

Course Outline

Course number	RBE357				
Course title	The Concept of Human Dignity in Law: Complexities and Relevance				
Credit points	3 ECTS				
Total hours	75				
Contact hours	32				
Independent studies	43				
Course level	Bachelor				
Prerequisites	none				
Category	Mandatory		Restricted elective	x	Free elective

COURSE RESPONSIBLE

<i>Name</i>	<i>Academic degree</i>	<i>Academic position</i>
Kate Karklina	Dr. iur.	Visiting lecturer

COURSE TEACHERS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Academic degree</i>	<i>Academic position</i>
Kate Karklina	Dr. iur.	Visiting lecturer

COURSE ABSTRACT

This course examines *human dignity* as a central yet contested concept in contemporary law, with particular emphasis on its role in human rights adjudication. It traces the concept's transformation from its historical roots—associated with status and rank—to its modern egalitarian articulation as a foundational reference in constitutional and international human rights law. Rather than treating *dignity* as a settled principle, the course approaches it as a complex legal concept whose meaning is shaped through philosophical debate, social context, and judicial practice.

The course explores key dimensions of *human dignity*, including its relationship to autonomy and consent, its social and material aspects, its temporal reach, and its function as a constraint on state power and punishment. It then turns to international and regional dignity jurisprudence, examining how *dignity* is invoked and operationalized by UN treaty bodies and by the European, Inter-American, and African human rights systems. Throughout, the course asks what *dignity* does in legal reasoning, what tensions and risks accompany its use, and whether—and how—it continues to serve as a meaningful legal concept in adjudication.

Given the normative and contested nature of the issues discussed, students are expected to engage respectfully with one another at all times. The course welcomes diverse perspectives and critical engagement, but discriminatory or exclusionary remarks of any kind will not be tolerated.

GRADING CRITERIA

Criteria	Weighting
Class participation	15%
20-question multiple choice test	20%
Case analysis: Human dignity in judicial reasoning	20%
Dignity portfolio roundtable	20%
Final take-home paper	25%

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.

Multiple choice test: In Session 15, students will complete a multiple-choice test of 20 questions intended as an assessment of their familiarity with the core concepts and themes explored in the course.

Case analysis: Each student will be assigned a judicial or quasi-judicial decision in Session 12 and will prepare a short, written case analysis focusing on how *human dignity* is used in the decision. The assignment asks students to examine the function *dignity* performs in the reasoning and to reflect on its significance for adjudication. The analyses will serve as a basis for discussion in Session 15.

Dignity portfolio: This assignment marks the conclusion of the conceptual part of the course and serves as a reflective exercise that captures students' interpretation of the idea of *dignity* before turning to its more structured treatment in jurisprudence. The portfolio consists of three elements, each representing a different way of thinking about *dignity*:

One person: An individual, living or deceased, who exemplifies or challenges the idea of *human dignity* to the student in a meaningful way. This may be a figure from history, literature, politics, activism, or any other sphere who has influenced their understanding of *dignity*.

One event: A historical or contemporary event that speaks to the recognition or violation of *human dignity*. The event should highlight the complexities, struggles, or achievements connected to *dignity* in social or global contexts.

One object: A tangible object or artifact that symbolizes or expresses the idea of *human dignity*. This could be a work of art, a cultural item, a symbol, or any physical object that holds personal or broader significance to the student in relation to *dignity*.

For each of the elements, students must write a short explanation (max. 250 words each) on why it represents, illustrates, or challenges the concept of *human dignity*. The written portfolio is submitted via the course portal before Session 9, when students will briefly present their portfolios in a roundtable format. The roundtable will be informal and discussion-based rather than structured as formal presentations.

Students are welcome to prepare slides or handouts, but it is not required. The minimum requirement for the presentation is to share 3 representative images (one for each element) with the class and give a short explanation of each choice. The aim of this exercise is to highlight the diversity of ways in which the idea can be interpreted before engaging with its treatment in judicial and quasi-judicial practice.

A final written paper (argumentative essay): At the end of the course (submission date TBD), students will submit an academic argumentative essay of 1500 words on a topic announced by Session 10.

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	Philosophical genealogy of the concept of human dignity	3
3	Different legal functions of the concept in constitutional law	2
4	Conceptual limits and contested meanings of human dignity	4
5	Social and status-based approaches	4
6	Dignity as a constraint on state power	2
7	Conceptual consolidation (Portfolio Roundtable)	4
8	Dignity jurisprudence of international and regional human rights (quasi-) judicial bodies	8
9	Cross-cutting patterns of the concept in judicial reasoning	2
10	The limits and future of human dignity as a legal concept	1
11	Wrap-up and an assessment of course learning outcomes	1