

Grading guidelines SUM4200, fall semester, 2019

Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo

Course coordinator: Kristian Bjørkdahl

Lecturers: Kristian Bjørkdahl & Alexander Dunlap

Background

This course takes up key issues in sustainable development. It identifies key systemic features of the Anthropocene era, and highlights how different lives are lived under this new planetary condition. The course explores the complex interplay between different scales and localities, the role of different actors, as well as the relation between research and policy, within the sustainable development agenda. It further aims to give students a keen sense of the problems involved and how they interconnect; an advanced grasp of how those problems have been understood and theorized within social science and humanist scholarship; and the creativity to see how theory can be linked up with practice to create change.

The teaching of the course

The course has consisted of 14 lectures/seminars, 6 group-wise student lectures, as well as 6 «lab» sessions. The lectures have aimed, first, to diagnose our current predicament with regard to the ambition of sustainable development, and then, to present a series of concrete issues which, in various ways, illustrate the overarching challenges of this field. The lectures have been mainly problem-based, and have focused on making links across issues, locations, and scales. The student lectures, meanwhile, were designed to challenge students to find ways to cooperate in finding solutions to some of the problems outlined in the lectures proper, as well as prompting them to design and deliver a lecture of their own. The labs have been designed in part to teach students advanced skills of academic reading and writing, as well as to offer input and assistance in students' work with the course assignments.

Evaluation type and criteria

The evaluation is based on a portfolio, for which students prepare, a total of 6 written assignments, including a written reflection about preparing and giving the student lecture. Each of the assignments is submitted twice, first ca. one per week, and then, the whole series anew, at the end of the course. In between the first and

second submission, each student shall receive written feedback on the first version of each assignment.

The student portfolios are evaluated either as a “pass” or a “fail,” and the evaluation should include certain *knowledge* aspects, certain *skill* aspects, and – most importantly – the student’s *progression* throughout the course.

In the first category, students should show an ability to operationalize each assignment, i.e. make it concrete and appropriately scoped, by defining their particular purpose for each assignment, drawing in the process on the relevant insights and discussions from class, as well as on course literature (and other literature where appropriate or necessary). The ideal portfolio would reflect an ability to see connections between actors and institutions on various scales and in different localities, and also, to see how similar dynamics cut across several of the issues dealt with in the course. As many of these connections can be assumed to become clear only as the course progresses, one would expect the student’s grasp of the complexity of the issues to increase with each assignment in the portfolio.

In the second category, a good portfolio should incorporate insights offered in the labs, in particular on academic reading and writing, structuring an argument and an essay, and so on. There is a particular emphasis on *clarity*, i.e. that one is explicit about what one aims to do and how one aims to do it, as well as on *structural coherence*, i.e. that one actually does what one promises to do.

When it comes to progression, it is evaluated as a function of an increasing grasp of the field’s complexity from one assignment to the next, but – more importantly – of the advances made from the first submissions of the separate assignments to the final portfolio. In assessing each student’s progression, special emphasis should be given to how far the student has been able to take account of the feedback (given in response to the first version of the assignments) in the final version of the portfolio, notably, how successful the student is in removing problems pertaining to the ideals mentioned above, *clarity* and *structural coherence*.