Evaluation-form: Written essay and 3-hour school exam

Course-code: STV2100

Course title: STV2100 – Contemporary Political Theory: Challenges and Opportunities

Language: ☐ Norwegian ☒ English

Course convener's evaluation of the course:
The course was 10 lectures shared between Robert Huseby (x4), Jonathan Kuyper (x4) and Fredrik Hjorthen (x2). We covered the major topics of contemporary political theory respectively: justice, democracy, and war.

The course entailed five seminars in which the main aim was to develop the term papers. Each student had to present their term paper and comment on another student's. We also covered in the lectures and seminars some background on methods from terms papers/exams, as well as practice questions from the exam.

The assessment therefore covered the term paper and the exam.

The course worked well in terms of covering a large variety of topics in an accessible manner. This gave students a raft of issues to focus on befitting their interests. The course also covered a range of important challenges facing current political systems, and tied this to underlying normative theories about how the world can and should work.

For almost all lectures, all three lecturers attended. We then asked questions of each other to gather clarifications on key points and allow a more inquisitive environment for students (so that they also feel more comfortable asking questions). This worked particularly well, as the student contact highlighted.

There were several limitations that we will develop for next year (discussed below as they overlap with comments from the student contact): Course Beginning; Lecture Orders; Seminars; Exams.

Summary of feedback from student contact-point:
Course Beginning: There was a sense that the first lecture should have been more introductory instead of theory-heavy. Some students felt that the first lecture was appropriate, but others felt it was too advanced and made it hard to catch up on later.

Lecture Orders: The course begins with justice, and democracy/war are not reached until week four. This is a slight disadvantage for those doing their term papers on those topics.

Seminars: There was a sense that the seminars could have also helped go back over lecture material as clarifications.

Exams: Students were stressed about the exam because this was the first time we had run the course so there were no previous exams or even term papers to offer as templates.

In all cases, the contact said these were minor issues and that the course was interesting, cohesive, and motivating.

Suggestions for improvements:
Course Beginning: We have decided to change the first lecture so half of it is a general introduction to contemporary political theory (in terms of justice, democracy, and war), and to thin down the number of theories.

Lecture Orders: Changing this course beginning will then help students working on democracy and war for their term papers receive an earlier introduction.

Seminars: This is one issue we cannot change much. The seminars are for the term papers, and there is space in the lectures for both clarifications and recaps (we could have small – 10 minute recaps on the previous lecture – at the start of the next lecture). We will consider integrating this. However, using the seminars for recaps is difficult because it is already difficult to coordinate presentations and comments across the weeks: some seminars have less student presentations and some have more. To be fair to students when there are several presentations, we cannot take time away from their term papers to do recaps. Giving a bit more space in lectures for recaps should solve this dilemma, though.

Exams: From next year we will be able to offer students terms paper templates and exam questions (though note that in the lectures we provided 'potential' exam questions: i.e. ones that follow the structure – but not content – of what we would ask). The student contact said that after the exams, students were very pleased with the questions.

Robert Huseby & Jonathan W. Kuyper