

## **Grading exam questions for SGO2302: Environment and Society, Spring 2021**

Students were asked to answer one of three “situational” exam questions. The questions challenge students to think about social science perspectives on environmental issues, and provide them with an opportunity to synthesize, integrate, and communicate the course material in a manner that demonstrates what they have learned during the semester.

The course this year focused heavily on climate change, but the topics and themes were relevant to all issues, including biodiversity loss. There is no “one correct answer” to these questions – we are rather looking to see how students approach the question and how much information and learning they can pull together from the course. All three questions ask the students to take an integrative approach to the topic as well as reflect on what such an approach might look like in practice. All questions present opportunities for the students to be creative, e.g., to write in a style that is suitable for a real-world context rather than a university exam. It is important, however, that students make an honest attempt to become concrete by linking problems and solutions.

Students were asked to bring in readings from the course curriculum, which included the Climate and Society textbook. Though there was no specific number of references to include, exam answers that are awarded As and Bs will generally integrate a wider variety of readings. While it is possible to answer the questions adequately with only the main textbook, we are looking for more depth and a greater capacity to think laterally, thus would like to see them bring together more “threads” from the readings.

In some instances, social science perspectives outside of the course could be relevant (e.g., on the rise of the youth climate movement or the role of the Presidency in climate negotiations), but these are not required for responding to the exam questions. It is acceptable, to bring in external literature, but students were encouraged to limit this to a minimum and focus on the curriculum. The use of additional/external resources should not be considered beneficial for the grade, i.e., there is no link between using additional information and receiving a better grade (e.g., for effort). If students mainly reference external literature, this should subtract from their final grade. The grade should awarded based on the successful application of course concepts.

## 1. Taking Your Government to Court

The first question asks the student to consider the recent rise of the youth climate movement, especially in Europe, and its relevance for Norwegian politics to prepare for a debate between a youth activist and a representative of the Norwegian government. The question mentions different tactics used by youth movements to create change in society but focuses on the use of legal strategies – lawsuits against governments. Students are asked to reflect on the reasons for young people’s engagement in climate politics and the effectiveness of different strategies to create change (e.g., protests vs. legal battles).

Students can draw on a broad set of course concepts, starting with the nature of climate change (e.g., a multi-generational problem, accumulation of GHG in the atmosphere), its expected impacts esp. on young people and future generations and the problem of inequality between those who have contributed heavily to climate change and might have benefited greatly from this (e.g., fossil fuel industries) and those who will bear the consequences. The latter is a dimension of climate justice and could lead to a discussion of the meanings of just transformations (e.g., who is responsible for acting and bearing the burdens of change in response to climate change).

Climate change discourses have been central throughout the course, and many students will likely build their answer around the concept of the discourse, e.g., differentiating different discourses and analyzing which discourse is associated most closely with the youth movement. While some students might stick closely to the textbook, since this is where the four discourses are discussed, the A and B answers will draw on a wide range of readings from the curriculum to explore how these discourses relate to other concepts, such as values, worldviews, human-environment relationships, etc. The importance of emotions could be highlighted – how inner dimensions (e.g., concern and fear regarding their future) motivate young people’s political engagement. Some external literature might be useful to deepen the analysis of youth movement motivations, but the emphasis should still be on the course curriculum.

To respond to the question about the effectiveness of different strategies of the youth movement, students should explore whether and how the different strategies affect the three spheres of transformation – a key framework used through the course. For example, they could question the effectiveness of pressuring governments to enact stronger climate policies, given that this affects the practical and the political spheres, but not the personal sphere. They can also make arguments how and why a lawsuit might affect the personal sphere too, or how other youth movement strategies have effects across the three spheres.

As a result of this discussion, students should make a recommendation for two or three topics to be included in the planned NRK debate between a youth representative and a government representative.

## 2. The Pandemic vs. The Climate – What Should India Do

This question asks students to put themselves into the position of the Indian government, which has to attend to two parallel – and possibly interdependent – crises: the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change. Students are asked to use the lens of vulnerability to understand India's situation, and to develop priorities for action for the rest of 2021. They need to consider in particular how (if at all) India should prepare for the upcoming climate negotiations (COP26) in November.

The analysis of India's vulnerability should distinguish exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity. Students could discuss the nature of climate change and the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, e.g., their causes and who is responsible for creating these problems, the distribution of impacts (exposure) and the corresponding justice/equity issues. Both the pandemic and climate change are problems that require scientific expertise and the ability to mobilize new technological developments (e.g., vaccines, renewable energy). In both cases, poorer countries face larger challenges because their ability to manage the impacts is limited. Students can discuss how existing inequalities (in India and in the world) influence vulnerability with regard to both climate change and the pandemic, or question what it means to be vulnerable (Ribot 2014; Leichenko and Silva 2014), potentially drawing in the concept of resilience (Brown 2013). Some may highlight climate change as a "threat multiplier," and argue that climate change increases the likelihood of disease outbreaks and future pandemics.

Based on a discussion in class and readings, the link between poverty and vulnerability should be a topic. Other relevant concepts and related readings include human security (Barnett and Adger 2007) as an integrative concept and double exposure/multiple stressors and the corresponding winners and losers (O'Brien and Leichenko 2000). There is not one right definition for human security, but the students should highlight different aspects of the concept, from practical (e.g. basic needs, livelihoods) to political (e.g. political agency, resource access) to personal (e.g. mental health, well-being).

Students are expected to engage with the equity dimensions of the pandemic and climate change to some degree as this is a key component of the course. For example, the question text highlights intellectual property reasons for the limited availability of Covid-19 vaccines in India. This is one of many instances where the developed countries play a role in creating or worsening India's vulnerability. Students can discuss whether and what could be done about this kind of international equity dynamic.

Regarding priorities for the rest of the year and preparations for COP26, there is no right or wrong answer. Students can make very different suggestions but have to justify their recommendations well. For example, a student could argue that saving lives is most important right now, and India should focus on its Covid-19 response at the expense of climate action and diplomacy. This could be justified with reference to India's vulnerability and the responsibility of developed countries to carry more of the climate burden, especially in the current context. Students could also argue that engaging in COP26 is very important to reinforce collective responses to climate change, to link Covid-19 and climate discussions, and to strengthen India's adaptive capacity/resilience through climate governance. Another argument could be that COP26 is an important opportunity to draw global attention to the challenges the twin crises create for sustainable development, strengthening equity-related arguments in the global climate debate.

### 3. The UK Government – In Search of Inspiration for COP26

The third question asks students to draft a strategy that can help the UK government run a successful COP26. The strategy should not focus on the general politics of climate change in the UNFCCC, although students can certainly bring in issues related to North-South relationships, power inequalities, vulnerability and capacity. Instead, the strategy should focus on ways that the worldviews, beliefs and emotions of negotiation participants can be engaged to bring them together around a shared vision of success for climate governance.

Students have to discuss discourses and worldviews as two central and related concepts of the course. They should be able to differentiate existing discourses and recognize that the biophysical discourse usually dominates the climate negotiations. From there, they can argue for different ways to elevate other discourses, esp. an integrative discourse. While some students might stick closely to the textbook, since this is where the four discourses are discussed, the A and B answers will draw on a wide range of readings from the curriculum to explore how these discourses relate to other issues, such as problem frames, values, and human-environment relationships. In particular, students should be able to relate discourses to worldviews, i.e., to recognize the existence of different worldviews (and their components), and to explain when and why a specific discourse resonates with a person. Besides the textbook, students might

- Draw in Dryzek (2012) for a definition of discourses
- Focus on the role of culture (Heyd and Brooks 2009) and assumptions about human-environment relations (Berkes 2008; Head 2016)

Given multiple discussions about the role of emotions for human responses to climate change, students should be able to discuss the potential role of emotions in the negotiations, and that the UK's strategy should focus on generating certain emotions that support cooperation and action.

Students are asked specifically to explore ways to engage the imagination of negotiators, e.g., using narratives and stories (Milkoreit 2016; Ingram et al. 2015). This is a space to get creative, even if the suggestions are unrealistic. Important is an engagement with the theories around storytelling and meaning making as drivers or motivators for change, and the question what kinds of stories are needed at the global scale. This opens up space to bring in concepts like inequality and justice, adaptation and resilience, shared values, sustainable development, technological development, energy futures etc.).

Strong answers will also discuss what it means to have a successful COP26. This is a challenging question, and many students will not know enough about the climate negotiations to discuss this in detail. However, they can discuss the general challenges of creating social change (e.g., with reference to the three spheres of transformation), and the challenge of overcoming different interests of different countries. Their ideas of success could touch on addressing international injustices, generating support for the most vulnerable countries, and the general importance of creating political will/ambition to strengthen countries' commitments and actions within the Paris Agreement.

Readings included in the course curriculum:

### **Main books**

Leichenko, R. M. and O'Brien, K. 2019. *Climate and Society: Transforming the Future*. Cambridge: Polity Press. (250 pages)

### **Available as e-book**

✦ Berkes, F. 2008. Context of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Chapter 1 (Pages 1-20) in: Berkes, F. 2008, 4th edition. *Sacred Ecology*. Abingdon: Routledge. (20 pages) E-book

✦ Brown, K. 2013. Social Ecological Resilience and Human Security. Chapter 9 (Pages 107-116) in Sygna, Linda, Karen O'Brien and Johanna Wolf (eds.), *A Changing Environment for Human Security: Transformative Approaches to Research, Policy, and Action*. London, UK: Routledge-Earthscan. (10 pages) E-book

✦ Dryzek, J. 2013. Making Sense of Earth's Politics: A Discourse Approach. Chapter 1 (Pages 3-23) in Dryzek, John. 2013. *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses* Oxford: Oxford University Press. (21 pages)

✦ Ehrhardt-Martinez, K. and Schor, J.B. et al. 2015. Consumption and Climate Change. Chapter 4 (Pages (93-106) in Dunlap, R. and Brulle, R. (eds.) *Climate and Society*, London. Routledge. (14 pages) E-book

✦ Head, L. 2016. Grief will be our companion. Chapter 2 (pages (21-37) in Head, Lesley. 2016. *Hope and Grief in the Anthropocene: Re-Conceptualising Human–nature Relations*. New York, NY: Routledge. (17 pages) E-book

✦ Heyd, T. and Brooks, N. 2009. Exploring cultural dimensions of adaptation. Chapter 17 (Pages 269-282) in: Adger, N. W., Lorenzoni, I. and O'Brien, K. (eds.) *Adapting to Climate Change- Thresholds, Values, Governance*. Cambridge University press, UK (14 pages) E-book

✦ Milkoreit, M. 2016. The Promise of Climate Fiction – Imagination, Storytelling and the Politics of the Future. Chapter 10 (Pages (171-191) ) in: Wapner, P. and E. Hilal (eds.) 2016, *Reimagining Climate Change*. Routledge Publishing (21 pages) E-book

✦ Riedy, C. 2019. The Witnesses. Pages 1- 15 in K. O'Brien et al (eds) *Our Entangled Future: Stories to Empower Quantum Social Change*. (15 pages) E-book.

✦ Sharma, M. 2017. The Radical Systems and Cultural Transformer: Everyone's Contribution. Chapter 9 (Pages 209-231) in *Radical Transformational Leadership: Strategic Action for Change Agents*. North Atlantic Books. (23 pages) E-book

✦ Stirling, A. 2015. Emancipating transformations: from controlling 'the transition' to culturing plural radical progress. Chapter 4 in: I. Scoones et al. 2015. *The Politics of Green Transformations*. (Pages 54-67) London: Routledge/Earthscan. (14 pages) E-book

✦ Wilhite, H. 2016. A theory of Habits. Chapter 2 in: Wilhite, Harold. 2016. *The Political Economy of Low Carbon Transformation: Breaking the Habits of Capitalism*. (21-39) London : New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. (19 pages) E-book

## **In compendium**

\*Singh, V. 2016. Entanglement. In: J.J. Adams (eds.) *Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction*. (269-322). London: Saga (54 pages)

\*Stoknes, Per Espen. 2015. *What We Think About When We Try Not to Think About Global Warming*. Pages 54-84 (Chapters 5-7). White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green. (31 pages)

## **Available online**

@Barnett, J. and Adger, W.N. 2007. Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict. *Political Geography*, 26, 6. 639–655. Available online (17 pages)

@Dietz, T., Rosa, A. and York, R. 2007. Driving the human ecological footprint. *Frontiers in Ecology and Environment* 5, 1: 13-18. Available online (6 pages)

@Gibbs, W. Wayt. 2017 “How Much Energy Will the World Need?” *Anthropocene Magazine*. Available online (4 pages)

@Ingram, M., Ingram, H. and Lejano, R. 2015. Environmental Action in the Anthropocene: The Power of Narrative Networks. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, November. 1–16. Available online (16 pages)

@Jenkins, K., McCauley, D., Heffron, R., Stephan, H., Rehner, R., 2016. Energy justice: A conceptual review. *Energy Research & Social Science*. 11: 174–182. Available online (9 pages)

@Leichenko, R. and Silva, J.A. 2014. Climate Change and Poverty: Vulnerability, Impacts, and Alleviation Strategies. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*. 5, 4: 539–56. Available online. (18 pages)

@Maxwell, S. Fuller, R., Brooks, T. and Watson, J. 2016. Biodiversity: The ravages of guns, nets and bulldozers. *Nature* 536, 7615: 143-145 Available online (3 pages)

@McGlade, C. and Ekins, P. 2015. The Geographical Distribution of Fossil Fuels Unused When Limiting Global Warming to 2 °C. *Nature* 517, 7533: 187–90. Available online. (3 pages)

@O’Brien, K. 2018. Is the 1.5°C Target Possible? Exploring the Dynamics of Social Transformations. *COSUST* 31: 153-160 Available online (7 pages)

@O’Brien, K. and Leichenko, R. M. 2000. Double Exposure: Assessing the Impacts of Climate Change within the Context of Economic Globalization. *Global Environmental Change* 10, 3: 221–32. Available online (12 pages)

@ Reckien, D., Creutzig, F., Fernandez, B., Lwasa, S., Tovar-Restrepo, M., McEvoy, D. and Satterthwaite, D.. 2017. Climate Change, Equity and the Sustainable Development Goals: An Urban Perspective. *Environment and Urbanization* 29, 1: 159–82 Available online (24 pages)

@Ribot, J., 2014. Cause and response: Vulnerability and climate in the Anthropocene. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41 (5), 667–705. Available online (38 pages)

@Roberts, J. T. and Parks, B. C. 2010. A “shared vision”? Why inequality should worry us. In: O’Brien, Karen, Asunción Lera St Clair, and Berit Kristoffersen, (eds.) 2010. *Climate Change*,

Ethics and Human Security. (65-82) New York: Cambridge University Press. Available online (18 pages)

Scoville-Simonds, M., Jamali, H., and Hufty, M. 2019. The Hazards of Mainstreaming: Climate change adaptation politics in three dimensions. *World Development* 125 Available online (10 pages)

Shi, L. et al. 2016. Roadmap towards justice in urban climate adaptation research. *Nature Climate Change* 6: 131–137. Available online (7 pages)

@Steffen, W.S., Rockström, J. and Costanza, R. 2011. How Defining Planetary Boundaries Can Transform Our Approach to Growth Solutions. *Solutions: For a sustainable and desirable future*. 2, 3: 1-8 Available online (8 pages)

@Tibbs, H. 2011. Changing Cultural Values and the Transition to Sustainability. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 15, 3: 13 – 32. Available online (20 pages)

@Vermeulen, S.J., Campbell, B.M., and Ingram, J.S.I., 2012. Climate Change and food systems. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 37 (1), 195–222. Available online (28 pages)

@Vijay, V., Pimm, S. L., Jenkins, C. N. and Smith, S. J. 2016. The Impacts of Oil Palm on Recent Deforestation and Biodiversity Loss. *PLOS ONE*. 11, 7: 1-19 Available online (19 pages)

@ Weber, A. and Hildegard, K. 2015. Towards Cultures of Aliveness: Politics and Poetics in a Postdualistic Age, an Anthropocene Manifesto. *The Solutions Journal* 6, 5. 58-65. Available online (8 pages) (NOTE: mistake in the curriculum – correct reference is Weber and Kurt 2015)

@Zoomers, A. 2010. Globalisation and the foreignisation of space: seven processes driving the current global land grab. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. 37, 2: 429-447. (19 pages) Available online