

# GOV351 23H / Understanding Global Challenges: Theoretical Foundations

## Course evaluation

January 2023

Lise Rakner (emneansvarlig)

### *About the course and the teaching*

Gov 351 is a graduate research course and the first (of two theoretical courses) in the English Master program *Politics and Governance of Global Challenges*. The course/master started in August 2023, subsequently, this is the first course of the first cohort. In 2023, there were 22 students in the master program and in addition, four Erasmus students took this course as part of their exchange program. The course has been taught over a period of six weeks (block teaching) with 14 teaching sessions and the various themes have been approached through (short max 20 min) lectures as well as student-driven investigation of selected real-world problems through different theoretical lenses. In the course, the students have explored the nature and role of the local, national and transnational governance regimes for understanding and tackling global challenges. The course has examined central theoretical approaches to understanding global challenges, hereunder normative theory, institutionalist theory, social movement theory and post-colonial political economy. To each theoretical approach presented, we have used various global challenges as illustrations (migration, inequality, poverty, development, climate, global trade, food security, health).

### *Course evaluation*

The course was taught by Lise Rakner (emneansvarlig), Siri Gloppen, Simon Neby, Regine Paul and Endre Tvinnereim. At the introduction meeting, the students were asked to select a team of *student evaluators* who would meet with the teachers and teaching administration throughout the course/master program. The student evaluator team for the 2023 -25 cohort consists of: Anne Marthe Borgen, Ole Anders A. Rognø, Christopher Zwoefler, Kristine Helgheim and Elisa Størksen. Lise Rakner, Thea Tufte (student councilor) and Simon Neby (head of teaching) have met with the students approximately once a month. Two of the meetings have in particular been concerned with GOV 351. The student evaluators have provided feedback based on written and oral inputs from the student group. This evaluation ireport ncludes the inputs provided by the student evaluators. They have also commented on this (draft) evaluation report.

### *Forms of assignment*

The GOV 351 exam is a portfolio submission consisting of

- Four reflection notes that the students have written before the various sections (normative theory, institutionalist theory, social movement theory and post-colonial political economy).
- A synthesis note drawing out key advantages and drawbacks of key theoretical

perspectives when explaining the politics and governance of global challenges, as well as complementarities and/or tensions between these theories.

- In addition one obligatory group presentation during the final student conference the task is presented further below.

The instructions provided to the students stated that the reflection notes should contain two main parts. In part one, the reflection notes should provide a short summary of the articles/chapters (one to two paragraphs per text), and include the empirical foundation of the texts (data, empirical foundation etc.). In the second part- the main part of the reflection note- students were asked to reflect on the topic that the various texts have in common- i.e. how they address the key debates. In this second part of the research note, students were encouraged to include their own personal viewpoints and argument, and also to reflect critically on the theories presented on conceptual, theoretical, empirical aspects of journal article(s) or book chapter (s) assigned.

The students received individual feedback on the reading notes that were handed in before class discussions (speed grader). The portfolio hand-in was expected to contain revised versions of the reading notes in addition to the synthesis paper.

#### *Reflection on the assignment:*

The four reflection notes were handed in before the start of the session. They were based on the core assigned reading for the first session of the module. The students wrote four reflection notes of approximately 3-4 pages. The feedback from the students was that this was quite a lot of work, and the work started from the first day of the course ("the word go"! ). In the evaluation meeting, the feedback from the students was that they appreciated the fact that the work was spread equally through the semester, as the assignments were due every week. A problem that was brought up by the student evaluators was when there were two assignments in one week (due to compressed schedule).

The feedback on the reading notes were also appreciated by the students as this was a new assignment for most of the students. The fact that they were asked to reflect on their own thoughts and perceptions on the reading were also quite challenging- and inspiring- to many.

From the perspective of the teachers, the fact that the students had not only read, but reflected on the readings before sessions, started made a major difference. All teachers (Rakner, Gloppen, Tvinnereim, Paul, Neby) report on very well prepared students and excellent quality class discussions. This is clearly a format we would like to continue.

As the students had received feedback on the main elements of the portfolio exam, it is perhaps not surprising that the grades were excellent (all between a and b). As all courses in the GLGov master have different exam forms, we believe that this portfolio exam provides an excellent starting point for the students and recommend that this form of exam is continued.

### *Reflection on group assignments*

In week 37 (September 15) (after the four reading assignments were completed) we organized a student conference. One week (three sessions) were set aside to evaluate the reading assignments and the portfolio, discuss and prepare for the group presentations. Students were randomly assigned into six groups that were given a global challenge each: Climate Change, Cyber Security, Global health and pandemics, Food Security, Global Trade and Migration. Each group worked on their assigned global challenge with the following task: Map your global challenge using the conceptual-theoretical frameworks which we already discussed during the last weeks: *How would the different frameworks address and help us think about the politics and governance of your challenge? What different questions may be asked from the various perspectives? Which strengths and shortcomings do the different lenses have?*

The students were asked to choose at least two different theoretical approaches/lenses in their presentation. Each group was tasked with creating a 20 minute presentation during the conference (on 15 Sep). The group assignment was purposely very open and students were encouraged to be creative and "think outside the powerpoint box" (A poll was created with the students votes only for the most enlightening and the most entertaining presentations).

The group presentations were incredibly inspiring. The students reflected on the global challenges using the theoretical foundation provided for in the course in insightful, communicative and engaging ways. From a pedagogical perspective, the main learning outcomes were most definitely reached during this student conference week.

#### *Learning- issues to change:*

- If possible, there should only be one reading assignment per week.
- Information of format and length should be clear and non-negotiable. The portfolio exams varied too much in length due to unclear guidelines.
- Consider whether the reading for the various weeks should be somewhat more standardized in terms of pages.
- Timing of feedback from instructors on reflection notes should be set in advance.

**FS580.001 Resultatfordeling**

Eksamen: GOV351 0 MAPPE 2023 HØST

Understanding Global Challenges: Theoretical Foundations - Portfolio assessment 10,0sp

Karakterregel: Bokstavkarakterer

-

|                               | Totalt | Kvinner | Menn |
|-------------------------------|--------|---------|------|
| Antall kandidater (oppmeldt): | 28     | 21      | 7    |
| Antall møtt til eksamen:      | 26     | 20      | 6    |
| Antall bestått (B):           | 26     | 20      | 6    |
| Antall stryk (S):             | 0 0%   | 0 0%    | 0 0% |
| Antall avbrutt (A):           | 0      | 0       | 0    |
| Gjennomsnittskarakter:        | B      | B       | A    |
| Antall med legeattest (L):    | 0      | 0       | 0    |
| Antall trekk før eksamen (T): | 0      | 0       | 0    |

| Karakter | Antall | Kvinner | Menn |
|----------|--------|---------|------|
| E        | 0      | 0       | 0    |
| D        | 0      | 0       | 0    |
| C        | 0      | 0       | 0    |
| B        | 17     | 14      | 3    |
| A        | 9      | 6       | 3    |

