



UNIVERSITETET I BERGEN
Institutt for Sammenliknende Politikk

Autumn 2010

SAMPOL115: Democracy and Democratisation

Course evaluation

Course lecturer: Michael E. Alvarez, associate professor.

The evaluation is prepared by Paulina López.

About the course

SAMPOL115 – Democracy and democratisation runs every autumn semester at the Institute of comparative politics. The course is an obligatory subject for students enrolled in the Bachelor programme in comparative politics, political economy and European studies with specialisation in comparative politics. The course gives 15 credits.

The aim of the course is to provide the students with basic concepts and theories of democracy, and acquire them to apply these comparatively by using empirical examples. Literature on political development is used to help students understand conditions that lead to the emergence of democracy, and to understand the nature of democratic transitions and consolidation. Also, attention is given to the relation between democracy, civil society and economic conditions.

The course is structured around five topics: (1) Concepts and theories, (2) Economic development and the process of democratisation; (3) The transition to and consolidation of democracy; (4) The breakdown of democracy and authoritarian regimes; and (5) Democratic institutions and performance.

Associate professor Michael E. Alvarez is the responsible course lecturer. The course is taught in English. During the autumn 2010 nineteen lectures were held in the course, all conducted by Michael Alvarez. The Institute offers five seminar meetings as part of the course. Participation in the seminars is voluntary.

About the evaluation

The first part of this evaluation is based on student answers from a survey handed out at the last lecture (attachment 1). 88 students answered the survey. The second part of the survey consists of feed back from the seminar leaders (attachment 2).

57 % of the students that answered the survey were female and 43 % male. The majority of these are enrolled in the bachelor programme in comparative politics (58 %) and SAMPOL year study (10,2 %). The rest of the students belong to ten different bachelor programmes from both the Faculties of Social Science and Humanity. The three biggest groups are enrolled in an Erasmus exchange programme (11,3 %), from European studies (5,6 %) and political economy (4,5 %).

Part 1: The students' evaluations

Lectures

The course consisted of 19 lectures. Student attendance has been fairly good this semester. Ten per cent of the students attended all lectures, while 58 % attended between 15-18 lectures. 21,5 % of the students attended from 10-14 lectures. Nine % attended less than ten lectures.

In general, the lectures are considered as good (47,7 %) or very good (45,5 %). A smaller group of students (9,8 %) evaluate the lectures as moderate.

The student group is almost equally divided concerning their preparation for the lectures. Half of the class prepared themselves often (45,5 %) or always (6,8 %) before class by reading the relevant literature, while the rest did so only on rare occasions (41 %) or never (6,8 %).

Syllabus

Most students (63,3 %) estimate that they used between five and nine hours on an average weekly basis to work with the syllabus. Then, 23,8 % of the students estimate that they averagely worked between two and five hours a week with the syllabus.

The majority of the students considered the difficulty level of the syllabus to be suitable (52,2 %). A considerable group of the students found the syllabus difficult (29,5 %) and very difficult (8 %).

Table 2: How many hours did you work with the syllabus during an average week?

2-5	21 (23,8)
5-9	32 (63,3)
9-12	17 (19,3)
12-15	8 (9)
15+	9 (10,2)
0	1 (1)
	N=88 (%)

Table 3: How difficult did you find the syllabus?

Very easy	3 (3,4)
Easy	5 (5,7)
Suitable	46 (52,2)
Difficult	26 (29,5)
Very difficult	7 (8)
Blank	1 (1)

Seminars

There were five seminar group meetings led by master students Elin Monstad and Adrian Kjær and bachelor student Else Rafoss. The seminar programme was structured with the first hour consisting of student presentations and the second hour of group work on two key topics.

Most of the students attended either all five seminars (48 %) or four meetings (26 %). The majority thinks that five meetings were suitable. 28 % of the students thought five meetings were too few. 16 % of the students did not attend the seminars.

Almost half of the students that attended the seminars thought the seminars were good or very good (46,5 %). The rest of the students thought they were suitable (33 %), poor (18,6 %) or very poor (4 %). In general, most of the students that attended the seminars evaluate the seminar leader's contributions as good or very good (56 %). 18 % thought they were suitable, and 25 % of the respondents are displeased.

The majority of the seminar participants (78 %) prepared themselves always or often before the seminars. The rest did so only on rare occasions.

Academic gain

The academic gain from the course is considered to be substantial by 57 % of the respondents and very high by 35 % of the students. Eight % of the students experienced a modest academic gain.

The students affirm that reading and working with the syllabus contributed in a very substantial way to their learning, followed by lectures. The seminars contributed in a more moderate way, and only 18 % of the students that participated in the seminars thought they contributed in a very substantial way, while the slight majority of the seminar contestants (34 %) evaluated their contribution to their general learning as moderate

A tendency that is observed in the answers is that, unlike in other SAMPOL subjects (especially on 100-level courses), there seems to be a lower tendency for students with negative perceptions of the seminars to rate the general academic gain of the course as low. A significant amount of the students that were displeased with the seminars still evaluated the course's academic gain as "high" or "very high". This might imply that the quality of the

syllabus and lectures contribute to a general positive learning experience and counteract the negative experiences with the seminars.

Table 4: What *has contributed to your learning?*

	Very substantial	Substantial	Modest	No gain	Blank
Lectures	38 (43)	39 (44)	10 (11)	1 (1,1)	
Syllabus	50 (57)	30 (34)	6 (7)	2 (2,3)	
Seminars	14 (16)	24 (27)	27 (30)	13 (14,7)	10 (11)

The students' ambitions for the exam results are for the majority of the group (63,6 %) to be like the average or better. 25 % want to be among the best, while ten % hope to pass the exam, but nothing more.

70 % of the students that evaluated the course would recommend SAMPOL115 to other students. 28 % are not sure if they will recommend the course.

Lastly, students were encouraged to suggest improvements or contribute with constructive comments. Most of the comments (24 comments) concerned the syllabus and seminars. The syllabus was found too demanding or extensive (six comments). Others suggested that the part on economics could have been included earlier in the lectures.

The students that commented on the seminars (seven comments) suggested better "structure" on the seminars (without adding an explanation on its meaning), some complained about the visible and troubling lack of enthusiasm from other students. One student thinks that stricter regulation of group member participation would increase the quality of the seminars.

Other suggestions were to include a topic heading on the blackboard before and during the lectures so as to better follow the red line during class. Finally, the early start of class (08.15) does not seem to have been appreciated.

Part two: Comments from the teacher assistants

The seminar leaders prepared themselves for the seminars by reading through the relevant literature and meeting before every seminar. Together they discussed the topics and activities

for the seminar and prepared questions for the different topics. The first hour of the seminars was used for student presentations and the second for group discussions of key topics. The seminar leaders gave a short introduction at the beginning of the second hour and then the students discussed the subjects.

The seminar leaders emphasise that the most positive aspect of the seminars was to divide the group in smaller groups because this facilitated discussions both within the smaller groups and in plenary. Smaller groups create a lower threshold for student participation. In addition, the clearly defined and well prepared seminar guide facilitated the seminar leader's preparation for the groups and enhanced active participation.

One aspect that slowed the seminars down was the often weak preparation of students. Many students were especially weakly, or unprepared, for the broader topic discussion in the second hour. Another thing that did not work out well was to name the groups after different study programs. This distorted group membership and this in turn affected group dynamics negatively in small groups.

Conclusions

The conclusions of the course evaluation of the autumn semester 2010 are:

- Attendance to lectures has been fairly good. 68 % of the students attended 15 lectures or more.
- The lectures are highly rated as good or very good (93 %).
- The majority of the students (63,3 %) used between five and nine hours on an average weekly basis to work with the syllabus.
- The difficulty level of the syllabus is considered as suitable by a slight majority (52,2), but a considerable minority found it difficult or very difficult (37,5).
- Most of the students attended the seminars (84 %). Of these, 74 % attended four or five seminars.
- The evaluation of the seminars is mixed. Almost half thought they were good or very good, 30 % think they were suitable, and 22,6 % are unpleased.
- The academic gain of the course is considered to be substantial (57 %) or very substantial (35 %) by the majority of the class.
- Students have learned most through working with the syllabus.