

## Call for Papers on “Empirical Approaches to Human Rights Law and the Rise of ‘Indicators’”

### AALS January 2019 meeting

The AALS International Human Rights Section and the Law and Social Sciences Section solicit papers and works-in-progress on empirical approaches to human rights law, with a preference for papers on human rights indicators (see description below). Submissions should be sent to Sharmila Murthy at [smurthy@suffolk.edu](mailto:smurthy@suffolk.edu) by **August 1, 2018**. Instead of a full-length paper, please submit a concept note of 5-15 double-spaced pages that contains a summary of the key ideas. If you have already written a full-length paper, please send an excerpt of the paper with an explanatory introduction.

#### *Panel description:*

In an era where facts are frequently replaced with “alternative” facts, there is a growing need for empirical approaches to the study of law. With the changing role of the U.S. in the global arena, this is especially true in the field of international human rights. How can a country’s human rights violations be objectively identified? How can one country’s compliance with complex human rights treaty obligations be measured and compared with those of other countries? Because traditional qualitative case studies do not necessarily provide an effective means for comparison, there has been growing interest in the creation of “human rights indicators.”

At the intersection of law and social science, human rights indicators involve the translation of legal obligations into quantitative or qualitative metrics, which then allow countries to be compared with one another over time. Indicators of civil and political rights and also economic and social rights can be powerful advocacy tools because of their potential to influence behavior—i.e. no country wants to be ranked last. Examples include the Social and Economic Rights Fulfillment Index, the Freedom House Civil Rights and Political Liberties Scales, and the U.S. State Department’s Trafficking in Persons report. The U.N. Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights’ 2012 report on “Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation” attempts to meet the growing demand for guidance on how to construct human rights indicators. Scholars in both law and social science have also begun studying how human rights indicators are constructed and deployed in order to understand when they are effective and when they may provide a misleading picture of progress.

This panel seeks to contribute to the growing debate over how human rights indicators can and should be used to identify human rights violations and to assess progress with treaty obligations over time. Our goal is to have a moderated conversation with the panelists and audience that goes beyond simply critiquing existing indicators. Instead, we would like to create a forum for those who are thinking critically and innovatively about how to measure human rights compliance.

Two well-known human rights scholars have already agreed to participate in this panel:

- [Beth Simmons, Andrea Mitchell University Professor of Law and Political Science, University of Pennsylvania](#)
- [Margaret L. Satterthwaite, Professor of Clinical Law, and Faculty Director and Co-Chair, Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, New York University Law School](#)

At least one additional panelist will be selected from this Call for Papers.