

Periodic course evaluation of SOSGEO4801 Social Movements in the Age of Migration Autumn 2019

Course conveyor: Mette Andersson

Course description and attendance:

SOS4801 Social Movements in the Age of Migration is a new specialization course at the 4000-level in the Master's degree programme in sociology, starting autumn 2019. The course is taught in English. It is organised as 11 seminars including lectures and discussions. The exam consist of a term paper (4000 words +/- 10%).

The course description focuses on how migration and diversity are among the most contested and polarizing issues in the contemporary world, and specific issues such as religion/ethnicity, antiracism, citizenship, fractions at work/class, populism, gender, social media, and emotions were discussed in designed seminars. The common glue of the seminar was two textbooks on social movements, one general, and one focusing on identity dilemmas in social movements. The students were from the start instructed that they could choose to write about other issues than migration-related movements, such as for example gender movements or climate movements. The requirement was that they needed to relate to one/more general theories about social movements from the curriculum and they referred to empirical articles in the specific domain they focused on.

Originally more than 20 students registered for the course, but many of these never turned up to the first lecture because they also registered for other courses and chose one of the other courses running in the same semester (SOS4013 Klasse og ulikhet – sentrale debatter or SOS4510 Cultural and Political Participation). Before the exam, 14 students were registered. Out of these, 9 students submitted the exam paper. In lectures, attendance varied between 5 and 10 students.

Organization:

The course involved six lecturers at ISS; Kristian Stokke, David Jordhus-Lier, Anniken Hagelund, Kjell Erling Kjellman, Inger Furseth, and Mette Andersson. Mette Andersson was responsible for six of the 11 seminars, and she took part in all seminars to get an overview over the course as a whole. The literature consisted of two main textbooks on social movements by Nick Crossley and McGarry and Jasper, and one anthology and several empirical/theoretical articles available digitally through the UiO library.

The three first lectures focused on the general literature of social movements, providing an overview of the development of the field over time, and the specific theoretical traditions and conceptual developments. The next seven lectures focused on specific themes, based on empirical and theoretical articles on these issues and the last seminar was an open seminar in which students could discuss their dispositions and ideas for the essay. For lectures 5-10 the students were divided into groups of two and given the responsibility to start the lecture by introducing today's theme through a relevant video/debate and to construct 2-3 questions for further discussion in the class (see last page for instructions to students about this).

Student evaluation:

The students were asked to fill in the evaluation questionnaire in the last ordinary lecture, but the link to the questionnaire did not work. We corrected this, and asked the students to fill in the questionnaire on a later occasion. Unfortunately, only two students followed the request. These students had followed all lectures, and they can presumably say something relevant about how the course functioned. Both regarded the information about the course as sufficient, and they clicked the option “passably” for to what extent they had read the course texts in parallel with the lectures. On the question of what they thought about the curriculum they stated that there very many interesting topics related to current issues. One thought the curriculum for the first lectures (the general texts about social movement theories) was a bit “dry” compared with the rest of the curriculum, and both clicked the box “neither easy nor difficult” when asked about how easy or difficult they regarded the lecture series. One clicked “satisfied” and one “neutral” with the lecture series as a whole, and both said it was easy to ask the lecturers questions and that the lectures presented the course content quite clearly. Both pointed out that it would have been nice with somewhat more class discussion and interaction during the seminars, noting also that this depended on the number of students following each lecture. One said she/he found the course very interesting with current themes, a broad global focus reminding him/her on why she/he studies sociology (in order to use sociological theorizing and research to understand what happens, has happened and might happen in the world). On the question of what was good, one answer was “good lectures by all, and interesting curriculum”, another was “topics, video presentations at the beginning of class”. In regards to the question about what worked ‘less well’, one answer was “would have been useful to get more supervision and talk about the exam paper during the course” and another was “lectures very focused on literature”.

Teacher comments/evaluation.

The (two...) student evaluations fit with my overall impression of the course. The three introductory theoretical lectures were perhaps a bit drier and close to the curriculum, partly because we had to cover quite much of the general theoretical literature in three lectures. Varying a bit according to the number of students attending, I was satisfied with the discussion in class, although I agree that we could have spent somewhat more time on discussions in the seminars. Students seemed to be interested and responding to the themes of the different lectures, and the other lecturers teaching also seemed to enjoy talking with the class.

For the next time (I hope we can teach this course again) I would try to provide more time for class discussions, and I want to continue with the student responsibility theme (see appendix for instructions) which students responded positively to, and took seriously. The problem with this, however, is that so few of the students registered for the course (more than 20) chose to turn up for the first lecture (10 students). I believe that more students could have chosen to follow this course if not two of the most competitive courses also were taught the same semester. Specifically the course on social class was a strong competitor among the Norwegian sociology students, but also the course on cultural and political participation partly overlaps as it covers some literature on social movements and political participation. It would have been preferable if the social movement course was taught in a semester where one of these courses not were optional. Students who both are interested in social inequality and social change (movements) would then have the possibility to choose both courses.

The exam essay is in my opinion a good exam alternative, although I would use more time in the middle of the seminar series next time to discuss themes for essays. One option could be that it should be mandatory to outline a preliminary research question and a short sketch for the essay midway in the seminar series. I am aware that some of the other voluntary 4000-courses demand approval from teachers on the research question/case chosen for the exam essay. I will consider this option for the next time.

About the curriculum: The students seemed to enjoy most of the curriculum, but we might consider including literature on other themes than migration/diversity-related movements later on. Several students chose to write about other types of movements, like anti-abortion/pro-abortion, the climate movement, and the movement against toll rings in Norway. If this solution is chosen, the course would be a more general collective action/social movement course that might draw more students. A counter-argument to this is that in relating the course literature to two broad issues (migration, diversity) the different theoretical departures and analyses get more depth in that it is easier to compare them to each other. I would like to maintain the current curriculum for one more year at least.

Overall, my evaluation is that teaching this course has been an interesting and positive experience, and I think that the choice to include several teachers with experience from social movement research and/or migration is a good way to build a broader collective around the broader issue of political sociology in our staff.

Exam results

Among the nine students who submitted their exams, the results (before eventual complaints) were as follows: 1 E, 3 C's, 3 B's, and 2 A's.

Responsibility groups lectures 5-10: student instruction

Each group is responsible for being specifically prepared with regard to the texts for the lecture in question. You shall prepare 2-3 questions for discussion in relation to the texts, and find a case, a video and/or a debate that illustrates the central theme of the lecture. You will start the lecture by introducing your questions and the case, video and/or debate.

The schedule for students responsible for each lecture is removed for anonymity reasons.