

Course evaluation report for ECON 4640 HT24

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Summary: The course this year had only a few students who regularly attended, with the lecture often only being 4 or 5 students. The seminar was even worse for attendance, which one evaluation response attributes to the scheduling on Friday afternoon. The students who responded were broadly satisfied with the course, giving positive evaluation on the material and presentation. This year, I found the participation and typical back-and-forth that you would expect from Master's level students was lacking. In the previous year, I was quite satisfied that I was holding the attention of the students and that they were curious and engaged in the material. However, I found that to be less so this year. The low attendance and poor preparation for seminars was also detracting from what could have been a more meaningful interaction. I do wonder if this ended up hurting final exam results, or if it's just a selection issue.

Before the course started there were a few students who wondered if I would record the lectures, because they had conflicting course scheduling. I do record my lectures in Panopto and make them available immediately after the lecture. Last year I think that this hurt attendance, but the core group of students who attended were sufficient to create a good learning environment. This year perhaps it was too costly, with a few exam submissions being very poor.

1. what is working?

I think the course material is working well and striking a difficult balance between theory and empirics. I try to emphasize the importance of learning the theory and deriving testable predictions that can motivate the good empirical papers that we examine more closely. Lessons that extend beyond just political economics, and hopefully carry into other fields when they thinking about what constitutes a good theory or model.

2. what can be improved?

There aren't really any specific complaints from the students in the evaluations. I have taught the course three times now, so feel more comfortable with the flow of the material and striking a balance between needing to present a lot of theory, but still appeal to the students who are more empirically aligned. This year I also included an exam booster in the last lecture, which should have been strong preparation for the exam. I was a bit disappointed with the exam results this year, for questions which I thought should have been quite predictable based off of previous year's exam and the exam review. Perhaps one could be more clear on what a good answer looks like. Since the students rarely prepared for the seminar (or even attended) this could have been an issue in being ready to answer similar questions in an exam situation.

3. what can you do to improve the course?

Based on the course evaluation results, it seems like most students found the work load and difficulty well-balanced, but leaning towards difficult. Given the exam results, I would say that this is mostly true. Maybe an earlier discussion on what should be retained for an exam, so that they can more easily identify the knowledge that is important to retain. For example, it's important to recall the setting and research design of several seminal papers in political economics, and be able to interpret results from their tables. Emphasizing the importance of this earlier in the course would maybe help students organize better for exam preparation.