Sensorveiledning / Exam guide
SOS2501, AUTUMN – 2010

The Norwegian Society SOS2501 in general:
This is a one semester 15 points course. The students are mainly exchange students from foreign universities visiting Norway for a shorter period of time. They have had several lecturers during this course and the curriculum covers a wide field (both sociology and political science with a focus on Norway). During the course each student has written two papers (one based on a sociological topic and one based on a topic from political science). The exam provides questions both from sociology and political science.

Both task 1 and 2 have to be passed in order for you to pass the exam.

Task 1 is based on a topic from political science and counts 50 % of the total grade. The candidate must answer one of the two alternatives below:

Task 1:

Question a)

*Through for instance international peacekeeping operations and international peace negotiation Norway has built a reputation as a humanitarian power. Identify at least two examples of Norwegian “humanitarian power”, and discuss to which extent Norway is a humanitarian power.*

This question is based upon Nils Petter Gleditsch’s lecture, the curriculum for this lecture, as well as Riste (2005). The students should first of all make an attempt at defining what a “humanitarian power” is. The student should give at least two concrete empirical examples – this could be anything from UN membership to peace negotiations in Sri Lanka. The discussion of to which extent Norway is a humanitarian power could be based on the empirical examples given, and the discussion may also draw upon counter arguments, such as Norwegian participation in the war in Afghanistan. In answering this question, extra points will be given to those students that manage to see the coin from both sides, and correspondingly students that fall into the “hallelujah” trap praising Norway as a humanitarian power will not be rewarded.

Question b)

*Describe central characteristics of the Norwegian party system as it can be observed today. Discuss the way in which historical cleavages have constituted the economical, territorial and cultural fundament for these political parties. How relevant are these historical cleavages in explaining the role of the parties today?*

This question is based upon Anders Todal Jenssen’s lecture, Rokkan (1967) and Heidar (2001). The students should be able to roughly identify the major political parties and from which processes they sprung out. E.g. the student may argue that the Socialist Left Party (SV)
was formed as a reaction to NATO membership, nuclear weapons etc. (reaction to some of the Cold War realities), that the Progress Party successfully campaigns on the tax and immigration issue and so forth. The best students should be able to identify how some of the major parties have adapted and changed, although the “old” ideologies may still be seen. The best students should also be able to identify new cleavages.

Task 2 is based on a sociological topic and counts 50 % of the total grade. The candidate must answer one of the two alternatives below:

Task 2:

Question a)

Account for characteristics and descriptions of the rural areas in Norway, and discuss different interpretations of the rural and urban.

This topic has been covered by Johan Fredrik Rye in his lecture, in his lecture notes, and in one of the articles that were set up in conjunction with his lecture (Rye 2006). The assignment is divided into two parts, but in the same time its parts are woven together. In this assignment the candidate is both asked to account for characteristics and descriptions of the rural areas in Norway – and to discuss different interpretations of the rural and urban. In the first part the candidate should focus mainly of the rural areas in Norway. In the second part of the question we expect the candidate to discuss different interpretations of both rural and urban areas in a wider context.

The candidate should mention that the rural is not described and defined solely by the concrete, or tangible, objective features of rural areas (e.g., landscape, settlement and occupational structures). Greater focus rests on the more abstract characteristics of social life that evolve in these areas, for example traditionalism, dense social structures, a feeling of community, and so forth. These abstract descriptions of rural social life are often normatively charged, and most often in favour of the rural which is conceived as more ‘natural’ than the urban. Nature/natural seems the most prominent feature of rurality. Rural life is conceived as being more ‘natural’ than life in the cities, and this quality of the rural is usually positively valued and often perceived as its major advantage. Another important factor is that the feeling of community is stronger and people seem to be closer to each other, partly due to the transparency of rural life that ensures that ‘everyone know everyone’. A third element is the tranquility, calmness and peacefulness of rural life, as opposed to the restlessness of urban life. The rural is also described as more ‘beautiful’ than the asphalted cityscapes. Some further characteristics of rurality are ‘health’, ‘relaxation’, ‘simplicity’ and ‘safety’. Taken together, these aspects of rural life may be summarized in the idea of the ‘rural idyll’ - the conception of the countryside as location for the good life. The countryside is described as the refuge from modernity.
In addition to account for the ‘rural idyll’, we also expect the candidate to account for the ‘rural dull’. The rural dull is characterized by negative factors like a structure of strict social control, less tolerance for those who succeed and more means to force the deviants into line. The fact that ‘everyone know everyone’ is not just a positive feature, but also a negative one. The rurality is described as double-edged (caring and controlling at the same time). Further, rural life is thought to be less progressive than life in urban societies. It is traditional rather than modern, and backward looking rather than exploring the opportunities for the future. The rural is often described as ‘primitive’ and thought to be the place for unskilled manual jobs rather than high-skilled and high-tech occupations. As an extension of this, it is important that the candidate explain that these findings from European research are relevant to a Norwegian context, but that the rural/urban-divide seems less marked in Norway than in other European countries. Young people in Norway have for instance good access to education, and unemployment does not seem to represent a particular problem for rural youth. While Norwegian rural communities are relatively inaccessible in terms of geography, the symbolic distance between city and countryside seems less than in most European countries. The assignment is considered very good if the candidate in addition to this manages to address the variety of rural images by making use of the social theories of Pierre Bourdieu.

**Question b)**

**Account for the Norwegian parental leave, and explain the objectives of the fathers’ quota and the cash-for-care-system we have in Norway. Discuss whether these welfare rights may have an impact on gender equality.**

This topic has been covered by Berit Brandth in her lecture and in her lecture notes. In this assignment the candidate is both asked to account for – and to discuss the topic. In the first part of the question, the candidate is expected to account for the Norwegian parental leave. The candidate should first mention what characterizes the Norwegian parental leave: 1) Right to leave from work in order to provide daily care for one’s children. 2) Precondition: Parents must have been employed six of the last ten months before birth. Then the candidate should mention the parental leave rights: Maternity leave: Paid leave reserved for the mother, 3 weeks before the birth and 6 weeks after. “Daddy days”: Welfare leave for father in connection with birth, 2 weeks. Father’s quota: Paid leave reserved for father, 10 weeks. Parental leave: Paid leave that may be shared by the parents. Either 27 weeks with 100 % pay or 37 weeks with 80 %. The candidate should also mention that 9 weeks is reserved for mother, 10 weeks is reserved for father, and that 27/37 weeks are shared. In this statement, the candidate should also mention how the parental leave is used in Norway.

In the second part of the question, the candidate is expected to explain the objectives of the fathers’ quota and the cash-for-care system we have in Norway. The candidate is expected to mention that the fathers’ quota is part of the Norwegian parental leave. Then the candidate should mention that the objectives of the fathers’ quota are 1) To promote fathers’ participation at home, 2) To promote more equal distribution of the burdens and benefits of working life between mothers and fathers and 3) To strengthen the father-child relationship.
The candidate should also mention to what extent it is used in Norway. In the third part of the question, the candidate is expected to explain the objectives of the cash-for-care system we have in Norway. The cash-for-care is a system where families with children less than 3 years who do not use public child care get cash (EUR 400) each month. The most important objectives of the cash-for-care system is 1) Justice between families in receiving public support, 2) Freedom of choice, 3) More time to care for own children. The candidate should also mention how the cash-for-care system is used in Norway.

Based on the statement of these welfare rights, the candidate is expected to discuss whether they have an impact on gender equality. Here we expect the candidate to discuss it based on the objectives and how these welfare rights are actually used in Norway.