

Periodic course report, ECON4640

The course as of Fall 2018

As detailed on the course web page, the course gives an introduction to new political economics. The web page gives a good description of the contents of the course. The readings for the course are mostly drawn from journal articles, but we also rely on a textbook for some of the methodological background. To the best of my knowledge, there are now recent textbooks in the field to draw on for the whole course. Teaching is based on 13 lectures following a fairly standard format as well as 8 seminars. In the seminars, students are expected to prepare solutions to a set of exercises, and these are solved and discussed in class. Examination is a closed book written exam.

Evaluation of the course

In the fall of 2018, 31 students signed up for the course of which 21 completed the exam. As it is common to sign up for more courses than one expects to finish, these numbers seem satisfactory. The results at the exam are also as one should expect, with a bell-shaped distribution of grades. No students failed, and only one student got the grade E. During the course, we undertook an informal evaluation using pen and paper where students filled in comments on lectures, seminars, reading, and teaching personnel. The reactions were that the personnel were doing a good job, and the students found the course interesting and relevant, but some also found it challenging. The course is not part of a course group, and overlaps little with other courses. There is some potential overlap between ECON4640 and ECON4921, but there is good communication between teachers to avoid overlaps in themes covered. Current prerequisites are a bachelor in economics and some background in empirical methods. In my view, these are reasonable requirements.

Future changes to the course

The readings for the course have been changing each time the course has been offered. This both reflects different research interests of the teaching personnel and changes in the field. A course that is close to the research frontier, which is the intention of the course at hand, will necessarily experience this, and I don't think this is problematic. The group teaching the course is also quite volatile. I have been involved every time the course has been offered, but otherwise the teachers have almost always been new to the course. It could be that increased stability in the teaching staff could improve the course. Still, this has not been a major problem as of yet.