

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
SPRING SEMESTER 2016

SYLLABUS

HUMAN DIGNITY: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND GENDER EQUITY

LECTURER: Chloe Schwenke, Ph.D.
Course Number: PUAF 688X Class Room: VMH 1101
Time: Wednesdays 4:15pm to 6:45pm

INTRODUCTION

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” – *from the first sentence of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

What does “human dignity” mean?

Does dignity even matter - is the concept of human dignity significant in terms of American diplomatic and foreign aid policies and associated institutions? Should it be? Does how we think about (and possibly advocate for) human dignity shape our views on global poverty reduction, social justice, human rights (legal and ethical), gender equity, community, diversity, and sustainable development? The rhetoric of dignity certainly is effusive and abundant, even if almost never well defined (and even if we seldom discuss its opposite – indignity). Perhaps we are cheapening the notion of human dignity – and its effectiveness in public policy – by overusing it in our rhetoric? Without some consensus on a moral and philosophical foundation for dignity, and some more precision in its meaning, is dignity quickly becoming a useless notion? Or, to the contrary, is dignity an essential baseline for public policy?

Such questions abound, but as policy experts we must understand the meaning(s) and implications of human dignity. This will require that we be more specific, starting first with a review of the ways that human dignity has emerged historically as a concept and how it is currently conceived both in the United States as well as in different cultures. The questions we ask will need to be incisive, as we unpack the rhetoric from the reality. We will also consider critiques of human dignity, and ponder the implications for public policy were we to decide that “human dignity” no longer has efficacy, i.e. what would be lost if it is discredited, abandoned, or replaced?

This is a graduate level course designed to develop within students the fundamental reflective and discernment skills and sensibilities to be aware of and responsive to human dignity as a foundational concept (or set of principles) at the heart of the normative content of public policy. The course will include comparisons with other fundamental ethical principles that shape public policy: human rights, gender equity, social justice, and human flourishing.

During this course, we will consider together such questions as:

- To what extent is the recognition and respect of human dignity considered to be universal and applicable to – and enforceable upon – all countries, and individual citizens?
- Where, if at all, does human dignity fit in as the structure, policies, institutions, and expectations of foreign aid moves progressively towards concepts derived exclusively from political economy analysis?
- Would our societies, and our commitments to democratic principles, survive in the absence of a commitment to human dignity?
- To what extent are global efforts for gender equity and the prevention of gender based violence dependent on universal values associated with human dignity?
- In what ways is dignity better conceived as a status rather than as a kind of value?
- Is human dignity an “existential” value that pertains to the identity of a person as a human being as measured through their actions, or as a “virtue” that can be discerned in their character?
- Does each of us have a direct and personal stake in how these questions about human dignity are answered, and an obligation to find such answers?

The course will have three main components:

- 1) **The evolution of human dignity as a concept and a principle:** Students will explore the origins and evolving interpretations of “human dignity” with appropriate references to Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, but also several other sources from Cicero to Nussbaum. This exploration, and the remainder of the course, will be framed primarily but not exclusively from the perspectives of critical social justice and gender equity considerations. And while the concentration will center on the secular, we’ll give some attention to the realization that most Jewish, Muslim, and Christian thinking about human value places much more emphasis on the concept of the sanctity of human life rather than on human dignity. We will reflect on human dignity in the sense that it refers to status, rank, nobility, or honor, and whether someone “of dignity” has a different standing under the law. Then we will consider the alternative and more abstract view, with appropriate reference to the thinking of Immanuel Kant, who saw human dignity more as an abstract yet very important philosophical concept – which in time became one of the strongest foundations for human rights. We will also consider whether there is a place in secular public policy (post Enlightenment) for the related concept of “sanctity” – either linked to or as a substitute for “human dignity”.
- 2) **Harnessing “human dignity” as a practical principle:** The second part of the course will involve a hard-nosed evaluation of “human dignity”. Is this simply an abstraction of little efficacy to the crafting of effective public policy, or is this instead of deep significance? Can

we measure policy results in the context of dignity indicators, processes, and outcomes? Do we need to think of human dignity possibly in a gritty way, reflecting the way we live our lives – passions, blemishes, prejudices, aspirations, virtues, vices, and all? How “human” can our dignity be? We’ll also learn to be picky consumers of dignity; after all, notions of dignity that aren’t carefully interrogated can quickly come to be interpreted as self-aggrandizement, self-indulgence, or the justifiable manipulation of those of “lesser dignity”, especially in a town like Washington where political rank really seems to matter. And while it is complicated enough to establish a desirable concept of human dignity that can inform normal political, economic, and policy discourse, what happens when we take the “human” away for “dignity”? Do the interests of human beings stand above, or in deep connection to, the dignity of other life forms on Earth? Who really owns “dignity”, and why?

- 3) **Human dignity in public policy:** The third and final part of the course will concentrate on the persuasive application of defensible notions of human dignity, and how to be incisive in challenging the superficial use of this concept. Through topical case studies and class debate on issues both foreign and domestic, we will do our best to gain some traction in the optimal uses of human dignity in the policy context. We’ll weigh some of the arguments of leading thinkers who contend that dignity is something that is owed to a person, and we’ll discuss to what society’s obligations might consist of in this regard. For example, when a person is assaulted by thugs his or her dignity is compromised; we express outrage and we demand justice. But when homophobic persons humiliate a lesbian we may feel indignant on her behalf, and wish that those who are verbally abusing her were more inclusive and respectful, but we are not quite sure if society has any formal obligation to protect her dignity. How do we “measure” the damage done by humiliation and other forms of maligning the dignity of another? We do recognize that to injure or even to try to efface someone’s dignity is to treat that person as not fully human – as an object or some kind of subhuman creature – but what should public policy do to prevent or punish such attacks on an individual’s dignity?

One or more guest speakers may join in such discussions, as schedules permit. Class time will be divided among lectures, discussions, and student presentations.

Upon successful completion of the course, students with a wide variety of specific sectoral interests should be able to:

- ❑ Articulate a persuasive view of the role of human dignity in both a domestic (U.S.) context and a global context, and offer arguments for and against the notion of human dignity as it ought (or ought not) to apply to public policies and to citizens of all genders.
- ❑ Contextualize specific moral challenges to human dignity, and suggest approaches to address these.
- ❑ Understand and articulate many dimensions of human dignity, human well-being, human flourishing, and gender equality.
- ❑ Articulate both the justifications for human dignity as a universal concept and guiding principle, as well the relative differences and assumptions between Western and non-Western moral thinking about human dignity.
- ❑ Frame policy analysis, outputs, and outcomes in terms of human dignity factors.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

There will be one short paper required early in the course, a mid term examination, a group presentation, and a final examination (with an option of a final paper in lieu of a final exam):

- ❑ **Assignment One:** Due February 17th. From the perspective of either social justice or gender equity, prepare and submit an 8 page paper addressing one historical aspect or conception of human dignity which is either still relevant to public policy, or (to the contrary) which is now outmoded (no longer having any persuasive relevance to policy deliberations, processes, or results). Describe what that particular concept of human dignity once did to inform (for better or for worse) policy discourse around the gender equity or social justice issue(s) you are focusing on, either historically (when that aspect of human dignity first emerged as a concept) or currently, and why it is or isn't still significant to public policy. (15% of grade)
- ❑ **Exam:** There will be a sixty minute closed book mid-term examination on March 2nd (20% of grade), and a 90 minute closed book final examination on May 18th (25% of grade).
- ❑ **Assignment Two - Dueling PowerPoints:** Prepare, in groups of two students each, a professional quality PowerPoint (or similar) presentation of not more than 15 minutes, each pertaining to a leading issue (and associated desired outcome) in social justice or gender equity, to be selected from a list of issues + outcomes provided by the professor.
 - ❑ One 2-student group will argue/advocate in favor of a specific policy direction or outcome by relying on a persuasive moral argument(s) based upon human dignity thinking and principles; while
 - ❑ Another 2-student group will be assigned to counter this argument or advocacy, by questioning the relevance or persuasive power of human dignity as the justification for the same targeted outcome, and by offering a strong counter-argument on any other moral basis besides human dignity.

Further details will be provided later. The presentations will be open to anyone from the School to attend, as well as selected guests and reviewers. A discussion period will also be scheduled after each presentation, and a (secret ballot) vote taken to determine whose presentation was the most persuasive. The professor will evaluate this presentation on the basis of its content, on the effectiveness of its presentation, and on its persuasiveness – both in terms of the vote results, and based on her own judgment (25% of grade).

Class attendance and participation are extremely important. Students will be expected to complete the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. Since the class does not follow a text consistently, students can only keep up through regular attendance. *Constructive and thoughtful participation in classroom discussions counts for 15% of grade.*

CLASS SCHEDULE

PART ONE OF THREE

27 January 2016 ~ **Week 1: Introduction**

Student and faculty introductions, review of the syllabus and course requirements, and a course overview of the modern prevalence, ambiguity, persuasiveness, and “problem” of (1) human dignity, of (2) dignity without the “human”, and of (3) indignity. Also, a brief interactive class discussion of the framing lenses of both social justice and of gender equity.

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- Dignity: Its History and Meaning, by Michael Rosen
Chapter 1, pages 1 - 62
- “In Search of Dignity”, by David Brooks, New York Times, July 6, 2009
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/07/opinion/07brooks.html?_r=0

3 February 2016 ~ **Week 2: The roots of dignity - 1**

Is human dignity “humbog”? This class will be an overview of contending and evolving historical concepts of dignity, both religious and secular. A review of Cicero’s, Kant’s, Aquinas’, and Nietzsche’s concepts of dignity, and some consideration of the relationship of dignity to equality, grace, hierarchy, and human rights.

(Note: Due to a prior commitment, this class will end early at 6:15pm).

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- Human Dignity, by George Kateb
Preface and Chapter 1, part of Chapter 3; Pages ix – xiii, 1 – 27, 160 - 173

10 February 2016 ~ **Week 3: The roots of dignity - 2**

This class will discuss the dignity and equality of individuals, compared to perceptions (and systems) of gravitas, rank, and status, and compared to dignity in the context of the species. Is dignity owned by the elite, is it universal, or is dignity an expanding and embracing circle? How does Kateb defend human dignity? In what ways can human dignity be considered foundational to human rights?

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- Embodied Self-Respect and the Fragility of Human Dignity: A Human Rights Approach”, by Arnd Pollmann, Chapter 17 in Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, edited by Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser, and Elaine Webster; Pages 243 – 261; Springer Dordrecht: Heidelberg, 2010
<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>

17 February 2016 ~ Week 4: Diverse ethical views of dignity

* First assignment due

Is human dignity an “inalienable value” that we cannot lose? Or is it instead an essential – if precarious – capability for basic human flourishing? What does it mean for human dignity to be “embodied”, and what is the relationship between human dignity and self-respect? And how does all of this relate to corresponding human rights? The class will discuss dignity as an explicit reason or “purpose” at the center of living a life in embodied self-respect, and whether human dignity is a desirable outcome of human rights or, to the contrary, whether human rights is an outcome of the failings of human dignity.

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- Human Dignity, by George Kateb
Chapter 2, Pages 28 - 112

PART TWO OF THREE

24 February 2016 ~ Week 5: Defending human dignity

What does it mean to be defending the concept of dignity, and why is it important to do this persuasively and well? What is the relationship between individual personal status and universal human rights? Where does the notion of autonomy come into the discourse on human dignity? The class will also discuss – in the context of human dignity – morality and relativism, and personal and public morality.

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- Human Dignity, by George Kateb
Part of Chapter 4, Pages 174 – 205
- Reading (to be identified) on Martha Nussbaum’s dignity perspective

**2 March 2016 ~ Week 6: Mid-Term Examination during First Hour
Second Hour: Dignity, justice, capitalism, and democracy**

After the mid-term, a brief interactive class discussion on social inequality, the relationship between equality of dignity and disparities in human achievement, the demands of justice, environmental stewardship and the dignity of nature (is there non-human dignity?). How, if at all, does dignity

influence capitalism and democracy? Can animals be deemed to have dignity (as asserted by Nussbaum)?

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- Does Technology Spell Trouble with a Capital “T”? Human Dignity and Public Policy By David A. Hyman, Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy, Dec 2003
https://www.law.illinois.edu/faculty/misc/hyman_pdfs/Hyman_Article.pdf
- “The Case for Caution – Being Protective of Human Dignity in the Face of Corporate Forces Taking Title to Our DNA”, by Barry Brown, The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics, Summer 2001
<http://www.mountida.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/journal-of-law-medicine-and-ethic.pdf>

PART THREE OF THREE

9 March 2016 ~Week 7: Dignity and innovation

In terms of human action and behavior, what does it mean to “be” dignified? Can we judge other people by their dignity? To what extent can dignity serve as a useful policy standard for regulating emerging and innovative technologies? Is the concept of dignity relevant to professional norms and forms of discourse? What about dignity (and sanctity) when it all gets personal – the exploitation of the human body in the name of science – and of profit?

Reading Assignments for the following class (March 23rd):

- “Rape: Does International Human Rights Law Adequately Protect the Dignity of Women?” by Ivana Radacic, Chapter 9 in Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, Pages 119 – 132
Springer Dordrecht: Heidelberg, 2010
<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>
- “Dehumanization: Perceiving the Body as (In)Human”, by Sophie Oliver, Chapter 7 in Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, Pages 85 – 97
<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>

16 March 2016 ~ No Class, Spring Break

23 March 2016 ~ Week 8: Embodied dignity...and the indignity of dehumanization

In terms of human dignity, what does it mean to be “dehumanized”? In the case of an atrocity, what impact does the resulting loss of humanity have on victims, perpetrators and bystanders?

Rape and sexual assault have long been considered profound indignities, and more recently have become framed as a violation of human rights. But does international law adequately protect the human dignity of victims of gender based violence? What moral duties do states bear to protect all who are vulnerable to GBV? What about marital rape, and of private and public standards of dignity? Ultimately, for someone who has suffered rape or any other atrocity, is human dignity a superficial and poignantly hollow concept?

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- “Absolute Poverty: Human Dignity, Self-Respect, and Dependency”, by Peter Schaber, Chapter 11 in Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, Pages 151 – 158
<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>
- “Relative Poverty On a Social Dimension of Dignity”, by Julia Müller and Christian Neuhäuser, Chapter 12 in Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, Pages 159 – 172
<http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>

30 March 2016 ~ Week 9: Wealth, poverty, and dignity

Is it undignified to be poor? Is it undignified to be in a dependency relationship with wealthier others, or to be socially and economically vulnerable compared to others? What about your dignity if you are not actually “impoverished” or poor in any absolute sense, but instead live in a society (or a world) with vast extremes in incomes and wealth? Many people in the world are very poor compared to people living in much more affluent societies, and many people struggle to find adequate daily nutrition while more affluent people lavish expensive food and frivolous toys on their dogs and cats. Is the rich person’s fat cat enjoying more dignity than the hungry child of a poor worker in a sweatshop?

Reading Assignments for the following class:

- On Constitutionalism and human dignity in Kenya specifically and in Africa generally: “Human Dignity, Human Rights and Social Policy: Implications for Courts and Legislators”, by William Binchy http://www.strathmore.edu/pdf/bincy_address_oct29.pdf
- “International Migration, Human Dignity, and the Challenge of Sovereignty”, by the Center for Migration Studies, October 26, 2015
<http://cmsny.org/kerwin-migrationdignitysovereignty/>

6 April 2016 ~ Dignity, constitutionalism, democracy, and international migration

Many African and other countries have incorporated strong “dignity language”, but not always for reasons that seem apparent based on the quality of governance. Why was this felt to be necessary? In Kenya, where such language is absent from their constitution, the legal system has made a concerted

effort to fill this gap. Is law and legal precedent an appropriate and effective way to champion human dignity? And African countries are not alone in the rhetoric of human dignity finding its way into governance institutions and instruments, yet in the current and dramatic global challenge to universal human dignity – the migration and refugee crisis – the official conversation about human dignity is at best muted. Are we failing the dignity test?

Reading Assignments for the following class: to be determined (by visiting speaker)

13 April 2015 ~ Week 10: Guest speaker (topic and speaker to be identified)

20 April 2016 ~ Week 11: Class “Dueling PowerPoints” Presentations and Discussions

27 April 2016 ~ Week 12: Class “Dueling PowerPoints” Presentations and Discussions

4 May 2016 ~ Week 13: Final Exam Review class

11 May 2016 ~ No class, review week

18 May 2016 ~ Final Examination: to be confirmed

READINGS

Readings will include the following complete books or e-books (purchase recommended):

- *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*, by Michael Rosen, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA., 2012
- *Human Dignity*, by George Kateb, Belknap Press; 1st edition, 2011

Readings will include a few selections from the following (available free on line):

- “Human Dignity, Human Rights and Social Policy: Implications for Courts and Legislators”, by William Binchy http://www.strathmore.edu/pdf/bincy_address_oct29.pdf
- “International Migration, Human Dignity, and the Challenge of Sovereignty”, by the Center for Migration Studies, October 26, 2015 <http://cmsny.org/kerwin-migrationdignitysovereignty/>
- Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization - Human Dignity Violated, Springer Dordrecht: Heidelberg, 2010 <http://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r30885.pdf>
- Does Technology Spell Trouble with a Capital “T”? Human Dignity and Public Policy By David A. Hyman, Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy, Dec 2003 https://www.law.illinois.edu/faculty/misc/hyman_pdfs/Hyman_Article.pdf
- “The Case for Caution – Being Protective of Human Dignity in the Face of Corporate Forces Taking Title to Our DNA”, by Barry Brown, The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics, Summer 2001 <http://www.mountida.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/journal-of-law-medicine-and-ethic.pdf>

OFFICE HOURS AND FACULTY BIO

Students may schedule time by calling or emailing the lecturer, so as to understand issues more fully or to discuss their work. Dr. Schwenke's home telephone is 301-260-1281, and cell phone 301-448-2953. Dr. Schwenke's email is chloemaryland@gmail.com.

Dr. Chloe Schwenke is an independent consultant in human rights and international development. She previously served as vice president for global programs at Freedom House in Washington, D.C. and was earlier a political appointee for the Obama Administration at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) as USAID's Senior Advisor on LGBTI Policy and as USAID Africa Bureau's Senior Advisor on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance.



Dr. Schwenke is a human rights activist, development practitioner and academic with over three decades of international experience, nearly half of it while living in developing countries. She has worked in a senior capacity with some of the leading American development organizations, and as an independent consultant, on projects of USAID, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Dr. Schwenke was a Fulbright professor at Makerere University in Uganda from 2005-6, and from 1995 to 1998 she was based in Durban, South Africa where she was managing director of one of South Africa's most successful town and regional planning firms. Her scholarly interests include human rights, LGBTI issues, international development ethics, gender equality & female empowerment, and leadership. As a practitioner, her experience has centered on the design, management, implementation, and evaluation of a wide range of human rights, LGBTI, gender equality, civil society capacity building, conflict mitigation, and ethical leadership programming.

Dr. Schwenke received her Ph.D. in public policy at the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland at College Park, where she was chosen as Alumna of the Year for 2013. She has an extensive list of publications; among her most recent work is the 2013 article "The Provocative Human Right to Be", in the *LGBTQ Policy Journal* at the Harvard Kennedy School. Soon to be published is "An American's view of trans*emergence and feminism's response in Africa", chapter 12 in *Bodies in Resistance: gender politics in the age of neoliberalism*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK. In 2008 her book *Reclaiming Value in International Development: The Moral Dimensions of Development Policy and Practice in Poor Countries* was published by Praeger. She also has a chapter on the ethical response to violent conflict in Africa in the book: *New Directions in Development Ethics*, (Wilber and Dutt, eds., 2010) and a chapter on development ethics in *The Handbook of Global Communications and Media Ethics* (Fortner and Fackler, eds. 2011).