RIGA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LAW

Course Outline

Course number						
Course title	**Philosophy of International Human Rights Law**					
Credit points	3 ECTS (2LV)					
Total hours	80					
Contact hours	32					
Independent studies	48					
Course level	Bachelor					
Prerequisites	International Human Rights Law					
Category	Mandatory		Restricted elective	x	Free elective	

COURSE RESPONSIBLE

Name	*Academic degree*	*Academic position*
Kate Karklina (Kate-Keita.Karklina@rgsl.edu.lv)	Dr. iur	Visiting lecturer

COURSE TEACHERS

Name	*Academic degree*	*Academic position*
Kate Karklina	Dr. iur	Visiting lecturer

COURSE ABSTRACT

This course offers a critical and interdisciplinary introduction to the philosophy of international human rights law (IHRL), designed for students interested not only in human rights but also in the broader structures and debates of international law. Through a series of thematic sessions, some of the field's most pressing and controversial issues are examined—from the foundations of rights and the problem of universality to post-colonial critiques, state sovereignty, and the accountability of global governance actors.

The main aim of this course is to equip the students with a fresh perspective on the many layers that constitute the thought of IHRL, and to encourage questioning their beliefs and pre-conceptions on the various contentious points discussed. Additionally, it aims to introduce the students to the intricacies of IHRL both in theory and practice, to provide them with a solid base understanding of the field that will allow to take further courses in human rights, and to consolidate the knowledge already gained in previous courses.

All sessions involve discussion-based learning, continuous reflection on the learning process through a reflective journal, and small exercises in groups to compare students' views with one another. Almost all the sessions require preparatory mandatory reading.

The course welcomes all kinds of reflections and observations, but there will be zero tolerance for discriminatory comments of any kind.

GRADING CRITERIA

Criteria	*Weighting*
Class participation	15%
3 reflective journal entries	15%
20-question multiple choice test	20%
Simulation of an IHRL governance summit	20%
A final written paper	30%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class participation: To pass the course, at least 10 out of 16 sessions must be attended. Failure to meet this minimum attendance requirement may result in being ineligible to take the final exam.

All sessions are designed as a blend of lectures and activities traditionally associated with seminars. However, in sessions marked as seminars, activities based on student participation will take most of the class time. Students are expected to read the mandatory readings before each session, as class discussions and activities build directly on them and require active engagement with the material.

Multiple choice test: In Session 13, students will complete a multiple-choice test of 20 questions as an assessment of their familiarity with the core concepts and themes explored in the course.

3 reflective journal entries: During the first three weeks of the course, students will complete three short reflective journal entries (max 250 words each). Four journal prompts will be provided, and students may choose any three to complete. The prompts relate to the themes and topics discussed in Sessions 1-10. Each entry should respond to the assigned prompt and reflect the student's observations, ideas, and thinking about the week's topic. No additional research is required for writing these reflections.

The reflections may also be used to raise questions, express confusion or insights, and engage with the broader conversations taking place in the course. They are intended to help students track their intellectual development over the course. Further information about the reflective journal will be provided in Session 1.

Simulation of an IHRL governance summit: In sessions 14 and 15, students will take part in a high-level simulation of international negotiations concerning refugee protection. Assuming the roles of various global actors students will work to revise, negotiate, and ultimately adopt a shared political declaration on large-scale refugee movements (draft will be provided in advance). This simulation will mirror real-world dynamics of international law-making and challenge students to confront the tensions between principle and pragmatism, sovereignty and solidarity, universality and political will.

The simulation draws on core themes explored throughout the course and offers a space to test how IHRL operates in the practice of global governance. Students will be assessed on their preparation, participation, responsiveness to competing interests, and ability to articulate arguments grounded in the course material.

A final written paper: At the end of the course (submission date TBD), students will submit a short written paper (approx. 1000 words) on a topic chosen from a list provided by the course instructor by Session 12. The paper should demonstrate the student's understanding of the topic, engage with relevant course readings, consider multiple arguments or perspectives on the issue, and present the student's own reflections and conclusions. A detailed assessment rubric will be shared in due time.

USE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in this course is governed by the following rules.

Students may use GenAI only in the following circumstances:

1. **Learning outside graded assignments:** GenAI may be used for general learning and exploration outside the context of graded coursework.
2. **Preparatory work for assignments:** GenAI may be used at the preparatory stage of assignments (e.g., identifying potential sources, clarifying concepts, or exploring background information). However, GenAI may not, by default, be used to generate portions of text intended for submission.
3. **Spelling and grammar checks:** GenAI may be used to check spelling and grammar, provided that such use results only in minor corrections and does not substantially alter the ideas, content, language, or structure of the submitted work. By default, this does not include paraphrasing, altering word choice or syntax, translation (including translation of one's own text), or restructuring the paper.

Declaration of Use: Any use of GenAI in graded work must be fully declared. Students must specify the tool used, the purpose of its use, and the extent of the assistance received, regardless of how limited the use may have been and regardless of whether the use falls within the permitted categories described above.

Failure to properly declare the use of GenAI may constitute a violation of the university's academic integrity policies.

COURSE PLAN – MAIN SUBJECTS

No.	*Main subjects*	*Planned hours*
1.	Introduction to the course: general requirements, expectations, setting learning outcomes.	1
2.	Natural human rights v. legal human rights	1
3.	Philosophical conceptions of human rights	2
4.	The concept of *human dignity* as the source of human rights	4
5.	*Westphalian sovereignty* vis-à-vis international obligations	4
6.	Universality and relativity of human rights	4
7.	Post-colonial critiques to international human rights law	4
8.	The notion of *international community* and international responsibility	2
9.	Subsidiarity in human rights protection	2
10.	Accountability of global governance structures	2
12	Simulation activity – role play of global governance structures of IHRL	4
13	Wrap-up and an assessment of course learning outcomes	2