

Emnerapport for KOR2510 – North Korea: Ideology, Society and Politics, høsten 2019

The teaching in KOR2510 generally followed the original study plan, without any serious deviations. While 61 students initially signed up to the course, the exam was taken by 54 students. Historically, these results must be seen as very positive. KOR topics almost never managed to attract more than 50 students before 2017, and when KOR2510 was taught last time, in autumn 2017, the exam essays were submitted only by 42 students. So the figures imply rather tangible growth in student numbers. The grades reflect high achievement levels of the students. Nine out of 54 students received “A” – the figure is the highest for any KOR topic whatsoever so far. The proportion of “B” grades (16 out of 54) roughly equalled the share of the “C” grades (14 out of 54) and was above the average for the KOR topics. There were no exam failures; however, seven students received “E”. It implies that, while the general level of motivation and interest was notably high, there also was clearly a minority of the students who experienced difficulties following the course. In the future, the task of giving needed aid and support to such academically struggling students should be prioritized. It should be also noted that many students had the North Korea-related interests of their own. Gender problems and women’s history of North Korea were among the priority interests, as well as North Korea’s *chuch’e* ideology and the current de facto capitalist transformation of North Korean economy.

13 among 61 course students supplied their answers for the regular course evaluation. 12 among them found the course either ‘good’ or ‘excellent.’ A typical criticism found in the course evaluation was of the following kind: “Syllabus a little difficult to read but Vladimir did a great job explaining phrases/words I didn’t understand, it was very easy to ask him questions during lectures as well.” I am not sure, however, whether the view of the syllabus as ‘difficult’ was widespread. I did a student evaluation on my own in the midst of semester, and in fact, several students wrote in their evaluation forms that they considered syllabus excessively simple. The external co-examiner, Prof. Barbara Wall, gave the following assessment: “I think basing the course on Lankov’s and Cumings’ works, providing the students with further readings and material and encouraging them to explore additional material on their own helps the students to become familiar with the topic «North Korea: Ideology, Society, and Politics».” So, I think that probably the best advisable course for the future will be to stick to the current syllabus, maybe supplementing it by other academic books rich on facts and relatively easily accessible by the bachelor-level students (Prof. Hazel Smith’s works may be a good addition to the syllabus, although her academic prose may be too intense and dry for the undergraduates). Another wish voiced in the student assessment was to enrich the course by more materials on North Korea’s women history. I will attempt to follow up on this next time. Just as in the autumn of 2017, ca 1/3 of the students were exchange students from diverse part of the world. The diverse and varied backgrounds of these students greatly enriched our classroom discussions. Some of them, however, apparently struggled with the use of the academic English in the classroom. The only way to help them in the future, I assume, will be to use a bit simpler English in my classroom Power Points. I will also attempt to check students’ understanding every time I use more complicated sort of academic terminology, and explain all the special terms I use (like ‘meritocracy’ or ‘path dependence’) in simple English in the class.

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