Sociology Grad Seminar in Social Movements Theory

Sociology 913
Seminar in Social Change: Social Movements
Fall 2017

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262-6829 (office)/ 262-2921 (messages)/ 829-3692 (home) No calls after 10:00 p.m., please.
Office Hours: Please make appointments. I may set up an appointment scheduler as soon as I get
control of class prep for my undergrad class.
Class Meets: Mondays 9:-11:30 am in #6232
Reading assignments are posted on the course Canvas learning center. Many of the articles are
available on my web page: http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/teaching/sm_seminar/soc-924-topical-
index-of-reading-assignments/
The username and password for article copies posted on this site will be posted my.uw and the Canvas
course site and sent out in email.
Please DO NOT print out all the articles in advance on the SSCC printer!! We will not read
everything posted on the web site. If you pay for your own paper and toner, you can choose what to
do, but your rights to free printing on the SSCC printer do not extend to huge volumes of library
materials.

I have listed four books as "required." Two provide synthetic overviews of literature. You should
probably have both although I have no moral feelings about whether you own books as opposed to
sharing them.

Blackwell Publishers. 2006. This is a graduate-level text that provides an excellent overview.
The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements. Edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and
Hanspeter Kriesi. Paper. 2009. A collection of commissioned chapters by top people that
provide broad overviews of most theoretical topics and many movements.

Two book are classic treatments of the Civil Rights Movement written in the 1980s that take different
approaches to studying social movements.

The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, by Aldon Morris. Based on detailed studies of documents
and dozens of interviews, Morris argues that the Civil Rights movement operated out of local
movement centers and Black churches. Morris puts his theoretical discussions in the last
chapter where many people miss them. He emphasizes local organization and charisma as a
learned leadership trait.
Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 2nd Edition by Doug McAdam locates the
Civil Rights movement in a broader historical context and includes McAdam’s political process
synthesis which became theoretically hegemonic.

This seminar is designed to pull students into current theoretical and empirical issues in the
study of social movements. As I will explain, will give very little attention to the question of whether a
particular phenomenon is or is not a social movement. Instead the emphasis in this course is on "social
movement processes and mechanisms" by which I generally refer to regularities in what happens when
people go about trying to change society. Research in the social movement terrain addresses questions
like the following:
1. Mobilization questions: How can people organize themselves to act collectively to pursue
social change? What kinds of resources and social organization do they need? What kinds of organizational forms do people adopt and how do these affect the effectiveness of their actions? What is the role of leaders? How do ideas and symbols affect mobilization? What happens in the process of gathering people together to act – how does that work?

2. Grievance and group formation questions: When and how do people come to define a situation as unjust? How do the major cleavages in society -- the lines of conflict and alliance -- get drawn? What is the role of systematic ideology? What is the role of culture, ethnicity, religion, regionalism, class? What is the interplay between ideas and material conditions? How does it work? Why are there often popular movements on both sides of major issues like pro- and anti-abortion, or pro- and anti- civil rights, or pro- and anti-war or pro- and anti-environmentalist?

3. Motivation questions: Why do some people participate and not others? What makes people feel solidaristic and committed to a movement? What happens when people come to identify with a movement? Why do different people identify with and feel committed to different movements? What is the role of interest? What is an interest, anyway? What is the role of identity? What is an identity, anyway?

4. Dynamics questions: How do the actions of movements and their opponents (or others) flow over time in ongoing strategic interaction? What is the role of repression? How does it work? What are the dynamics of movement-countermovement pairs over time? What role do powerful elites play in popular mobilizations?

5. Organizational and political questions: How do political, economic and other social structures shape and constrain the possibilities for action? How do social movements relate to parties? To unions or interest groups or voluntary associations? When and how do movements change the structures themselves? What is the interplay of structure and agency? How are movement dynamics affected by national political culture and a country's geopolitical location?

6. Outcome questions: What factors affect whether groups "win" the social changes they want? What does it mean to win? What is the relation between social movements and public policy? When and how do social movements matter?

These are just sample questions. The field of social movements has grown from a disciplinary insurgency to a sprawling field with connections to virtually all areas of social science. It includes work on "movement processes" within organizations or other formations that are not themselves social movements, work on the social conditions that give rise to the things we call social movements, work on how people go about producing social change in formations that do not look anything like the "social movement" as it has been understood in the US and Western Europe, and work on the ways in which elites sometimes create/foment movements or attempt to portray themselves as popular mobilizations. What remains at the core of the field is the image of agentic people who want to produce social change. Everything else flows from this. The field draws on and has had major influence on organizational sociology, social psychology, political sociology, and media studies, among others. Theorizing in this area has long tended toward the synthetic, and in recent years, theorizing has become increasingly dynamic, and interactive. It is a field that has typically been focused on understanding how things work, not on dividing into polarized theoretical armies. Research and theory at any level of analysis will be improved by an awareness of the others, and I urge all students to work to develop some understanding of topics that are not of central interest to them.

There are two school of theorizing. The first is militaristic: opposing theories are pitted against each other to see which one "wins." The second is utilitarian: the goal is to understand how something works, and theories are judged as more or less useful for understanding a particular problem. My own philosophy is solidly in the second school. As we compare theories, we will emphasize not which ones are "best," but what kinds of empirical phenomena each theory illuminates. We will seek to focus on the processes and mechanisms that commonly operate in social movements, being aware that most of
these processes occur in other contexts as well. As we analyze writings, we will attempt to focus on what research question the author is trying to answer and what methods s/he uses to go about answering it.

This term we will begin with several weeks in which we get oriented to some of the major lines of research and theory. We will generally read this chronologically as the field developed, beginning with resource mobilization and political process theories and then picking up work on frames and identities and then dynamic models of events over time. Because they are my central interests, we will have sessions on issues of repression and media effects. Later sessions will be adapted to the particular interests of students in this class, either workshops on your term papers or reading and discussing issues of particular interest to students in this class.

Course Requirements

NOTE: Because this class is so large, I am considering possible modifications to these requirements to make it possible for me to handle this class.

(1) Reading and preparing for seminar, pulling together your thoughts. 30% The expectation is that you will do more reading and writing in the first half of the course and that the reading/writing burden will ease in the second half, when you are devoting more attention to your term paper. Many weeks I give you some choice in what to read among many more things than you can actually read. In general, if there is not clearer instruction, you should at least skim or read lightly at least 5 things.

WRITING REQUIREMENT:
   a) Write and upload to Canvas before class notes that demonstrate that you have done the required reading. A target length for the writing would be about 2 pages or around 500 words. This is just a guideline for expectations and not either a minimum or maximum. This should include a list of what you read at what level (e.g. skimmed, read over lightly, read closely) and then write whatever seems most useful to your own purposes. This may include: summaries of what you read, key points that you found particularly interesting, notes of which parts of the readings may be helpful for your research agenda, or synthetic comments that link across several articles or questions that you have about the reading. Comments: (i) I prefer that you come to class on time rather than arrive late because you are finishing the writing. If you are running late, upload what existed at in time to arrive at class on time as a sign of good faith (you may include a note saying which things you’ve read but didn’t take notes on) and then upload your completed notes as soon as possible. Everyone is allowed 2 late submissions of up to a week late. Beyond that, the grades for this writing will be discounted for lateness with the degree of the discount increasing with the degree of lateness. It IS acceptable to upload your rough notes before class and then edit the notes to reflect your thinking after our discussions and upload the edited document after class; this will not be discounted as long as it is obvious from the rough notes that you did the reading before class. (ii) Illness illness or other circumstances beyond your control that impact your ability to do the work will be a basis for accepting the written work late without penalty. Communicate with me about any such issues. (iii) I will read these over and make brief comments on line in Canvas
   b) Use the Canvas discussion board to post questions or discussion topics that can help me and that weeks’ facilitators to plan for the seminar. Given that this class is early in the morning, I will be discussing with you the best deadline for this to make it worthwhile.

(2) Participate actively and constructively in the seminar. 25%
   a) Obviously, you must be present to participate. Barring circumstances beyond your control, you should expect that missing more than 1 class will have some effect on your grade with the effect rising with the number of absences. If your grading is S/U, missing more than 4 classes will generally
lead to a grade of U. Chronic tardiness is disruptive and irritating to those who are on time. Occasional lateness due to unforeseen circumstances can happen to anyone, but please organize your life so that you can arrive promptly on a regular basis. Missing a significant amount of class due to tardiness or leaving early will be treated the same as absence. Please DO NOT come to class if you have symptoms of communicable illness; this is the basis for an excused absence. If you have problems that force you to miss class too much, speak with me about extra written assignments to compensate for missed class time.

b) Active participation is not the same as engaging in monologues or shouting down other students. Rather, it involves listening to others, asking questions, and building on others' ideas, as well as giving your own ideas. Contrary to the goals in many classes, my central goal is NOT to teach you to find fault with everything you read (although criticism is certainly important). Instead, the main goal in this class is to understand how social movement processes work, and what research and theory tell us about these processes. We do need to be aware of the limitations of research results or the blind spots in theorizing, but we also need to pay attention to the usefulness of research for understanding phenomena we want to understand.

c). Provide process feedback on discussions, either publicly in the Canvas discussion board or privately to me by email. Do you feel the discussions are going well? Do you have suggestions for improvement? I would like to see your feedback every week, especially in the first half of the term, as I am getting a sense of you and your needs as a class.

d) I will periodically ask you to provide anonymous feedback on each other's participation, especially based on small groups.

e) Be part of a group that takes special responsibility for organizing one of the “general” sessions early in the term. This will involve consulting with each other and me about which readings to ask others to read, reading in more depth and taking leadership in laying out the issues to be discussed. I will create “groups” in Canvas that will allow you to collaborate on line, which should facilitate this process. One part of this will be to use the discussion board to provide other students with some suggestions about things to look for in the readings. These groups will be assigned in week 1.

e) Help organize one of the sessions in the second part of the course. These will return to previous topics in more depth, address specific theoretical or empirical topics of interest to students (e.g. transnational movements, religious movements, specific types of movements) and/or will feature depth discussions of students' term paper topics.

(2) Term paper due by the last day of finals to Canvas. 40% The goal is "article length," about 20 pages, but the number of pages per se is not a criterion.

How far along the paper should be by the end of the term depends on what its state was at the beginning of the term. Papers that are wholly new this term will be held to different standards than those that are revisions of earlier work. If your paper builds on work you have previously done, I want to see the prior work (paper, thesis, etc.). If you wish to prepare one paper or two closely related papers for my class and another class, you need to provide full disclosure to me and the other professor and we need to have a clear agreement in advance about what is for what class. There are several types of appropriate papers.

a) A draft of an empirical article destined (hopefully) for publication; such an article poses a research question, locates it in a broader literature, and uses data to answer the question. If this is a first draft, you should think of it as a conference paper. If it is a revision, you may well be moving it towards publication.

b) A grant or thesis/dissertation proposal, which poses a research question, locates it in a broader literature, and proposes a plan of research to answer the question.

c) A review article, similar to an Annual Review article (or the chapters in the Blackwell Companion) in which you pick a particular body of research and build an argument about the state of
the literature. This model selects one segment of social movements literature (for example relations to parties, identity, treatment of gender) and reviews a broader range of literature than we have covered in class and examines it in more depth than we did in class.

d) A pedagogic review of part of the social movements literature. This paper type may be most appropriate for people studying for prelims. In this paper type, you write the equivalent of a series of lectures or a textbook chapter for a social movements course in which you give clear statements of theoretical issues and provide examples while also citing sources. This model emphasizes breadth rather than depth in literature coverage and pulls together a broader range of literature than we have examined in class, with an emphasis on providing a clear explanation of the most important issues. This kind of paper would ideally feed into teaching a course on social movements or a segment of a course on political sociology.

e) A variant on d would be to write or improve a Wikipedia page on a topic in social movements. I have information about this and a person who is interested in helping you learn how to do this if you are interested

(3) Participate in a “writing buddy” group of size 3. Give feedback on the ideas & each step of the other two members and receive their feedback to you.

By October 1 communicate with me about your paper idea and receive general approval. With such a large class, individual appointments with everyone are going to be impossible so we should use email as much as possible for this. This is the time to negotiate the boundaries of your project and/or its relevance to this course. Do enough preliminary work to guarantee the feasibility of your idea. Write up a paragraph of your understanding of what we agreed to, and upload it to the assignment folder in Canvas. If your ideas about this change, you should stay in touch with me.

By November 3 submit the “official” paper proposal for official approval. This has two parts:

1) A written narrative or outline that is at least 500 words long and gives a clear idea of what you plan to do for the paper. It should include discussion of what sources are available for this paper and some elaboration of the theoretical or empirical issues you plan to explore. That is, you should already have done several hours of preliminary work before you submit the proposal. (“I think I’ll do something about framing in the environmental movement” is not a proposal.) I will tell you if I have concerns or suggestions about the project as it is defined in this proposal.

2) A report on the results of a detailed library literature search relevant to your paper. This report contains (a) a discussion of the kind of literature you are looking for, (b) the databases you searched (SocIndex is generally best for this class but there are others that can be relevant), (c) the keywords you used, (d) the number of hits you got in your searches and an estimate of how many (or what proportion) of the hits seemed useful, e) a qualitative discussion of whether you seem to have found the right amount of literature for your paper, or whether you have too much or too little to work with.

3) A copy of the abstracts of the works you have found that you plan to use for your paper. You do not need to have read all of them by this time, but you do need to have identified a good working list, be well underway in obtaining copies of them, and have skimmed some to get an idea of whether they will work for your paper or not. It is FINE to use some sort of online technology to share this with me (e.g. an EndNote Online group), just consult.

By November 27 submit a detailed progress report, an outline of the whole paper, and a draft of at least five pages. (The draft may be of any part of the paper, not necessarily the beginning.) This is your chance to get my feedback on how you are doing. If you realize you need to scale back your paper to make it doable, this is the time to do it.
Final Due Date: Thursday December 21 to the Canvas assignment folder. Grades must be submitted electronically by December 29 and you must allow me several days to read your paper, not to mention having a Christmas holiday. If you wish to request “a few more hours” or a day or two to finish, upload what you have by the deadline to Canvas with a note saying "this is a draft" and adding “draft” to the file name to make sure there is no confusion and also send me an email telling me what the deal is and how to reach you by email and phone/text. Please double-check that you give the final version when it is done a different file name from the draft!

About Incompletes: Taking an incomplete is like going into debt with a loan shark. The day the deadline is past, interest starts accruing and the quality of paper you think you need to write grows exponentially. Most of the students I have given incompletes to in the past have NEVER gotten them done, and I decided I had to change my formerly lax policy. You are far better off doing the paper you can do now than trying to do the paper you wish you could do later. If you realize you have defined your paper more broadly than you can execute, speak to me about narrowing the bounds of the paper, not about taking longer to do it. If you realize you simply cannot do the paper, you may take this course for a grade of S (satisfactory) rather than a letter grade; this will count as credits toward a degree but will NOT count toward the Sociology program's "four seminar" requirement. Talk to me as soon as possible if you get into trouble in this class.

Grading benchmarks: If I give you a grade of AB, it means that you are doing good quality graduate work that is consistent with making good progress toward a PhD. I begin the term expecting to give most students an AB. If I give you an A, it means that your performance is truly excellent in some way, unusually good compared to other grad students. It is by definition not possible for most people to be above average, although averaging across many semesters it is sometimes the case that a particular class will have a large proportion of unusually good students in it. If I give you a B, it means that your work needs to improve in some way for it to be consistent with PhD quality work. (Students have to maintain a 3.25 average to stay in good standing in graduate school.) I do not anticipate giving any grade below a B, although I will if it is merited: A grade of BC means that there are serious deficiencies, typically in simply not doing the work and a grade of C is the equivalent of an F for a graduate student and does not count for graduate credit.

Schedule

The detailed schedule of topics and readings will be posted in Canvas.