

Evaluation of the university course EUR103

Semester: Spring 2024

Course coordinator: Elena Kochetkova

Instructors: Marcus Colla, Sarah Hamilton, Rolf Hobson, Elena Kochetkova, Ines Prodöhl.

General evaluation of the course:

The course consisted of 14 lectures; each discussed a particular aspect of European history with a focus on the global context.

The overall number of students enrolled in the course, as shown in the *mitt.uib*, was 136. The course was regularly attended by ca. 60-80 students what made about 50 percent of the enrolled students at average. Students were generally active in class and expressed an interest into the subject. This, along with the received feedback enables a conclusion that the course was successful and quite popular among the students.

The mid-term essays submitted in the middle of the course demonstrated a strong engagement and good performance as well. Out of 119 students who delivered essays only four received “did not pass”, i.e. failed, and two of them resubmitted their works and finally passed.

Students` evaluation:

The students` evaluation of the course was fulfilled as a combination of quantitative method (grading) and qualitative feedback with the use of *Surveyxact*. The evaluation was fulfilled in the period between the final lecture and the final exam to minimize the bias. Students were asked to use the electronic form to grade the course via five criteria, and they also were asked to leave comments on two specific questions. The five criteria to grade the course were the following: 1) the general evaluation of the course, 2) the reading list, 3) the teaching methods, 4) communication with the lecturers, and 5) the content (namely, students were asked to evaluate the extent to which they found the course interesting). The grade varied from 1 to 10 where 1 meant ‘very bad’ and 10 meant ‘very good’. In addition, students were asked to provide a commentary on what they liked most in the course, what they suggested for improvement, and they also had a possibility for making any other comments. The commentary was asked after the grading and the five criteria implicitly provided a guideline for students` comments as an addition to the grading. However, their feedback touched upon other aspects as discussed below. This report additionally builds on an oral feedback received from two students by the coordinator in the middle of the course.

The overall participation in the evaluation of the course was low: out of 123 students who received the evaluation link only 12 responded. Yet, all together these responses provided a detailed feedback on the major criteria sufficient for *some* observations about the quality of the course as seen by the students. A suggestion for the next evaluations might be to fulfill the evaluation of the course right in class to increase the number of participants.

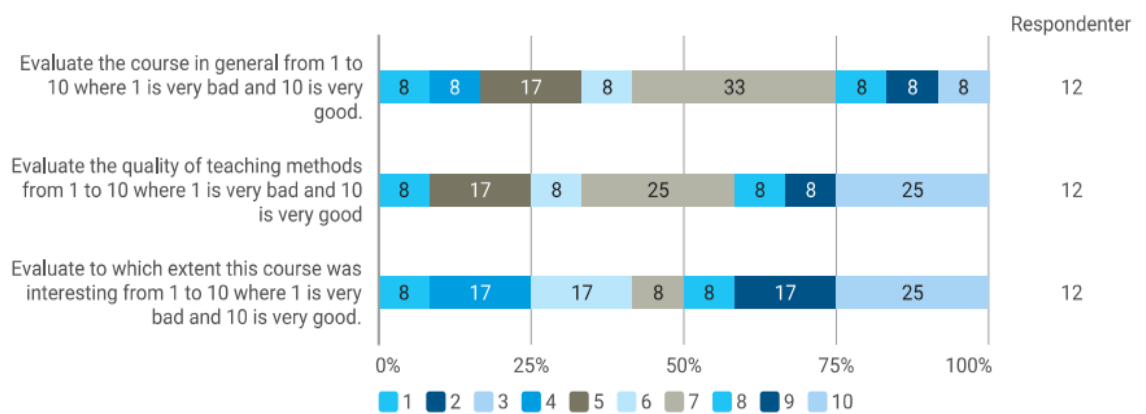
The written commentary has another limitation because it exposes some personal preferences of students that seem to affect their feedback. For example, they mentioned that they liked the political and economic history and this might make them a bit more critical towards the

other lectures and the course as a whole. Overall, however, students seem to provide a useful feedback reflected in this report.

The feedback is analyzed based on the four issues below.

The overall performance of the course:

Most of the students evaluated the course as very good (33 percent of students graded the course with “7”) and pretty good (17 percent grader the course with “5”). The scale of evaluation is quite uneven, however, and displays polar opinions about the course: there are equal distributions (8 percent) between grades “1” (very bad”) and “10” (“outstanding”). The majority, or 25 percent of the evaluators, found the course as very interesting and graded it with “10” when evaluating to which extent the course was interesting to them. The overview of all the grades can be found below in graph 1.



Graph 1. Evaluation of the course in general and teaching methods in particular.

In the written comment, five students specifically commented that they would not improve anything in the course which can be interpreted as a sign of their satisfaction with the course. One student directly wrote that it would be worth keeping the course as it is in terms of the variety of topics and professors.

For two students the mid-term exam format was challenging and they mentioned that in addition to the obligatory essay another form of control should be added, for example, exam. It is not clear, however, what kind of exam they meant to suggest.

Teaching methods and contents of the course:

Most students evaluated the methods of teaching as both outstanding and very good (25 percent evaluated the course with “10” and 25 percent gave “7”). Graph 1 above presents an overall quantitative evaluation of this criterion.

In their oral feedback given after two lectures to the course coordinator, two students emphasized that they learned a new perspective on European history. They appreciated that the course covered Eastern and Central Europe specifically.

In the written comment, the evaluators presented two different opinions on the content of the course. One student mentioned that while some topics/lectures were broad, i.e. were focused on a broad context, such as globalization and decolonization, others missed the broader European context (did not specified the exact lectures). At the same time, this student mentioned that they liked the variety of perspectives that the course had offered (“enabled me to see the continent in more complex and comprehensive picture”). Another student emphasized that some lectures were quite broad and tried to cover too much while they would like to have much more detailed discussions. In opposite, one student considered that a broad scope of the course was a benefit and covered “several different topics and factors”. They said that they appreciated the macro-level approach that some lectures employed.

There are five more students who mentioned that the topics of the course were “very interesting” and “fascinating” to them.

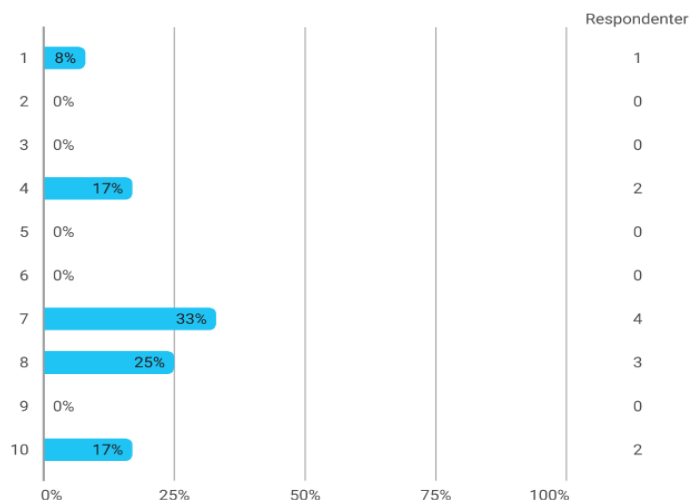
One student said that they would like to have more primary sources in the course, and another one said that it would be better to have seminars in addition to lectures.

Course readings/pensum:

The quantitative evaluation of the reading list is similar to the other results and shows that most of students gave “7” and “8” what means that they found the readings as good. 17 percent gave “10” to denote that they found the readings as excellent. 8 percent (one student) were not satisfied with the readings at all. Graph 2 shows it in more detail.

The written commentary from students is mainly concerned with the scope of the course. One student explains quite in detail that the readings were broad and sometimes not relevant to the lectures. At the same time, another student said that lectures were too much connected to the readings and they would prefer to have lecture discussions as different from the readings. This demonstrates that students with quite polar preferences and expectations attended the course. Only one student said that the amount of reading was excessive in their opinion.

Evaluate the relevance of the course readings from 1 to 10 where 1 is very bad and 10 is very good.



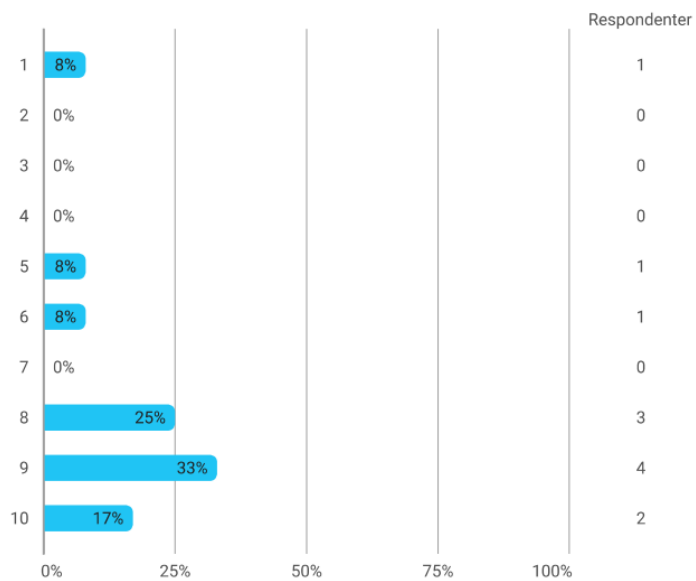
Graph 2. Evaluation of the course reading list.

Communication with the lecturers/coordinator:

This criterion was included to analyze the communication between students, lecturers, and coordinator within the course. The course consists of lectures given to a big audience where communication is more limited than at a seminar. Therefore, analyzing how students see the quality of interaction between them and lecturers seems to be important.

Most responses show that students were satisfied with the communication: 17 percent graded this criterion with “10”, 33 percent gave “7” and 25 percent gave “8”. One student (8 percent) expressed their full dissatisfaction and two students (17 percent) gave “4” which can be interpreted as satisfactory. Graph 3 provides a meticulous picture.

In their written commentary, a student mentioned that they liked the communication with the lecturers because they always received the required answers.



Graph 3. Evaluation of the communication between the lecturers (and coordinator) and students.

Conclusion:

The feedback received from the students is not fully representative given the number of evaluations (ca. 10 percent out of the total number of students). At the same time, it provides some insights that might be sufficient for evaluation and useful for the future.

The major challenge for the course as seen by the students is to keep it coherent – it might be a good idea if the instructors of the course hold a pre-course meeting to discuss some key lines that every lecture will keep. For example, it can be an agreement on global historical perspective and the balance between the general context and details, and/or a more active use of primary sources. As the coordinator of the course, I find this important as, even though the course syllabus is built on certain logical, thematic, and methodological reels, it might be important to reflect on it further.

Overall, the feedback received from the students makes it possible to conclude that the course was successful and in general was satisfactory to them. The strongest side of the course, as it appears in the feedback, is the variety of topics and perspectives, even though one student

found the topics too broad. The reading list seems to be satisfactory as well even though one student found it too general and sometimes not connected to the lectures.

The main conclusion that could be made is that the course could be kept as it is now with some reflections/improvements in the reading list and teaching methods. The reading list could be reconsidered and more detailed works could be added there. As a matter of improvement, a better focus and method of teaching (namely the interplay between macro history and historical details) could be discussed among the lecturers of the course in the coming years. However, these conclusions are mainly based on critical comments received from two students.

Elena Kochetkova, coordinator of the course

2 June 2024