

Presidential Chair Fellows: Curriculum Enrichment Grant 2015-2016 Final Report

1. **Project Title:** Engaging Undergraduate Students in Human Rights Research

2. **Project team members** (and any others who were involved in the process):

- Alexa Koenig, Executive Director, Human Rights Center
- Eric Stover, Faculty Director, Human Rights Center
- GSIs: Brent Nakamura & Aniket Kesari

3. **Context of the program/course:**

With support from the Presidential Chair Fellows' Curriculum Enrichment Grant, the Human Rights Center's Alexa Koenig and Eric Stover significantly revamped the curriculum for their undergraduate International Human Rights course (LS154) to emphasize research methodologies and skills as well as highlight real-world experience by bringing in Berkeley faculty and other human rights researchers as guest speakers.

4. **Goals of your project, including curricular gap or issues you addressed in your project:**

The goals of the project were as follows:

- Strengthen undergraduate research opportunities at UC Berkeley by increasing the number of undergraduate students introduced and prepared to participate in research
- Engage undergraduates in real-world problem solving by inviting professional human rights researchers to discuss their work with the class
- Increase undergraduate engagement in research projects and resources on campus

Eric Stover, adjunct professor of law and public health, and Alexa Koenig, lecturer-in-residence at Berkeley Law, taught International Human Rights (LS154) during spring semester 2016. The course, taken by 107 undergraduates, introduced students to the historical, political, legal, sociological, and psychological underpinnings of human rights.

With funding support from the Presidential Chair Fellows' Curriculum Enrichment Grant Program, Koenig and Stover redesigned the International Human Rights course curriculum to emphasize research concepts, methods, ethics, and practical experience. They revised course assignments to give students opportunities to frame and develop research questions and engage in initial research on course topics, including drafting of a research concept note. Professional human rights researchers discussed their methods with the class, and gave undergraduates an opportunity to engage in real-world problem solving.

5. **In pursuing these goals, what did you accomplish?**

The revised course exceeded our goals and expectations by providing students with:

- An understanding of and familiarity with the tools and methodologies used to design, conduct, and present human rights research;
- Opportunities to conduct interviews related to real-world human rights problems;
- A greater awareness of research opportunities on and off campus to increase their probability of long-term participation; and
- A greater understanding of the ways in which disciplines that have not traditionally engaged with human rights research can substantially impact the field.

Students learned how to design research questions, interview subjects, and record and analyze data. By integrating a hands-on component into the curriculum, undergraduate students were introduced to human rights research methods and practice and gained important skills useful beyond the span of the class. This initiative was able to provide a large group of undergraduate students an opportunity to engage in real-world, international human rights research.

6. What did you implement and what were the steps to get there? What role did your GSR play in the process?

Phase 1: Our GSRs, Brent Nakamura and Aniket Kesari, reviewed the spring 2015 syllabus to determine the disciplinary make-up of the course and determined which Berkeley faculty members would be most appropriate to invite to speak in the revamped class.

Phase 2: During the fall 2015 semester, Nakamura and Kesari worked with the course instructors to redesign the syllabus, based on the data gathered in Phase 1. Nakamura and Kesari also helped conduct a thorough literature review to revamp the readings for the course. In addition, they designed and conducted a survey with our spring 2015 (the previous year's) students to determine a baseline of research knowledge coming out of that year's class and to learn the perceived strengths and weaknesses of that earlier iteration of the course. They also designed a survey to ascertain the incoming students' baseline research experience. That survey was distributed to current students at the very start of the spring semester.

Phase 3: During the spring semester, Nakamura and Kesari attended the course, provided course instructors with feedback on instruction, ran supplemental instructional sections on data analysis and quantitative research methods, and helped to coordinate logistics for speakers.

Phase 4: Toward the end of the semester, the GSI's distributed a third survey, which was designed to ascertain the research skills students had acquired over the course of the semester. Nakamura wrote a final report, based on all three surveys, to help us further revise the syllabus for future semesters and further refine our teaching methods.

7. Summarize any information/data gathering and its findings that informed your curriculum/course planning and improvement. If you have a survey or focus group prompts you used, please append them to this report.

Pre-Survey: A pre-survey, using the web-based *Qualtrics* survey program, was sent to students at the start of the semester. The total enrollment of LS 154 at the beginning of the semester was 112 students. Of those enrolled, 102 students (91.1%) responded to the survey. The majority of the class identified as having junior standing (54.9%). A slight majority of students had declared or intended to declare a major in Legal Studies (55.88%). Nearly three-fourths of students (74.5%) said they had taken a statistics or data analysis course. When asked about their comfort levels with statistics and data analysis, those students noted a moderate comfort level of 3.64 out of 7 with statistics and 3.83 out of 7 with data analysis. Approximately one-fifth (20.6%) of students said a previous course had required them to perform original research. Approximately one-third (37.6%) of students had previously taken a course "that was about or touched on human rights or human rights law." Students who had previously taken a "human rights" course rated their knowledge of international human rights law at a mean of 3.68 on a scale from 1 to 7. When asked why they wanted to take LS 154, many indicated interest in international human rights or a particular field of law or the need to fulfill a major requirement.

Post-Survey: Students received a second survey at the end of the semester. The total enrollment at the end of the semester was 107 students. Of those enrolled, 96 (89.7%) responded to the survey. Students were asked if they "plan to take a class that involves conducting or studying investigations or research?" Nearly half of students, 45.8% responded that they would. Students were then asked whether "LS 154 influence[d] [their] decision to take that/ those class(es)?" Nearly half, 47.7% (21 students) said "yes." The explanations ranged from "[LS154] taught me what doing research is really like, and I enjoy it" to "LS 154 showed me how much positive impact research can have since it brings awareness to hardships all around the world." Students rated the extent to which their experience in LS 154 contributed to their understanding of how they could conduct their own original scholarly undergraduate research at UC Berkeley and, on average, students rated LS 154's contribution 5.31 out of 7. In a question replicated from the Spring 2016 pre-survey, students were asked how comfortable they now felt analyzing data on a scale of 1 "Very comfortable" to 7 "Extremely comfortable." Students provided a mean

response of 4.59. This is an improvement over the 3.83 mean response in the pre-survey. Replicating another pre-survey question, students were asked about how much they knew about international human rights law. On average, students gave a high mean rating of 5.71 on a 1 to 7 scale. This compares very favorably to the pre-survey 2.85 mean rating. Lastly, students were asked for suggestions about how to improve the course. First, in regard to improving “teaching ethics in international human rights research and investigations,” many students (20) indicated nothing should change, while others suggested including a connection to real-time issues or events. Second, students were asked for suggestions “for improving the course with respect to learning about conducting original research.” Several students expressed a desire for more examples and a few suggested workshops. Students also expressed a need for clearer guidelines about the Research Project concept note, which will be easily solved next year. When asked what was the most valuable aspect of LS 154, many students identified the guest lectures and the professors. Finally, students were asked: “What other suggestions, if any, do you have for improving LS 154 for future students?” Students were generally very positive about the class and most had only minor suggestions, such as “[m]aybe add more presentation or short assignments to help practice outside of class.”

8. Describe how your project will be sustained and/or expanded beyond the end of the project period. What are the challenges in sustaining or expanding your effort?

Since 1994, the HRC has trained students and advocates to document human rights violations and turn that information into effective action. HRC is committed to integrating research skills into teaching to improve undergraduate and graduate education. We appreciated the opportunity to partner with the Presidential Chair Fellows program to strengthen research opportunities for Berkeley’s undergraduate students and expect that our revamped curriculum will be used for years to come. Beyond the project period, we plan to make changes to the existing curriculum as needed.