Course Title: Literature and Visual Arts of Human Rights (draft syllabus; to be fully revised, rethought, and worked up in detail during the summer of 2019)

Course Description:
This course is an introduction to the study of human rights through literature, creative non-fiction, photography, and documentary film. The course is divided into three units—one on foundational texts for understanding human rights ideals (including grappling with both bystander and official complicities in injustice), a second that considers the uses and limits of photography and documentary film in raising awareness about human rights stories, and a third that examines how (and undertakes case studies of how) climate change and immigration have become fundamental, often intertwined human rights problems today. We seek to understand a number of questions, including: the connection between the modern notion of the individual and the ideal of human rights; why some bystanders and spectators develop empathy and others do not, and what separates those who are merely moved from those who are moved to act; what blocks awareness and guilt among those who are culpable for inhumane acts; and why, how, and where climate change and immigration are core and intertwined human rights issues today.

Requirements:
All texts must be read by the day they are assigned. Please bring books/reading materials to class on assigned day. You are responsible for changes in the syllabus including redesigned units, writing assignments, and different readings that are announced in the revised syllabus.

Required Books:
Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem
I, Rigoberta Menchu, An Indian Woman in Guatemala
J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians
Other texts TBD

Daily Schedule:  
Foundational Texts and Questions

Week 1-2  Bergers, “Hiroshima;” Declarations; Douglass, Narrative; Hotel Rwanda; Obama, “A Just and Lasting Peace”
2-3 page response (awakenings and declarations)

Weeks 3-4  Paper due; Arendt, Eichmann, chapters 1-3, 6-8, 14-15, epilogue and postscript; Orwell; Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians
2-3 page response paper on complicity and the moral imagination

Weeks 5-6  I Rigoberta Menchu, chapters 1, 4, 6-8, 13-15, 17-20, 23-27; 31-4; Scarry, Body in Pain; 2-3 page response on I Rigoberta Menchu and Bodies in Pain

Weeks 10-14  Non-Fictional Case Studies and Research Projects—Malala Yousafzai, from *We Are Displaced*; Amitav Ghosh, from *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*; from Valarie Luiselli, *An Essay in Forty Questions: Tell Me How It Ends*

**Attendance and Participation:**
*Attendance will be taken. You must be prepared and ready to participate at each class meeting.* Arrive in class on time. Complete all assignments. Bring the right texts to class. Speak regularly and intelligently during class, striving to be thoughtful instead of right or passive. Exceptional participation improves your final grade, and insufficient preparation or unhelpful participation lowers your grade.

**Reading Presentation:**
All students are required to do at least one reading presentation with one partner from class (10 minutes per presentation). This entails introducing the material and a question about a problem focusing your discussion (your choice) for the day; summarizing efficiently the text’s crucial passages to raise and explore the question and the problem; and positing 2-3 further questions for debate, discussion, and thought. Use evidence from the text under study and any other texts we have read to engage us in your interest and fascination. Be prepared to help guide the discussion and deepen the debate. Be ready to take us to other related passages that will shed light on or complicate the topic and our discussion. I will meet with student partners (as a kind of recitation) to plan for presentations.

**Research Presentation:**
All students are required to do a research presentation on secondary readings and contextual concerns. Students will be placed into groups of two or three. Each group will be assigned one of the writers or contextual topics we cover and asked to introduce this writer or this context to the class. At the start of course, each group will meet to discuss how members want to divide the labor. You might think, for instance, about assigning one person the task of researching the history of the topic; another might focus on the most important key events or the significant patterns a few key documents relating to the topic; another on important concerns shaping the topic; etc. As a group, you should provide interesting information in several of these areas. At your first meeting, set a date to reconvene and discuss strategies for presentation. In conducting your research, remember to make use of the reference librarians and to consult an array of library sources (please consult books and articles as well as web-pages and on-line databases; when your information is derived solely from web-pages, these reports tend to be a little shallow). These presentations should last for about 15 minutes; frame a tight focus or argument around a key tension; define key terms dynamically; present and analyze vibrant, well-chosen evidence; and communicate the group’s view about the topic snappily and deftly.

**Papers:**
TBD
Grading:
TBD (how grades will be weighed is dependent on papers and projects that will be assigned)

Standards for Assessing Essays:
I use the following standards for grading essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. B-/C+). I assign grades based on the overall quality of the submitted essay, not on the effort or time your put into it.

A – Excellent (not the same as perfect). This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with a complex idea; explores well-chosen evidence carefully; and responds effectively to the ideas that complicate the idea under consideration. The beginning opens up rather than flatly announcing the essay’s aim. There is a coherent inquiry linking together the developing thoughts with the new evidence throughout the middle. The ending is grander than mere summary. The language and style are precise and elegant.

B – A piece of writing that achieves many of its aims. Most paragraphs coherently explore a main idea across a clear beginning, middle, and ending. However, some thin patches may require more analysis or reflection. The language is generally precise, though some confusing sentences are apparent. Sometimes as well the writing avoids the most challenging aspects of the inquiry.

C – A piece of writing that has real problems in one or more of these areas: conception (the idea is fuzzy or underdeveloped or obvious); structure (an unfulfilled plan for the essay); use of evidence (the evidence is not analyzed; the interpretations amount to clichés); language and style (the sentences are awkward or incoherent, dependent on unexplained abstractions, and/or contradict each other; patterns of error are prevalent).

D and F – These are efforts that are much shorter than they ought to be; they fail to grapple seriously with ideas; or they are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aim, structure, use of evidence, language, etc. They do not come close to addressing the expectations for the essay.