Course title: International Politics of Humanitarian Action

Language of instruction: English

Professors: Miriam Bradley (mbradley@ibei.org)

Professor’s contact and office hours: To be arranged with the instructors

Course contact hours: 45

Recommended credit: 3 US credits - 6 ECTS credits

Course prerequisites: None

Language requirements: None

Course focus and approach: In 2013, the US government spent US$4.7 billion on overseas humanitarian assistance. This is part of a wider trend of increasing spending on humanitarian aid since the end of the Cold War. Does this massive expansion of the humanitarian sector suggest the world is becoming more compassionate and civilized? How do the political interests of donor governments drive humanitarian priorities? Does aid do more harm than good? How does humanitarian aid differ from human rights or development work? Should humanitarian action be political? How does law protect in war? This course will grapple with these, and other, important questions regarding the ethics, law, politics and practice of humanitarianism. The course is structured around student presentations and discussions on particular humanitarian emergencies, and interactive lectures on related themes and issues.

Course description: The course will serve as a challenging introduction to the main debates within the study and practice of humanitarianism, and will provide students with a range of conceptual tools for understanding the international politics of humanitarian action, as well as empirical knowledge of key events and actors. We will examine the work of UN agencies and international NGOs in response to armed conflict, famine, and natural disasters. We will discuss how politics and principles interact to shape the priorities, practice and outcomes of humanitarian response in countries like Haiti, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria.

Learning objectives:
At the end of this course the students should:

- Demonstrate substantive knowledge of the major historical developments in international humanitarianism
- Be able to engage in reasoned critical reflection on humanitarian principles and associated approaches to humanitarian action
- Understand the strengths and criticisms of some of the main actors in international humanitarian action, including donor states, UN agencies, the Red Cross movement and international NGOs

Course workload: The course is divided into lectures, discussions and student presentations. Students should be prepared to read between 100 and 150 pages per week.

Teaching methodology: The course combines classes which focus on one or two case studies of particular humanitarian emergencies, and classes which address a general theme or topic. The case study classes will comprise student presentations and class discussion, and the thematic classes will follow a more traditional lecture/seminar format. Each week, the humanitarian emergencies under study offer particularly pertinent or interesting examples of the issues and debates in the general topic covered in the following class. Readings are drawn from academic journals as well as from humanitarian policy think tanks, and international humanitarian agencies themselves.
Assessment criteria:
• Case study presentation: 30%
• Final exam: 30%
• Class participation: 10%
• Term paper: 30%

Absence policy: Attending class is mandatory and will be monitored daily by professors. Missing classes will impact on the student’s final grade as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absences</th>
<th>Penalization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Up to two (2) absences</td>
<td>No penalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three (3) absences</td>
<td>1 point subtracted from final grade (on a 10 point scale)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four (4) absences</td>
<td>2 points subtracted from final grade (on a 10 point scale)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five (5) absences or more</td>
<td>The student receives an INCOMPLETE (&quot;NO PRESENTAT&quot;) for the course</td>
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The PEHE/HESP attendance policy does not distinguish between justified or unjustified absences. The student is deemed responsible to manage his/her absences. Emergency situations (hospitalization, family emergency...) will be analyzed on a case by case basis by the Academic Director of the HESP.

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Classroom norms:
• No food or drink is permitted in class
• No mobile phones, texting, surfing, chatting etc
• There will be a ten-minute break during the class
• Students must come to class fully prepared

Weekly schedule
Part 1: What Does It Mean To Be “Humanitarian”?
Humanitarianism is a contested concept, and the first four weeks of this course will introduce students to the central debates and main areas of contestation in international humanitarian action. We will discuss, among other things, what distinguishes humanitarian work from development work, how expansive and ambitious the goals of humanitarian action should be, and to what extent humanitarianism should be political.

Session 1: Introduction
No reading

Session 2: Brief history of modern humanitarian action

Session 3: Case studies
Famine in the Horn of Africa 1983-85 – and celebrity humanitarianism


Session 4: Constructing humanitarian emergencies


Session 5: Case studies
Rwanda 1994-1996


Somalia 2000 to present


Session 6: Principles of humanity and impartiality


Session 7: Case studies
Iraq 2003 to present


Afghanistan 2001 to present


Session 8: Principles of neutrality and independence


Part 2: Different types of Emergency

In the second part of the course, we turn to look at different types of emergency: natural disasters; famines; and armed conflict. In these three weeks, we will examine how the media portrays different kinds of emergency and how the public responds. We will look at who funds humanitarian action in response to different kinds of emergency, what the main humanitarian needs are, and which legal frameworks are relevant. We will also discuss the main critiques of humanitarian action in these different contexts.

Session 9: Case studies

2004 Asian Tsunami


2010 Haiti earthquake


Session 10: Natural disaster


Session 11: Case studies

Somalia Famine 2011

All articles in the 2012 Special issue of Global Food Security – see http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/22119124/1/1

Session 12: Famine


Session 13: Case studies

Former Yugoslavia


Darfur 2003 to present


Session 14: Armed conflict


Part Three: Humanitarian Agencies

In the final three weeks of the course, we turn to the different kinds of agencies involved in humanitarian response, specifically: UN agencies; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; and NGOs. For each of these different types of actor, we look at how they interpret and implement humanitarian principles, how they are funded, what their strengths and emphases are in terms of response and activities, and how accountable they are—to their funders, the people they are supposed to help, and other stakeholders. We will also discuss the main criticisms made of different organizations.

Session 15: Case studies
Sri Lanka 2009


Session 16: United Nations agencies

Why humanitarian reform? 40 min presentation by Mark Cutts of OCHA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN-vtFbUGs8


Session 17: Case studies
Biafran War 1967-1970


Session 18: International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement


Session 19: Case studies
Syria 2011 to present


Session 20: Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)


Required readings: As above

Recommended bibliography:


