SOCI 511
Social Movements and Collective Action
Winter 2011
Mondays, 9:35-11:25
in Leacock 819

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 10am-12pm.

**Course Description:**

This seminar provides an introduction to the major topics and issues in the study of social movements and contentious politics. Instead of attempting the impossible task of surveying the entire field, we will concentrate on the main theoretical approaches and assess their contributions through the discussion of in-depth case studies. We will address the following questions: What is a social movement? Why and how do people become involve in protest? How do they experience collective action? What are the forms and strategies of social protest? To what extent and how does the political-institutional and cultural context shape collective action? What role do organizations play in this process? How are coalitions formed and sustained over time? What factors contribute to the transnationalization of collective action? To what extent and how do social movements matter? We will move from the micro to the meso and macro levels.

**Course Requirements:**

1) **Weekly Readings:**

This is a reading-intensive course (between 100 and 200 pages a week). All students are expected to complete weekly readings so as to have a better grasp of the subject matter and participate in class discussions.

The following required books are available at the university bookstore and on reserve at the library (except Lopez’s):


I have also placed the *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* on reserve at the library; it surveys the main topics and provides good bibliographical references.

In addition to these books, there are *required* articles in PDF format that can be downloaded from the course website.

2) **Class Discussion:**

Insofar as this is a seminar rather than a lecture, class discussion will be a central element. No discussion, no class. We will not have time to discuss every single point of the readings. We will focus instead on the main contributions of each reading; the goal is not to do an exegesis but to compare and contrast the different concepts, theories, and approaches, and assess their value added (epistemic gain and explanatory leverage). Your contribution to class discussion will be evaluated on the basis of **Participation**, **Reaction**, and **Moderation**.

2.1) **Participation:**

All students are expected to attend class regularly and participate in class discussions. Participation will count for 10% of the final course grade.

2.2) **Reaction:**

All students are required to prepare two comments and two discussion questions each week. Comments/questions can either focus exclusively on one particular reading or compare readings and draw parallels.

Reactions should be **150 word-long** and emailed to me by **6pm on Sunday at the latest**. I will then copy and paste all Reactions on a single document and send them to the entire class. All students are expected to read everybody’s Reaction before class. The first Reaction will be due on **Sunday January 23**. You will be exempted from sending out a Reaction on the week that you are scheduled to moderate the class discussion.

Reactions will **not** be graded. By simple virtue of sending out your Reaction on time, you will get 1%, for a total of 10% of the final course grade.

2.3) **Moderation:**

Each student will have to lead and moderate class discussion **during 30 minutes** once during the term. Moderation does not imply lecturing; it simply entails raising issues and questions and facilitating the discussion as you do when you are leading conferences for an undergraduate course. You will be allowed to use people’s Reactions to lead the discussion. I will begin the class by briefly introducing the readings of the week and then let the moderators do their job.

Two students will be responsible for moderating class discussion each week (2 x 30’ = 1 hour). Dates will be assigned on Monday **January 17** so as to begin on Monday **January 24**.

Moderation will count for 10% of the final course grade.
3) Papers:

3.1) Review Paper:

All students are expected to write one review paper during the term. Review papers should be structured and written like a book review that one can read in academic journals (e.g., *Contemporary Sociology*) and between 750 and 1,000 word-long double-spaced. See the Appendix at the end of the syllabus for guidelines.

*B.A. students* must write the paper on *one of the four books discussed in class*. The paper must be handed in at the beginning of the class during which we are supposed to discuss the book. Late papers will not be accepted.

*M.A. and Ph.D. students* must write the paper on *a book of their choice not discussed in class and published within the last two years (2009 and 2010)*. The book must focus on social movements or contentious politics and should be related to the topic on which students are planning on writing their term paper. I will have to approve the book. Papers are due in class on *Monday February 28* (late papers will be penalized: -2% a day). Students will receive feedback on their paper so that they can improve it and send it to a journal for publication.

The Review Paper will count for 20% of the final course grade.

3.2) Term Paper:

Each student will have to write a term paper. The latter can (1) focus on a specific social movement organization, protest event, or social movement, (2) compare two organizations, events, or movements in a single country or across countries, or (3) discuss a general theoretical issue. If your paper focuses on one of the theories or movements discussed in class, you are expected to go beyond class discussions and readings.

You must submit a one-page proposal by *February 7* and papers are due in the mailbox of the Sociology Department (Leacock 712) by Monday *April 11 before 4pm* (late papers will be penalized: -2% a day). Papers should be 20 pages, double-spaced, with 2.5cm margins.

Make sure to include references in the text. Failure to do so is plagiarism.

*McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).*

The Term Paper will count for 50% of the final course grade.

4) Summary:

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COURSE OUTLINE

1) Overview of Course (January 10)

2) Definitions and Paradigms (January 17)


   * Discussion of Moderation schedule

3) The Role of Emotions (January 24)


   * First Reaction due on Sunday January 23 before 6pm

4) Identity, Frames, and Repertoires (January 31)


5) **Case Study: Experiencing Collective Action in Argentina (February 7)**


* Brief presentation of Term Paper proposals in class

6) **Mobilizing Resources (February 14)**


* February 21-25: Spring Break

7) **Case Study: The American Labor Movement (February 28)**


* Review Papers are due in class (only for M.A. and Ph.D. students)

8) **Networks and Coalitions (March 7)**


9) Political Opportunity Structures and Fields (March 14)


10) Case Study: The Civil Rights Movement (March 21)


11) Mobilization Beyond Borders (March 28)


12) Case Studies: The Zapatistas and Transnational Labor Organizing (April 4)


13) Social Movement Outcomes (April 8)


APPENDIX: Guidelines for Review Paper

Reviews provide an opportunity to survey in a systematic way a book in which you are interested. Every non-fiction book has certain architecture. A large argument is based upon the coherent linking together of several smaller arguments, each of which is argued through the exposition of some empirical findings that support the point.

As you read, you should bear in mind four things:

1. What is the really big argument that the author is trying to make?
2. What are the smaller arguments that the author claims add up to the big argument? Are you convinced that the big picture is equal to the sum of these smaller arguments?
3. What types of evidence does the author provide to demonstrate his/her thesis? Are you convinced these data really prove the points claimed for them? Could you make a different point with the same data?
4. On what assumptions and paradigms does the author build? Where does he/she stand in current debates?

Here is a potential structure for the paper:

1. Introductory paragraph. What is at stake here? Locate the work and the author in bigger debates and controversies.
2. Get to the point right away (about 1-2 paragraphs). What is the big point and why should we care? Quite often, the author of the book will tell you why they think you should care. If you are convinced, you can use their reasoning.
3. What are the smaller arguments that compose the book and the evidence that the author uses to make his/her case? (3-4 paragraphs). Enumerate them in a way that the reader can follow the plan of the book, but avoid a lengthy blow-by-blow account of its contents (such as: Chap. 1 covers A; Chap. 2 covers B; etc.). Present them in a way that the author would find fair.
4. Does it add up for you? (3 paragraphs). Are you convinced? State your criticism clearly and honestly (certainly do not be embarrassed to be critical), but try to remember that someone worked hard on this book. Avoid personal attacks and trivial polemics; be constructive.
5. Concluding paragraph. Here you can exit by returning to the biggest issues that are at stake and highlight the main contribution(s) of the book. Avoid ending with empty recommendations (e.g., “More research is needed...” or “I recommend this book to people who like books”).

1 Thanks to Eran Shor for suggestions.