

Course evaluation KOR2510

Autumn 2017

The teaching in KOR2510 generally followed the original study plan, without any serious deviations. While 55 students initially signed up to the course, the exam essay was submitted by 42 students. Historically, these results must be seen as relatively positive. In fact, KOR topics almost never managed to attract more than 50 students before, so the figure implies a growth in student numbers. The grades reflect rather high achievement levels of the students. 7% of them received “A” – the figure is close to the historical average for the KOR topics. However, the proportion of “B” grades (40%) equalled the share of the “C” grades (40%) and was above the average for the KOR topics. There were no exam failures, and nobody received “E”. Generally, the level of motivation and interest was notably high. Many students had the North Korea interests of their own (human rights, ideology, gender problems etc.) from the beginning, even before the classes started.

Since the class assessment by students was not conducted, I have no statistical basis to speak on students’ attitudes towards the course. My impressions from the dialogues with the students were that the course was generally satisfying them, but at the same time some frustrating issues were encountered too. The most difficult problem was the relative paucity of Anglophone literature on North Korea, and strong elements of ideological judgement in many existing books (*The End of North Korea* or *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why it Matters* are most problematic in this regard). Probably the course will gain if a short survey of the existing literature on North Korea in English will take place in the beginning. Around 1/3 of the students were exchange students from diverse part of the world, South Korea being prominently represented together with a number of other European and Asian countries. It reflects the wide international appeal of the courses on Korea in general, and some sort of – partly sensationalist – topical interest towards North Korea in particular in relationship with the current nuclear standoff.

One guest lecture – by Prof. Bruce Cumings, one of world’s most distinguished authorities on North Korea and Korean War history – was integrated into the course, and attracted wide interest. I would suggest that more guest lectures integrated into the course program may have positive effect on student’s motivation. A number of Europe-based colleagues are currently engaged in North Korea research (Prof. Hazel Smith from the UK, or Prof. Koen De Ceuster from the Netherlands), and inviting them may profit both the students and the wider public given current levels of interest in North Korea in general.

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