Human Rights and Business  
Haas School of Business, UC-Berkeley  
Faris Natour and Roger McElrath

Course: UGBA196-3  
Spring 2015  
Units: 2

Course Description

Conventional wisdom has long been that the social responsibility of business is merely to increase its profits and provide jobs. Today, the idea that business has human rights responsibilities – moral and/or legal – is steadily gaining acceptance, and there is a strong business case for companies to address human rights risks.

High profile cases such as poor working conditions in the electronics supply chain, business involvement in government surveillance, and environmental degradation from major energy projects have put human rights squarely on the business agenda. Major human rights organizations such as Amnesty International now monitor and report on human rights abuses by companies. A large and growing number of multinational corporations have adopted human rights policies, report on their human rights performance and employ human rights experts.

Through lectures, class discussions, case studies, and guest speakers, this course is designed to:

- Provide students with a basic understanding of the international human rights framework and how business can impact and advance human rights. Students will also acquire a firm grasp of the steps necessary for companies to minimize human rights risks and maximize opportunities for positive impact.
- Describe and assess the ways in which companies manage human rights issues, and the considerations involved in embedding human rights in corporate culture.
- Examine the scope of businesses’ human rights responsibility and how it differs from the government’s, the development of global standards, and the strategies employed by civil society to address the human rights impact of corporate activities.
- Encourage students to develop critical thinking skills in the area of human rights and business.

Classroom discussion will include a review of major cases involving companies, standards and trends in human rights and business; human rights issues facing business operations at home and abroad; the growing public demand for greater corporate accountability; strategies of civil society groups to hold companies accountable; collaborative efforts of business and non-profit organizations; and other issues business managers must deal with in their day-to-day work. Through guest lectures students will have the opportunity to engage first hand with business managers and human rights advocates dealing with these issues.

Faris Natour has spent more than a decade working at the intersection of business and human rights. He leads the global human rights practice at BSR (www.bsr.org), a global consultancy and business network. Faris advises multinational companies on human rights strategy, policy development and human rights due diligence. Prior to joining BSR, Faris spent four years with Calvert Group, where he led investment analysis of corporate human rights performance. Faris has co-taught a business and human rights course at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights. Faris received law degrees from George Washington University Law School and Universitaet Regensburg, Germany.

Roger McElrath has extensive professional experience delivering impactful consulting and research services to companies and other organizations on critical social, community, and environmental issues. His work at BSR in the area of human rights has included a leadership role in developing and implementing methodologies for calculating living wages in multiple countries, assisting in the development of a human rights assessment tools for the extractives and agricultural industries, conducting field-based human rights risk assessments, and providing detailed advice to companies on the content and implementation of supply chain codes of conduct. Roger holds a Master’s degree from the George Washington University in International Affairs.