

Periodic subject evaluation: Media and politics MEVIT 3350, MEVIT 4350, autumn 2017

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NB: The course might be different next time, since teachers may change the course.

Introduction

In 2017, we changed the course significantly, following these principles:

- Emphasis on continuous work flow, designing the course around student activity (seminars, papers, tutorials, exams) rather than around lectures and syllabus.
- Narrowing the topic, more concentrated subject matter
- Simple syllabus (four books only, no articles)
- Increasing contact with students, written feedback on papers, individual and group tutorials for BA as well as MA-students (1 individual tutorial on literature review, 3 on group work).
- Using a student as consultant when planning the course.
- A weekly update on Monday (short video on Facebook) reminding the students about the class Thursday and what was on the agenda. A Facebook group to supplement other information.
- Detailed description of what was expected in the different exams/papers. The students had to hand in a literature review early in the course, then to take part in a group assignment and finally a school exam (2 hrs.)

Results

- 23 students passed on BA-level, 18 on MA-level
- Grades on the group project were good and made the total grades better than average.
- Grades on literature review and school exam were average.

Assessment of the course

- The overall structure worked well in terms of the intention to get students to work actively from the beginning, but some students felt that it was too much pressure.
- Lectures worked well in general, but some students wanted more lectures and some wanted more in-depth (Student evaluation of lectures: Grade 3,7 on a 1 (low) -5 (high) scale)
- Seminars worked well in general, but some students wanted more seminars and more free discussion of opinions on controversial topic (Student evaluation of seminars: Grade 3,7 on a 1-5 scale)
- The structure with three exams: literature review with grades, group project and school exam secured continued workflow, but some student felt it was too much. We would recommend to keep the structure with three exams and to continue with a literature review initially which was graded in order to stimulate students to start reading from the beginning.

- The group exam was a favorite among many of the students, and the grades were good. However, there were problems with tutorials for some of the groups (see below) that influenced the final evaluation.

Student evaluations

The mid-term evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, and had few suggestions for improvement. However, the final evaluation identified some problems that emerged later in the course.

On the question “How satisfied are you with the course as a whole”, the students gave the course the average grade 3,6 on a scale from 1 to 5 on the final evaluations.

We also asked one student to evaluate the course more in detail, and her report provided valuable comments.

These were the main problems according to students (and our comments):

1. The system with one tutor who was not in Norway and was supposed to communicate with students on Skype did not work out, leaving one third of the students without proper tutorials on their group projects. The problem was not reported to the teachers responsible until it was too late to compensate.
 - Our comment: This should not have happened; we will not rely on Skype-tutorials in the future, and always provide a backup for students.
2. Several students felt that they had too much to read, since they had to read additional literature for their literature review and group projects
 - Our comment: We agree, in the future we will only have three books instead of four and leave space for self-selected literature and articles
3. Some MA-students felt that the course did not go sufficiently in depth and should have provided more empirical and in-depth cases.
 - Our comment: We agree, however, this was described in the course description. We also believe that there is a structural problem – a 10 credit course with such a diverse student body cannot be expected to go in-depth on many issues. Since this was a combined MA + BA-course (heisemne), with a great number of students from different countries and many students without prior knowledge of media studies, we had to prioritize basic knowledge in the first part of the course in order to get students ready for their group projects. Fortunately, many students felt that their literature review and (especially) group projects provided possibility for more-in-depth work.
4. Some students felt that they were not properly informed about the requirements for the literature review.
 - Our comment: We worked quite a bit with the information beforehand and also provided a sample from an article. We also offered individual tutorials to all students in order to discuss their literature review. However, we acknowledge that this is a new genre to many students, and that there is still a need for more information. In further courses, we will also use more time on the literature review in seminars or offer group tutorials.
5. Some students were not happy about the composition and size of the group in the project
 - Comment: this is hard to avoid. However, in the future, we will use a different system and make students sign up for various topics which will form the basis of groups. We will retain the possibility of adding new students to a group at a later stage, due to unforeseen circumstances.