



SOSC 12400 27 - Self, Culture, and Society I - Instructor(s) - Anirban Karak

Project Title: **College Course Feedback - Autumn 2024**

Number Enrolled: **17**

Number of Responses: **10**

Report Comments

Opinions expressed in these evaluations are those of students enrolled in the specific course and do not represent the University.

Creation Date: **Friday, January 31, 2025**

What are the most important things that you learned in this course? Please reflect on the knowledge and skills you gained.

Comments
Marxist ideas. Read through capital volume 1, the manifesto, and part of the grundrisse. Essay writing requirement supported a deeper understanding of the material and how many of the texts were interrelated.
Understanding what Marx really meant in his works and gaining a wider and more thoughtful view of capitalism and the world that we live in today.
We learned about the essential teachings of Ibn Khaldun, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel. We investigated all of their perspectives surrounding the origin and functions of civilizations, but more importantly, the development of capitalism and what it was like to live in a capitalist society. I've learned a tremendous amount about the works of these individuals.
Smith Marx Weber Simmel Khaldun
I gained a pretty solid understanding of all the main thinkers we talked about (Smith Marx Weber Simmel). I learned about thinking in a sociological way and writing SOSC style papers.
the main arguments of Marx, Weber, Simmel, Khaldun
Understanding the context and key arguments behind the writings of Smith, Marx, Weber, and other influential social thinkers in the capitalist era. We learned about these thinkers and their writings framing the course around the question of necessary/unnecessary suffering in the world.

Describe how aspects of this course (lectures, discussions, labs, assignments, etc.) contributed to your learning.

Comments
Essay prompts were very directly related to the heart of the course standards.
There is a final exam at the end of the course instead of a final paper. This is bad. This is very very bad. It adds unnecessary stress and I wouldn't say even fairly evaluates course mastery. The SOSC sequence is supposed to get us to think about these readings, learn how to make intelligent/ well-structured arguments about the texts, and have productive discussions. I'm not someone who believes you should be able to entirely blow-off CORE classes. However, I see little to no benefit of this type of assessment for this type of course. A final exam encourages rote memorization rather than deeper thinking. We're also not at all assessed in this way throughout the quarter, so there is no practice for us.
What I found to be a very decent, though somewhat difficult, course throughout the quarter kind of shoots itself in the foot pedagogically when it comes to this final exam. For future students, note this exam is: 4 open-ended essay question on the reading. With no notes/access to the text during the exam. Expected length of response is ~600 words each question.
Slides to help organise information were helpful and Professor Karak's general method of teaching.
Lectures were extremely important in understanding the material read in assigned readings. They helped solidify and clarify concepts that were confusing, as texts like Marx are very dense and difficult to understand. Professor Karak did an excellent job of lecturing and explaining concepts that appeared daunting at first.
Lectures went into depth about the readings
Lectures were very good, I think they were the most helpful. Readings are readings, some of them felt a little long but it's a 9 week quarter ٩(ڤ)٩
very class-based
Prof is very organized, knows these writers and their points fluently, and presents their arguments/recaps our reading assignment in class in an unbiased and clear manner.
The lectures were pretty vital to success in this class, as everything you would need to remember for doing the essays and final would be stated during his lectures.

Please respond to the following:

	Mean	Median	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
This course challenged me intellectually.	4.78	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	22.22%	77.78%
I understood the purpose of this course and what I was expected to gain from it.	4.75	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%	75.00%
I understood the standards for success on assignments.	3.88	4.00	0.00%	12.50%	25.00%	25.00%	37.50%
Class time enhanced my ability to succeed in graded assignments.	4.89	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	88.89%
I received feedback on my performance that helped me improve my subsequent work.	4.11	5.00	0.00%	11.11%	22.22%	11.11%	55.56%
My work was evaluated fairly.	4.00	5.00	11.11%	0.00%	22.22%	11.11%	55.56%
I felt respected in this class.	4.00	5.00	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%
Overall, this was an excellent course.	4.11	5.00	0.00%	11.11%	22.22%	11.11%	55.56%

Additional comments about the course:

Comments
Professor Karak is amazing – he demands a lot, and you will not succeed if you do not do the readings and come to class and take active notes – but if you work hard, the class is actually very interesting and the professor is genuinely very passionate and that comes through in his classes. I loved learning the content we did (even though it was very difficult and took a lot of time).
Professor Karak is excellent. He is an extremely enthusiastic teacher, and makes class fly by. He definitely assigns a lot of reading, and be prepared to work hard in the class for a good grade, but you will learn so much in the process.
Very interesting class that truly makes you understand the texts in depth. Professor can come across as condescending towards some students.

I would recommend this course to:

	No	Yes
Highly-motivated and well-prepared students	0.00%	100.00%
Anyone interested in the topic	50.00%	50.00%

Thinking about your time in the class, what aspect of the instructor's teaching contributed most to your learning?

Comments
Karak clearly had a very in-depth understanding of the material, which made him a very clear lecturer. He also had mixed success with guiding discussions. It felt like he had a very exact answer he expected of any in-class discussions. Specifically with Marx he was very intense. On a positive note this did yield very exact discussions about the material, where everything could be noted down as fact. However, this did not allow for people to feel like they could safely be wrong. In this way, class discussions at times felt more like a verbal quiz on the readings, rather than a time to learn new material. This was not always the case, but it was often enough that I think some students were scared of talking because he could be judgmental of wrong answers.
The lecture slides whilst he spoke
Lectures. Professor Karak, as I mentioned, is an incredibly enthusiastic lecturer, and does a fantastic job of explaining the teachings of the authors we read. He was responsible for helping me understand what was discussed in the extremely dense texts, which was very helpful.
Professor Karak is very passionate and speaks with a lot of precision and clarity at all times that I think models how we should talk and write about the topics discussed in class.
Helped make complex concepts easier to understand.
Very well-prepared, very knowledgeable about the course material, engaging lecturer, passionate about the material
The lectures, and also the small group discussions.

What could the instructor modify to help you learn more?

Comments
Karak has very high standards for essays. I wouldn't say he is unnecessarily an unfair grader, but 1. He wants you to basically parrot back things exactly as he explained in lecture, which means that sometimes essays don't feel like they're evaluating the depth of your understanding of the content, but rather your ability to repeat things elegantly. On one hand, he does make a big point out of using the correct vocab in lecture/discussion and he does post guided slides of the content from lecture. However, the level of precision expected by Karak mirrors this intensity. It's not enough to understand the main arguments of the writers, but instead you must know exactly how to explain it with the writers words. This is problematic with authors like Marx, who often have very inaccessible texts.
Nothing
He could have gone a bit slower over some of the larger, more complex topics, like, say, the fetish Karl Marx discusses in Capital, Volume I. It took me a very long time to understand what exactly Marx meant by the fetish, which entailed a lot of my own research on the topic. Going over these very difficult conceptual topics more slowly would've been helpful for me to leave the class understanding exactly what was said.
Maybe a little more explanation in the essay prompts but also it's kinda on me for not asking.
NOT HAVING A FINAL.
N/A
I wish that we were able to talk about our own opinions and perceptions of the books, but Karak only allows for us to discuss and learn the author's argument in full, and we don't get to really explore our thoughts about the texts. I wish we had more long discussions during the course, but we only had a few for the whole quarter.

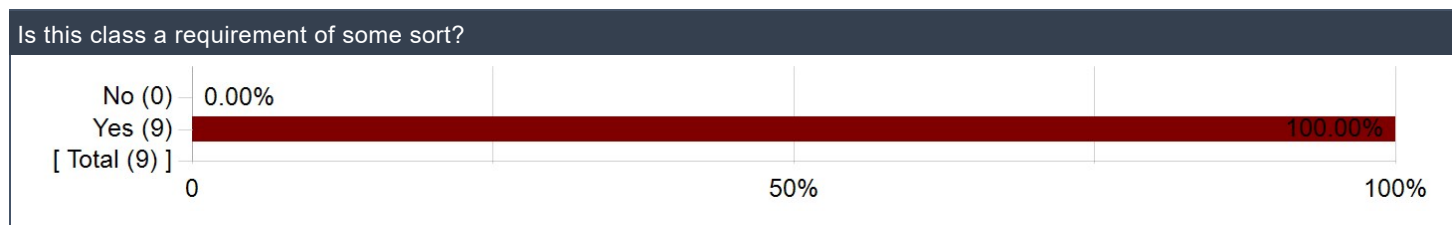
The Instructor . . .

	Mean	Median	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Organized the course clearly.	4.56	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	44.44%	55.56%	0.00%
Presented lectures that enhanced your understanding.	4.78	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	22.22%	77.78%	0.00%
Facilitated discussions that were engaging and useful.	3.78	4.00	0.00%	22.22%	22.22%	11.11%	44.44%	0.00%
Stimulated your interest in the core ideas of the course.	4.22	5.00	0.00%	11.11%	11.11%	22.22%	55.56%	0.00%
Challenged you to learn.	4.67	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	11.11%	77.78%	0.00%
Helped you gain significant learning from the course content.	4.63	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	37.50%	62.50%	0.00%
Was available and helpful outside of class.	4.78	5.00	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	88.89%	0.00%
Motivated you to think independently.	3.44	5.00	22.22%	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%	55.56%	0.00%
Worked to create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment.	3.89	5.00	11.11%	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	0.00%
Overall, this instructor made a significant contribution to your learning.	4.44	5.00	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%	22.22%	66.67%	0.00%

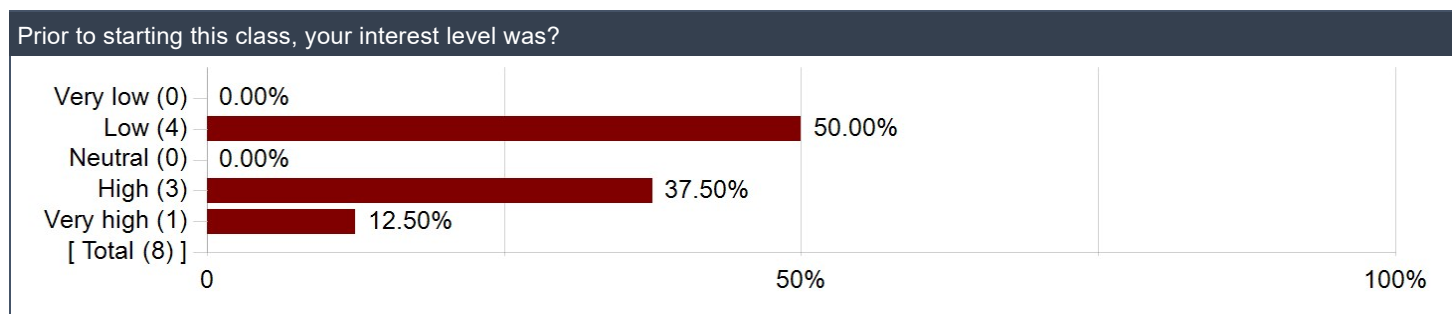
How much did the following elements of the course contribute to your learning gains?

	Mean	Median	No Gain	A Little Gain	Moderate Gain	Good Gain	Great Gain	N/A
Laboratory Experience	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Field Trips	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Library Sessions	N/A	N/A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Review Sessions	4.00	4.00	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Writing Seminars	1.00	1.00	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

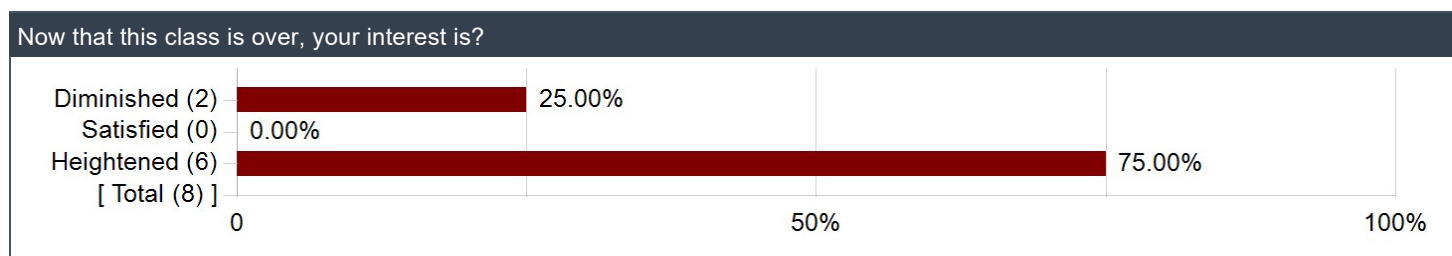
Is this class a requirement of some sort?



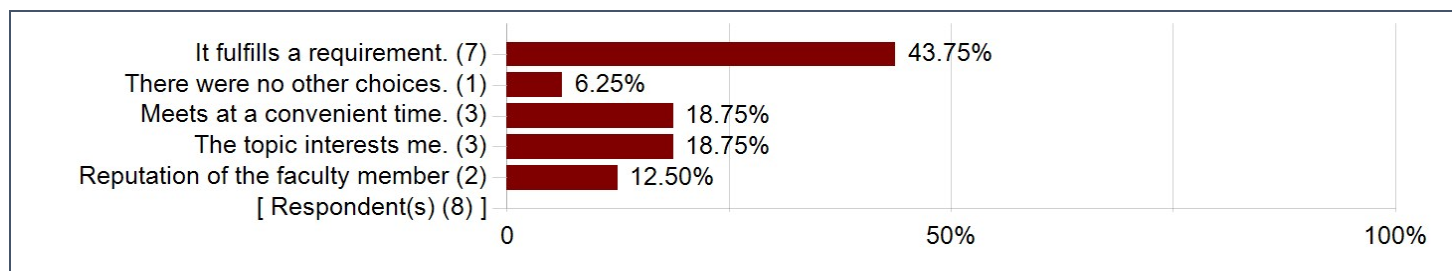
Prior to starting this class, your interest level was?



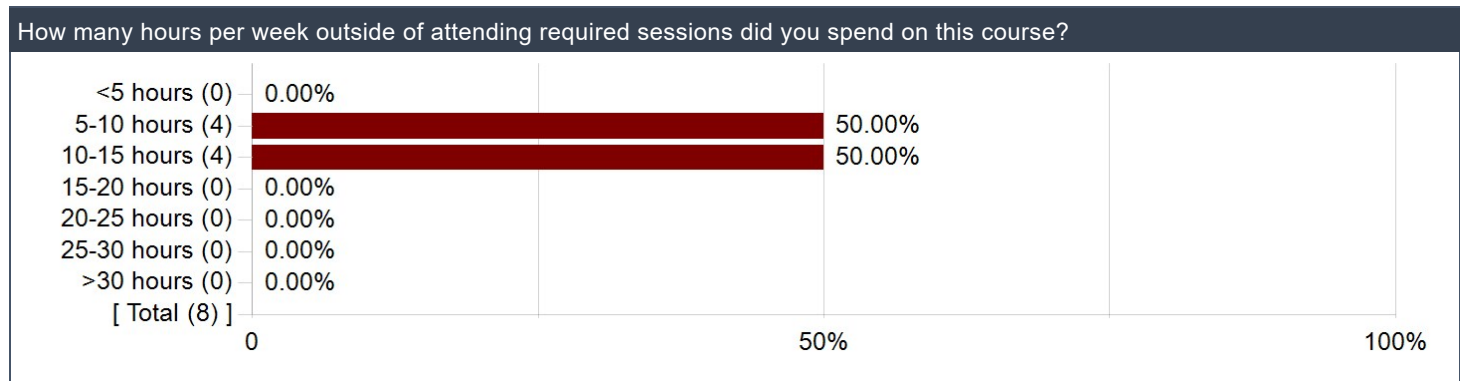
Now that this class is over, your interest is?



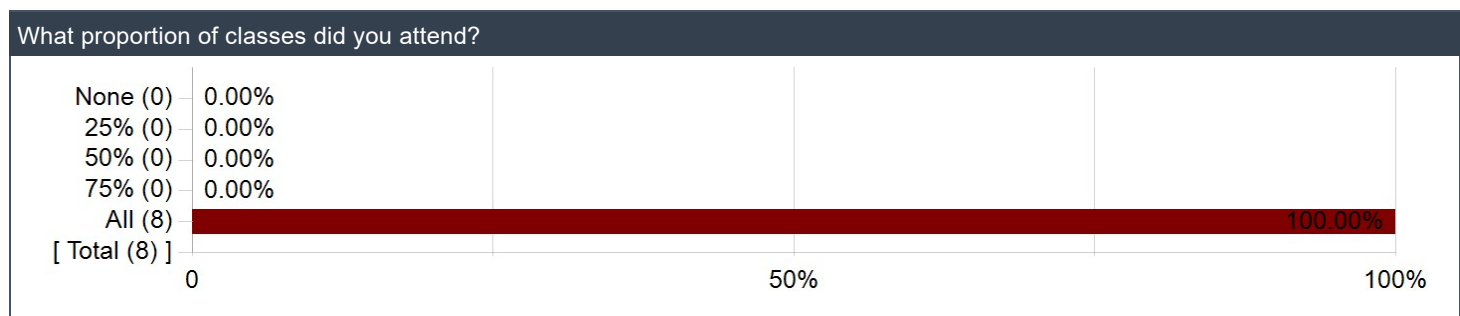
Why did you choose to take this course? (Select all that apply)



How many hours per week outside of attending required sessions did you spend on this course?



What proportion of classes did you attend?



Please comment on the level of difficulty of the course relative to your background and experience.

Comments
I think if you are STEM don't take this section. I took HUM last year, and had a very good time in that course because I didn't feel overly burdened by the reading. Here the reading is much more demanding. It's not that he's a bad instructor, it's that he's not easy, which Self has a bit of reputation for (at least in contrast to other socs courses). If you're sincerely interested in the topic and are willing to put in more than 10 hours a week (in order to not only get the gist of things, but actually master them) then I think this would be a good experience. However, taking this course with the expectation of very low commitment is not a good idea.
Very difficult but incredibly rewarding and certainly doable – the professor is amazing
Definitely a lot of reading, and a lot of work in general. However, as an econ student, couldn't recommend this class more. Really helps put into perspective many very important issues in economics that help conceptualize your studies in other classes.
Challenging but interesting class – not very opinion based but rather diving deep into the texts that we read. Final in-person exam no open book. Professor is slightly intense and can come across as slightly condescending.
I am interested in politics and sociology but nothing formal, and it was my first time reading all of the works presented. I still learned a lot and I didn't feel left behind, so I think the course works well on its own.
Not too difficult, if you do the readings and take good notes. Final exam was relatively difficult, though.
The course was difficult to adjust to as an Economics major with no background in reading philosophy. The texts we read in this course are dense and somewhat unforgiving, but careful reading, paying close attention in lecture, and consistent review made this less of an issue overtime. The coursework was difficult, but truly fascinating.
I found it pretty difficult to live up to Karak's expectations for the essays and didn't really know what he wanted besides the exact argument straight out of the text; it was hard to put it into my own words without getting it wrong, because he wants things very exact.