

Course Evaluation SGO2500 North South Development

April 5, 2019

Course Overview

SGO2500 North South Development is one of the core courses in the Human Geography undergraduate program. It seeks to provide students a robust and inspiring entry point into a global view of human geography, particularly understanding the many key issues in sustainable development. The course discusses fundamental trends and issues that explain the difference between the global North and South, conveying empirical knowledge and critical perspectives on global poverty and inequality. By linking key concepts, theories and strategies of development to the discussion of global poverty, methods of measurement and poverty reduction efforts, students will be able to analyze development problems in different contexts in the South. The awareness of the importance of a spatial perspective to development problems and processes, highlighted by a value chain framework, will enable the students to identify and understand the impact of regional and global processes on people's lives in specific places. The course takes also a closer look at some specific sectors, to explore the impact of North/South relations for the global South.

The course was structured in the following way:

- Introduction to North/South Development: The South in a global world
- The South in a globalizing economy
- Understanding global poverty
- Global poverty eradication: institutions and programs
- Development strategies: Market, grassroots, both?
- The role of the state in development
- Emerging issues in North/South Development
- From MDGs to SDGs: results and pending challenges
- North/South Food security
- North/South Energy systems
- Synthesis Lecture - Review of main themes

The course is taught largely through lectures and seminars. There was an ungraded group assignment as a requirement to take the exam, and then the exam itself for 100% of the grade. Last year's student statistics on the final grade 55% of the class received B or higher grades, with 32% getting a C, and the remaining 14% getting D or lower.



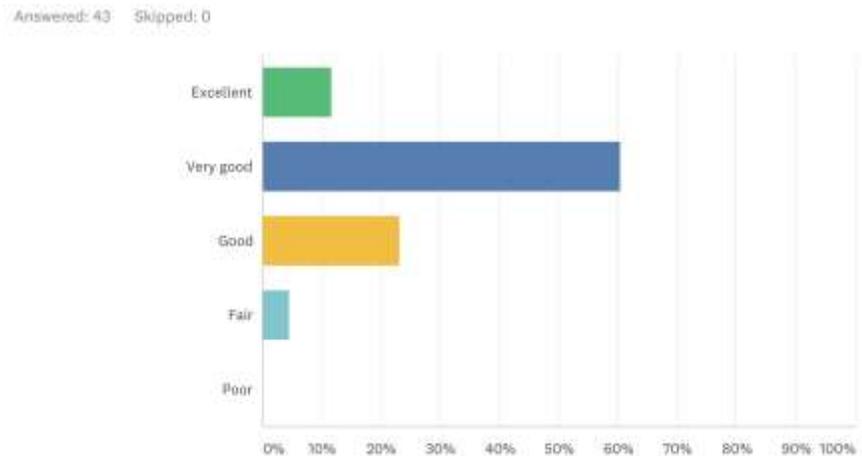
In fall 2018, a course evaluation was sent out using an online program SurveyMonkey and was answered by 43 respondents, which is a sample of approximately 34% of the class. Below, a summary of this feedback is provided on the lectures, the seminars and the readings, with a conclusion that summarizes the recommendations for the coming years.

Below is an executive summary of this report, that includes recommendations. Following that is a more detailed report that specifically looks at the lectures and the seminars and includes quotes and feedback from students.

Executive Summary and Recommendations:

Overall students seemed to get a lot out of this course topic and the manner in which it was taught. When asked to rate the course overall, 60% of students rated it as “very good,” 23% said “good,” 11 % said “excellent” and 5 % said “fair.” As the course is changing hands again in the coming year, after transitions across the last few years, it is a reasonable moment to evaluate the course and reconsider how best it could be designed and delivered.

From this evaluation, it is recommended that the lectures be carried out in a dynamic and applied manner, are clearly connected to the course readings, and balance the presentation with student discussion and the use of other learning aids, like videos. Focus on maintaining a ‘red thread’ through the course material is advised, limiting the amount of words on PPTs is suggested, and possibly reducing the material covered so to not overload students, and therefore having more time to go into greater depth on the key points.



In terms of the seminars, it is recommended that the OpEd assignment be changed or adjusted, and other ways found to use the seminars productively. Students recommended more facilitation to support class discussion, more small-group discussion, as well as a clear summary by the instructor of the previous week’s course material. For example, in the last two weeks of Fall 2018, a method called *World Café* discussion was used to deepen discussion among students, which worked very well towards that end. That type of facilitation of group discussion might be preferable to the Op Ed in the coming years.

In terms of the readings, students seemed to appreciate the text books but less the articles on the syllabus. While those same textbooks could be carried over to the next year, it could also be useful to reconsider the readings and perhaps refresh them in this course for the coming years.

Finally, in terms of the way the course is graded, one suggestion is that the assignment in the seminars be graded as a 10-15% of the overall grade; in which case, not all the stakes lie with the exam.

Due to logistics and circumstances, the course has changed hands twice since 2017, and it might benefit from a stable course coordinator in 2019-2020 who can carry it forward and be its champion for a longer stretch of time.

Below, a detailed report provides quotes by students evaluating the lectures and seminars in terms of what most supported their learning.

Detailed Evaluation Report

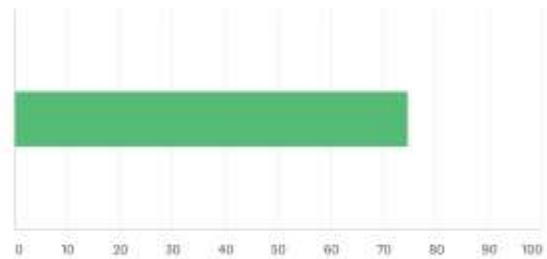
Lectures

In this evaluation, when asked to comment on the degree to which the lectures supported the student's learning the course material, on a scale between 0 – 100, with 100 being the highest degree of support, the average number provided by respondents was 75.

Among the comments provided regarding why were included the following themes and statements:

Please assess the degree to which the lectures support you in learning this course material?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 1



Lecture format with the use of learning aids and an applied style:

- *Lecturer expands well on topics presented in the powerpoint presentations*
- *Interactive teaching, focus on students and bringing our experiences and thoughts into the lecture, and the lecturer being committed to teaching students.*
- *Explicitly saying what are important take-aways each lecture, using examples and cases through videos etc. is also inspirational*
- *Good that the reading are being discussed, and that the lecturer is very motivated and want the students to really understand the topic and learn something*
- *The presentation of information in relation to the syllabus*
- *Good balance between depth and understandability, some variation in the form, overall a good lecturer*
- *Lecturer's style of presentation; presented with passion and clarity - a genuine wish to help students gain understanding of the field. Very appreciated that the lectures are uploaded as well, because it helps well in repeating. Also, nice that the lecturer includes video (talks, etc) into the lecture; good application of variety!*
- *I really like the lecturer's presentation style. The somewhat laid-back style with elements of personal experience etc. makes it really easy to follow, and it creates a comfortable atmosphere for speaking up and asking questions.*
- *I like that the things we talked about in the lectures are so relevant to the seminars and the readings*
- *The lecturer is always excited and eager to teach, the availability of the slides prior to the lecture is also appreciated.*
- *I like the fact that the lectures are in PowerPoint format. Sometimes I think the reading a 'material can be a little overwhelming, and it can be hard to really get a hold of what is the most central/important things to focus on. I enjoy the examples from "real life" experiences out in the field, it makes the material "more alive".*
- *The lecturer's style of presentation was well prepared, and the Power Point reflects on the readings for the specific lecture*

- *Active use of the readings.*
- *Easy to see a red thread*
- *I like that the lecturer sets the topics into real life cases that he or she has experienced*
- *The lecturer is very clear and keeps it tidy*
- *What I find most helpful is when the lecturer uses own experience, to support statements.*
- *I like that theory is connected to examples that makes it all easier to understand.*
- *Gives an overview of the readings, and makes the reading more clear.*
- *I like that the course follows what I consider a logical progression, in which the different themes build upon each other. This makes it easier to both remember and understand the material, but more importantly stresses the interrelation between the topics in development. I also really like that the lecturer shares personal experiences; it puts the theory into practice and it's also nice seeing some examples of what one might do after we've completed our degree.*
- *Use of real-world anecdotes to the content*
- *Well structured*

Student participation through discussion of course concepts:

- *It's really interactive and that supports myself to think about the topics*
- *student participation,*
- *That the audience is included and encouraged to speak*
- *interaction between lecturer and students*
- *The small discussions that we do in pairs.*
- *I like that most of what is being said is written out on the powerpoint*
- *When we take a minute to discuss with our partner, and get the possibility to do some "live" thinking*
- *very vivid presentation, a lot of discussion, examples and space for own thoughts*
- *nice powerpoints, interaction with students, videos*
- *I like the idea of a more dialouge-based lecture and that the lectures is not just a recitation form the books*
- *Back & forth questioning and comments from us.*
- *It's great that she facilitates participation and co-learning.*
- *That we can discuss some topics together, that the reading material is summarized and often applied. The powerpoint is clear and contains a lot of pictures.*

Areas to improve the lectures included even more time for group discussion, as well as fewer words on the ppts, "It's hard to read all the text while listening to the professor." Also mentioned was the need to better focus on the main points of the course concent each week, going into greater depth on fewer points, with comments such as:

- *"the material covered in each lesson is slightly overloaded, if each lecture focused on less amount of topics then the lecture would be easier to follow and to remember."*
- *"The biggest problem for me is when there is too much information on the powerpoints, when it goes too fast and without examples etc. Then nothing really sticks. Would then be better to take some parts more detailed and spend more time on these parts and then just give a quick overview on other parts (which we then will have to study more closely at home)."*
- *I suggest greater depth of the material.*

Seminars

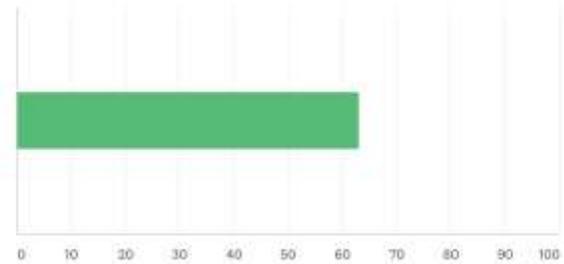
The seminars were created to be a place to examine course topics in small group discussion, and to apply course material to development issues through the creation of Opinion Editorials. Each week, in small groups, students submitted an outline of an Op Ed, and then full Op Ed as a final assignment for the seminar.

In the evaluation, on a scale from 0 (low degree) to 100 (very high degree), students reported that the seminars scored 63 in assisting them in their learning the course material.

When they were asked to describe what they liked about the seminars, responses included:

Please assess the degree to which seminars are supporting you to learn this course material, using the following scale below.

Answered: 39 Skipped: 4



- 1) Discussion and group work:
 - *It is a great way for us students to discuss the different areas within the course. Also good to get some guiding from the seminar leader.*
 - *That we get the chance to discuss our own thoughts in a group with other students (its an atmosphere where you can say basically everything)*
 - *the group discussion at the end of the seminars*
 - *The discussions and group work*
 - *The smaller groups within each seminar group allow for more participation and involvement*
 - *I like the fact that we are able to discuss some of the reading material, and some of the topics which were discussed at the lecture.*
 - *The discussions*
 - *The seminars, but it helps me understand, and remember. I also find the groups we're assigned to are very helpful.*
 - *discussion of the readings, discussion with classmates*
 - *discussions*
 - *I like that it gives us the opportunities to work with the material in groups and address aspects one might not have time for in the lectures. I feel like they, like the lectures, are relevant to the readings.*
 - *Group work focused on Op-Ed is interesting & productive.*
 - *Forces engagement in things other than readings and lectures, such as a videos and discussions*
- 2) The applied learning, which included applying course material to a written assignment as well as the practice with writing:
 - *The tasks we get to work on in relation to readings*

- *I like that the seminar is very relevant to the readings, and I like that we get time to write a relevant text to each weeks theme.*
 - *The assessments (Op Ed outlines) in the second half of the seminar*
 - *Op-Ed writings is a good idea, helps me/us get better at writing academically*
 - *The creation of the outlines each time to really get and think about good subjects*
 - *group discussion and group work*
 - *The group work*
 - *I like that we are able to discuss in groups, and work out an opinion piece*
 - *The writing task in the second half*
 - *That we have to discuss and create something ourselves (in the group). Then it forces us to connect what we read, to write something and then also to have a small discussion with the other persons in the group.*
- 3) The review at the beginning of the seminar in which concepts from the lecture were summarized and expanded upon:
- *The first half is usually good, with an emphasis on discussing the topic, or explaining things further. This part has overall been done well.*
 - *That the seminar leader gives a short recap of the theme*
 - *I like the way that we review last weeks texts and seminar and that this is mostly done thru conversation*
 - *I like the fact that in the beginning you talk also a bit about the readings, and we get to express our own viewpoints.*

In terms of areas to improve, the class was mixed on the value of the Op Ed assignment. While some clearly appreciated the challenge, others brought up issues with the fact that it was highly dependent on the group dynamic and that they felt too early in their learning to create opinions about the material. Across both the years that OpEds were done in seminars, it did appear that some students (not all) were too new to some of the ideas in the course, and that it was too fast a step to expect them to then write an opinion on what they were learning. One student said:

“The group Op-Ed`s has been proving a difficult format, and has been very dependent on group dynamics. There has been some improvement, but people are in general reluctant to have real opinions, making opinion-pieces a difficult thing to write. Some have been shy, and less than confident in their understanding of the topic. Others have been, putting it a bit harshly, ‘Terminology-fanatics’, only really reciting lines from thinkers from inside and outside the curriculum. Neither have been particularly helpful for my learning, sadly. I think it is quite an interesting idea to do it this way, but the experience so far has unfortunately been less positive. I am also in some doubt as to how clear the understanding of the Op-Ed-format is for the majority of the students.”

In terms of other suggestions about the seminars, students reported the following:

- *Bigger variation in the groups is needed, more feedback on op-ed outlines.*
- *Walkthrough of concepts, would like the seminar leader to take a bit more time to fully explain them to us before we start working on the op-ed*
- *I think the outline for the paper is not so useful, as I am the only person in our group that is able to write it, the others do not give any input.*