

## Course Evaluation SGO2302 – Environment and Society – spring 2021

4. October 2021

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### 1. Course Overview

This course focuses on human-environment relationships and their implications for nature and society. The issue of climate change is used as a focal point for examining the drivers and consequences of environmental change, including relationships to processes such as globalization, urbanization, and land use changes. Scientific concepts, such as the “Anthropocene,” which are increasingly used to describe the nature and extent of contemporary environmental challenges, are explored from a social science perspective. Other topics, such as consumption, energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, impacts, vulnerability, resilience, adaptation and mitigation are introduced and related to the broader debates about transitions and transformations to sustainability. The concept of discourses frames the exploration of human-environment relationship and provides a connecting line across topics throughout the semester.

The lectures, readings and seminars explore in particular how distinct environmental discourses influence (i.e., promote or constrain) understandings and responses to contemporary environmental problems, including the role of beliefs, values, and worldviews in shaping the rules, norms, institutions, policies and power relationships. Students actively engage with debates on and experiments with individual and collective change, and explore what alternative approaches and paradigms have to offer.

The main textbook for the course is Leichenko, R., & O'Brien, K. (2019). *Climate and society: Transforming the future*. John Wiley & Sons. The lecture topics follow largely the chapter structure of the textbook. The course is structured in the following way:

1. The Social Challenge of Environmental Change,
2. Climate Change: is Scientific Knowledge enough?
3. Discourses and Framings of Environmental Problems and Solutions
4. The Role of Worldviews, Beliefs and Emotions
5. The Social Drivers of Environmental Change
6. Biodiversity Loss and Land use Change
7. Climate Change and Energy
8. The Impacts of Climate Change
9. Climate Change and Human Security
10. Adaptation to Environmental Change
11. Transforming the Future

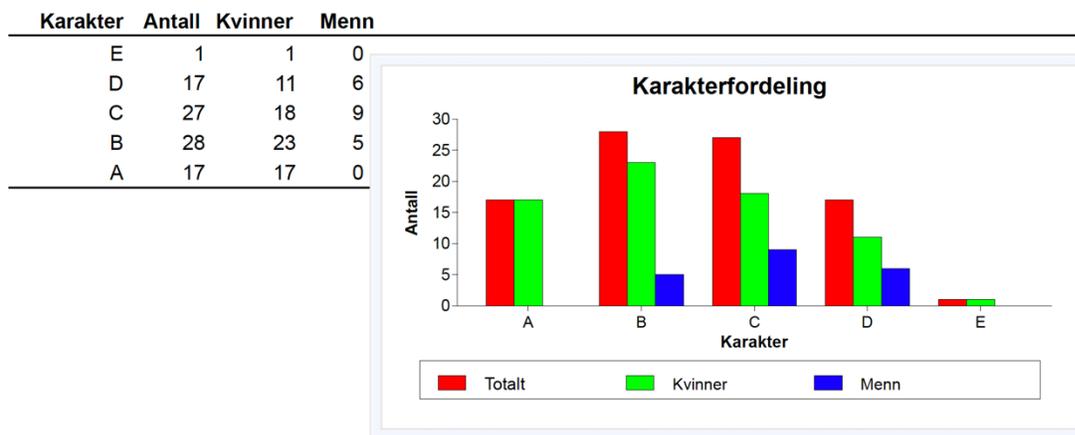
In the Spring of 2021, two instructors and one guest lecturer offered lectures. Karen O'Brien lectured sessions 1-3; Manjana Milkoreit lectured (for the first time) sessions 4-11 with the exception of session 10, which was an external guest lecture by Julia Benz.

Due to Covid-19, all lectures and seminars had to take place virtually, using the Zoom platform.

## 2. Assessment and Grading

Students were invited to participate in a 30-day behavioral change experiment for sustainability transformations ([cChallenge](#)). Exploring the effects of a personal change with relevance for sustainability and developing corresponding stories, this was an opportunity to 'live' some of the challenges and concepts discussed in the class. The cChallenge experience was the subject of a written assignment (reflection paper) students had to submit to be admitted to the final exam. The final exam was a 8-day take-home exam (May 20-28, 2021). Students could choose between three essay questions.

Of the 106 students registered for the class, 90 took the exam; all 90 passed. Grade details are



included below.

50% of students received letter grade B or better (B was the most frequent grade). 30% received a C, 19% a D and 1% an E. There were five grade complaints with the following resolutions (original grade-grade after complaint): D-D, D-C, C-B, E-D, B-B.

## 3. Student Feedback

After the last lecture, students were invited to participate in an online survey (Netskjema) to provide feedback on their course experience. 33 students (37%) participated in this survey. The results are briefly summarized below.

Students were asked “Overall, how would you rate the course from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent)?”. Of all respondents, 88% rated the course 4 (very good) or 5 (excellent). No student scored the course 1 (poor) or 2 (fair).

Overall, how would you rate the course on a scale from 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent). \*

Answer	Number	Percent
1 - Poor	0	0%
2 - Fair	0	0%
3 - Good	4	12.1% 
4 - Very Good	16	48.5% 
5 - Excellent	13	39.4% 

Asking to elaborate on their score, students’ comments included the following:

- It inspires, heals, and have given me a language and an understanding on so many things often crossing my mind. It feels like a really important subject, and I will look at especially activism and lacking of environmental commitment in totally different ways.
- This has been a great course, I only wish I could have taken it in person.
- Overall, the course has provided me with insights that I will bring with me, both in my studies, but most importantly, in my personal life.
- Is is for sure my favourite course so far, even though I did not expect it to be
- It has extended my horizon; agency
- It is an important course, incredibly interesting and well built and taught.

Being asked “What advice would you give future course coordinators of this course?”, select student comments included the following:

- The only problems are the fact there are no physical lectures. it makes it difficult to learn. It doesnt feel like a lecture or a seminar it feels more like a podcast you interact with from time to time. This is not the teacher's fault, only covid
- I think this is a course where the discussions were important, and the good discussion questions were key to make it work, especially with everything being on zoom. I would have liked if the lectures dove even deeper, but that is just a preference as I tend to focus better with fast paced lectures that go beyond the readings.
- Continue with cChallenge, practical experience was very important for me. Also, continue with emphasising the fact that a lot of the readings and informations can be hard to handle, so check in with the students as you did. Thank you for providing a course that I am sure I will never forget!
- I think the lectures were really interesting and left enough room to talk with other students about all the different issues. The presentations were clear and gave another perspective on the themes compared to the readings, and the main aspects of the readings were highlighted, which is helpful.

- The course was great. I would be happy if we used only one platform – either Teams, or Canva; this way, it was a bit messy for me and I never knew where to look. However, it was one of the best online courses I have taken, I can't even imagine how great this course must be in person. Thank you for everything!
- Environment and society was a great book! Keep using that one.
- I have no advice, I thought the course worked well for me so I have no feedback there. Hope it will continue just as it is now, actually :)
- I found some articles very specific and hard to understand. The amount of study is quite a lot, however it was necessary for comprehending the topic in all its different shades.
- attend to the seminars!
- The breakout room discussions were very interesting and allow me to have a larger perspective on the topic of each class.
- God pedagogikk, veldig bra!
- I liked the fact that the professors were passionate about what they teach us. It would have been good to have more time devoted to advising for the exam (for the methodology).

The large majority of students was satisfied with the **SYLLABUS**.

### Syllabus

**What do you think of the syllabus of this course? \***

This course focused on human-environment relationships and their implications for nature and society. The issue of climate change was a focal point for examining the drivers and consequences of environmental change. The course explored how environmental discourses influence understandings and responses to contemporary environmental problems, including the role of beliefs, values, and worldviews in shaping the rules, norms, institutions, policies and power relationships. Students engaged with debates on individual and collective change, and explored what alternative approaches and paradigms have to offer.

Answer	Number	Percent	
Overall, I am satisfied with the syllabus	28	84.8%	
The syllabus works quite well, but could be adjusted a little	5	15.2%	
The syllabus for this topic should be thoroughly revised	0	0%	

Concerning the quality of the **LECTURES**, 75% of students stated that the lectures were very helpful in their learning.

**Please assess to what extent the lectures supported your learning throughout the course. Use a scale from 1 (The lectures were not helpful at all) to 5 (They supported your learning very strongly). \***

You had two different instructors and a guest lecturer, and you might have different assessments for each of their lectures. However, please provide an overall / average ranking for all the lectures you attended.

Answer	Number	Percent	
1 - Not at all	0	0%	
2 - Somewhat	2	6.1%	
3 - Well	5	15.2%	
4 - Strongly	15	45.5%	
5 - Very strongly	10	30.3%	
I have not attended the lectures	1	3%	

Asked to elaborate, students commented:

- I think the lectures were good, and that the discussion points we were given worked well. In some subjects they are too vague, but in this course they gave us a good starting point and got us going.
- Very good and interesting lecture, but sometimes it went a little fast. It would be very helpful if you could manage to hand out the presentations before lectures, so that we could read through it in advance.
- The lectures were really interesting, and it was nice to have the most important issues found in the readings highlighted in the lectures.
- There were some key concepts and notions that were really interesting on an academic matter. But, I personally think that this class is more a kind of introduction to the climate change problem so it was sometimes a bit superficial especially in the critics. There were still some authors who criticized our folk society model and that we rely on, which was highly appreciable. Sometimes I felt it a little bit like "coaching" with all the introspective questions and the focus on personal change. But a very good point of the lectures is that Manjana made it interesting, so it was easy to focus :)
- A lot of interesting topics which made me reflect a lot around climate change and how to face it in the future
- I really liked all of the lecturers as they are all so skilled and engaging to listen to. The only thing that could be changed in my opinion is the amount of breakout rooms. Assuming things will be back to normal next time this course is running, it will not be an issue. However, since there are seminars, I prefer lectures where the lecturer talks as much as possible and keeping the discussion in seminars.
- Didn't like having breakout rooms during lectures as I often didn't prepare and wanted to use the lectures as sort of an introduction to each theme
- it's been fascinating to hear the instructors input, especially when discussing with each other or with students, but when covering the material I preferred just reading the syllabus
- Zoom made it very difficult to follow lectures. Interactive lectures make that easier
- They have been informative and I appreciate interactive learning. Since the lectures are on zoom it is important to be inactive.

Concerning **SEMINARS**, students indicated an even higher level of satisfaction:

**What do you think about the quality of the seminars? Please use a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates low quality and 5 indicates high quality. \***

Please consider both the seminar experience and the performance of your seminar leader.

Answer	Number	Percent	
1 - Very Poor	0	0%	
2 - Poor	1	3% 	
3 - Average	3	9.1% 	
4 - Good	15	45.5% 	
5 - Excellent	12	36.4% 	
I have not attended the seminars	2	6.1% 	

Elaborating on their assessment, students stated:

- Good focus on the class notions
- Very good, but I feel like they could have been slightly better structured.
- Very good and helpful, made me question some assumptions I had gotten from the readings and helped me be critical. Good discussions and I liked the use of break out-rooms.
- The seminars were the perfect place to discuss the issues, and to have more precisions on important concepts. It was really interesting! The seminars were not very entertaining; I did not get to know much of new staff - I would appreciate if the seminars were more about the readings and getting deeper into the topic; eg, it could for students that are extra interested in the topic to get more information.
- Very friendly, fun & hardworking seminar leader, focusing a lot on what we will need for exams.
- Did not have the time to discuss all the themes
- Our seminar leader was good at explaining everything we felt were unclear, and we had really good discussions during the seminars
- I think our seminar leader tried his / her best, but was not that fluent in english, seem unsure about the time frame as he / her talked about her own views and ended up using more time on talking than on discussion.
- Some mix up with technology, but I'm suprised as a master student with no pedagogy backgorund (i presume), He was quite good at making engaging exercises and explaining topics
- Not very fan of speaking in front of everyone on zoom, and there was a lot of that. Besides that, it was very good.
- Maybe some more discussions about the specific subjects and topics.

## **SUMMARY**

Overall, students had a positive and productive learning experience, both in lectures and seminars. Many students thought that no changes were necessary to the course structure, content and teaching method. A number of students remarked on their difficulties with Zoom lectures/online instruction, and the importance of interactive lecture components. On the other hand, some students disliked breakout rooms, which required them to interact with other students. These are issues specific to online teaching that seem to be hard to resolve. However, future iterations of the course are likely to be taught physically, rendering these comments less important in the overall assessment of the course. Based on these insights, I do not have any recommendations for future changes of SGO2302.