Course evaluation
“Media, War and Journalism” (MEVIT 3427/JOUR4427)

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The course “Media, War and Journalism” ran for the first time at IMK in spring 2016.

Organization
An initial plan was to run weekly interactive sessions that combined both lecture and seminar. This format, in my experience, is very effective in bringing together theory and hands-on practice by students. However, due to the high number of students enrolled (51), this would have been problematic in practice. That is why the course ran through weekly 2-hours lectures and 2-hours seminars (one seminar groups for BA students, another one for MA). This format also worked very well.

Results
The course achieved its learning objectives. Students, both at BA and MA level engaged with the topic and achieved very good results in the final home exam. Not only did the great majority of students pass, but 7 out of 24 (29.16%) in the BA cohort and 5 out of 17 (29.41%) among the MA students achieved a mark of either A or B.

The students who received marks at the lower end of the spectrum were, as it is invariably the case, those who tended not to be present at lectures and seminars. This shows the importance of attendance as a key to successful learning.

Here are additional comments about specific aspects of the course, which also incorporate feedback from the students:

Syllabus: Consistently with the learning objective of encouraging greater independence of thought and a critical attitude to the literature, I had included additional texts on the syllabus that, although not compulsory, would enable students to follow their own interest in preparing for the final exam. This, however, appears to be quite confusing for them. They clearly prefer a more prescriptive approach and a definite list of what needs to be read.

Obligatory activity: The compulsory activity in order to qualify for the final assessment consisted in: 1) doing a group presentation (about 10 min) and 2) serve as discussant for somebody else’s presentation. Students were asked to sign up on a schedule during the first meeting for the module, where they could choose on a list of presentation questions which topic they wanted to present about and which topic they wanted to be discussant for. Although most students had to have done this before, it seemed to create some confusion to some, with feedback from one student suggesting that groups and topics should have been assigned rather than chosen.

The presentations worked overall very well, with the majority of students showing a great deal of preparation and research. While they deserve credit for their work, this also meant that presentations practically always went over the allocated time. It is true that I could have been stricter in enforcing time limits. However, this would not have done justice to the amount of work that many students made. I thus applied a flexible time-keeping. Especially in the case of the BA group, since there were always 2 presentations scheduled per seminar due to the number of students, most of the session was taken by the presentations, my
feedback to the presenters and some Q&A. Very little time was left for further discussing the topic.

I did not find this situation satisfactory and plan to change this aspect of the course next year (see below). Students also clearly indicated that they would like more time to discuss, although some of them expressed some frustration at the fact that not everyone is making an effort to engage and contribute to the discussion.

**Feedback from students:** Students were asked to provide feedback on the aspects that they thought worked well and what could be improved towards. They did so towards the end of the course, on anonymous post-its that were collected at the end of the class. Here are the main points that were mentioned:

**Positive aspects**
- Range of topics covered and the use of practical examples/cases
- Use of audiovisual materials to illustrate the points
- Easy to follow structure of the lectures
- Engaging presentation and enthusiasm of the tutor about the topic
- Group work in the seminars
- Several students, especially at MA level, expressed appreciation for being challenged when it comes to critical thinking. Both MA and BA students found it useful to be encouraged to question the reading and finding the possible weaknesses within the arguments there.

**Aspects students thought could be improved**
- More time for discussion of interesting topics
- Sometimes there is a lot of content to go through during lectures
- Several enjoyed the presentations as they allowed students to learn from others and appreciated the feedback provided by the tutor. However presentations took too much time from the discussion
- Smaller written assignments to allow practicing for the home exam instead of presentations
- More focus on texts from the syllabus
- More prescriptive activities (what to read, what to present about)

**Changes planned for next year**

1) **Syllabus** This is going to be more prescriptive.

2) **Obligatory attendance** Attendance and participation are key to achieving the learning objectives. In addition to this the course is not designed to be long-distance learning. This is reflected, for example, in the learning materials: I will upload the powerpoint files of the lectures on Fronter, so students can use them as a reference. However, they are only useful as notes, not as replacement to attendance.

3) **Change in obligatory activity (essay instead of presentation)** Although developing presentations skills is important, given the weight placed by this course on developing a critical stance towards the literature and the fact that the final evaluation is a written home exam, I plan to remove presentations altogether. They will be replaced, as also suggested by one of the students in the course feedback, with a shorter written assignment (one essay of 2,000 words). The essay will be evaluated as pass/not-pass. It is an opportunity for the students to practice
their writing and critical analysis skills. Importantly, they will get feedback on which aspects of their writing they need to work on before the final evaluation. This will also free time for more in-depth discussion of reading materials, what has been presented in the lectures, as well as related current affairs. This will contribute to practicing the critical analysis skills to be evaluated in the final exam.

**What is expected of students**
No amount of changes in the way a course is organized can make up for a lack of engagement by students. What I expect is:

1) attendance of ALL lectures and seminars: the sessions of the course are designed as a journey. The course makes sense as a whole. It is unrealistic to be able to get the most out of a course by relying on powerpoint slides on Fronter or a couple of visits. The course is NOT designed as a distance learning one. The requirement of compulsory attendance should take care of this.

2) Participation to class discussions. I realize that we are not all equally comfortable speaking in public. What I expect is that every student tries to get just a little bit beyond his/her comfort zone at every session. It takes time, but consistent effort will produce results. I was myself a person who was afraid to speak. If I can change, so can you.