

**Full Course Title:** The National Security Archive: Access to Information and Human Rights in the Americas

**Course Title for Registration System:** NSA: Accss to Info/HR in Amer

**Course Number:** SIPA9000.017

**Faculty Advisor:** James Green

**Columbia Email Address:**

**Meeting Date/Times:** Fridays 9:00AM – 10:50AM

**Location:** TBD

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Credits:** 3

**Course Overview:**

**Brief description of client:**

**The National Security Archive** is a non-governmental, non-profit research institute and advocacy organization based at George Washington University in Washington, DC, that campaigns for the citizen's right to know, investigates U.S. national security and foreign policy, and uses the Freedom of Information Act to obtain and publish declassified U.S. documents. Founded in 1985 by journalists and historians, the National Security Archive has established a track record of credible, award-winning investigative journalism, scholarship, human rights and openness advocacy.

Within the Archive, the **Evidence Project** works with human rights groups, truth commissions and prosecutors to obtain government records from secret archives that shed light on state violence in Latin America. Recent developments in the region – such as the rise of human rights litigation, the emergence of military and police archives, and the passage of freedom of information laws – have permitted investigators to press local governments for documentary evidence related to human rights crimes in ways never before imaginable. The Evidence Project seeks to take advantage of these trends to demonstrate how the right to information and the right to truth are at the core of the human rights struggle for accountability.

**Summary of project:**

Since 2002, six countries in Latin America have passed Freedom of Information laws that explicitly prohibit using secrecy to withhold information related to human rights abuses and crimes against humanity. But if governments can no longer shield themselves from human rights inquiries with national security claims, does that mean information is now being made available for human rights cases as a result? **The National Security Archive**, the Client for this Capstone Project, seeks to evaluate if and how the laws have impacted human rights investigations and court cases. Are the laws giving investigators new leverage to request information? Do prosecutors and judges understand the provisions? Are there court rulings that reflect the use of government information used as evidence in

human rights criminal cases?

The objective of the Capstone project is to produce an analysis of the impact of current Freedom of Information laws on national efforts to uncover information about past human rights crimes. The project will examine three case studies -- Mexico, Peru and Brazil - to evaluate the extent to which human rights organizations have obtained official documentation in support of their investigations into gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity. Mexico and Peru both passed federal access to information laws in 2002, and have had almost a decade of practice using the laws to obtain records and government data. Brazil is in the middle of a national debate about whether to pass its own access to information law, and as such will be used by the project to assess the creative legal strategies required by investigators to obtain information without recourse to a dedicated law. The analysis produced by Capstone students will serve as an advocacy tool for openness and human rights activists, and will help the Evidence Project design an action plan to improve human rights accountability in the Americas.

**Deliverables to client:**

- Week of January 23rd: Client meets with capstone team
- February 6th: Detailed work plan finalized
- March 5th: Draft report outline
- Week of March 20th: Capstone team briefs client of project's progress
- Week of April 14th: Written draft report submitted to client
- Week of April 27th: Capstone team brief client of findings
- Before April 30th: Final report

**Special skills/knowledge needed by team members:**

Candidates should have strong research, analytical and writing skills and be relatively fluent in Spanish or Portuguese. They must be familiar with Latin America and have a basic understanding of the human rights history in the region. Experience in interviewing subjects is a plus.

**Initial meeting(s) with your student team in late November or early December, if applicable:**

**Dates for meetings with client, if already scheduled:**

**Field component:** Travel to Peru, Mexico, and Brazil.

Please note: Students who participate in a capstone workshop that involves international travel will be charged a course fee of \$250 at the outset of the capstone project which will be included in their student bill.

Additionally, travel is contingent upon the conditions within the country during the expected dates of travel. If the faculty advisor and administration determine that the conditions within the country could put students in physical danger, then the travel will not occur and students will be refunded the \$250 course fee.

**Student selection:** [All eligible students may apply for up to five workshops through a special online application process from October 15<sup>th</sup> until October 31<sup>st</sup>. Assignment of students will be coordinated

by the Office of Academic Affairs, and relevant faculty will be consulted about team membership for their workshop(s).]

**Grading (students receive an individual grade):**

Grades for the workshop will be based on the following criteria:

- Quality of individual written work (10%)
- Quality of participation in class, Peer review (20%)
- Feedback from the client (20%)
- Overall professionalism, including timeliness, ability to work with team, etc. (20%)
- Quality of team's final report and briefing (30%)

**Readings:**

Books may be purchased in the campus bookstore. Articles will be on the course website.

**Capstone Project Seminar Schedule**

**Week #1**                      **Introduction**  
**January 20**

**Seminar Activity:**

Introduction to the course

**Week #2**                      **Human Rights: How we understand the 1970s and 1980s**  
**January 27**

**Seminar Activity:**

- Presentation of the Plan of Action by the Kate Doyle of the National Security Archive
- Discussion of *A Mother's Cry*.

**Required Reading:**

Penna, Lina Sattamini, *A Mother's Cry: A Memoir of Politics, Prison, and Torture during the Brazilian Military Dictatorship*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. **University bookstore.**

**Discussion leader:**\_\_\_\_\_.

**Week #3**                      **Truth and Reconciliation Process and the Archives**  
**February 3**

**Seminar Activity:**

- Division of the class into three working groups to discuss the implementation plan
- Discussion of the week's reading. **Discussion leaders:**\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Required Readings:**

Excerpt from the report of the Historical Clarification Commission, *Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio* (in Spanish). **On course website.**

Greg Grandin, "The Instruction of Great Catastrophe: Truth Commissions, National History, and State Formation in Argentina, Chile, and Guatemala," *American Historical Review* (February 2005), 110: 1. **On course website.**

Kate Doyle, "The Atrocity Files: Deciphering the archives of Guatemala's dirty war," *Harper's Magazine* (Dec. 2007). **On course website.**

Antonio González Quintana, *Políticas Archivísticas para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (Paris: Consejo Internacional de Archivos, 2008). **On course website.**

Verne Harris, "'They Should Have Destroyed More': The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990-1994" in *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society*, ed. by Richard J. Cox and David A. Wallace (Westport, CT: 2002, Quorum Books), pp 205-228. **On course website.**

*Assignment for Week #4:* Individual readings of about country focus and the development of working group bibliographies

#### **Week #4                      Justice**

February 10

##### Seminar Activity:

Seminar discussion on week's reading. **Discussion leaders:** \_\_\_\_\_ and

- \_\_\_\_\_.
- Detailed work plan finalized
- Students report on their bibliographies and individual readings

##### Required Readings:

Naomi Roht-Arriaza, *The Pinochet Effect: Transitional Justice in the Age of Human Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: U Penn Press, 1985). **Entire book. Available in University bookstore.**

Cath Collins, *Post-Transitional Justice: Human Rights Trials in Chile and El Salvador* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), pp. 1-35, **On course website.**

Kate Doyle and Jesse Franzblau, "[Archival Evidence of Mexico's Human Rights Crimes: The Case of Aleida Gallangos](#)," Web posting for the National Security Archive, March 9, 2010. **On course website.**

Inter-American Court ruling: [Case of Gomes Lund et al. \("Guerrilha de Araguaia"\) v. Brazil](#), Judgment of November 8, 2010 – read especially, Chapter IX, "Right to Freedom of Thought and Expression, to a Fair Trial, and to Judicial Protection," pp. 183-232. **On course website.**

#### **Week #5                      Access to Information**

February 17

##### Seminar Activity:

- Seminar discussion on week's readings. **Discussion leader:** \_\_\_\_\_.
- Students report on their bibliographies and individual readings

##### Required Readings:

Greg Michener, "The Surrender of Secrecy: Explaining the Emergence of Strong Access to Information Laws In Latin America," PhD diss. University of Texas, Austin (May 2010). Selections **On course website.**

Mexico's Freedom of Information law: "[Ley Federal de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública](#)," approved June 10, 2002. **On course website.**

**Week #6**                      **Field Research: Obstacles and Solutions**

February 24:

*Seminar Activity:*

Project update: obstacles and solutions

**Week #7**                      **Preparing a Report**

March 2

*Seminar Activity:*

Draft report outline due: Introduction, outline of report, related literature

**Week #8**                      **Field Research**

March 9

*Seminar Activity:*

Field planning

**Week #9**                      **Spring Recess**

March 16

No class: Spring Recess

**Week #10**                      **Field Research**

March 23:

No class. Students returning from field and report writing

**Week #11**                      **Reporting Back**

March 30

*Seminar Activity:*

Report from countries (Representative of National Security Archive present).

**Week #12**                      **Draft Report I**

April 6

*Seminar Activity:*

Students present first draft of report

**Week #13**                      **Draft Report II**

April 13

*Seminar Activity:*

Students present draft of report

**Week #14**                      **Final Report**

April 27

Seminar Activity:

Final report due

**Briefings to client**

**\*Academic Integrity Statement\*:**

The School of International & Public Affairs does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct will be subject to the Dean's Disciplinary Procedures. Cut and paste the following link into your browser to view the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct online.

[http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources\\_services/student\\_affairs/academic\\_policies/deans\\_discipline\\_policy.html](http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources_services/student_affairs/academic_policies/deans_discipline_policy.html)

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research:

[http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources\\_services/student\\_affairs/academic\\_policies/code\\_of\\_conduct.html](http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources_services/student_affairs/academic_policies/code_of_conduct.html)

Violations of the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct should be reported to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.