

**ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY**  
**First Year Seminar**  
**Spring 2009**

**Human Rights: The Power of Narrative**

**FRPG 188K: First Year Seminar**  
**Tues/Thurs, 10:10-11:40; Wed, 12:0-1:30**  
**Office: Hepburn 210 Phone: 229-5279**  
**Communications Skills Mentor: Prav Chatani (Contact Information to follow).**

**Joe Kling**  
**Atwood 031**

**Course Description**

The concept of human rights holds out the possibility of a world in which all persons, by virtue of their humanity alone, have a legitimate claim to personal autonomy, security of person, and those social and material conditions necessary to physical well-being. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the ways struggles for human rights have advanced is through the use of *narrative*- the stories people have told of their experiences of abuse, injustice, and denial of freedom. These stories have been communicated through the process of *witnessing* and the offering of *testimony*- the use of memoir, fiction, poetry, film, and most recently, sworn statements before truth commissions. In this course, after briefly looking at some of the issues associated with the notion of human rights itself, we will read and discuss a number of these narratives— starting with classic slave narratives from the United States and concluding with a recounting of the practice by which thousands of African children have been kidnapped and forced to fight in many of the continent's brutal civil wars.

In the end, these witnesses to suffering affirm the human capacity for dignity and survival. Students will be asked to explore a human rights struggle of the past 200 years about which they would like to know more, and report on some of the narratives associated with that struggle—thus reproducing and extending the very impact the narratives themselves were designed to foster.

**Our Course And The FYS**

In the First Year Semester, the emphasis is on research, and you will be expected to complete by the end of term, as one of the major requirements of the course, a 10-12 page research paper. We ask you to remember that, in exchange for the intense and varied work necessary to meet these goals, the FYS is a 1.5-credit course, and meets for more time than most other SLU courses.

**Texts**

Clapham, Andrew, 2007, *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press.  
Gates, Jr., Henry Louis, ed. 1987, *The Classic Slave Narratives*, New York: Mentor Books..  
Levi, Primo, 1993, *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Collier Trade Books Edition  
Menchú, Rigoberta, 1984, *I, Rigoberto Menchu*. Edited and Introduced by Elisabeth Burgos Debray, New York: Verso Books.  
Beah, Ishmael. 2007, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre.

Davis, James P., 2007, *The Rowman and Littlefield Guide to Writing With Sources*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

On Electronic Reserve:

From: Arias, Arturo, ed., 2001, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Reading To Be Assigned.

## **COURSE METHODOLOGY AND REQUIREMENTS**

The course will be organized in the form of a seminar. *An extended research paper of 10-12 pages, which develops and supports a thesis in relation to a human rights movement of particular interest to the student, is the central requirement of the course.* This will be prepared in stages, over the duration of the term. *Two drafts of the research paper are required.* Students will not receive a satisfactory grade unless they have submitted both a first draft and subsequent revision of their final paper. As the term ends, each student will make a formal oral presentation of his or her findings and conclusions to the seminar.

It is critical that you meet the due dates for each stage, since the assignments are scaffolded, and you cannot complete one stage of the process without first having completed the previous stage. If you fall behind, you will find yourself in a situation where you cannot meet the requirements of the course. PLEASE NOTE: *The steps for the preparation of the paper are outlined in Part II of the syllabus.*

*Do not be fooled. Preparation for the final paper begins the first week of the semester. There is no slack in this syllabus. Writing begins the first day, and doesn't let up until we say good-bye at the end of the term. You will find yourself with some sort of writing assignment every week.*

**NOTE: *The steps for the preparation of the paper are outlined in Parts II and III of the syllabus. Please follow them closely.***

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION**

### Writing

1. First Essay: 'What Do You Believe Are the Most Important Human Rights and Why?'	5%
2. Exploratory Proposal. Two Drafts	10%
3. Literature Review	5%
4. Two Analytic Writings on Course Readings (One of these will be in class.)	20%
5. Thesis Statement and Revision	(Check Grade.)
6. Formal Proposal, Including Tentative Outline. Two Drafts	15%
7. Final Paper. Two Drafts	20%
8. Portfolio	5%

## Speaking

- 9. Short Speaking Assignment ..... 5%.
- 10. Formal Presentation of Research. .... 10%
- 11. General Participation ..... 5%

For assignments requiring two drafts, the first draft will be assigned a prospective grade range, so that the student will have some idea of where her work falls on an assessment spectrum. The 2<sup>nd</sup> draft will receive the final grade, which may or may not fall within the range. The final grade will be independent of the earlier one.

## Other Requirements

1. Correct grammar and spelling are **fundamental**. Use Spell Check regularly. We will also consistently refer to Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*, so please bring it with you to class, and use it to check for correct grammatical usage.
2. Short Speaking Assignment: Brief Background Presentation of Human Rights Movement. Once the final draft of your exploratory paper has been returned (Feb 17), a number of the following class periods will open with 2 short (3-5 minutes) presentations. Students will share with the class the substance of their exploratory proposals, providing some background to the human rights movement they have chosen to study, and why. These talks will continue until each student has presented.
3. It is required that all papers for our FYS be sent to the instructor via the Drop Box on the Angel page for our course. The Drop Box will be found under the 'Course Materials' tab on that page. Papers will be returned via the same system.
4. As in your fall FYP, you will collect your written assignments into a portfolio at the end of the semester. Your portfolio will include a reflection and assessment on the progress of your work generally over the course of the term. I hope to find a way for you to submit this portfolio electronically.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### **WEEK ONE**

- Tu 1/20. Introduction to Class. Overview of Syllabus. Visiting the Angel Site. 'What Are Human Rights And What Is Their Source?'
- W 1/21. Small Group Discussion: What Do You Believe Are the Most Important Human Rights? Why?  
Writing Assignment: 'What Do You Believe Are the Most Important Human Rights?' Due Tu 1/27. Anytime. On Angel. Graded.
- Th 1/22 Read: Clapham, pp. 1-56

## WEEK TWO

Tu 1/27      Read:            Clapham, pp. 57-107  
                 Handout:        Human Rights Struggles in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

W 1/28      Finding A Topic: How do you decide what human rights movement you wish to study, and what question you want to ask? Tentative: Trip to Library. ‘Initiating Research on a Topic. Where and How Do I Begin Exploring?’ Learning the Data Bases.

Assigned: Exploratory Research on a Human Rights Movement of Particular Interest To You.

This paper is a first systematic exploration of a proposed research topic. Its point is to suggest what human rights movement you would like to study over the course of the term. You will need to do some background reading on your proposed topic before you can write the proposal. Be sure to include documentation and appropriate referencing format for any works you do consult.

In this brief essay: a) Propose a human rights movement you would like to explore as the topic of your research paper. b) Describe some of the critical issues you find associated with this movement. c) Discuss why you believe these issues are important, interesting, or challenging. d) Identify some of the leaders connected to this movement, and compile a brief listing of whatever of their writings are available. e) If they have few or no writings of their own, see if there are biographies, documentaries, or narrative films which explore their lives. f) Develop some questions you might want to raise in relation to either the movement or its leaders, and select one to serve as your tentative research question. This question-- even as it evolves and changes-- will guide you through the entire process of your research.

Assignment is due on Angel anytime, February 3. You will be asked to revise and resubmit your exploratory proposal. A revised draft will be due February 17. 2 ½- 3 pages.

Due: Written Report on Exploratory Research, Tuesday 2/3 on Angel, anytime.

Th 1/29      Read: Clapham, pp. 108-163

## WEEK THREE

Tu 2/3      The Universal Declaration of Human Rights- Clapham, pp. 182-189  
DUE. ON ANGEL, ANYTIME: First Draft of Exploratory Proposal.

- W 2/4            Constructing a Bibliography: Visit to Library
- Due: What Human Rights Movement Are You Interested in Studying? Why? What is its background?
- Visit to Library For Beginning Literature Search. Discussion of Research Question. Read: Davis, pp. 1-48.
- Assigned: Literature Review. Due, On Angel, Tuesday 2/10, Anytime.
- Th 2/5            Read: Gates, pp. ix-xviii; pp. 187-215

#### **WEEK FOUR**

- Tu 2/10          Read: Gates, pp. 243-276.
- W 2/11          Exploratory Proposal Returned. Revision Due 2/17  
Due: Literature Review. (Graded)
- Th 2/12          Read: Gates, pp. 276-315

#### **WEEK FIVE**

- Tu 2/17          Read: Gates, pp. 315-331. Literature Review Returned. Analytic paper on Human Rights Text Assigned. Due Tue 2/24.
- W, Th 2/18, 2/19    **NO CLASS- DR. KLING IS ATTENDING AN ACADEMIC CONFERENCE.**

#### **WEEK SIX:**

- Tu 2/24          Read: Levi, pp 9-64
- W 2/25          Workshop: Constructing a Thesis Statement.  
Assigned. Potential Thesis Statement. Due: 3/4
- Th 2/26          Read: Levi, pp. 65-122

#### **WEEK SEVEN**

- Tu 3/3            Read: Levi, pp. 123-173

- W 3/4 Discussion of Thesis Statements. Revisions Due March 10.
- Th 3/5 Read: Menchúr, pp. xi-xxi; pp. 1-58  
Guest Speaker: Thomas Hunt '62, Pro Bono Attorney and nationally recognized civil rights and equal opportunity law expert.

### **WEEK EIGHT**

- Tu 3/10 Read: Menchúr, pp.59-116
- W 3/11 Discussion of Formal Proposal. Draft Due 3/25
- Th 3/12 Read: Menchúr, pp 117-182  
Steve Molnar?

### **WEEK OF MARCH 13-MARCH 22: SPRING BREAK**

### **WEEK NINE**

- Tu 3/24 Read: Menchúr, pp. 183-247
- W 3/25 First Draft of Formal Proposal Due.
- Th 3/26 Read: Articles Assessing Menchúr Text—

### **WEEK TEN**

- Tu 3/31 Class Discussion: Narrative, Authenticity, Veracity.
- W 4/1 Formal Proposal Returned. Workshop: What is a Good Outline?  
Revised Proposal, with Outline, Due: 4/8
- Th 4/2 Read: Beah, pp. 3-57

### **WEEK ELEVEN**

- Tu 4/7 Read: Beah, pp. 58-120
- W 4/8 Revised Formal Proposal, with Outline Due.  
Discussion: Formatting A Formal Research Paper.  
Rubric: Presenting a Formal Oral Report.
- Th 4/9 Read: Beah, pp. 121-178

## **WEEK TWELVE**

Tu 4/14 Read: Beah, pp 179- 218. Revised Formal Proposals Returned.

W 4/15, Th 4/16 NO CLASS: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH INSTRUCTOR

## **WEEK THIRTEEN**

Tu 4/21 In Class Analytic Paper: Comparing Narrative Texts. (Graded.)

W 4/22 No Class: First Draft of Paper Due Anytime- On Angel.

Th 4/23 ORAL REPORTS

## **WEEK FOURTEEN**

Tu 4/28 ORAL REPORTS .

W 4/29 ORAL REPORTS.

Th 4/30 REVIEW AND EVALUATION

**FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE AND PORTFOLIO DUE ANYTIME DURING EXAM WEEK.**

### **PART II:**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF STEPS FOR PREPARATION OF RESEARCH PAPER**

##### **A. Exploratory Topic: Issue, Rationale, Research Question**

**ASSIGNED--** Week 2, 1/28

**DRAFT FOR REVIEW:** Week 3, 2/3

**REVISED DRAFT DUE--** Week 5, 2/17

Finding A Topic: How do you decide what human rights movement you wish to study, and what question you want to ask? Trip to Library. ‘Initiating Research on a Topic. Where and How Do I Begin Exploring?’ Learning the Data Bases.

Assigned: Exploratory Research on a Human Rights Movement of Particular Interest To The Student..

This paper is a first systematic exploration of a proposed research topic. Its point is to suggest what human rights movement you would like to study over the course of the term. In this brief essay you will: a) Propose a human rights movement you would

like to explore as the topic of your research paper. b) Describe some of the critical issues you find associated with this movement. c) Discuss why you believe these issues are important, interesting, or challenging. d) Identify some of the leaders connected to this movement, and compile a brief listing of whatever of their writings are available. e) If they have few or no writings of their own, see if there are biographies, documentaries, or narrative films which explore their lives. f) Develop some questions you might want to raise in relation to either the movement or its leaders, and select one to serve as your tentative research question. This question-- even as it evolves and changes-- will guide you through the entire process of your research.

Assignment is due on Angel anytime, February 3. Based on class discussion, you may wish to revise and resubmit your exploratory proposal. A revised draft will be due February 17. 2- 3 pages.

Due: Written Report on Exploratory Research, Tuesday 2/3 on Angel, anytime.

## **B. Background Literature Search**

**ASSIGNED-- Week 3, 2/4 DUE- Week 4, 2/11.**

Do a library search as background for your paper, and provide a preliminary literature review. Find approximately 10 items-- at least 3 books, and 5 articles, three of which must be from scholarly journals. The remaining sources may be from the Internet (you do not have to limit yourself to two), as long as they are reliable, and suit the purposes of your research. Introduce your literature review by explaining the topic of your research, and what some of the issues are that you expect your research to address.

In your review, include *a brief description of the main idea of each referenced text—no more than 3 sentences, and explain how the text might be useful in exploring the research topic at hand.*

Finally, **make sure your bibliographical references are formatted correctly.**

## **C. Thesis Statement**

**ASSIGNED-- Week 6, Feb. 25**

**DUE-- Week 7, March 4.**

Tentative thesis statement. Remember: this is a one sentence statement of the basic argument of your paper, the proposition that the entire thrust of your work is meant to support. It will not be graded, but expect to have to revise and resubmit it.

## **D. Formal Thesis Proposal**

**ASSIGNED Week 8, March 11**

**DUE-- Week 9, March 25**

The formal proposal for your paper presents an overview of your main idea and central argument (your thesis). Other than the final draft of your project, it is the

most important piece of writing you will do in the course. The more developed this proposal, the better organized, richer, and more effective will be the end product-- the paper itself.

The formal proposal should be organized to do the following. a) Provide some background for the issue or controversy with which your paper is concerned. b) **State your central thesis**, or the main idea of your paper in relation to this controversy. This will be the **argument** of your paper. c) Lay out a proposed **strategy** through which you intend to support/establish your argument; d) discuss, briefly, some of the literature you intend to use as sources (including websites). e) Offer a brief summary conclusion.

The formal proposal should have the following structure, and include answers to the following questions:

1. **Introductory paragraph:** what is your general area of interest? What are some of the controversies in this area? Which of these controversies do you intend to address? Why does it interest you? **What specific question do you propose to ask in your writing about this controversy?**
2. What is your central **thesis**, that is, the main idea of your paper? **What general arguments do you plan to offer in relation to the controversy you are addressing?** Explain and develop your position a bit.
3. Through what tentative strategy or outline do you intend support/demonstrate your point of view? This is equivalent to a **brief overview of the structure of your paper**. It should be reflected in your general topic outline, which is the next phase of the paper, and which must be attached to both drafts of your paper.
4. What are some of your expected sources? How have they changed since your original bibliography?
5. Any concluding or summary remarks you wish to offer. **3-4 pages.**

#### **E. Revised Thesis Proposal, With Addition of Topic Outline**

**ASSIGNED-- Week 10, April 1.**

**DUE: Week 11, April 8.**

**Returned Prior to Individual Meetings With Instructor**

**F. First Draft-- DUE Week 13, Wednesday, April 22. On Angel**

**G. Final Revision-- DUE ANYTIME WEEK OF EXAMS.**

### **PART III: COURSE POLICIES**

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Class attendance is expected and required.

**LATE WRITTEN WORK:** Because the development of your research paper is *scaffolded*, it is essential that you submit each of the stages in the preparation of that paper to the instructor on its due date. Extended and consistent lateness of written work will have a negative effect on your final grade.

**PLAGIARISM:** It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with the rules and regulations governing plagiarism, as listed in the Student Handbook. The student should also be both sensitive to, and aware of, the issues involved in academic honesty as it relates to the appropriate use of technology, that is, of online resources of any sort. We will discuss issues of plagiarism in detail over the course of the semester.