The Right to Water

161HS-325F-1, Spring 2016, Module 2, Thu 2:00 - 4:50 PM, Heller School G055

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By 2050, at least one in four people is likely to live in a country affected by chronic or recurring shortages of fresh water¹

This course explores the practical applications of the internationally recognized human right to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation from a science and policy perspective.

Water is a life requirement of essentially all Earth’s organisms and is the literal habitat of all aquatic life. Freshwater is a tiny percent of all Earth’s water but is of central importance to human health, industry, and agriculture. Water is, in other words, a sine qua non (without which not) of all human affairs, and of all non-human life on earth (biodiversity).

Sanitation - proper disposal of human waste, especially of fecal matter - is intimately tied to the proper use and stewardship of water as well as to human health, because scores of microbes, parasitic worms, and other disease-causing agents can pass from one human to another via poorly isolated feces. The complete isolation of human waste from drinking water, food, and human habitation is arguably the first and most important step in ensuring basic human health.

In spite of these truths, as of 2014, an estimated 700m people, or one in ten, lack access to improved water sources for household use.² 2.5bn people still lack access to “improved sanitation facilities” which means that basic hygiene is more difficult and water sources are in danger of contamination by human pathogens.

What does it mean, in practical terms, to address clean drinking water and adequate sanitation as human rights issues and how to develop effective water and sanitation policies? This course, co-taught by an ecologist and a policy/governance expert, examines these questions from an interdisciplinary perspective. At the core of the class are the decision points and modes of decision-making with regard to water policy, which we examine both from a technical perspective - to understand the geographical and geological realities of water on Earth - and from a rights perspective, to understand the relevant international standards and how they apply at national levels. On the science

front, we examine the basic factual contours of water for personal use with an emphasis on the role of safe water for human health; the methods used to define clean drinking water and adequate sanitation; technologies available for delivering safe drinking water; and, the principal means of accessing water and processing household waste, along with issues like safety regulation, distribution, and pricing for cost recovery. We consider various arrangements for sustaining durable water systems. On the policy/governance front, we explore safe drinking water and sanitation issues from the perspective of both substance - government obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the right to water and sanitation - and procedure including issues of non-discrimination, participation, access to information and means of remedy. We discuss policy options that governments can choose among for advancing water and sanitation agenda in the post-2015 sustainable development context and global public policy concerns resulting from increasing water stress.

**Core Competency Statement.** This course teaches concepts and skills that have been identified as core competencies for a degree in SID: Methodological and conceptual tools for approaching a key substantive issue in development (access to water and sanitation) from a human rights perspective; and, science-based appreciation of constraints imposed by nature on humankind’s use of natural resources. We recognize that a) there is a finite supply of water; b) untreated surface waters can host pathogens even in pristine areas; c) freshwater is inequitably distributed; d) we need to leave wild nature some water too; and, e) reckless land and waste management practices can harm this essential resource. The course also hones basic skills in finding, evaluating and using data in development contexts.

**Sustainable Development Statement.** This course explores technical, policy, and rights issues related to access to two fundamentals of human societies everywhere: clean drinking water and appropriate sanitation.

**Gender Perspective Statement.** Many of the issues around access to water and sanitation have different impacts on women and girls than on men and boys. This course will explore issues of gender in regard not only to substantive issues (e.g., access to water and sanitation, safety while obtaining water) but also to process issues (e.g., participation in decision-making, etc) that are core to rights-based approaches to development.

**Race and Ethnicity Statement.** This course recognizes the impact of race and ethnicity: The course will explore the issue of non-discrimination, including non-discrimination with regard to race and ethnicity, as a core component of the right to water.

**Grading:** Students are required to attend all sessions, arrive promptly, prepare the readings and participate in class discussions. Grades are based on:

- **Two fact papers (30%):** you will select a country/region/sub-region you will study throughout the course and use to apply the class material. Fact papers need to be fully referenced and draw on credible sources – we will provide you with a list of sources.

  - **Fact Paper 1 (15%):** Information on quality, major pathogens and toxins and on availability of water resources and services in chosen country. Due class 4.
Fact Paper 2 (15%): Information on the legal, policy, institutional framework for the human right to water and sanitation in chosen country. Due class 5.

Desk review (45%): Final desk review draws on the two fact papers and reports on the status of safe water and appropriate sanitation in the chosen country/region, analyzes how to improve water and sanitation policy and offers policy recommendations. Due class 6.

In-class final quiz (25%): You are given reading questions/study guidelines to review the key topics we studied and need to provide short answers to questions in class 7.

Late papers or missed exams. Assignments are expected to be turned in on time. If you are ill or have another serious reason for turning in a paper later, please contact either of the two professors in advance of the deadline. Assignments turned in late without advance permission may result in a lower grade.

University notices: 1. If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately; 2. You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty are subject to possible judicial action. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about our expectations, please ask. Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source. This means that you must use footnotes and quotation marks to indicate the source of any phrases, sentences, paragraphs or ideas found in published volumes, on the internet, or created by another student.

CLASS SESSIONS

CLASS 1. RIGHT TO WATER & WATER ECOLOGY OVERVIEW

Global Water Ecology, Availability of Water and Sanitation
  1. Water: The singular nature of this essential resource; review of global water cycles, sources and uses of water; water in industry and agriculture (blue vs. green water); ways to conserve water; transnational water issues
  2. Sanitation: Why we include sanitation when we talk about water

Right to Water and Sanitation in the Post-2015 Development Agenda
  1. Water and sanitation as public policy concerns and human rights
  2. Rights-based approach to water and sanitation: evolution, rationale and criticism
Required Readings:


Please read:

Part 1 What is the Right to Water? Pages 3-17
Part 3 What are the Obligations on States and Responsibilities of Others? P. 25-38


Recommended Links and Tools

(Central UN platform for water issues) UN Water [http://www.unwater.org/home/en/](http://www.unwater.org/home/en/)

(For visualization of water stress) Growing Blue [http://growingblue.com/the-growing-blue-tool/](http://growingblue.com/the-growing-blue-tool/) choose a country to see water concerns

(Practitioner perspectives) UN Practitioner’s Portal on Human Rights Based Approaches to Programming [http://hrbaportal.org/](http://hrbaportal.org/)

CLASS 2. WATER QUALITY AND GEOGRAPHIC ACCESSIBILITY

Water Quality
1. Global standards for water quality – “safe” drinking water
2. Overview of hazards affecting water safety
3. Key water-borne pathogens: natural history, prevalence, diseases, detection, and treatment
4. Toxins

Geographic Accessibility
1. Global standards for geographic accessibility and why they are linked to quality
2. Global standards for minimum amounts of water available per person per day
3. Water capture and storage for personal use

Required Readings:

Familiarize yourself with UN water reports from lead UN Agencies at: 
http://www.unwater.org/publications/en/ including


UN WATER, *Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (GLAAS) 2014 Report*, available at 

**Recommended**

WHO Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality 

**CLASS 3. PROTECTING WATER SOURCES & SDG ON WATER**

Protecting Water Sources
1. Protecting surface waters: monitoring, minimizing, and mitigating sedimentation, pathogens, and chemical pollution in streams, rivers, lakes.
2. Protecting underground sources: assessing and managing groundwater
3. Water purification – centralized systems and point-of-use (in home)
4. Protecting the path: water from source to consumption, different water delivery systems

Sustainable Development Goal for Water and Sanitation
1. Transitioning from MDGs to SDGs
2. SDG Formulation, Targets, Indicators and Means of Implementation

**Required Readings:**


UN Water Statistics, familiarize yourself with water statistical information, 

National Ground Water Association. 2009. Groundwater Protection, 
http://wellowner.org/water-quality/groundwater-protection/

Olson, Eric. “Illustrated Guide to Biosand Filters” PowerPoint


UN Water. Water in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development http://www.unwater.org/sdgs/en/ (click on all the links on the left)

Recommended:


CLASS 4. ECONOMIC ISSUES: COST RECOVERY, WATER AS A COMMODITY, PRIVATE SECTOR ROLE

Cost Recovery, Private Service Providers
1. Private service providers, utilities, government and civil society
2. Financing first costs, maintenance costs, expansion of service costs
3. Pricing schemes

Affordability and Water Privatization
1. Establishing standards of affordability
2. Contestation over water privatization: case of Bolivia
3. Remunicipalization trends

Required Readings:


**Recommended Readings**

UN Water for Life Decade. Financing Water. 


**CLASS 5. PARTICIPATION AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Participation
1. Importance of participation, when is it effective, access to information
2. Barriers to participation: the case of breaking the sanitation taboo

Non-discrimination
1. Attention to vulnerable groups
2. Water, sanitation and gender

**Required Readings:**


UNDP. 2011. Fighting Corruption in the Water Sector: Methods, Tools and Good Practices (read executive summary)

UN Water. Gender, Water and Sanitation 
CLASS 6. SOFT WATER PATHS AND TRENDS IN WATER DIPLOMACY


UN Watercourses Convention Enters into Force

CLASS 7. FINAL QUIZ AND DESK REVIEW DISCUSSION

Two Water Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cool Clear Water</th>
<th>At Blackwater Pond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many a time i walked</td>
<td>At Blackwater Pond the tossed waters have settled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A well beaten track</td>
<td>after a night of rain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my search for water</td>
<td>I dip my cupped hands. I drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool clear water</td>
<td>a long time. It tastes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was hot and dry</td>
<td>like stone, leaves, fire. It falls cold</td>
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<tr>
<td>The sun hung high</td>
<td>into my body, waking the bones. I hear them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When i searched for water</td>
<td>deep inside me, whispering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool clear water</td>
<td>oh what is that beautiful thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mischief', the blue healer and i</td>
<td>that just happened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searched low and high</td>
<td>Mary Oliver</td>
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<tr>
<td>So we could taste the water</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cool clear water</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The creek we found</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low in the ground</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We bathed ourselves with water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life giving water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cool clear water</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Death will come with the setting sun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without the taste of water</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cool clear life giving water</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cool clear water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When life began and did arise</td>
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<tr>
<td>From the embrace of water</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Cool clear water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cool clear water</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Written and revised July 2007</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Allan James Saywell</td>
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