To: SAMPOL leadership /administration

From: Michael Alvarez

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Subject: Commentary on SAMPOL306 student survey, Autumn semester 2018

The average score for "how much have lectures contributed to your learning" is an unsatisfactory "3". Undoubtedly, this score derives from the fact that this course does not include lectures at all – it is a purely discussion-based format. But if we instead assume that "lectures" is understood more generically, then my interpretation of the low score is that it derives from the very unsatisfactory degree of student preparedness and discussion – this was a major liability of seminar sessions this semester. How to address this problem? (1) Via the teacher: *Increase the degree of teacher-led structure* – incorporate more brief lecture introductions to the readings, summarize more key points; (2) Via the students: require that each student prepare a set of bullet points for each and every session – minimal: five bullet points based on three of the required chapter/book chapter length readings. NOTE: I have tried this approach previously on several occasions – on a voluntary basis. Result: *fewer than 20% of the students actually did it.* In one session, five out of 38 students actually prepared as requested. Hence my recommendation: Such submissions be added to the course as *obligatoriske innleveringer*.

No clear patterns in the "favorite topics / readings" data, except for evidence that the Inequality session worked very well!

Other suggestions indicate: (1) no clear evidence that students desire that participation be incorporated into the grade. Furthermore, given that so few people *did* in fact participate, I am inclined *not* to push for participation. I suggest that we incorporate more week-to-week writing assignments (see above), which guarantee that each student will have *something* to contribute; (2) Many thought that the class sizes were too large. Hence, either, (1) live with the situation, as it is the best we can do; (2) if we have a large incoming class, then hold three sessions; (3) reduce the size of new students admitted into the program.

Reading Load. This is an issue. Without exception, student feedback has indicated a reading load which is "far too heavy". Our traditional response has been threefold: (1) to repeat that we do not expect that all the readings are read carefully, but rather that students develop the skill of carefully skimming and reading selected parts. (2) There is no expectation whatsoever that students need to utilize the recommended readings. (3) In response to past student input, I have indeed already recently reduced the number of themes by two and reduced the total quantity of reading.

Nonetheless, this year a very large majority consider the reading load to be too heavy. We must strike a balance between "sticking to our guns" and "taking student input into account". I suggest the following.

(1) Reduce the reading load in each respective session and adopt a rule: each session is to include no more than *eight* book chapter/article length entries.
(2) Require that writing submissions incorporate *all* the required readings for that respective session;
(3) Required that *reading* requirements for each respective seminar session include only a *subset* of the required *writing* readings, namely that the instructor identify in advance which *four* of the required readings will constitute the basis of class discussion. Those who are writing for that session, will, as identified in point (2) above, necessarily have read *all* of the required readings.
(4) Remove *entirely* from the course syllabus the lists of "recommended readings".