

Emneevaluering / course evaluation ISV

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Emnekode / course code *

STV2380

Emnenavn / Course title

Ikke besvart

Semester *

H-2023

Emnerapport / course report *

Course convener's evaluation of the course:

This course was held for the first time in 2022, and combines insights into six specific cases with a comparative take on some key political issues in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe: political trust, support for and satisfaction with democracy; democratic backsliding; the influence of oligarchs and grand corruption; the international context (EU and Russia), and populist radical right parties. Teaching consists of 10 lectures and 5 seminar meetings. We tried to vary the format of the seminars: literature review of contributions on democratic backsliding (seminar meeting 2); presentation of country cases with slides and summaries (seminar meeting 3); review of a selected far-right party, group, or movement in the post-communist region (seminar meeting 4), and mock debate on whether Ukraine should join the EU (pros and cons, with students representing the EU, Ukraine, Russia, and Hungary) (seminar meeting 5).

We were four colleagues who developed the course together, and we originally split lectures and seminars equally between us. This year a fifth person helped out with seminars, and two of the original four did most of the teaching, because the other two had other commitments. For the same reason, the lecture on the far right was moved up to the second week of the course. This was not ideal, both because it gave the students the impression that it was an overarching topic, and because they were not yet familiar enough with the post-communist context. In addition, it may have created the problem of too much interest in assignments for seminar 4, compared to all other seminars. The lecture should be moved back (after the country lectures) next year.

This year's edition of the course was even more popular than last year's, while the number of seminar groups was reduced from four to two. While two of the groups last year had too few students to work well, this year's groups were thus too big for the students to feel comfortable to speak, and too many papers/presentations (especially in the seminar on radical right parties) added to the problem. Many presentations do not leave much room for discussion, and many papers to read for each seminar in practice means that many students come unprepared. Too big groups defy the student interactive purpose of seminars.

The overall impression is nevertheless positive. Students were interested, they generally showed up for lectures (we even had to move to a bigger auditorium), and we had very few dropouts. 48 students sat for the exam. The results were also good – better than last year.

Summary of feedback from student contact-point:

We recruited one student from each seminar group as course contacts (both are UiO students). One of these took part in the evaluation meeting. We also had a mid-way meeting with both contact students. In addition, we asked all students to fill in a net-based survey after the exam was held. 23 of the 49 students who were qualified to sit for the exam did.

The general impression is that students are well satisfied with the course. They found lectures well-prepared, well-structured, informative, and engaging, and liked that there were multiple lecturers. However, while they loved the lecture on the far right, they (rightly) pointed out that it would have been better to have that lecture later in the semester. Some of the foreign exchange students were unhappy that not all syllabus items were explicitly discussed in lectures or seminars, and some found some lectures too detailed.

Like last year, the students appreciated the variation in seminar formats and types of assignments. Seminars reportedly worked well even if not all students were very involved in discussions. Next time, groups should be smaller (with fewer presentations per seminar meeting) to leave more time for discussion. Also, the student contacts suggested appointing discussants for each of the presentations to make the seminars more student interactive, and perhaps connect seminars even more closely to the rest of the course.

The student contacts did not themselves find the syllabus excessive, but some of the foreign exchange students were reportedly shocked by the amount of readings. The students liked most of the readings, but found a few to be too technical or outdated. Finally, the mid-way evaluation revealed some frustration around the exam, especially among the foreign exchange students. After the meeting we posted last year's exam questions on Canvas and subsequently also grading guidelines.

Survey: the survey confirms that the students liked the course. 96% answered that they learned 'very much' or 'a lot'; the remaining 4% learned 'a fair amount'. 78% answered that lectures helped them understand the topic to a 'very large' or a 'large' extent. 48% said the difficulty of lectures was 'about right', with 44% rating them as 'somewhat difficult'. A majority of 74% found lectures engaging. Students found the lecture on oligarchs most interesting this year, and the lecture on support for democracy least interesting. Students were most satisfied with seminar meeting 5 (mock debate on Ukraine's EU membership). Comments (freely formulated) suggest that smaller groups with more time for discussion, more direction, and better prepared students would make seminars even better. In the end the students were satisfied with the exam. 91% found it easy to understand the questions, and 74% found the difficulty to be about right. A majority (61%) found the difficulty of the readings to be 'about right'. However, a large majority (74%) found them excessive, which is an increase since last year (this may be because exchange students constituted a majority). The students were also asked to mention readings they found particularly helpful and readings that should be replaced. We have noted the ones mentioned by several students.

Suggestions for improvements:

We do not think it is necessary to make major changes to the course. The course seems to have worked rather well as a whole, but we will of course make adjustments to the syllabus, as suggested in the evaluation, perhaps also reduce the amount of readings, and move the lecture on the far right. The administration should plan for an extra group that can be implemented if the course remains this popular. It does not make sense to have seminars that leave little or no room for discussion. Provided that groups become smaller, the idea of appointing discussants should be tried out. In the case of the seminar on the radical right, the task should be formulated more precisely.

Emneevalueringen bør inneholde:

1. Vurdering av emnet

- Læringsutbytte i emnet
- Undervisningsformer og organisering
- Andre relevante temaer som læringsmiljø, studentenes arbeidsinnsats og eventuelt vurderingsformer

2. Studentens tilbakemelding

- Oppsummering av studentenes viktigste tilbakemeldinger

3. Helhetlig vurdering og videreutvikling

- En samlet vurdering av kvaliteten på emnet
- Justeringer som er foretatt som følge av evalueringen.
- Muligheter for videreutvikling av emnet

The course evaluation should include:

1. Assessment of the course

- Learning outcomes in the course
- Teaching methods and organization
- Other relevant topics such as the learning environment, students' effort and possibly forms of assessment

2. Student's feedback

- Summary of students' most important feedback

3. Overall assessment and further development

- An overall assessment of the quality of the course
- Adjustments made as a result of the evaluation.
- Opportunities for further development of the course