2004): 379–98.

Unit II: The Responsibility to Protect (Using a lens: 1,600 – 2,000 word paper)

Now that we know some of the historical complications of where the idea of human rights comes from, we’ll move on to addressing the contested concept of the “responsibility to protect.” In this paper, you will apply your lens authors’ established argument to the evidence of our sources, and offer your own interpretation. In other words, you will use a secondary source – **either** Mark Mazower’s article **or** Lynn Hunt’s chapter as a springboard to help your reader understand a primary source’s approach – either Samantha Power’s **or** David Rieff’s. In doing so, you’ll ask how a deeper past can help contextualize and understand the interventionist/non-interventionist approach of the turn of the century. You’ll also help explain for your reader what your argument means for the nature of human rights. In doing so, we’ll focus on identifying authors’ positions and evidence, dealing with counterargument, and staking out your own, well-evidenced and well-argued argument.

Readings:

Background — Tony Judt: *Postwar*, summary of 1990s Balkan Wars (5 page excerpt)
 Pro interventionism — Samantha Power: Preface/Conclusion, *A Problem From Hell*
 Against interventionism — David Rieff, *At the Point of A Gun* (excerpts)

Unit III: Human Rights Today (Multi-source research paper, 3,000 – 3,250 word paper)

We now move to the present, and analyze some of today’s controversial human rights issues. Some of these will feel very different; some will not. How did we get from the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights to here?

This unit culminates with a multi-source research paper. The goal is to investigate a human rights issue with a sharp eye to its historical development. What has that development been, and why does it matter for how the issue that you have chosen is unfolding today? Below are topics to choose from, along with a reading to jumpstart your thinking. The rest of your sources – and the angle with which you approach the topic (there are many!) – are for you to choose.

Topic options:

The “veil debates” in France (Joan Scott, *Politics of the Veil* excerpt)

France has had a strong secular streak since the Revolution, and officially declared a governing principle of secularism in the early twentieth century. Then, however, practiced religion in France was majority Catholic. After decolonization in the postwar period, however, France has

been home to a large Muslim population from its former colonies — and many Muslim women prefer to wear various forms of the veil. France has banned the wearing of religious garb in public spaces — schools, courts, etc. In theory this ban is universal, but in practice the people affected by it are almost all Muslims. Some say that the ban is an admirable, universal, equal secularism that deliberates women in particular; others contend that it is racist, neocolonialist, paternalistic, and specifically targets Muslims and continues to define them as an Other.

The right to be forgotten (Jeffrey Toobin, “The Solace of Oblivion” in *The New Yorker*)

How do we balance individual privacy with the freedom of the press/speech and a communal right to information? The “right to be forgotten” has been affirmed by European courts — there, you can force Google to erase terrible, hurtful, or inaccurate information about you. The U.S., as Jeffrey Toobin surveys in his article, has no such law, and likely never will. The U.S. has extensive freedom of the press and freedom of speech, principles that reach back to the country’s founding and make, in certain cases, the right to privacy more difficult to pursue. In Europe, the legacies of the violence of the twentieth century have lent privacy stronger legal (and social) protections. The idea of erasing information pits the individual against society, and the individual rights against various forms of collective or societal rights.

Racial inequality in the United States: Civil rights, affirmative action, and Black Lives Matter (Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”, in *The Atlantic*)

The United States was built on a paradox: all men were declared equal and born with “inalienable” rights, and yet those rights only applied to men with white skin (not to mention women with any color skin). The Constitution sanctioned slavery. The Southern economy could not survive without it and the South gets the worst rap, yet — as school busing and “white flight” showed after the Great Migration — Northerners also had their own serious problems with race. Coates poses a powerful question: how to make up for “Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy”? His answer: reparations. It is a provocative argument that takes a look at a long history, and sparked quite the debate when it was published.

LGBTQ Rights (Olga Gershenson, “The Restroom Revolution: Unisex Toilets and Campus Politics,” in *Toilet*, ed. Harvey Molotch and Laura Norén)

Who gets to use which toilet, and why? Who gets to define what many see as the most basic category of a person’s identity — their sex? The newly visible push for transgender rights asks society to consider broad questions about what constitutes gender in the first place, and often generates fearful retreats to undefined arguments in which opponents insist on the “safety” of women and children over the rights (and safety) of transgender individuals. Here, Olga Gershenson reviews some of this history and tells the specific tale of the movement to open unisex restrooms on the UMass-Amherst campus in 2001. The battle for transgender rights is one in which sex (as a category), sex (as an action), gender (as a social construct), and society’s desire to categorize others are woven together in complicated ways.

The Nuremberg Trials: What was Nuremberg? Popular lore sees the trials as a beacon of human rights law and as the beginning of punishing genocide in a legal context; the actual legal history (as with the rest of the history of postwar de-Nazification) is much more complicated. Harvard has an extensive collection of original Nuremberg documents, including (in English!)

the papers of the American judge, Robert Kaplan, as well as voluminous translated evidence from American analysts. We also hold remarkable photo albums from Wehrmacht soldiers and officers who fought on the Eastern front. If you are interested in using photographic evidence, you might also consider the Lodz Ghetto photos, available here:

(<http://agolodzghetto.com/objects/viewcollections?t:state:flow=f1b0e9be-a2e4-43f1-a55c-2530fdbed908>) For general reference on postwar trials, I have posted a review article on recent scholarship titled “Seeking Justice, Finding Law: Nazi Trials in Postwar Europe” by Devin Pendas on Canvas.

Universities and Slavery: How did the U.S. go from enshrining slavery in the Constitution (in the three-fifths clause) to abolition? Harvard, as well as many other schools, has a long and complicated history with both slavery and abolitionism. Houghton, Harvard’s rare books library, holds a collection of early abolitionist materials, including a late-eighteenth century commencement debate on the merits of abolition, various pamphlets on the merits of slavery and abolition, including whether or not it was appropriate for clergymen to own slaves, and a series of documents on bills of sale and shipment of slaves themselves. The Harvard University Archives have previously put on an exhibit on this subject that was the result of a History Department seminar (see <http://www.harvardandslavery.com> as well as <https://www.harvard.edu/slavery>); likewise, Georgetown has a large online archive detailing that school’s nineteenth century sale of slaves to support the university’s finances (see <https://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu>) For general reference on early abolitionism, I have posted a review article of Manisha Sinha’s *The Slave’s Cause: The History of Abolition* on Canvas.

*If you have another topic that you have a **burning** desire to write about instead, you will be able to arrange an individual meeting with me to pitch your idea.*

II. HOW THE COURSE WORKS

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS:

All of the materials for this course are included in the coursepack, available from Flashprint (86 Mt. Auburn Street). If the coursepack causes financial hardship for you, please contact me ASAP, and we will work something out.

TECHNOLOGY:

There will be minimal technology use in our classroom. While technology offers many advantages to both students and professors, it also offers many distractions, and a growing body of scientific research suggests that reading on paper produces better learning than reading on screens. Our class is seminar-style, so basic, face-to-face, non-digital discussion is paramount. Cellphones are, obviously, not allowed in class and should remain in your bag (not your pocket!) if they must come into the classroom at all. We will not use laptops in class unless you are working directly in groups on a writing exercise; this will mostly happen in Unit III and will be noted in the daily syllabus. In the meantime, please a) always bring ***the coursepack and a hard copy of your notes/assignments*** for the day, and b) bring something to write on, and something to write with.

WRITING AND REVISING:

In Expos, you'll write produce one graded revision per each of our three units. Before that graded revision, however, you'll also write a fully finished, complete paper (known in Expos as a "draft") on which you will receive extensive feedback from me, and for which we will have a one-on-one, 25 minute conference to discuss your revision. Drafts and revisions are preceded by "response papers" and exercises, which help build the skills that you'll need for each unit. In each unit, we will also have workshops, where we workshop selected peers' papers in class. More detail is provided below.

- **Response Papers:** Before you compose an initial draft of each paper, you'll complete a response paper that focuses on particular writing skills that are important for the relevant paper type. Check each unit assignment packet for specific instructions and due dates, etc.
- **Drafts:** You will submit a fully finished paper (what we call a "draft" in Expos, but generally what you'd turn in as a final paper in most classes – in other words, *not* a "rough" draft!) in each of the three units, which will then be revised. On each paper you'll receive detailed comments from me (in writing and in conferences) before you revise.
- **Cover Letters:** Every time you hand in a paper or a revision, you'll include a cover letter in which you provide guidance to your reader about the aspects of the paper you are struggling with in addition to whatever other comments or questions you might have. I'll give you more specific instructions about writing cover letters over the course of the semester.
- **Draft Workshops:** The week after each draft is due, we'll have an in-class workshop in which we work through two student papers (chosen by me) and offer the writers *constructive* criticisms and suggestions for improvement. I will email you the paper I have chosen before each workshop. You will be expected to provide written comments on each paper that we workshop together. I'll hand out more guidelines on workshops later in the semester.
- **Conferences:** After I've carefully read your paper and provided comments to you, we'll meet for a 25 minute conference in which we'll work together on strategies for revising the paper. You should bring your paper (with my comments) with you to our conferences, either in hard copy or on your laptop. You should also plan on taking notes during the conference.

A word of warning: my schedule for conference weeks is *packed!* Missed conferences may not be rescheduled, and I cannot hold office hours during these weeks either. Likewise due to the hectic pace of the week between drafts and revisions, I am not able to provide feedback for "second drafts" leading up to your final revision. However, by the time you are revising your papers you will have received a number of stages of feedback and can by all means make appointments with the Writing Center!

- **Revised papers:** You should expect to extensively revise each of your paper before submitting it for a grade. Since you'll have a significant period of time for revision, the expectations for this aspect of your work in the course are high. Revision is not the same thing as editing or proofreading. It often involves extensive reconsideration and reworking of your initial paper. I

will provide written comments on paper revisions. Paper revisions must be submitted via Canvas, and I will also provide my comments in electronic form.

III. OTHER POLICIES

GRADES:

Your grade is earned through the following breakdown:

Participation (including exercises, response papers, and commenting on other students' work as well as in-class participation): 10%

Unit 1 Revision: 20%

Unit 2 Revision: 30%

Unit 3 Revision: 40%

The standard for each paper becomes more demanding as we progress, since you are building on certain fundamental skills and techniques with each paper.

COMMUNICATION:

The course works best when we treat it as a semester-long conversation about your writing. To make that conversation possible, there are a few important things to remember:

Office Hours: In addition to our formal conferences, you are of course free to come see me during office hours about your developing ideas, or to set up another time to meet if office hours aren't convenient.

Email: As part of your participation in the course, I ask that you check your email daily – and you are always welcome to email me! I will respond as quickly as I can. Some other technical notes: as our time together is limited, most “housekeeping” items will come via email. You are responsible for the information I send you, including the feedback to your drafts and revisions (which are easy to miss on a smartphone, where the software sometimes doesn't show everything – please, *please* be sure to review them on your desktop, where Word's track changes and comment bubbles are visible!).

ELECTRONIC SUBMISSIONS:

All response papers, drafts, and revisions will be submitted electronically, via our Canvas website.¹ As you send or upload each document, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have saved the document in a form compatible with Word. *I strongly suggest that you upload all files as Word .docx files.*

It is also your responsibility to ensure that the file you are sending is not corrupted or damaged. If I cannot open or read the file you have sent, the paper will be subject to a late penalty. FYI: Word files have not *spontaneously* corrupted since the late 1990s; unless you are using a vintage

¹ Note: Some response papers will have alternative formats, but an electronic submission must always be submitted. See each Unit syllabus for the relevant details. If you have questions about a specific assignment, please email me.

IBM desktop PC from the era in which the Internet still ran on dial-up, I don't expect to receive one from you! ☺

Unless you have made prior arrangements to do so, please do not email me your assignments. If your assignment is late, please submit it on Canvas and then send me an email letting me know that it has been posted.

All work you submit to the course is for public readership — in other words, we will use student papers (possibly yours!) as some of our texts this semester. If at any point you submit a draft or revision that you would prefer other students not read, please let me know that — but please don't make that request about everything you turn in this semester.

PARTICIPATION:

Being prepared for class means that you have given careful thought to the reading and writing assignments for our class, and that you are ready to offer ideas and questions to open our discussions about human rights. The participation portion of your grade represents a serious measure of your completion of assigned readings, exercises, and response papers; your constructive participation in class discussion and in conferences; and the care with which you respond to fellow students' work. Fair warning: *participation and respiration are not the same thing.* ☺

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the class. Failure to do so may result in my inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.

LATE WORK:

All deadlines in the course are firm. Any drafts or revisions not submitted by the deadline will immediately incur a late penalty of a third of a letter-grade on the revision (e.g., A to A-); an additional one-third grade penalty will be applied for each 12-hour period that passes before the completed paper is submitted. This does *not* mean that you should just turn in anything: please note that papers that do not substantially meet the requirements of the assignment at the time of submission will be considered late and will be penalized accordingly. Because of the aforementioned crazy schedule of conference week, late papers additionally may not receive comprehensive feedback prior to or during our conference. Failure to submit a paper revision within 24 hours after the deadline may trigger the Writing Program Completion of Work policy, which can lead ultimately to course exclusion (see below).

*All that said: since our deadlines are strict, our schedule is tight, and I know that all of you are super busy, I offer you **A VERY GOOD THING**: I will offer you ONE no-questions-asked 24-hour freebie extension on a single assignment. You just need to let me know by email BEFORE*

the assignment is due that you'll be taking your "freebie." Yes, an email time-stamped 60 seconds before a deadline is fine! The point is that it's BEFORE a deadline, not after.

Further extensions will be granted *only* in the case of medical or family *emergencies*, and will need to be appropriately documented. If you cannot meet a deadline due to a medical emergency, you should contact me right away; you will likely be required to produce a note from UHS. In the event of a family emergency, you should contact me right away; you will likely be required to ask your dean to contact me by email or phone. In addition, please contact me as soon as possible to work out an alternative schedule.

HARVARD WRITING PROGRAM ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Because Expos has a shorter semester and fewer class hours than other courses, and because instruction in Expos proceeds by sequential writing activities, your consistent attendance is essential. *If you are absent without medical excuse more than twice, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.* On the occasion of your second unexcused absence, you will receive a letter warning you of your situation. This letter will also be sent to your Resident Dean, so the College can give you whatever supervision and support you need to complete the course.

Apart from religious holidays, only medical absences can be excused. In the case of a medical problem, you should contact your preceptor before the class to explain, but in any event within 24 hours: otherwise you will be required to provide a note from UHS or another medical official, or your Resident Dean. Absences because of special events such as athletic meets, debates, conferences, and concerts are not excusable absences. If such an event is very important to you, you may decide to take one of your two allowable unexcused absences; but again, you are expected to contact your preceptor beforehand if you will miss a class, or at least within 24 hours. If you wish to attend an event that will put you over the two-absence limit, you should contact your Resident Dean and you must directly petition the Expository Writing Senior Preceptor, who will grant such petitions only in extraordinary circumstances and only when your work in the class has been exemplary.

Class begins promptly at seven minutes past the hour. A third occurrence of lateness of more than eight minutes (and each subsequent occurrence) will count as an absence.

HARVARD WRITING PROGRAM COMPLETION OF WORK POLICY:

Because your Expos course is a planned sequence of writing, you must write all of the assigned papers to pass the course, and you must write them within the schedule of the course — not in the last few days of the semester after you have fallen behind. You will receive a letter reminding you of these requirements, therefore, if you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of a paper by the final due date in that unit. The letter will also specify the new date by which you must submit the late work, and be copied to your Resident Dean. If you fail to submit at least a substantial draft of the paper by this new date, and you have not documented a medical problem, you are eligible to be officially excluded from the course and given a failing grade.

HARVARD WRITING PROGRAM ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY:

Throughout the semester we'll work on the proper use of sources, including how to cite and how to avoid plagiarism. You should always feel free to ask me questions about this material. *All the work that you submit for this course must be your own, and that work should not make use of outside sources unless such sources are explicitly part of the assignment.* Any student submitting plagiarized work is eligible to fail the course and to be subject to review by the Honor Council, including potential disciplinary action.

HARVARD WRITING PROGRAM POLICY ON COLLABORATION:

The following kinds of collaboration are permitted in this course: developing or refining ideas in conversation with other students and through peer review of written work (including feedback from Writing Center tutors). If you would like to acknowledge the impact someone had on your paper, it is customary to do this in a footnote at the beginning of the paper. As stated in the Student Handbook, "Students need not acknowledge discussion with others of general approaches to the assignment or assistance with proofreading." However, all work submitted for this course must be your own: in other words, writing response papers, papers or revisions with other students is expressly forbidden.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES:

If things become rocky for you at any point, or if you would just like someone to talk to — about feeling homesick, fitting in, or becoming depressed or overwhelmed — there are great people available to listen and to help at Harvard. You can talk to your Freshman Advisor, your Dean, your Proctor, or your Peer Advising Fellow (PAF). Harvard also provides care (free of charge!) to all students at Counseling and Mental Health Resources (4th Floor, Smith Campus Center, 617.495.2042). Remember also that you should always see your Resident Dean if you are feeling over your head in terms of coursework, or if a major event has come up over the course of the semester that is affecting your work. They are there to help!

WRITING CENTER:

At any stage of the writing process — brainstorming ideas, reviewing papers, approaching revisions — you may want some extra attention on your papers. The Writing Center (located on the garden level of the Barker Center) offers hour-long appointments with trained tutors. I can't stress strongly enough the benefit of the service they provide; regardless of the "strength" or "weakness" of the paper, any piece of writing benefits from further review and a fresh perspective. Visit the Writing Center's Web site at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr> to make an appointment. Tutors also hold drop-in office hours at other campus locations; see the Writing Center website for details.

A final note... If you have any questions or concerns about the course, please send me an email and let me know, and I'll either address them in an email response or in class.

IV. SCHEDULE OF DUE DATES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: PENDING