

Course information

SOSANT2270, Contemporary Studies in Kinship and Gender. Spring 2024

course convenor: Anne-Erita G. Berta. Date of report: 1. July 2024

2. Assessment of the course

During the course, students are expected to acquire a general understanding of the relevance of kinship theories. The students are expected to know that as analytical concepts, kinship and gender initially converged around the debates of natural differences, biological givens, and the ethnocentric bias of the use of these concepts in anthropology. Within contemporary anthropology, kinship and gender are viewed as mutually constitutive. In the course we have explored how gender and kinship are recognized and practiced differently between and within societies/cultures. We have explored how these processes are productive of social inequalities and notions of difference more generally. With a view to critical reflection, we have explored the kinds of contemporary phenomena that kinship and gender help to elucidate and how these two core modes of relatedness come together.

Teaching methods and organization

Teaching have mainly consisted of a series of 10 two-hour lectures (2x45 mins). The lectures have taken the form of a combination of lecture and various forms of student active teaching. Students have been assigned readings and a preparational task before each lecture with the expectation to contribute to class. The preparational tasks have varied from a hand-in essay to various analytical, theoretical, comparative questions that the students are expected to think about or answer while they read the prepared texts for each lecture. In class, these tasks have been discussed in groups or plenum, in addition to other tasks, problems, questions, or discussions. Extra-curricular resources such as news articles, podcasts, conference recordings, video clips, etc. have been added to the Canvas platform in relevance to each lecture and they have been actively used in lecture to illustrate the relevance of the theoretical and empirical readings for understanding contemporary phenomena across the world. In class the students have been expected to contribute to discussions and various group tasks where they get to practice their analytical and critical reflection skills with peers, supervised by the teacher. 69 students were admitted to the course and in-class appearance was varied between 25-35 students. In the end 35 students ended up sitting for the exam, making the show-up in class relatively high. In class, students were always welcome to contribute to discussions or debates in addition to the assigned tasks they were given. The learning environment was generally perceived as positive in the sense that most students contributed actively and with curiosity and interest during discussions. The students' efforts among the students who showed up in class varied, but most contributed to discussions and group tasks. In a student active classroom, the teacher was able to provide formative feedback by contributing in the smaller group-discussions and in plenum discussions.

3. Student's feedback

In the breaks, and after each class, I received feedback from students who expressed that they found the topic difficult and complex. Many of these students were exchange students and about 2/3 of the students came from other disciplines. The same (and other) students frequently reported that they found the discussions in class intriguing and inspiring. In these informal feedback sessions students reported that while finding the readings long and difficult to comprehend, in-class discussions and lectures helped them comprehend and understand the material and their comparative potential better. The students were given opportunity to answer the online course evaluation questionnaire in class around mid-term. Every class since, they were reminded to fill out the form. However, only 10 students submitted their evaluation. The more informal feedback is therefore an important

supplementary to the questionnaire. The report from the online course evaluation reflects similar feedback to that given in class. Students report that they find the readings difficult, that they are too long and too many readings for each lecture. Some report that they prefer if the lecturer go deeper into fewer texts and others suggest that the teacher go through all the readings rather than focusing on one or two more in-depth. The report further show that students find the comparative discussions in class meaningful and that they like the informal tone of the lecturer.

4. Overall assessment and further development

The course has sparked enthusiasm and engagement in the students and although many of the students major in other disciplines and/or speak English as their second- or third- language, both the students feedback in the formal, anonymous course evaluation report and the teachers' informal in-class feedback reflects that the course sparks engagement among students. The two main feedback that is worth noting is that students find the topic, readings, and contents of the course challenging and difficult to comprehend, while they simultaneously report that they find the contents, readings, and the topic of the course highly interesting, compelling, and inspiring. In both course evaluation form and in-class feedback students report that despite finding the course "hard", they experience a high learning outcome.

A suggestion to improve the student's learning outcome and motivation could be to offer seminars in addition to the two-hour lectures which are now a combination of seminar and lecture. The course requires students to be independent and find informal forums (study groups) to fully explore and discuss the complex issues that make the content of this course, this might be a disadvantage for some students. The fact that students find the readings too long, too many, and too hard might be explained by the fact that a large proportion of the students come from other disciplines than anthropology where they are not accustomed to the length of anthropological essays.