**Do rights matter?**
Rights seem to be everywhere in American politics. They have been at the center of struggles for racial and gender equality, abortion, marriage equality, even foreign policy matters, such as the treatment of enemy combatants. The use of rights to mobilize interests and pursue policy goals, however, is highly controversial. Some argue that rights are an essential tool for social change: they provide a means to raise consciousness, challenge entrenched practices, and build pressure for reform. Others argue that reliance on rights is counter-productive, distracting groups with limited resources to costly litigation at the expense of more effective modes of advocacy (such as lobbying and grass roots mobilizing) and/or engendering backlash by powerful interests. Others insist that framing social problems in terms of individual rights distorts our understanding of the underlying issues, limits our capacity for collective action, and undermines social solidarity.

This course takes on this debate and asks: do rights matter? Do they deliver on their promise as leverage for social change? Or are they ultimately counter-productive?

This course fulfills the Law and Public Policy subfield requirement or an upper division POSC elective.