Human Rights Studies at Columbia University

The Human Rights Studies Master's Program (HRSMA) at Columbia University is a launchpad for students committed to understanding the political, economic, sociocultural, environmental, and technological challenges to human rights and social justice in the United States and internationally.

The program, offered by the Institute for the Study of Human Rights, has a reputation for academic excellence and a long-standing commitment to the interdisciplinary study of human rights and social justice, with an emphasis on connecting theory and practice.

Students examine key concepts, norms, institutions, and movements in the field, and critically engage with human rights issues of local, national, and global significance. Working under the guidance of leading human rights scholars, you will produce innovative research and gain essential skills and knowledge that will set you apart in this competitive and ever evolving field.

What Sets the HRSMA Degree Apart

Flexible

- Complete courses at ISHR and across Columbia's schools and departments.
- Tailor your academic studies to the human rights themes, topics and questions of greatest relevance to you.

Critical & Interdisciplinary

- Critically examine human rights and social justice issues through the lens of different disciplines and a range of methodologies.

Grounded in Theory & Practice

- Gain essential skills, experience, and knowledge.
- Learn to apply human rights-based approaches to practice.

Located in a Global Campus in NYC

- Join a uniquely vibrant academic and professional community.
- Explore all New York City has to offer.

Apply here by February 19, 2026

For inquiries about the program, please email us at humanrightsed@columbia.edu or schedule a prospective student call with a program representative here.

Columbia University ISHR institute for the study of human rights

What Our Faculty Have to Say

"In recent years, Columbia University has emerged as the epicenter of questions central to the study of human rights: around speech, access to space, and the links between power and culture. With this, the courses and topics of study in our HRSMA program are both urgent and timely, equipping our students to become engaged members in their communities, and grounded and thoughtful researchers within academia more broadly." - **Dr. Shourideh C. Molavi, Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Human Rights and Director of Graduate Studies**

"We have students with such an incredible range of experiences and perspectives, including some deep lived-expertise in human rights. I think this opportunity to learn from each other, when effectively facilitated, can be among the most powerful aspects of the program." - **Dr. Glenn Mitoma, Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Human Rights and Director of Undergraduate Studies**

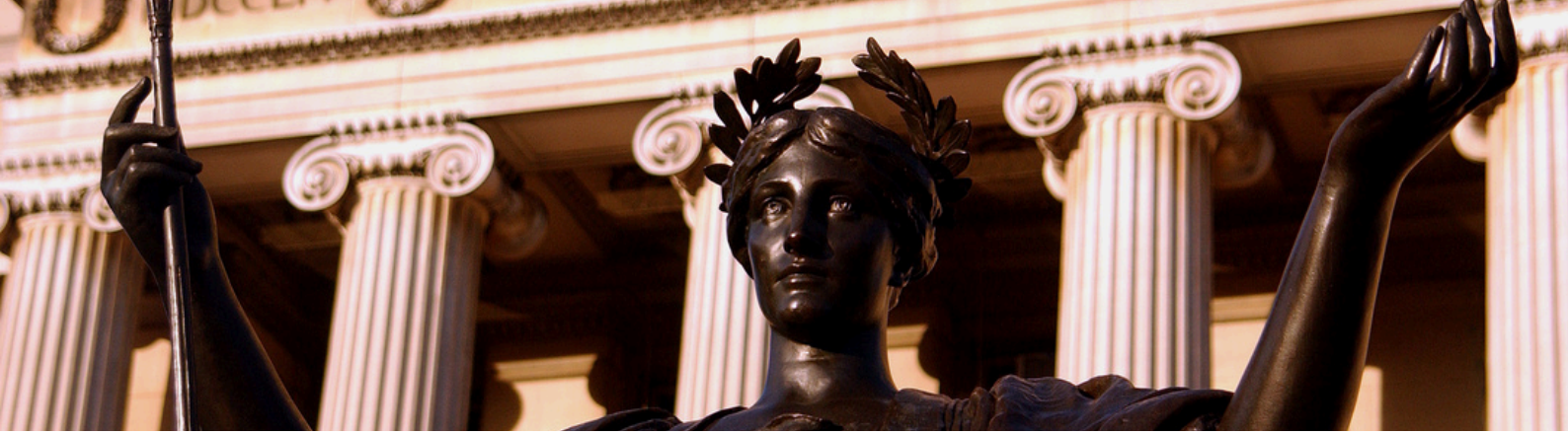
How Our Students Make a Difference

Taylor Rae Almonte-Roman

Alberta Christina Cahya Pertiwi

Taylor Rae Almonte-Roman, was selected to receive one of the Social Justice Mini-Grants for her podcast, On the Outside. Reflecting on her motivation for starting the podcast, Taylor shares: “After growing up in a predominantly white community and experiencing racism, discrimination, and ostracization throughout my youth, I was moved to create a space for people to share their stories of being marginalized. I wrote over one hundred issues of a weekly anti-racism newsletter and blog from 2020-2024 and was inspired to transform that passion project into *On the Outside*, the podcast where we talk about all of the ways we’ve been made to feel left out.”

Alberta Christina Cahya Pertiwi’s research focuses on Indigenous issues and sustainable development. When asked about her favorite moment in the program, Alberta shares: “One of the most memorable experiences I cherish is the field research I conducted for my thesis. I had the privilege of interacting with numerous Indigenous women hailing from diverse regions. This invaluable experience significantly enriched my knowledge, honed my skills, and deepened my understanding of my own positionality within the context of my research.”



Meet Our Alumni

Tanya Kotelnykova (right) with Gergana Halpern, Director of Education Programs

Tetiana (Tanya) Kotelnykova, HRSMA ‘23, is a recipient of the Scholarship for Displaced Students, a highly competitive opportunity, which enables displaced students to pursue higher education at Columbia University. During her studies Tanya launched a mentorship program for Ukrainian youth called MentorUkraine and later co-founded Brave Generation to expand support provided to displaced Ukrainians beyond education. Born and raised in Donetsk, Ukraine, Tanya left her hometown, which was occupied by Russian forces during the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. She fled Ukraine after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. In the HRSMA program, Tanya focused on issues of social inequality, human rights in the context of war, and Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet space. Her research examined the obligation of the occupying power to ensure the right to water, and Russian education policies in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Tanya was selected as a recipient of the GSAS Outstanding Recent Alumni Award and the Davis Fellowship Award.

Maria Rohani

Maria Rohani, HRSMA ‘17, is a seasoned human rights practitioner with over a decade of experience ranging across philanthropy, international development, big tech, UN agencies, and grassroots organizations. She currently serves as the Case and Policy Officer at Oversight Board and has previously held roles at Google, UN Women and CARE, among others. Maria is deeply passionate about technology, gender justice, and social movements. In 2024, she returned to ISHR to lead a workshop, titled "Building A Human Rights Career Beyond the Traditional Path," as part of Institute’s Human Rights Training Series. During this interactive training, Maria introduced students to career opportunities outside of the mainstream human rights field, provided guidance on how to leverage a human rights degree in diverse sectors, and offered advice on developing strategies for a successful job search.

Julie Ciccolini

Julie Ciccolini, HRSMA ’18, has dedicated her career to building technology to advance human rights. She is the CEO and Founder of Techtivist, a software firm dedicated to empowering human rights defenders. After graduating from Columbia, she was a founding member of the Digital Investigations Lab at Human Rights Watch, a first of its kind initiative to apply emerging technology to bolster remote investigations into human rights abuses in over 90 countries. In her previous role at The Legal Aid Society, Julie designed software to identify and expose police misconduct, which prevented numerous wrongful convictions and sparked a movement to reform police secrecy. In 2020, Julie became the Director of Law Enforcement Accountability at the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, where she created and directed The Full Disclosure Project to expand her software nationwide. In 2022, Julie founded Techtivist to fill a critical need in the human rights community for innovative software solutions that drive meaningful change. She was awarded the 2022 Outstanding Recent Alumni Award from Colombia University.

Alumni Connections

HRSMA alumni pursue careers in the United States and around the world, working in positions as wide-ranging as research, policy, advocacy, programs, grassroots organizing, and online trust and safety, among many others. Their skills and expertise drive the work of organizations in all sectors - from NGOs, UN agencies, and governments, to think tanks, philanthropies, social movements, and educational institutions, to the private sector. Alumni are a valued and engaged part of the ISHR community, running workshops, sharing career advice, and serving as mentors to current students and recent graduates.

Alumni Placement by Sector

40.6% Non-Profit/NGOs

19.7% Government/Public Interest

21.7% Business/Private Sector

10.2% Further Graduate Studies

3.1% Higher Ed Administration

2.4% K-12 Education

2.3% Academia

Frequently Offered ISHR Courses

- Introduction to Human Rights
- International Human Rights Law
- Human Rights Research Seminar
- NGOs and the Human Rights Movement
- Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights
- Children's Rights Advocacy
- Indigenous Rights & Settler Colonialism in North America
- Socio-Economic Rights
- Human Rights in the Anthropocene
- Human Rights and Human Wrongs
- Refugees, Citizenship, Migration
- Human Rights, Activism & the US Carceral State
- Advocacy for Socio-Economic Rights
- Climate Justice
- Beyond Human Rights Critique
- Human Rights in the United States
- International Humanitarian Law & Human Rights
- Human Rights and Education
- Borders, Surveillance, Rights
- Human Rights and Urban Public Space
- Digital Advocacy for Human Rights: Social Media & Open Source Intelligence
- Oral History & Justice: Memory, Power & Trauma

Student Perspectives

"I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to study and work alongside such amazing and smart peers." - **Carly Sandstrom, HRSMA '24**

"The two reasons I wanted to return to school for a master's degree were to make new friends and to learn more about something I'm passionate about. Both of these hopes not only came true, but completely surpassed my expectations!" - **Kylie Clark, HRSMA '24**

"Studying at ISHR has been an enriching and transformative experience. My peers' diverse perspectives and unwavering dedication have profoundly influenced my understanding of human rights. Engaging in thoughtful discussions and collaborative projects with such a talented and supportive group has deepened my knowledge and inspired me to strive for meaningful change. I am eager to see the significant impacts we will make in the field of human rights, driven by the collective energy and commitment we have cultivated together." - **Sky Lingo, HRSMA '24**

Visit www.humanrightscolumbia.org/education for more information.