

Guidance on Petitioning MAPHR Electives

Our formal criterion for Program electives is that courses should "engage with the language, ideas, and methods of human rights." We ask that you distinguish this from courses for which the subject matter is an issue or issues that affect people's human rights or that would be susceptible to a human rights analysis or would simply be useful for understanding a human rights issue in which you are interested. The purpose of the Program's elective requirement is not to have you take courses covering subjects to which one can apply human rights thinking. Such courses, we hope, will be part of the work you do for your major or other commitments, but they should not be selected as Program electives. Rather, because the Program requires only four electives and the Program's goal is to offer a coherent study of human rights, please keep your electives focused fairly tightly on courses that will engage directly with and will enhance your knowledge and facility with the concepts, institutions, and development of human rights discourse. **A course that is just descriptive of the nature of a particular social or economic issue in a particular country or region is not likely to meet the Program's criteria.**

Note also that your choice of electives should aim to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of human rights study. This includes a diversity of perspectives and methodologies, and you are encouraged to select your elective courses from across departments. Additionally, you're encouraged to select courses that explore different geographic or thematic areas and that introduce both theoretical and practical concerns. In approving your electives, we will consider not only the specific courses, but also the mix of electives you have taken.

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To make these guidelines a bit more concrete, here are some examples of classes that were not approved as electives and some on closely related topics that were:

"PLSC 265 The Politics of Economic Security - This course examines the politics of economic security in the United States. Topics include the psychology of risk pooling, the design of social policy, and why people want (or don't want) to address economic insecurity and poverty. We also consider how local contextual factors and family structure affect support for redistribution and social insurance." → **No**. This course engages with "issues that affect people's human rights" (poverty) but has a purely domestic U.S. focus. It does not indicate that it will bring in human rights as a perspective or framework for understanding poverty in the U.S.

"AMST 318/HIST 415J – The Problem of Global Poverty - Study of the programs and policies that aimed to end global poverty from 1960 to the present, from modernization to microcredit to universal basic income. Topics include the green revolution, population control, the "women in development" movement, and the New International Economic Order." → **Yes**. Human rights institutions and frameworks have been part of the conversation around global poverty in a way that they haven't for U.S. poverty. International development and humanitarian aid efforts such as the sub-topics listed, while distinct from and sometimes in conflict with human rights goals, are an important part of understanding conventional human rights "methods" on the global scale.

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"ENGL 165/WGSS 266 Gender, Class and Narrative Form in the Victorian Novel - A selection of nineteenth-century novels, with particular attention to questions of gender, class, and narrative form. Authors chosen from the Brontës, Gaskell, Dickens, Collins, Eliot, Trollope, and Hardy." → **No**. This course engages "descriptively" with "issues that affect people's human rights" (gender and class.) However, the description does not suggest that "language, ideas, and methods of human rights" will be used to analyze those issues, and the discussion of "narrative form" suggests that this is a class focused primarily on literary craft and theory.

“AFAM 451/ANTH 445/THST 450/WGSS 442 Black Women Moving and the Ethnography of Embodiment - In this course we explore the theory and methods employed by Black women ethnographers, artists, and activists invested in transforming the traditional norms of the academic disciplines and creative contexts in which they operate. These boundary erasing, rule breaking women challenge us to think expansively and act courageously in our efforts to not only dream a new world but bring that world into fruition. The life and work of anthropologist/dancer/choreographer/activist Katherine Dunham (1909–2006) provides the framework through which we think through the strategies contemporary scholar-artists employ in their social justice practices, while the concept of movement is our theoretical and methodological foundation for engaging with the work of historical and contemporary Black women change agents. We ask how movement functions in the work of Dunham and these contemporary scholar-artists in terms of: the moving and/or dancing body; movement and migration across geographic territories and imagined space; and participation in social movements. Inspired by the techniques these women have developed for re-imagining the possibilities for moving as an act of social change, we experiment with creating our own embodied artistic practices and research methods.” → **Yes**. Although, like the course above, this class engages with art and “issues that affect people’s human rights” (race & gender), its focus is explicitly on dance/bodily movement and its function within social movements/movements for change. Social movements and art-as-activism can themselves be thought of as “methods” in human rights, and an important theme in human rights study is the relationship between human rights advocacy and social movements; further, this course seems to be approaching its subject not only descriptively but with an analysis of “strategies...in social justice practices.” It’s clearly more concerned with the direct application of art to movement than ENGL 165/WGSS 266 Gender, which does not seem to address that question about “methods.” The course is also bolstered as an elective by the fact that it addresses two themes of human rights inquiry, even if the description doesn’t indicate that they’ll be discussed with reference to the human rights framework: the efficacy of art as a strategy for change and the effects and significance of migration across geographic territory.

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“GLBL 289/PLSC 431/HIST 245J War and Peace in Northern Ireland - Examination of theoretical and empirical literature in response to questions about the insurgency and uneasy peace in Northern Ireland following the peace agreement of 1998 which formally ended the three-decade long civil conflict known widely as The Troubles and was often lauded as the most successful of its kind in modern history. Consideration of how both the conflict and the peace have been messier and arguably more divisive than most outside observers realize.” → **No**. This course is a pretty exact match for a class that is “descriptive of the nature of a particular social or economic issue in a particular country or region” but that does not meet the program criteria.

“EVST 305/GLBL 301/GLBL 505/MMES 305 Environmental Security in the Middle East - This course overviews how environmental, water, food, energy, and climate change have increasingly become linked to human and national security in the Middle East. It begins by exploring the state of the environment in the region and how the policies of the Middle East governments have lead to serious environmental degradation and subsequent loss of jobs, migration, social tension, violence, and regional conflicts. Drawing on an in-depth analysis of contemporary case/country studies, students learn how these problems can serve as major human and national security threats.” → **Yes**. Although, like the course above, it focuses on an issue/conflict in a particular region, this class ultimately seeks to draw broader conclusions about the impact of climate change on “human...security.” It engages in analysis that is more than just descriptive, and it seems designed to engage with the relationship between the environment and human rights.