Learning outcomes in the course

The objective of STV4428B is to provide students with knowledge and skills derived from important public policy theories. In terms of knowledge, the students showed a solid understanding of the political science theories that explain who and what influences public policy choices and design. They grasped how these theories can be employed to navigate the various steps in the decision-making process, from agenda setting to the execution of political decisions. They developed insights into the complex interplay between national and international dynamics that shape policy-making and its implementation. Additionally, they became aware of the diverse challenges associated with implementing political decisions. On the skills front, most students demonstrated their ability to analyze the factors causing policy change and decisions. They could form reasoned opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of central explanatory approaches in studying public policy. Furthermore, students showed the capacity to carry out independent and clear written analyses of the causes (drivers) and consequences of specific political outputs or outcomes.

Teaching methods and organization

The course was facilitated by Yves Steinebach, Jens Jungblut, and Helena Seibecke. Yves led four sessions, Jens conducted three, and Helena directed one. The introductory and seminar sessions, in which students presented their term paper ideas and drafts, were given collaboratively by Jens and Yves.

Each session was structured to include both theoretical texts and two application texts, allowing for a comprehensive and practical understanding of the concepts. The main teaching method was input from the course leaders backed up by a PowerPoint presentation. In addition, various educational tools were utilized throughout the course, including group work. For instance, group discussion was encouraged on the theme of framing strategies for different issues. Additionally, an implementation game was incorporated into the course, intended to showcase to the students that the possibility of successful policy implementation, on aggregate, is often lower than anticipated.

Learning environment and students' effort

Overall, the course saw a satisfactory attendance rate, with students attending an average of 79% of the sessions. It is worth noting that two students borderlined the minimum attendance requirements, attending only 66.7% of the course. Beyond simple attendance, we observed that some students were very engaged in class while others did less actively participate.

Student's feedback

Students were generally content with the course, appreciating its structured approach, the curation of texts, and the clear division between theoretical concepts and their practical applications. Despite these positive evaluations, there was some constructive criticism pertaining to the organization of the one seminar session in which they presented their drafts.

The feedback highlighted a sense of disarray during these sessions, particularly pointing out that some students presented for too long, leaving insufficient time to provide balanced feedback to everyone, especially those presenting later.

Additionally, students expressed a desire for feedback to be provided not only orally, but also in written form. They claimed that it was challenging to "remember" the details of the feedback they received during their presentations.

3. Overall assessment and further development

Overall, we believe the course was quite successful, as students were able to acquire substantial knowledge in public policy. However, we must also engage in critical reflection, as we did not fully succeed in engaging all students in class. While group work facilitated some level of involvement, it did not substantially shift the balance of contributions within the course. Therefore, we recognize the need to explore additional strategies to encourage active participation from every student.

Regarding the seminar session that received the most criticism, we realize that strict time management and reinforcement of presentation duration will be essential. We acknowledge the validity of this criticism and believe that with more rigorous time enforcement, this issue is an easily solvable one. Part of this issue stemmed from our inclination to provide comprehensive feedback, even if it meant extending beyond the scheduled time for those who overran. Overall, however, stricter time management seems to be ultimately "fairer" to all students.

In response to the requested need for written feedback, we acknowledge that it's a change we could efficiently implement. However, we also consider the ability to take and process notes during oral feedback sessions to be a key skill. Thus, we are somewhat reluctant to alter this aspect of the course. A potential solution might be to more explicitly require students to take notes during feedback sessions, treating it as a real-world experience akin to attending a scientific conference. This would allow students to develop valuable skills while also ensuring that important feedback is not forgotten.