

Human Rights BA

Educate students to understand, promote, and defend human rights

Mission Statement (Full Description):

The mission of the SMU Human Rights Program is to educate students to understand, promote, and defend human rights as responsible citizens of the world. Students are prepared to serve as human rights leaders, advocates, and activists in a wide range of career paths. The physical geographic location of program delivery is the SMU campus in Dallas, Texas. The human rights major does not offer courses through distance education technology.

Does your program offer courses at an off-campus instructional site (not at SMU Dallas campus)?:

No

Does your program offer courses through distance education technology (e.g., asynchronous, synchronous, or both)?:

No

During which academic year were students first enrolled in this program?:

Prior to AY2022-2023

Progress:

Complete

Demonstrate understanding of foundations

Step 1A: SLO Number:

1

Step 1C: SLO Statement (Full Description):

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of foundational human rights principles.

Step 2A: Measure:

We measure this PLO using the final exam for HRTS 3301. HRTS 3301 is a required core course for the human rights degree that all majors must complete. The final exam specifically requires students to demonstrate an understanding of foundational human rights principles as evidenced in the historical context of the United States.

Attached Files

[Prompt - PLO 1.pdf](#)

[Example - PLO 1.pdf](#)

Step 2B: Type of Measure (check all that apply):

Commented [SS1]: Strengths:

- 1. Clarity and Focus (3 – Good):** The mission statement clearly defines the program's primary objective—to educate students in human rights, with a specific focus on advocacy and leadership roles. This provides a clear and meaningful focus that resonates with students interested in social justice and activism.
- 2. Alignment with Institutional Values (3 – Good):** The emphasis on preparing students as responsible global citizens aligns well with many universities' goals of fostering socially conscious and engaged graduates. This demonstrates how the program supports SMU's commitment to developing ethical and globally aware leaders.
- 3. Practical Career Preparation (3 – Good):** The mission highlights the program's preparation for diverse career paths in human rights, which makes it relevant and appealing to prospective students seeking impactful careers.

Suggestions for Improvement

- 1. Specify Key Skills and Competencies:** Add details about the skills and competencies students will develop, such as analytical skills, policy development, or advocacy techniques. This would provide a clearer picture of the educational benefits of the program.
- 2. Highlight Unique Program Features:** Mention unique aspects of the program, like internships with human rights organizations, experiential learning opportunities, or guest lectures from prominent human rights leaders. This would make the mission statement more distinctive and showcase what sets the SMU Human Rights Program apart.
- 3. Connect to Broader Societal Impact:** Link the program's mission to broader social or global goals, such as advancing peace, social equity, or international human rights advocacy. This would

Commented [SS2]: Strengths:

- 1. Relevance to Program Goals (3 – Good):** This SLO aligns with the goals of a human rights program by ensuring students develop an understanding of essential principles in human rights, which is crucial for building a strong knowledge base.
- 2. Broad Applicability (3 – Good):** The SLO's focus on "foundational human rights principles" is broad enough to cover various contexts, making it adaptable across different courses within the human rights curriculum.

Suggestions for Improvement

- 1. Specify Key Human Rights Principles:** List some specific foundational principles (e.g., justice, equality, freedom) that students are expected to understand. This would provide clarity on the content and focus of the SLO.
- 2. Include Assessment Methods:** Indicate how students will demonstrate their understanding, su

Commented [SS3]: Give a general description of the rubric and provide the detailed rubric

Essay exam

Step 2C: Is Measure direct or indirect?:

Direct

Step 3A: Target for Measure:

80% will score 80% or above; median score will be at 80% or above.

Step 4A: Was the target met for this Measure?:

Partially Met

Step 4B: Results and Findings for this Measure:

73% scored at 80% or above; median score was 86%.

Attached Files

[Results and Findings.xlsx](#)

Step 4C: Interpretation of Results:

The measurement of this Program Learning Outcome (PLO) incorporated two specific targets: "80% of students will score 80% or above" and "Median score will be at 80% or above."

Analysis of the 2023-2024 data reveals two main findings: a) a significant number of students scored well above the 80% threshold, while those scoring below it did not fall substantially below; and b) 73% achieved scores of 80% or higher. The latter finding marks a decrease from the 2022-2023 finding of 79% but remains higher than the 2021-2022 finding of 70%. Although year's finding falls slightly short of the target, analysis of this PLO over the past two years suggests that the Target of "80% of students will score 80% or above" remains an important goal and benchmark to maintain. This assignment is a particularly rigorous one (in a particularly rigorous course), but we do not find it to be inappropriate for the level or pedagogy, especially in light of the fact that the median score was maintained at 86% (which exceeded the Target of 80%). These findings collectively suggest that while the majority of students demonstrate strong comprehension of foundational human rights principles, a minority struggle to meet the PLO's high standards. The findings align with instructors' subjective assessments of student learning. We will be making slight adjustments to the Action Plan with the goal of meeting the first part of the Target while maintaining or improving upon the second part of the Target in the next assessment cycle.

Step 5A: Use of Results for Seeking Improvement (Action Plan):

This PLO remains integral to the human rights curriculum and will remain unchanged. We intend to maintain both components of the Target for 2023-2024, as they have provided valuable insights into effectiveness within this domain and inform our strategic planning. Based on this year's Results and Findings, we will be making slight adjustments to the previous Action Plan to better recognize and respond to the relatively small number of students who are not meeting the first part of the Target. In 2023-2024, instructors focused on early intervention strategies for a

subset of students showing initial academic challenges. This process will continue, as will the focus on patterns between specific assignments and overall course performance. There seems to be a correlation between student performance on the first two short essay assignments in the class and student performance on the final exam (which serves as the Measure for this PLO). Future student outreach will be tailored based on performance on the first two short essay assignments. This intervention will hopefully help instructors to identify and intervene with students who will be most likely to miss the Target on the final exam. The Measure associated with this PLO, which directly assesses human rights foundations through the final exam, has proven to be a robust and comprehensive assessment tool and will therefore be retained.

Step 5B: Type of Action:

Additional emphasis or time on content, Faculty involvement, Other

Step 5C: Dialogue Participants (check all that apply):

Administrator, Committee, Faculty, Staff, Student

Step 5D: Evidence of Dialogue:

Several meetings and communications related to this topic have occurred over the course of the past year, with the most recent occurring on 7/10/24.

Step 5E: Type of other Improvements (check all that apply):

Other

Step 5F: Other Improvements (Full Description):

The Human Rights Council, a student body that serves as a liaison between the academic program and student community, will focus on increasing peer mentorship opportunities related to this course.

Step 6A: Status Update on Action(s) Identified in the Previous Assessment Cycle (Full Description):

Two years ago, the Program Learning Outcome (PLO) underwent revision to incorporate a dual Target approach: "80% of students will score 80% or above" and "Median score will be at 80% or above." This addition of the median score criterion aimed to enhance the depth of performance assessment. Additionally, the Measures for POs 1 and 2 were interchanged two years ago. Both Measures provide valuable insights into performance; however, the adjustment was made to better align with the specific objectives of the PLOs following updates to assignment prompts during the transition back to fully in-person learning post-pandemic. The Results and Findings from the current assessment cycle demonstrate that the implemented Action Plan has contributed to improvements, although more work is needed. Therefore, the Action Plan will be sustained but adjusted (as explained above) for the next assessment cycle to continue enhancing student learning outcomes in this area.

Step 6B: Status Update on Previously Identified Action Plan(s):

In progress

Progress:

Complete

Analyze from an interdisciplinary perspective

Step 1A: SLO Number:

2

Step 1C: SLO Statement (Full Description):

Students will be able to analyze human rights issues from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Step 2A: Measure:

We measure this PLO using a major essay assignment from HRTS 3301. HRTS 3301 is a required core course for the human rights degree that all majors must complete. The major essay assignment specifically requires students to analyze human rights issues from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Attached Files

[Prompt - PLO 2.pdf](#)

[Example - PLO 2.pdf](#)

Step 2B: Type of Measure (check all that apply):

Written paper/project

Step 2C: Is Measure direct or indirect?:

Direct

Step 3A: Target for Measure:

80% will score 80% or above; median score will be at 80% or above.

Step 4A: Was the target met for this Measure?:

Met

Step 4B: Results and Findings for this Measure:

92% scored at 80% or above; median score was 91%.

Attached Files

[Results and Findings.xlsx](#)

Step 4C: Interpretation of Results:

This PLO was last assessed in 2021-2022. For that assessment cycle, the Target was updated to include the two aspects that are retained through the present cycle: "80% will score 80% or above" and "Median score will be at 80% or above." The adjustment was motivated by an analysis of recent data which highlighted that the original single-target approach, although rigorous, offered only a partial view of effectiveness within this domain. In this year's assessment findings, we observed significant progress: 92% scored at 80% or above (as compared to 78% in the last assessment cycle 59% in the year before that) and the median score was 91% (as compared to 85% in the last assessment cycle. These results suggest that most students demonstrate strong interdisciplinary analytical abilities, reflecting improvements likely influenced by adjustments in teaching strategies following last year's assessment.

Step 5A: Use of Results for Seeking Improvement (Action Plan):

Our commitment to the importance of this PLO within the human rights curriculum remains steadfast, and we will retain both components of the Target for the next assessment cycle. We are pleased to see that the current Action Plan is yielding results along both aspects of the Target. These components have proven instrumental in deepening our understanding of effectiveness and guiding strategic planning efforts. However, given that both aspects of the Target have only been considered once before, we need more information from future assessment cycles to determine what, if any, changes are warranted at this point. Building on this year's findings, we plan to continue forward with the enhanced interdisciplinary analysis pedagogy and assignment prompts that were implemented in light of past goals. Additionally, we will monitor how performance in this PLO corresponds with performance in the other PLOs, especially PLO 1. The Evidence employed this year continues to offer a robust method for assessment, particularly as it directly engages students in interdisciplinary analysis through major assignments. This approach ensures a thorough evaluation aligned with our educational objectives and program goals.

Step 5B: Type of Action:

Program leadership involvement ,Faculty involvement,Other

Step 5C: Dialogue Participants (check all that apply):

Administrator,Committee,Faculty,Staff,Student

Step 5D: Evidence of Dialogue:

Several meetings and communications related to this topic have occurred over the course of the past year, with the most recent occurring on 7/10/24.

Step 5E: Type of other Improvements (check all that apply):

Other

Step 5F: Other Improvements (Full Description):

The Human Rights Council, a student body that serves as a liaison between the academic program and student community, will focus on increasing peer mentorship opportunities related to this course.

Step 6A: Status Update on Action(s) Identified in the Previous Assessment Cycle (Full Description):

Our dedication to integrating this PLO into our human rights curriculum remains resolute, and we are committed to maintaining both components of the Target framework in the upcoming assessment cycle. We are encouraged by the evident success of our current Action Plan, which has shown positive outcomes across both facets of the Target. These elements have proven pivotal in enriching our understanding of effectiveness and shaping our strategic planning efforts. However, as this is only the second assessment cycle incorporating both aspects of the Target, we recognize the need for additional data from future cycles to ascertain whether adjustments are necessary. Going forward, we intend to introduce a more formalized peer mentorship program. This program will identify and train student ambassadors who serve on the Human Rights Council and who have successfully completed HRTS 3301 to work with program faculty and staff in offering students currently enrolled in the course with an additional layer of support and guidance. The Evidence utilized this year continues to serve as a robust method, particularly in its direct engagement of students through interdisciplinary analysis in major assignments. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation aligned with our educational goals and program objectives.

Step 6B: Status Update on Previously Identified Action Plan(s):

In progress

Progress:

Complete

Identify abuses and explain responses

Step 1A: SLO Number:

3

Step 1C: SLO Statement (Full Description):

Students will be able to identify human rights abuses and explain potential responses.

Step 2A: Measure:

We measure this PLO using the final applied project from HRTS 4343. HRTS 4343 is a required capstone seminar for the human rights degree that all majors must complete. The final applied project specifically requires students to identify a human rights abuse and explain a potential response to it.

Commented [SS4]: Provide a brief description of the rubric and the and provide the detailed rubric

Step 2B: Type of Measure (check all that apply):

Capstone project

Step 2C: Is Measure direct or indirect?:

Direct

Step 3A: Target for Measure:

80% will score 80% or above; median score will be at 80% or above.

Step 4A: Was the target met for this Measure?:

No data collected/reported this cycle (provided explanation in Step 4B)

Step 4B: Results and Findings for this Measure:

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 4C: Interpretation of Results:

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 5A: Use of Results for Seeking Improvement (Action Plan):

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 5B: Type of Action:

Other

Step 5C: Dialogue Participants (check all that apply):

Administrator, Committee, Faculty, Staff, Student

Step 5D: Evidence of Dialogue:

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 5E: Type of other Improvements (check all that apply):

Other

Step 5F: Other Improvements (Full Description):

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 6A: Status Update on Action(s) Identified in the Previous Assessment Cycle (Full Description):

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 6B: Status Update on Previously Identified Action Plan(s):

Not applicable for this cycle (explain in Step 6A)

Progress:

Complete

Apply conventions of writing (Writing in the Major)

Step 1A: SLO Number:

4

Step 1C: SLO Statement (Full Description):

Students will be able to apply conventions of writing from the discipline of human rights, in support of SMU's Writing in the Major initiative.

Step 2A: Measure:

We measure this PLO using the final applied project for HRTS 4343. HRTS 4343 is a required capstone seminar for the human rights degree that all majors must complete. The final applied project specifically requires students to apply conventions of writing from the discipline of human rights.

Step 2B: Type of Measure (check all that apply):

Capstone project

Step 2C: Is Measure direct or indirect?:

Direct

Step 3A: Target for Measure:

80% will score 80% or above; median score will be at 80% or above.

Step 4A: Was the target met for this Measure?:

No data collected/reported this cycle (provided explanation in Step 4B)

Step 4B: Results and Findings for this Measure:

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 4C: Interpretation of Results:

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 5A: Use of Results for Seeking Improvement (Action Plan):

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 5B: Type of Action:

Other

Step 5C: Dialogue Participants (check all that apply):

Administrator, Committee, Faculty, Staff, Student

Step 5D: Evidence of Dialogue:

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 5E: Type of other Improvements (check all that apply):

Other

Step 5F: Other Improvements (Full Description):

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 6A: Status Update on Action(s) Identified in the Previous Assessment Cycle (Full Description):

This PLO is not being assessed this year.

Step 6B: Status Update on Previously Identified Action Plan(s):

Not applicable for this cycle (explain in Step 6A)

Progress:

Complete

Increase internships

Step 1A: PG Number:

1

Step 1C: PG Statement (Full Description):

The program will increase the number of students completing internships.

Step 2A: Measure:

We measure this PO by counting the numbers of internships completed by students.

Step 2B: Is Measure direct or indirect?:

Direct

Commented [SS5]: Provide more details:

Template

The program will increase the number of students completing internships by [target percentage or number, e.g., 15%] over the next [timeframe, e.g., academic year]. To achieve this, the program will implement [specific strategies, e.g., partnerships with local businesses, expanded career support services, internship-focused workshops]. Progress toward this goal will be evaluated [timeframe, e.g., annually, each semester] to ensure continuous growth and support for career development.

Step 3A: Target for Measure:

The number of internships completed by students will increase year to year.

Commented [S56]: Provide a desired percentage

Step 4A: Was the target met for this Measure?:

Met

Step 4B: Results and Findings for this Measure:

14 internships were completed.

Attached Files

[Results and Findings.xlsx](#)

Step 4C: Interpretation of Results:

14 internships were completed this year, compared to 8 in the previous assessment cycle. 2023-2024 was the second full year that the Human Rights Internship course was offered. This course has grown in maturity and effectiveness as assessment on its implementation and results has moved forward. This PO was changed last year from "The program will maintain numbers of human rights students" to "The program will increase the number of students completing internships." At that time, we determined that student numbers could not be maintained in the face of years of significant and ongoing program budget cuts, despite the best efforts of program staff to implement workarounds. The budget cuts necessitated the elimination of essential staff and programming, a problem that was consistently made clear on our annual assessment reports. Since the university provided no additional funding, we decided to choose a different PO that could be better assessed in light of the changes to the program's capacity and academic curriculum. The internship course is allowing more students to gain hands-on experience directly relevant to the human rights degree. The Human Rights Program already had a multitude of partners in the Dallas area and beyond that could offer students excellent professional experience to complement and extend their classroom learning. This network has continued to grow as we have helped students identify and obtain placements with a variety of organizations, including some working in global settings far from Dallas. An internship contract has been created, which students must complete and submit with their placement organization's approval, before registering for the class. This process ensures that all the necessary pieces are in place before the semester begins. Students may work with any type of local or global organization (nonprofit, for-profit, educational, religious, governmental, etc.) can be selected as a placement as long as: 1) it is conducting work directly in some area of human rights; 2) its mission and conduct do not violate basic human rights principles; 3) it can support a meaningful internship experience that provides relevant training (i.e. beyond busy work); and 4) it has an official organizational status (nonprofit or tax ID, governmental recognition, etc.).

Step 5A: Use of Results for Seeking Improvement (Action Plan):

Although we are satisfied with year-over-year growth so far, we are committed to continually improving this PO. To that end, we have developed and are constantly expanding a database of

opportunities that incorporates feedback from former students based on their internship experiences. We are also working to improve proactive communications with students, as the need to have an approved contract in place before registering for the course represents a deviation from common expectations about class enrollment. One important eventuality that we are already considering involves the upper limit of growth for this PO. At some point, we will reach a saturation point where all eligible majors (and some non-majors) are enrolling through the course of their SMU career. Once it seems like that point has been reached over a couple of assessment cycles, we will reevaluate this PO. For now, we are concentrating on fully implementing and maximizing this important but relatively new initiative.

Step 5B: Dialogue Participants (check all that apply):

Administrator ,Committee, Faculty, Staff, Student, Other

Step 5C: Evidence of Dialogue:

Many meetings about the internship course have occurred throughout the previous year in both formal and informal settings, most recently on 7/1/24. Discussions of the course are particularly prevalent in the weeks preceding course registration. We have also had several communications with representatives from current and potential placement organizations throughout the year, as their partnership is an essential aspect of the PO.

Step 5D: Type of other Improvements (check all that apply):

Enhanced recruitment effort, Improved efficiency by incorporating technology and automation

Step 5E: Other Improvements (Full Description):

We are also working to improve proactive communications with students, as the need to have an approved contract in place before registering for the course represents a deviation from common expectations about class enrollment. New technological resources will be brought to bear to communicate sooner, more regularly, and more effectively with students.

Step 6A: Status Update on Action(s) Identified in the Previous Assessment Cycle (Full Description):

The previous action plan remains in progress. As this course continues to roll out toward full implementation, we are 1) increasing our database of partners; 2) enhancing our communications to boost recruitment and awareness; and 3) adjusting course materials and assessment procedures to better align with real-world needs. One specific grouping of changes has involved updating the contract, timesheet, and Canvas site for the course. Another change has involved creating a Box folder with vital materials that students can access before enrolling (since Canvas access is contingent upon enrollment).

Step 6B: Status Update on Previously Identified Action Plan(s):

In progress

Progress:
Complete

