CSUS 854  
Agriculture and Social Movements  

Spring 2015  
Wednesday 2:00-4:40 p.m.  
Location: 19 Natural Resources Bldg.

Instructor: Wynne Wright, Ph.D.  
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“Like the prophets, movements ‘speak before’: they announce what is taking shape even before its direction and content become clear.” - A. Melucci, 1996:1

COURSE DESCRIPTION

MSU Catalog  

Course Elaboration:  
This course will explore the rich legacy that social movements have played in transforming food and agriculture systems. Recently, the role of citizens and nongovernmental organizations in bringing about sustainable and democratically constituted food systems has strengthened the interest in social movements. In different segments of our economy and society, social movements have declined in popularity, but in the food system they appear to have enjoyed a resurgence and are successful in bringing about change in some arenas. Sociologists are not only beginning to analyze these relatively recent socio-political developments (see for example the recent issue of “Contexts”, special issue on Food [Summer, 2014]), but some are just beginning to relate them to a longer history of social movements (including traditional environmental, consumption, and farmers’ and workers’ rights movements).

In this class we will investigate social movement theory, and the plurality of agrifood social movements in concrete historical and contemporary settings in order to understand how citizens can effect change, what has worked and what has not worked, as well as the role of social protest in shaping our food system. Comprehending social movements requires understanding power relations in society and the role of popular culture, material conditions and ideas, thus allowing us to ask, “Who benefits from this arrangement?”; “What are people doing about the situation?”; “Why do movements come into being at a particular time?”; “How to they succeed?”; and “Under what circumstances do they fail?” The theoretical literature will provide us with the tools to answer these questions.

The main goal of the course is to acquaint students with the breadth of contemporary literature on how social change is possible through the vehicle of social movements and to become familiar with the scholarship on agrifood insurgency. Students are urged to bring specific interests in this topic and help us customize the syllabus on the first day. Since this is a new but burgeoning field, I hope to encourage your writing to take the form of ‘works in progress’ so that you might become one of those voices that makes an impact on this field through your publications that took form in this class. This will provide you the opportunity to stake out your own interests and apply critical thinking skills to contribute to the conversation.
Program Statement:
This course is targeted toward graduate students with an interest in social change in agrifood systems but students interested in social change in broader issues will also be well served by this course. This course will advance students’ analytical thinking, academic writing and research skills. CSUS 854 will be useful for students who aspire to academic positions, but it is equally valuable for those interested in applied work. Students can learn more about the Department of Community Sustainability graduate program at http://www.csus.msu.edu/graduate.

Learning Objectives:
• Acquire fluency in the literature in food, agriculture and social movements.
• Cultivate an understanding of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of social movements as a form of social change, power and democratic engagement.
• Develop the capacity to discern how agrifood system change is or is not possible through the medium of social movements.
• Sharpen critical thinking skills through reading, writing, and class discussion
  o “Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is … clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness” (Scriven and Paul; 8th Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform, 1987).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Article 2.III.B.2 of the Academic Freedom Report states: “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the Department of Community Sustainability adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations.

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU regulations on Protection of Scholarship and Grades will receive a failing grade in the course or on the assignment.

Faculty are required to report all instances in which a penalty grade is given for academic dishonesty. Students reported for academic dishonesty are required to take an online course about the integrity of scholarship and grades. A hold will be placed on the student's account until such time as the student completes the course. This course is overseen by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
The course will be presented in a seminar format. By this I mean that all members of the class will be responsible for leading class discussion. Regular attendance is a necessity as it is in all graduate level courses. Completing weekly critical commentary assignments before class is also a necessity to promote dialogue in class. I see my role as a class director. I will provide direction and information as well as link you to networks to help you blossom as a scholar. Your responsibilities as a student are to read, raise questions, think seriously about assigned materials, read, raise questions, be attentive to issues presented in class, read, raise questions, engage in scholarly discussions, read some more, raise more questions, and write. If we all live up to our responsibilities, we will create the best learning environment possible.
Class Attendance and Engagement
All students are expected to regularly attend class, be on time, to complete the assigned readings PRIOR to each class meeting, and to participate in class discussions. My position on class participation is that it is necessary to talk about complex social phenomena or you won’t grasp the material. I know this is hard for some and comes too easily to others, but we will work on it together to build your skill set in this area. The key is that you are prepared by having read and reflected on the readings, written a thoughtful and critical weekly commentary, engage with the material and each other during class discussions to create a lively and stimulating intellectual environment. I realize you are also at different stages of your development (masters, doctoral), keep in mind that I am aware of this. I am first and foremost interested in your growth over the semester regardless of your starting point.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
• Electronic Articles

EVALUATION:

| Attendance, Preparation and Participation | 20% |
| Critical Commentary Papers (10) | 25% |
| Social Movements Term Paper | 30% |
| Movements Paper Presentation | 10% |
| Class Facilitator | 15% |

Weekly Commentary Papers
Students are periodically expected to write a one page critical commentary on the readings assigned for that week. These commentaries should be organized as follows: 1) one paragraph (or so) that summarizes the main argument(s) of the readings; 2) one paragraph (or so) that positions the reading(s) within the main themes we are exploring in this seminar (e.g., within the broader context of agrarian mobilization or social movements theory, or etc.); 3) one to two paragraphs (or so) that outlines the major contributions and major weaknesses of the argument; 4) several questions that are unresolved within the reading and/or that provide a useful direction for class discussion.

Students are expected to complete ten of these commentaries throughout the term. You can select what dates you want to submit, but at the end of the term you should have ten completed. The commentaries should be submitted via email and are due no later than 3 pm on the Tuesday preceding Wednesday’s seminar. If you are late submitting these, no credit will be given for the assignment. This will be worth 30% of your total grade.

Class Facilitator:
You will be expected to lead class discussion for two weeks of the semester. This will include identifying the papers on the movement of your choice we will read as a class. A sign-up sheet for class discussions will be available at the first class meeting. In preparing your week as discussion facilitator, you will have the set of written comments prepared by class participants (you will receive these on Tuesday afternoon, so do not rely heavily on these), but the focus and direction of the discussion should reflect your own sense of what is important and worthwhile for the seminar. See the handout “Guidelines for Class Facilitation” for direction.

Social Movements Term Paper and Presentation:
During the first weeks of class, you should select a social movement to research that will serve as your case study. Your task is to develop a research question about the movement and conduct the scholarly
work needed for answering the question. You will be required to report on your paper verbally to the class in a 10-15 minute presentation toward the end of the term. By Feb4 you should submit a 1-2 page proposal for the paper so that I can provide feedback and suggestions before you begin writing.

This paper will give you the chance to integrate, analyze and critique assigned readings from several weeks around a common theoretical framework or set of issues of your choice. The paper should be about 15-20 pages in length. I also expect that as you research your own movement, you will be bringing interesting findings, probing questions, or perplexing dilemmas to the class for dialogue and deliberation. You should approach the class as a resource tool for aiding in your discovery process. See the handout titled “Guidelines for Social Movements Research Project and Presentation” for more detail.

Disability Accommodations
Any student who feels that she or he may need accommodations based on a disability should make an appointment to see me so arrangements can be made.

Other Resources
On-line databases, e.g. JSTOR: http://er.lib.msu.edu.index.cfm

On-line journals: http://er.lib.msu.edu/index.cfm

Journals:
- Social Movement Studies
- Rural Sociology
- Journal of Rural Studies
- Journal of Rural Social Science
- International Journal of Sociology of Food & Agriculture
- Mobilization: An International Journal
- Agriculture and Human Values
- Sociologia Ruralis
- Food Policy
- Journal of Agrarian Studies

Professional Organizations:
- Rural Sociological Society
- Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society
- Association for the Study of Food & Society
- International Rural Sociological Association

Tentative Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments
(dates subject to change)

The following is organized by theoretical and substantive topic. Roughly half of the semester will be devoted to discussing social movement theories and concepts and half dedicated to particular issues pertaining to food and agriculture movements. I will provide the readings that come out of book chapters or reports but you are expected to access the readings that are journal articles. These are easily downloaded. For those with advanced interest in this topic, you will do well to read the “recommended” readings and to ask me for more readings specifically targeted toward the massive body of social movements’ scholarship.

Week One (14 Jan): Getting Started: Introduction and Overview
Today we will get acquainted with the course content, format, as well as each other. We will spend much of our time discussing goals for the class and organizing content based on student input.

Week Two (21 Jan): What are Social Movements and why do they Matter?: Introduction to Social Movements in Historical Context: Definitions and Debates
Today we have two primary goals. First, we will consider the definition of social movements – what are they, what do they attempt to accomplish, what is their role in society, and how they differ from other forms of collective behavior. Secondly, will also explore the study of social movements from an historical perspective – how this scholarship has ebbed and flowed over the decades which will lead us to contemporary understandings of the phenomena including definitions and key on-going debates. Please read the following before class. Read them in the order I have listed them.

Read:


- Read these two articles together – the Blumberg piece illustrates many of the points in the Goodwin & Jasper article.


Recommended:


**Special Session: January 23, Friday, 12 noon**

Rory McVeigh, Notre Dame University


Dept. of Sociology Brown Bag Series, Room 457, Berkey Hall.

Pizza lunch and class session to follow presentation.

Read:


**Week Three (28 Jan): “Politics by Another Name”: U.S. Agrarian Protest 1700-1850.**
Today we explore the conditions of conduciveness for social movement emergence – when and why they occur and how they succeed from the perspective of Resource Mobilization (RM) theory.

Read:


Recommended:


**Week Four (4 Feb): Sowing the Seeds of Protest: Populism Spreads Throughout the Countryside:**
Today we explore the conditions of conduciveness for social movement emergence – when and why they occur and how they succeed from the perspective of political process theory.


Recommended:


**Week Five (11 Feb): The Role of the State in Social Movements**


Recommended:


**Week Six (Feb 18): Methods in Social Movements**
Today we explore methods commonly used in the study of social movements


Recommended:
It is highly recommended that you explore the entirety of the Klandermans and Staggenborg edited volume for excellent articles on other methods such as survey research, mathematical modeling, network analysis, participant observation, and comparative analyses.
See *Mobilization: An International Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 4: December 2013. This entire volume is devoted to social movement’s methods.

**Week Seven (25 Feb): Culture in Movements**
Today we return to the role of the subjective reintroduced by the cultural turn in social movements.


Recommended:

Week Eight (4 Mar): Culture in Movements: Farm Workers and Landless Workers Resistance


Recommended:

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The remainder of the semester will be co-constructed with students. Topics and readings for the remaining Spring 2015 sessions will be posted as they are determined.

Finals Week (6 May; Wednesday 1—12 pm): --- TBD