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Disciplining Human Rights (abstract)

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2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Oct. 2-3, 2015, Dayton, Ohio

For the archive of the conference, see http://ecommons.udayton.edu/human_rights/2015/

Research Panel: Human Rights Education

Presenter: Sarita Cargas

Title: *Disciplining Human Rights*

Abstract: Hundreds of thousands of people work in human rights. They work for one of the international or local non-governmental organizations, international organizations, government ministries of human rights, and even corporate divisions of human rights. Despite this, it is not being taught as an academic discipline in the US. It is treated like an interdisciplinary subject in the few universities with degree programs. While about a dozen universities offer a BA in the US, there is not a single course common to them all. It is not clear that a student graduating from an interdisciplinary human rights program is leaving with a specific set of skills or body of knowledge. Thus, it is time for the nascent field of human rights to be taught as an academic discipline. The subject fits all the criteria of what it means to be a discipline and there is a strong consensus on what students should know. This agreement can be discerned from the academic literature on human rights education, the content areas being taught in the US, and from the older more rigorous curricula being offered in Europe, especially in the UK. Through research on where and how human rights is being taught throughout the world we can construct what a strong human rights curriculum should look like in the US academy. Armed with this information, pedagogy can be directed as well as research areas since there are gaps in available resources for university faculty.

Keywords: Human rights education, HRE, pedagogy, professionalization of human rights

Biography: Sarita Cargas, D.Phil, is an assistant professor in the Honors College at the University of New Mexico. Her research area is human rights, and her pedagogical interest is in explicitly teaching critical thinking. In addition to teaching in Honors she has taught human rights courses for the MA in Latin America studies and the Peace Studies program. Her courses include Introduction to Human Rights, and Globalization and Human Rights (which uses feeding the world as a case study). She is currently writing a book intending to define human rights as an academic field while laying out its foundational history and concepts.

Born in St. Louis, MO, she attended the “Great Books” college, St. John’s College in Annapolis, MD. She earned an MA in Psychology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. After that she turned to the study of theology in a Roman Catholic seminary, Aquinas Institute, where she earned an MA in Theology. And finally she folded all her interests together at Oxford University and pursued an Mst in the Study of Religion – exploring the phenomenon of the nature of religion and then focusing, at the doctoral level, religion and World War One. She coordinated the writing and editing of the *Encyclopedia of Holocaust Literature* involving approximately fourteen leading Holocaust scholars.