Globalization and Private Governance
Government 94ek

Professor Michael J. Hiscox
Office Hours: Wed. 10-12pm
CGIS K-210

Fall Semester 2017
Meetings: Tu. 10-12pm
Room: CGIS K450

DESCRIPTION

This research seminar examines the impact of international trade and investment on human rights and labor and environmental standards in developing nations. We will discuss core concerns that globalization may be contributing to the spread of sweatshops and pollution havens in the developing world, creating a race to the bottom in social and environmental standards among countries competing to establish new export sectors and attract investment from multinational firms. The focus of the course is the evolution and impact of a variety of voluntary codes of conducts, standards and certification schemes aimed at improving social and environmental conditions among developing country producers. Together, these codes and standards represent a new form of self-governance in the private sector, initiated and implemented by companies, labor unions, and non-governmental activist groups in an effort to manage globalization. There is an ongoing debate about whether these codes and standards represent real progress or mere symbolism. Advocates promote them as necessary tools to improve workplace conditions and promote environmental conservation, especially in nations that lack robust enforcement of regulatory standards. Detractors worry that these codes and standards are not the result of democratic processes, are not reliably enforced or monitored, and actually may dampen or divert pressures for enforceable government regulations for which they are poor substitutes. Specific topics include: the rules of the World Trade Organization pertaining to labor and environmental standards, corporate social responsibility (CSR) in theory and practice, the spread of corporate codes of conduct, the effectiveness of activist campaigns, and the impact of voluntary certification and labeling schemes such as Fair Trade.

REQUIREMENTS

This class is intended to develop research, writing, and discussion skills, and to help prepare students for writing an honors thesis in their senior year. Students are expected to do the readings, prepare carefully for each meeting, and participate actively in class discussions. Each meeting is structured around a set of debates in which students are expected to take clear and reasoned positions. Regular participation will account for 20% of the course grade. Students will be required to write a short paper (3-5 pages) which summarizes and critiques readings for one of the meetings. Students will give a short presentation based on that paper at the relevant meeting. Most importantly, all students will write an independent research paper on a topic of their own choice. A paper proposal defining the topic, method, and sources to be used is due by meeting 7 (Oct 17); students will make a presentation describing their research proposal/paper to the class in the last meeting (Nov 28). The final grade will be calculated by:

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POLICIES

Students are encouraged to collaborate with fellow classmates on joint class presentations and joint research papers, but to do so in each case students must request explicit approval from Professor Hiscox.

MATERIALS

The following book is highly recommended, but not required (assigned chapters are available online):


All other readings are available online from the course web page: http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~hiscox/gov94ek.html

Students are encouraged to check the web page regularly. It provides copies of all course materials, including weekly discussion questions, lists of additional readings on each topic, and resources for research (including links to web sites, quantitative data sets, and documentary evidence).

COURSE OUTLINE

-- Meeting 1 (Sept 5): Core Debates and Issues


-- Meeting 2 (Sept 12): International Law, Institutions, and Trade Agreements


-- Meeting 3 (Sept 19): Activist Groups and Campaigns


-- Meeting 4 (Sept 26): Political Consumers


-- Meeting 5 (Oct 3): Political Managers and Employees


-- Meeting 6 (Oct 10): Political Owners, Investors, and Social Entrepreneurs


-- Meeting 7 (Oct 17): Manufacturing and Labor Standards


-- Meeting 8 (Oct 24): Commodities, Farmers, and Fair Trade


-- Meeting 9 (Oct 31): Oceans and Forests


-- Meeting 10 (Nov 7): Resources and Energy


-- Meeting 11 (Nov 14): Food – Organic, Local, and Ethical Treatment of Animals


-- Meeting 12 (Nov 28): Presentations of Student Research Proposals/Papers

--- Research Papers due Dec 9