

Exam Questions for SGO2500 Fall 2025

About exams at SGO/HGO: A good examination paper contains solid knowledge, logical and coherent reasoning and a systematic structure. The answer to a discussion question/task must examine, analyze, and connect different parts of the curriculum.

1. The answer responds to the question/task given in a precise and exhaustive way.
2. The answer demonstrates knowledge.
3. The answer must be well-written: coherent and using good academic language.
4. Key concepts – those at the core of the answer – must be defined.
5. The answer demonstrates analytical capacity and reflection.

Om eksamen ved SGO/HGO: En god besvarelse inneholder solid kunnskap, logisk argumentasjon og ryddig disposisjon. Besvarelsen av en drøftingsoppgave skal være diskuterende, analytisk og koble ulike deler av pensum.

1. Besvarelsen svarer på oppgaveteksten på en presis og utfyllende måte.
2. Besvarelsen viser kunnskap.
3. Besvarelsen skal være velskrevet: sammenhengende med godt akademisk språk.
4. Viktige begreper - de som er i kjernen av besvarelsen – skal defineres.
5. Besvarelsen skal vise analytiske evne og refleksjon.

This course provides a geographical and critical perspective to global development, with a focus on energy transition processes in and in relation to the Global South. The course aims to provide students with a fundamental understanding of the challenges related to a green energy transition from the perspective of the Global South. Considering the need to divest from fossil energies, energy transitions are at the heart of global sustainable development and debates concerning how to meet current as well as future needs – while at the same time balancing social, economic and ecological considerations. The materiality of different forms of energy not only impact nature and climate; it also shapes conditions for democracy and development. The course looks at historical transitions to fossil energies as well as the discussions on transitions away from fossil energies. The burden and benefits in energy systems and energy transitions are unevenly distributed within and between countries. Peoples of the Global South have less access to energy, while also suffering more from the consequences of climate change, making questions of justice key in debates over energy transitions.

For further detail on learning outcome etc.:

<https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/iss/SGO2500/index.html>

About specific questions/tasks: Students need to answer one question from Part I (long answer) and one question from Part II (short answers) to pass the exam, that is, a total of two answers. Failure to do so implies failing the exam. The first part – the long answer – is about 70 percent of the grade; the second part is about 30 percent.

The aim is that students will be able to apply their knowledge to interpret the world around them. The questions are formulated in such a way that students are given room to structure their answer on their own. Good answers are those explicitly making use of basic concepts and approaches while drawing on cases and examples from readings and lectures. Questions are given in English. Students can choose to respond in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, or English. English terms can be used for those answering in a Scandinavian language

1. LONG-ANSWER QUESTIONS (1500 words) Choose one (1) of the two questions presented below and write an answer of maximum 1500 words based on what you have learned in the course. The course syllabus should inform your answer, but you might also draw on what you have learned in seminars and lectures. Please indicate the question number at the beginning of your answer.

Question 1:

With a particular emphasis on the Global South, elaborate on the ways in which energy systems shape conditions for democracy and development. You might draw on both historical and more contemporary examples in your answer.

Grading guideline for question 1

This question is very open, and the student can approach the question in different ways. Thus, there is no simple answer. However, good answers should make sure to define key concepts in the questions: The energy transition, the Global South and development. There are seldom very strict definitions provided throughout the course, but here are some that could serve as a guide:

- Energy transitions have been addressed in readings and in class as the transition from energies of flow (wind and water) to fossils, and furthermore the transition over to renewables. However, it is important to emphasize that we are still not seeing the transition away from fossil fuels, but rather the addition of renewable sources.
- The Global South is problematized and deconstructed as a concept. Attempts at doing so should be rewarded. The same goes for being specific.
- Development is defined as “good change”. Lower-case and upper-case development: As a verb and as a project stemming from the context of the cold war and decolonization post-WWII.

In the answer, the student is expected to refer to the dynamics described by T. Mitchell in Carbon Democracy and elaborated in the 2nd lecture. The student might also draw on the literature on the resource curse (Ross, Watts & Obi) which point to the correlation between abundant resources and poor conditions for democracy due to, authoritarian regimes, clientelism and corruption (Ross), or voices that underline the importance of historical and social context when assessing the veracity of the resource curse (Watts).

Here I present an elaboration of the narrative of Mitchell, although the candidate is not expected to cover all the following: Coal is seen as foundational for modern democracy, whereas the flow of oil led to more automation and less structural power in the hands of organized labor. Mitchell also points to how the US promoted a European shift to oil and gas through the Marshall plan post-World War 2, pegging the trade to the dollar while also undermining the power of unions. The latter was also the outcome of Thatcher’s political standoff with the coal workers of the UK.

Moreover, candidates might even mention gender equality and how women are particularly vulnerable in areas of energy poverty. Also, certain (both state-) and market led energy-developments might be – and have been – developed without consultation (lecture on green colonialism) which undermine democratic principles. Moreover, development of the capacity to generate energy is not synonymous with this energy reaching everyone, and therefore the matter of access and affordability could be addressed.

While the questions ask about how energy systems shape democracy and development, the long answer format could allow for some slight detours – for instance one could reflect on how social movements and labor unions shape the energy system, e.g. with calls for energy democracy and public ownership.

Overall, weaker candidates – C and below – will either not be able to present the theories of T. Mitchell and democracy, or the literature on the resource curse, in a precise or thorough manner. Weaker answers will not be able to draw parallels between different parts of the syllabus or define key concepts in a satisfactory way.

Question 2:

Throughout the course, we have learned about how both markets and states affect the energy transition. Considering the state-market nexus, please elaborate on how both state- and market-led development of renewable energy can play out. In your answer, you can also take the readings and lectures on solar energy as a point of departure to discuss how different ownership models can either inhibit or promote the sustainable diffusion of solar energy.

Grading guidelines for question 2

Another broad question, allowing the student to draw on a wide array of literature and lectures from the course. A good answer will be able to define the energy transition and then give different examples of state- and market led energy transitions, which was the topic of the 3rd lecture.

An excellent answer will be able to question the boundary between market and state-led development of renewables and showcase how the state can be an important actor in the regulation of – and participant in – markets.

In the third lecture we discussed state led electrification campaigns in both the Soviet Union and the USA, before diving into the topic of de-risking investments (states guaranteeing a certain level of profitability for companies) and how state-owned companies might also go into international markets, like Statkraft in Chile (Heiret 2024). Generally, this question allows the candidate to illustrate North–South relations and asymmetrical power, and to contextualize the differential capacities of states in different regions.

The candidate might also draw on examples of Chile (Furnaro 2020) to describe the state as an active agent and distributor of energy/power –as in Chilean history and as demanded by some activists today, but also as an agent that promotes a neoliberal, market-led roll-out of renewables in the service of extractive industries such as copper (Furnaro 2020). The candidate can furthermore point to Indonesia (Kennedy et al. 2018) for describing how financialization led to very large-scale projects due to the need for economies of scale and low risk investments and thereby shaping the very energy landscapes that are emerging.

While by no means expected, the student might also point to the Marxist approaches to the study of the energy transition, and how investments in renewables might be seen as a spatial fix for capital (Furnaro, drawing on David Harvey, but also mentioned in the reading of Steelman in the context of EVs).

The candidate can point to the fact that capital is scarce in developing countries, and that market-led approaches and actors such as Norfund (who visited in the penultimate lecture) can help attracting additional investments, thus leveraging much needed funds.

The student might also point to how historically slavery involved a certain mode of governing the use of energy (muscle power) and how both markets and states were implicated in colonialism.

Finally, it is also possible to address the question of ownership through the lens of small-scale solar energy, which is drawing on Kirsten Ulsrud's lectures and corresponding readings. There are indications in the literature that a 100% market-led strategy of solar diffusion will have problems with energy access and with waste (see Groenewoudt et al. 2022).

Overall, weaker candidates – C and below – will either not be able to present the aforementioned dynamics in a precise or thorough manner. Weaker answers will not be able to draw parallels between different parts of the syllabus or define key concepts in a satisfactory manner, while also lacking in a nuanced understanding of how state and market forces are intertwined in the energy transition and rolling out of renewables.

2. SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS (500 words)

Choose one (1) of the two questions presented below and write an answer of maximum 500 words based on what you have learned in the course. The course syllabus should inform your answer. Please indicate the question number at the beginning of your answer.

Question 1:

Discuss different ways of understanding transfer of innovations between geographical regions with different contextual conditions, and how such transfer may contribute to inspiration, joint learning, and system innovation among different kinds of actors such as private companies, NGOs, civil society and the state. Reflect briefly on barriers (or inhibitors) for transfer of innovations. You may use examples from the field of small-scale solar electricity systems.

Grading guide for question 1

Since this is a short answer, it is not possible to include all the following points, but the more dense, precise and nuanced the answer is, the better the grade.

An important starting point is the way spatial transfer of innovations/technology has mostly been seen both in research and international cooperation:

- It has commonly been understood as transfer of technical hardware, expertise and financing from external sources into a country – often from the Global North to the Global South.
- Technology transfer has mainly been imagined as coming from a “sending context” to a “receiving context”.
- The social aspects of technology have not been central, such as the ways in which technology may gradually become integrated in society.
- Innovation taking place in the Global South is often ignored.

The points above are treated both in the lecture, Ulsrud et al. (2018) and Kirchherr and Urban (2018).

After presenting one or more of the points mentioned above, the answer should move to alternative ways of understanding transfer of innovations. The article by Ulsrud et al. (2018) and the second lecture are central here, but the first lecture and the articles on energy innovations are also useful.

Some of the following aspects should be mentioned:

- Transfer of innovations can be seen as a movement in the opposite direction – from within a country and outwards, as a search for relevant examples and knowledge by actors who want to learn from innovative solutions (e.g. energy solutions) developed elsewhere.
- Since innovation consists of both social and technical aspects that form “socio-technical systems” such as energy systems, innovation can be seen as “system innovation”. The attempts to build up new societal systems happen in specific geographical settings, influenced by contextual conditions (social, cultural, political, regulatory, etc.)
- When engaged actors study examples elsewhere, they may get inspiration, ideas and new knowledge, and get insights into the lessons learned by involved actors both on success and failure.
- Such inspiration and new knowledge can be fruitful input in innovation processes and new initiatives at “home” and lead to long-term creative processes for involved actors – learning by doing, involving different levels of society. (Gradual “institutionalization” of new energy solutions in government institutions is one example.)
- One advantage of South-South transfer is that there can be important contextual similarities, for instance in people’s energy needs.

There are barriers/inhibitors, especially for such alternative approaches to transfer of innovations: Lacking access to relevant information about examples, high costs of travelling, challenges of getting visa, little funding for relevant research studies, lack of contacts and networks in areas with relevant examples, etc.

Question 2:

Elaborate on how different aspects of justice are relevant for the energy transition. You might address both the production and consumption of energy. Use examples.

Grading guidelines for question 2

A very open question, allowing the candidate to draw on a wide range of course readings and lectures.

Here the candidate is expected to elaborate on justice, drawing on the literature on different ways of approaching justice (Energy, climate justice & just transitions) and how different tenets of justice (restorative, procedural, distributive restorative and recognition) is implicated in the energy transition (Bommel & Höffken 2023).

The candidate has ample opportunity to show a geographical understanding in answering this question, addressing justice in and between countries, who should phase out first (Muttit & Kartha), carbon credits and offsets (Lyons & Westoby 2014).

The candidate might mention the distinction between luxury and survival emissions, as underscored by Sultana (2022), which is important when thinking about justice in consumption. This is also a good place to point to the readings and the lecture on fuel subsidies resistance. For an elaborated list of different aspects related to justice in energy transitions you might consult last the [examination guidelines for the long answer in SGO2500 2024](#). Since this is a short answer, it is not expected, nor possible within the allowed length, to address all elements, but strong answers manage to draw in a wide variety of the topics while addressing them in a precise way.

Climate Justice: Foregrounds the justice impacts of climate change.	Energy Justice: Foregrounds the justice impacts of energy systems, energy technologies, and energy projects.	Just Transitions: Foregrounds the justice impacts of transitioning away from fossil-fuel usage.
	Procedural justice	
	Distributive justice	
	Recognition justice	
	Restorative justice	