

Evaluation-form

Course-code: Write the whole code (letters and number) STV4510

Course title: Fill in the title of the course Terrorism and Political Violence in Western Democracies

Language: Norwegian **English**

Course convener's evaluation of the course:

Assess how the course worked. Be concrete. Discuss what worked particularly well, as well as what worked less than optimal.

In my opinion the course worked well – there was a group of around 40 highly engaged students who were attending most if not all of the lectures. Within that group around 10 asked probing questions and all either emailed me or stayed after the class to discuss topics for their essays. I am not sure if one can say they enjoyed a course on terrorism and political violence but yes, there was interest in the air and dare I say, enthusiasm for at least some of the material covered.

This is an intensive course which introduces students to the phenomenon of political violence. It looks at its development across time and ideologies and for this reason needs to compress a lot of material and readings into 10 meetings. Some of the students have been for the first time exposed to its elements such as ideology of anarchism, developments of jihadi-salafism, post-1968 events in Europe etc. and for this reason lack reference points for our discussions and debates on and around the issues of terrorism and political violence. The course could not cover for that and it was visible that students at times struggled with understanding some of the key connections or concepts underpinning the course, e.g. fall of the Soviet Union = no more sponsoring of far left terrorism by Moscow, ISIS not as a standalone organisation but a splinter or a spin off from Al Qaeda; modern jihadism not starting with ISIS attacks in 2015-16 but around 1979; far right violence limited in size in Europe and 22 July 2011 attacks as an outlier, a highly unusual event for this milieu etc. The improvements section will provide some ideas as to how this could be addressed in the future.

Summary of feedback from student contact-point:

Fill in the key points from the student feedback. Mention what worked well, what worked not so well, and suggest areas of improvement.

On the plus side: the students appreciated the lively style of my delivery, humour and parallels to “real life” – I was told that this had been “a breath of fresh air.”

Re improvements: students asked for slides which would be more informational, i.e. not limited to a few phrases-headlines but also more information heavy.

Secondly, students asked for more clarity on the essays. My intention was to ask them for a problem essay, an “is it this or is it that?” type of a written work in which they would form their opinion on a self-chosen, but pre-agreed with me, subject. The agreeing worked very well but there was confusion as to how this needs to be written. I got the impression that the students treated it as a mini-MA thesis which was contrary to my intentions. In this

sense, they spent most of their essays writing up theory, method, analysis literature and at times, wasting a good deal of the space in which they could work. On the plus side, most of the essays resembled one another in terms of structure and introductory and theoretical content so I must tip my hat to the colleagues working on methods courses – they really drilled into the students as to how to prepare an MA thesis, how to develop arguments etc. However, for an essay covering a field which is largely new to the students, in which I asked less for how they got their thoughts but for these on a “this or that” type of a topic, this has not always worked well.

Suggestions for improvements:

Describe how the course can be improved for the next time it is on offer. Assess to what extent it is necessary to make major changes to the course.

Apart from the obvious two: redoing of the slides + more clarity, with perhaps examples of what to do and what not to do, on the essays, one more issue stands out. Since this is a new and at times challenging topic, I would strongly recommend turning the format of this course from an all lecture one towards lectures supplemented with seminars. There we could actually discuss some of the more complicated topics and students could develop a better understanding of the problems involved in the field of terrorism studies. This could also help us with sharpening some of the analytical skills – so no longer would they write only an essay but perhaps prepare “mock” intel reports on a, b, c, d etc.