Course Overview:
In a moment when our planet faces destruction due to climate change, this class offers a space to rethink human being's relation to the environment. Can we say that there is a human right to enjoy life on this planet? How do social hierarchies, like race, class, and gender, structure such rights? What is environmental justice? What are the spiritual, moral, and legal foundations for environmental justice? How are struggles for land, environmental safety, and climate change made more visible or legitimate by framing them as human rights? We will think about these questions by focusing in part on case studies from India.

In the first section, we will begin with some historical accounts of the rise of the rights regime. What are human rights and who decides? Are they enforceable? Rights for whom? In the second section, we'll cover the debates about the universality of rights. How is the notion of human rights embedded in colonial, Western, and/or racialized structures of inequality? How does the discourse of human rights create victims and saviors? In the third section, we take up the idea of environmental justice, and consider the lived experiences of people facing injustice and violence in the US and in India. In the fourth section, we take up the search for justice. How do people mobilize for their rights? We consider the different ways people conceptualize the environment, looking especially carefully at Buddhist notions of humanity's relation with the Earth. In the concluding section, we consider the pressing question of climate change. Is there a right to healthy climate? This brings us to the take home question: What are the potentials and the limits of human rights as an international regime?

Course Requirements:
This is a five week global seminar that will take place in three different locations in India: Delhi, Kerala (where the students will carry out community work with our partner university), and Dharamsala (where the students will meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama). The syllabus is designed to compliment the travel and community work components, and the assignments are timed to give the students opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their experiences during the trip.

Students are expected to do all the readings on the syllabus and to be ready to discuss them in our class meetings. Participation in class is a significant part of the
course grade. There are three written assignments: two 3-page response papers during the time we are in India, and one final paper due the week after our return. The last session of our class will meet in Dharamsala, and each student will make a short oral presentation summarizing the last paper. This meeting will give us all a chance to think together about the visit with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The course grade will be determined as follows:

- First Response Paper: 20%
- Second Response Paper: 20%
- Final Paper: 30%
- Class participation: 30%

Course Outline:

**Week One (Delhi): Introduction: What are Human Rights?**

**Meeting 1: Introduction, What are Human Rights?**

**Meeting 2: Human Rights in the Indian Context**

Excursion in Delhi: Interview with The Centre for Development and Human Rights (CDHR)

**Week Two (Kerala): Cultural Relativism and Human Rights**

**Meeting 3: The International Human Rights Framework and its Discontents**

**Meeting 4: Are Rights Universal?**

**Excursion:** Work in local community
First Critical Response Paper: In a 3 page paper, referring to at least two of the readings, answer the following: What assumptions about rights did you bring to this seminar? How has your first week of community work altered your ideas? Are there some rights you would argue are universal? What evidence do you have for this?

Week Three (Kerala): Environmental Justice
Meeting 5: What is Environmental Justice?

Recommended:

Meeting 6: Is there a Human Right to a Healthy Environment?

Excursion: Work in local community

Week Four (Kerala): Environment and Rights in India
Meeting 7: Environmental Struggles in India

Recommended Reading:

Meeting 8: Buddhist understandings of the Environment and Rights
2. Joanna Macy and the Great Turning, film. Online at:  
(Also spend some time on Joanna Macy’s Work That Reconnects website:  
http://workthatreconnects.org/.  Especially read the Foundations of the Work  
section.)  
Center, pp. 31-36.  

Second Critical Response Paper: In a 3 page paper, referring to at least two of the  
readings, answer the following: What is environmental justice? What are its legal,  
spiritual, or moral foundations? What environmental struggles are most important  
to you and why?  

Week Five (Dharamsala): Climate Change and Human Rights  
Meeting 9: Climate Change  
Klein, Naomi, 2014. This Changes Everything. New York: Simon and Schuster  
(excerpted sections).  

Recommended:  
1. Barbara Adams and Gretchen Lechinger, Climate Justice for a Changing Planet: A  
Primer for Policy Makers and NGOs. United Nations 2009  
3. Report of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights: Climate Change,  
Displacement and Human Rights 2009.  

Excursions: Dharamsala visits to Orphanage, Temple, Textile factories, and all day  
meeting/panels with the Dalai Lama.  

Meeting 10: Student Discussion  
Each student will write a final 3-page essay answering these questions: What are  
the major challenges to human rights and environmental justice? What resources  
are available to meet them? What are the obstacles? What responsibility does each  
of us have in this? This final meeting will give us an opportunity to discuss our  
reactions to our day with the Dalai Lama and to refine the essays, which will be due  
the week after we return to the US.