Department of Sociology

SOCIOLOGY III

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY:
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

2019: Fourth Term

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“Hope remains only in the most difficult task of all: to reconsider everything from the ground up, so as to shape a living society inside a dying society” (Albert Camus)

Introduction:

Sociology as an academic discipline is known for inspiring ideas of social transformation. But the discipline also faces many distinct contemporary challenges in its quest to articulate social life and present possibilities for movement. This is clearly evinced by the recent student movements which introduced complex dilemmas of inequality, squarely located in the higher education and disciplinary environment. The student movement highlighted the urgent need for us to use the tools of intellectual inquiry not only as instruments with which to explore greater society but also with which to scrutinise ourselves as South African scholars, theorists and members of the academy. It is in this vein that the course critically explores the socio-political role of the intellectual in contributing to meaningful social change.

The course will take place over seven weeks. Four major themes will be covered. Part One of the module is an overview of higher education transformation in South Africa and positioning current developments within a long view of the relationship of the university with society. Part Two of the course is on the sociology of intellectuals. Here we will explore texts which attempt to decipher the ‘role of the intellectual in society’. Part Three of the course looks specifically at the university-trained intellectual or the academic, and interrogates some of the tensions and possibilities between academics and society from the perspective of social movement research. Part Four follows from the first three themes, by dissecting what academic identity could mean across different and unequal racial and gender identities and how this could be a basis for transcending traditionally elite structures of intellectual life – or not. Here standpoint theory is used as a framework for discussing marginal intellectuality, “outsiders-within” and the relationship between social and academic identity.

The module is reading-intensive and requires you to study core readings (as outlined in class) against class discussions as well as the slides. You are expected to consult additional readings to corroborate your understanding, as well as the additional literature emailed during the term.

Keeping Up to Speed:

Preparing for topics ahead of time will make lectures more valuable – doing this will allow you to listen more meaningfully to what is said in class. A passive attitude to reading compromises
your ability to keep pace with the course and, ultimately, to do well. So, preparatory reading is very important. Even better, form study groups and discuss ideas amongst yourselves.

Revision questions will occasionally be handed out before or after lectures to highlight the important points of thought being introduced in lectures; this will help you to navigate readings and help you to focus on particular elements when preparing for discussions, essays and exams. The revision questions will also be helpful in understanding the way in which literature is tackled.

Assignments and Grading:

Your in-term class mark will comprise 40% of your overall mark. The class mark will be made up of the writing of an essay of 1500-2000 words and a chapter review of 1000 words. The chapter review will be based on Khunou et al. (2019) Black academic voices: The South African experience (see full reference below). Students will choose one of the thirteen chapters in this local anthology to review, in terms of their own understanding of the higher education landscape as well as their own personal experiences. The chapter review is due on Monday, 23 September. The essay questions will be handed out in week two of the course and the essay is due on Friday, 18 October. Finally, a three-hour written examination in November carries the remainder (60%) of the course mark.

Please consult Handout 1 for an outline of the University’s policy on plagiarism, guidelines on the formatting and writing of assignments, the departmental rules regarding citations and references, and the criteria for assessing written work. A copy of the Assignment Cover Sheet, which must accompany all assignments submitted to the Department, is also available in Handout 1.

Course Requirements:

In order to do well in this course critical engagement with texts is crucial. The goal of the course is not to test whether you can repeat the readings that you have done, but whether you are able to use existing academic concepts, arguments and perspectives critically to form a perspective and contribution of your own. Developing a unique, dynamic and inquiring perspective on social questions is not an easy thing to do, it requires that you commit time to thinking through information, reading and discussing what you have learned. I am available for one-on-one meetings to discuss course material; these can easily be arranged by sending me an email. The lectures on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are there to clarify
concepts, provide frameworks for understanding and direction to help you navigate readings but you are ultimately responsible for your own grasp of the course material through individual study.

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<th>1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT TO TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION</th>
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2. THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN MODERN SOCIETY


3. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE? THE ACADEMY
AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY


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4. STANDPOINT THEORY – IDENTITY, MARGINALITY AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE


