

# Grand Challenges to Human Security

Government 134-001 – Fall 2025

George Mason University

**\*DRAFT SYLLABUS\***

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Class Times: Tuesday & Thursday, 10:30am-11:45am EST  
Classroom: Horizon Hall, Room 2010  
Instructor: Meghan Garrity, PhD  
Assistant Professor, International Security & Law  
Email: [mgarrit2@gmu.edu](mailto:mgarrit2@gmu.edu)  
Office Hours: Tuesday, 12pm-1pm (in person)  
Thursday, 12pm-1pm (in person)  
Aquia Building, Room 317

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## Course Description

At its most basic level, security is the protection from harm. The field of international relations typically focuses on two kinds of security: *national security*—the protection of the state from harm (external or internal)—and *global security*—the protection of the “international order” from harm, or the stability of the state system. In this course we will pivot from this traditional security focus and instead examine *human security*—the protection of individuals and communities from harm. This harm can be separated into two main areas: 1) freedom from fear (physical safety and security) and 2) freedom from want (economic, social, and cultural security). At its core, human security is “the idea that people, and the protection of human life and dignity, should be the central focus of security policy and practice.”<sup>1</sup>

In this **Mason Core class**, which fulfills the requirement for “**Global Contexts**,” we will explore the following questions: What is included in human security? Who is responsible for providing human security (the state, the UN, international organizations)? What happens when a state is unable, or unwilling, to provide their citizens with security, or deliberately violates their security? What are the challenges to ensuring human security for all? Whose human security should be prioritized?

The course is divided into three parts. Part I provides the key frameworks for analyzing human security. We begin with a conceptual examination of human security, studying its distinction from traditional security, and the tradeoffs of a broad versus narrow concept. Next, we investigate the historical foundations of human security in the field of international relations and its connections with international human rights. We then turn to key actors in human security exploring the role of the United Nations, regional organizations, and transnational advocacy networks. After, we consider the disproportionate effects of human security issues on certain population groups, specifically related to gender, age, and disability and the tension between ensuring the security of civil and political rights versus economic social and cultural rights.

Part II shifts to armed conflict and human security. We examine mass violations of civilian protection including genocide and mass atrocities, the principle of the “Responsibility to Protect” and the role of humanitarian intervention to prevent atrocities, and efforts toward international accountability and justice. In Part III we delve into core topics of human security

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen-Rodgers, David and Kerry F. Crawford. (2022). *Human security: Theory and action*. Rowman & Littlefield.

including refugees & forced displacement, climate change and environmental security, food security, and gender inequality and security.

### Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the major concepts and approaches for analyzing human security
- Identify and explain the core challenges, debates, and key actors in human security and how they have shaped societies to create interdependence and inequality
- Use a disciplinary lens to demonstrate knowledge of human security challenges facing different countries, world regions, and vulnerable groups
- Critically analyze the breadth of contemporary challenges in human security, strategies for addressing them, and the obstacles to coordinated responses to achieve justice and equity
- Communicate ideas and arguments clearly, concisely, and persuasively to different audiences, in different contexts, including written policy memos and papers, and oral presentations

### Course Materials

Required readings are posted on Canvas under “Modules.” The readings should be read in advance of the class meeting as they will serve as the basis for our discussion. Students are also expected to engage with the readings in writing assignments and on exams.

Blue Book (examination book): This course includes two in-class exams. Please purchase blue examination books at the campus bookstore to bring to class on the days of the exams.

### Course Requirements / Evaluation

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENT OF GRADE	DUE DATE
Class participation (including in-class comprehension quizzes)	15%	Ongoing / Randomly assigned
Exam 1 (in class)	20%	September 23
Policy debate	15%	October 19: Pre-debate memo (10%) October 21: In-class debate (5%)
Research exercise & class conference	25%	Research proposal (5%): October 11 First draft (5%): November 8 Presentation (5%): November 18, 20, or Dec 2 Final paper (10%): December 5
Final exam (in class)	25%	December 16

### Assignment Descriptions

*Class participation (15%)*

The participation portion of your grade is based on active in-class engagement and randomized comprehension quizzes. Timely completion of the assigned readings and engaged participation in class discussions are essential requirements of this course. Because this is a synchronous course, attendance is mandatory. Students should come to class having read the assigned material closely, noting any questions and/or areas of confusion. Throughout the semester, classes will randomly begin with short comprehension quizzes. The quizzes will include three questions that aim to measure students' knowledge of the previous class material and understanding of the readings for that class. The lowest two quiz scores will be automatically dropped, so no make-up quizzes will be offered. The participation grade also includes engagement in class activities such as debates, simulations, and small-group activities. Class discussions are expected to be respectful; freedom of expression is important to academic discussion and all students are encouraged to participate.

#### *Exam 1 (20%)*

The first exam (in-class) is focused on the material covered in Part I of the course. The exam is scheduled in Week 5 to ensure that all students understand the foundational concepts of human security before applying them to different contexts and topic areas in Parts II and III. The format of the exam will be discussed in class. Make-up exams are not permitted without extreme extenuating circumstances.

#### *Policy Debate (15%)*

At the end of Part II we will have an in-class debate. Students will receive a scenario about a human security issue during armed conflict and will be assigned a specific position. In advance of the debate, students will submit a pre-debate memo (500-700 words) outlining the scholarly arguments supportive of that position, the possible policy options to respond to the human security issue from that perspective, and potential alternative arguments and how to refute them. The pre-debate memo is 10% of the grade, and the in-class debate performance is the other 5%. We will further discuss the format of this assignment in class. Policy memo is due on Canvas **Sunday, October 19 at 11:59pm**; **debate is October 21** during class. *\*Note: you cannot participate in the class debate (and thus forfeit 5% of your grade) unless your policy memo is submitted in advance.*

#### *Research Exercise & Class Conference (25%)*

The research exercise consists of writing an in-depth *Human Security Actor Profile* that allows students to explore an area of human security that is of personal interest and to examine the policymakers and practitioners that are working to address the issue. The assignment aims to connect the theoretical aspects of the course with practical application. We will hold a class conference at the end of the semester where students will present their findings from the research exercise. This assignment is worth 30% of the total grade and is broken into four parts.

- Research Proposal (5%): Write a short proposal about a human security actor that you would like to investigate this semester (300-500 words; excluding references). Your proposal should include the following:
  - Identify a contemporary human security area of interest (e.g., food security, environmental security, gender inequality, economic development, forced

migration, UN peacekeeping, etc.). *This may or may not be an issue area covered in the course.*

- Explain why you chose this human security issue. What is of personal interest about this topic?
- Identify an organization that is currently working on this human security issue (UN agencies – UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM), non-governmental organizations (International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, World Wildlife Fund), Congressional committees (House Foreign Affairs Committee), State Department Bureaus (Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations), or think tanks (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Brookings Institute, U.S. Institute of Peace).
- Identify an initial list of 5-6 sources of information that you will use to develop your research paper about this human security actor. This must include at least 2-3 academic sources and 2-3 non-academic sources (i.e., organization website, think tank and government reports, UN documents, interviews, news articles, etc.).
- References: Use APA 7<sup>th</sup> footnotes citation format to document your sources.

Due on Canvas **Friday, October 10, 11:59pm.**

- Draft Paper (5%): Written profile of the human security actor identified (1600-1800 words). Your paper should address the following questions:

- What human security issue does this organization work on? Why is it important?
- Background of organization: What kind of organization is this (UN agency, NGOs, government agency, etc.)? Where do they work (what countries / regions)? How long have they been around?
- How does this actor's work connect to questions, debates, issues raised in this course (*draw connections with at least 2-3 class readings*)?
- What is this actor doing to address the relevant human security issue? What programs do they implement? What reports have they written? Who are they trying to help / influence?
- What are two policy challenges that this actor faces?
- References: your paper must cite (in the main text) at least 2-3 academic sources, and 2-3 non-academic sources (*these may include relevant course readings*). Use APA 7<sup>th</sup> footnotes citation format.

Due on Canvas **Friday, November 7, 11:59pm.**

- Class Conference Presentation (5%): Students will give 5-minute presentations (with PowerPoint slides) about their research profiles. These presentations will be organized in the style of a professional academic conference/think tank meeting with similar topic areas clustered together and questions and answers from the audience. Student presentations should address the following:
  - Why does this human security topic matter?
  - Who is your key human security actor?
  - What are they doing to respond to the human security issue?
  - What are some of their successes and some of their challenges?

As part of the requirement for the class conference, students are responsible for asking the presenters questions during the Q&A. Attendance to all conference sessions is mandatory and is part of the participation grade. Presentations will take place on **November 18, 20, and December 2.**

- **Final Paper (10%):** The final paper is a revised draft of the Human Security Actor Profile (1600-1800 words). It should incorporate feedback from peers during the in-class draft workshop, written feedback from myself, and responses to questions that were raised during the class conference. This is due on Canvas **Friday, December 5 at 11:59pm**. Late assignments (any time after 11:59pm) will be deducted a full letter grade for each day it is late.

#### *Final exam (25%)*

The final exam (in-class) is cumulative, covering material in all three parts of the course. The final exam will draw on the material covered in class as well as the assigned readings and is worth 25% of the total grade. The exam structure will be discussed in class.

*\*All assignment due dates are posted at the beginning of the semester. Make-up exams and assignment extensions will not be granted. If you are experiencing extenuating circumstances, please communicate with me in advance of any assignment deadline.*

#### **Grading Standards**

Assignment evaluations in this course will be based on the grading scale outlined below:

Letter Grade	Percentage	Interpretation
Excellent A A-	95-100 90-94	Mastery of concepts. Can clearly apply concepts to new situations.
Above Average B+ B B-	87-89 83-86 80-82	Strong understanding of concepts. Acceptable foundation for future work.
Proficient C+ C C-	77-79 73-76 70-72	Basic understanding. Questionable foundation for future work.
Marginal D	60-69	Weak understanding and foundation for future work.
Failure F	0-59	Failed to demonstrate understanding and/or effort.

#### **Course Administrative Policies**

##### **Office Hours**

I will hold in-person office hours on Tuesday (12-1pm) and Thursday (12-1pm) in my office: Aquia Building, Room 317. Office hours are a dedicated time for you to speak to me about any questions you may have regarding readings, assignments, or other concerns about the

course. If you cannot meet during this period, please email me with an alternative time. I can also meet virtually, via Zoom, if preferred.

### **Email Policy**

You may email me with any questions or concerns about the course. I will do my best to respond to your email within 24-48 hours. Students must use their Mason email account to receive important university information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from, or send messages to, a non-Mason email address.

### **Make-Up & Late Policy**

Students are expected to complete the assignments on the dates specified in the syllabus. Exams cannot be rescheduled and assignment extensions will not be granted unless there are extraordinary circumstances. Students with prior commitments conflicting with assignment deadlines must let me know in the first three weeks of the semester to organize advanced rescheduling. Late assignments will be deducted half a letter grade for each day it is late after the assigned deadline has passed.

### **Technology policy**

Students must bring their computers to class to take the randomly assigned in-class comprehension quizzes on Canvas.

Please respect your fellow students by refraining from using electronic devices other than those needed to take notes and participate in class. Avoid the temptation to check your email, messages, social media, or news during class as it is disruptive to your learning experience. Phones should be silenced.

### **Academic Integrity**

Faculty in the Schar School have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty and will strictly enforce [Mason's honor code](#). The integrity of the university community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using the appropriate format for this class. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

### **Disability Accommodations**

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please visit the [Disability Services website](#) for detailed information about the Disability Services registration

process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu), phone: (703) 993-2474.

### **Names and Pronouns**

If you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with me and indicate how best to address you in class and via email. I use she/her/hers for myself and you may address me as “Dr./Professor Garrity” in email and verbally. Furthermore, Mason supports and recognizes that an inclusive and welcoming community is linked to our strategic goals and is key to building a sense of belonging and well-being. For this reason, students may use the tools we provide to change their names and pronouns on [Mason records](#).

### **Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism**

The Schar School, an intentionally inclusive community, promotes and maintains an equitable and just work and learning environment. We welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and disability. As a member of the George Mason University community, I will work to create an educational environment that is committed to anti-racism and inclusive excellence. I affirm that in this class, faculty and students will work together to interrupt cycles of racism against Black individuals, indigenous people, and other people of color so as to cultivate a more equitable, inclusive, and just learning environment for all participants, regardless of racial background.

### **Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Interpersonal Violence**

George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination and a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students and employees who believe that they have been sexually harassed, sexually assaulted or subjected to sexual or interpersonal misconduct to seek assistance and support. [University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct](#) speaks to the specifics of Mason’s process, the resources, and the options available to students and employees.

### **Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual or interpersonal misconduct**

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Non-Confidential Employee” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, complicity, and retaliation to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-993-3686 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing [titleix@gmu.edu](mailto:titleix@gmu.edu).

### **Additional Campus Resources**

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)  
[Center for Culture, Equity, and Empowerment](#)  
[Disability Services](#)  
[Learning Services](#)

[The Writing Center](#)  
[Mason Student Services Center](#)  
[More Student Support Resources on Campus](#)



## Academic Standards

Academic Standards exist to promote authentic scholarship, support the institution's goal of maintaining high standards of academic excellence, and encourage continued ethical behavior of faculty and students to cultivate an educational community which values integrity and produces graduates who carry this commitment forward into professional practice.

As members of the George Mason University community, we are committed to fostering an environment of trust, respect, and scholarly excellence. Our academic standards are the foundation of this commitment, guiding our behavior and interactions within this academic community. The practices for implementing these standards adapt to modern practices, disciplinary contexts, and technological advancements. Our standards are embodied in our courses, policies, and scholarship, and are upheld in the following principles:

- **Honesty:** Providing accurate information in all academic endeavors, including communications, assignments, and examinations.
- **Acknowledgement:** Giving proper credit for all contributions to one's work. This involves the use of accurate citations and references for any ideas, words, or materials created by others in the style appropriate to the discipline. It also includes acknowledging shared authorship in group projects, coauthored pieces, and project reports.
- **Uniqueness of Work:** Ensuring that all submitted work is the result of one's own effort and is original, including free from self-plagiarism. This principle extends to written assignments, code, presentations, exams, and all other forms of academic work.

Violations of these standards—including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating—are taken seriously and will be addressed in accordance with university policies. [The process for reporting, investigating, and adjudicating violations is outlined in the university's procedures here.](#) Consequences of violations may include academic sanctions, disciplinary actions, and other measures necessary to uphold the integrity of our academic community.

The principles outlined in these academic standards reflect our collective commitment to upholding the highest standards of honesty, acknowledgement, and uniqueness of work. By adhering to these principles, we ensure the continued excellence and integrity of George Mason University's academic community.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for understanding how these general expectations regarding academic standards apply to each course, assignment, or exam they participate in; students should ask their instructor for clarification on any aspect that is not clear to them.

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services

at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit the [Disability Services website](#) for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu). Phone: (703) 993-2474.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for registering with Disability Services and communicating about their approved accommodations with their instructor in advance of any relevant class meeting, assignment, or exam.

### **FERPA and Use of GMU Email Addresses for Course Communication**

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) governs the disclosure of education records for eligible students and is an essential aspect of any course. **Students must use their GMU email account** to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. Instructors will not respond to messages sent from or send messages regarding course content to a non-GMU email address.

**Student responsibility:** Students are responsible for checking their GMU email regularly for course-related information, and/or ensuring that GMU email messages are forwarded to an account they do check.

### **Title IX Resources and Required Reporting**

As a part of George Mason University's commitment to providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning, living, and working environment for all members of the University community, the University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities. Accordingly, **all non-confidential employees, including your faculty member, have a legal requirement to report to the Title IX Coordinator, all relevant details obtained directly or indirectly about any incident of Prohibited Conduct** (such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, gender-based stalking, dating/domestic violence). Upon notifying the Title IX Coordinator of possible Prohibited Conduct, the Title IX Coordinator will assess the report and determine if outreach is required. If outreach is required, the individual the report is about (the "Complainant") will receive a communication, likely in the form of an email, offering that person the option to meet with a representative of the Title IX office.

For more information about non-confidential employees, resources, and Prohibited Conduct, please see University Policy 1202: [Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct and Other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#). Questions regarding Title IX can be directed to the Title IX Coordinator via email to [TitleIX@gmu.edu](mailto:TitleIX@gmu.edu), by phone at 703-993-8730, or in person on the Fairfax campus in Aquia 373.

**Student opportunity:** If you prefer to speak to someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential employees in [Student Support & Advocacy \(SSAC\)](#), Counseling and [Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#), [Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#), and/or the [Office of the University Ombudsperson](#).