Semester Evaluation Spring 2013

Development and International Relations (DIR)
European Studies (ES)
Specializations (CAS and LAS)

Course work and project work

This evaluation is based on the electronic questionnaires conducted by the School of Culture and Global Studies. Students from the DIR and the ES programs also consist of two specializations, i.e. Chinese Area Studies and Latin American Studies. Questionnaires cover the questions regarding the course blocs for the two masters programs, the two specializations, as well as the non-ECTS course lectures. The collected evaluation data were also sent to the coordinators of DIR, ES and the specializations.

The general collective feedback from the questionnaires is fairly positive despite a few individual or specific criticisms. The student representatives from the Study Board also expressed a similar positive view the course work and the project work on behalf of the whole student group. However, the limitation of the term evaluation lies in the fact that the number of students participating in the questionnaires is about half of our student population: only 51% of 75 students for DIR, and 63% of 27 students for ES.

General assessment
Regarding the course series for DIR, ES, CAS, LAS, one specific comment is that the percentage of students answering to the questionnaires regarding some specific course assessment is low and also various with some course series having more answers than others. Comparing with the previous semester, the general picture and situation of our education, seen from the assessment, is improving steadily.

Course assessment
The overall assessment on the course work is fairly positive because the students find the subjects taught in the course series very interesting and engaging, and they feel that the learning objective and learning process have been achieved. The majority of the questionnaires views that the level of the course series and the reading materials are suitable and balanced. But some answers to the questionnaires also show rooms for improvement at various points. Most course series by the ES program, for example, EU Law, EU Institutions and Policies are assessed to be positive (9 participants). Still, there is a high percentage of students claiming that the course objective is not communicated clearly.

Therefore, there is one general problem – a recurrent one - that is the “objectives and requirements of the courses” regarding some courses (fx. Political Change and Development Theory, and IR course, and external role of the EU) are still seen as NOT being communicated clearly in the views of some students, and the data show that there is comparatively high percentage of students who thinks that the objectives of the
courses need to be further clarified. And there are many debates and feedbacks in the comments of the evaluation that need to be discussed among the course teachers.

Some comments from the students are directed at the course of “regional integration” in which the focus is too much centered on Europe and EU experiences. The study board chairman and the coordinators agreed to address this issue by extending “regional” integration process in other parts of the world.

Specialization – Chinese area studies and Latin America Studies
The most positive assessment is on the Chinese area specialization and fairly positive on the Latin American specialization. The overwhelmingly positive assessment covers all aspects of the assessment, i.e. literature, tasks, learning, objective, level, ....). This is to say that, as to the quality of the teaching, virtually no student expressed dissatisfaction at the courses of “Chinese Area Studies”. The evaluation from non-SNIF students shows (students from other programs) that, albeit the fact that the majority of the students are very positive to CAS, the percentage under various groups of questionnaires is slightly lower than that of SNIF students.

Other teaching activities (both for DIR and ES)
Most questionnaires also find the Aalborg model of Problem-Based Learning and the Simulation Game inspiring (although tough for some of the international students and others who are not used to it before). There is also a separate assessment on the Simulation Game activity, where most students find it useful and valuable.

Project work assessment
Student attitude toward group project is varied and mixed with satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and some project groups got “divorced”. This semester has a high percentage of individual groups. Historically speaking, this is an abnormal situation. We need to make further effort on training student to work effectively on project work.

The project assessment is more directly related to individual supervisors. In most cases, students are satisfied with the working relations between the supervisors and students, and with the professional assistances received from the supervisors. However, in some particular cases, some individual students/groups are very unsatisfied with the unfairly “limited” number of supervision meetings, which implies that one or two supervisors were seen to be too busy with their external research activities to concentrate on supervising their student project works. This situation needs to be taken care of more seriously in the new semester.

Semester and education program evaluation
Regarding the evaluation of the whole semester and the teaching program, the number of students participating in the questionnaires is even less than half of our student population: only 41 of 117 students for DIR (35%), and 11 of 35 students for ES (31%) submitted their answers.
To most questionnaire statements, the majority of the students share their agreement, while on some aspects students’s “disagreement” is a bit higher. Students have also provided some explanations and
arguments for why they wrote their projects alone. Some made suggestions on wishing to receive more
guest lectures including some practical courses.
What is important is that the majority of the students agree upon the statement that they have benefited
concretely from the PBL-model of education.
However, students are divided on the issues of whether they have been informed substantially regarding
the practical information (forms, rules and regulations, etc.) including the criticism on moodle.

Lessons: areas that have been improved or that need to be further improved

One of the most serious problems in the spring semester of 2013 is the emergence of individual-based
groups. In addition the 3-hour written examination has been seen as both time- and resource-demanding
and viewed as improper by both the staff members and the students. Therefore, it is suggested that the SN
should initiate the revision of the study syllabus in order to change the 3-hour written examination. One of
the suggested solutions is to combine the 3-hour and the 48-hour examinations so that the 48-hour
examination should cover all the 3-chosen course blocks.

One recurrent remark has been that the objectives and requirements of courses should have been
adequately communicated at the beginning of the term. The board of studies - both the previous and the
current one - have begun to address this problem by revising the syllabus and making content and aims of
each course much more explicit in the Moodle System. Another previous critique was that the literature for
the lectures was often uploaded rather late. Now, the Study Board has implemented a specific deadline for
all teachers to upload their recommended reading materials 10 days ahead of the new semester (Aug. 20
for the Autumn Semester and Jan. 20 for the Spring Semester). Also previously, some critiques pointed out
the fact that in some course series the cohesion between the lectures given by different teachers was
insufficiently explained. This problem has been addressed by making one teacher “course coordinator” for
one specific course series, and the coordinator of this course will coordinate the coherence of the lectures.

Despite of some criticism (including individual complaints) from the students regarding examination and
course issues, the general positive assessment is also due to another learned lesson, that is, a quick
reaction to any problem that is related to teaching and supervision. Constant dialogues between the SN
chairman and the coordinators, and between the coordinators and the teachers have been undergoing in
order to build mutual understanding. The SN meetings have been able to work with School and make quick
and effective decisions, while the chairman and the coordinators are able to maintain certain principles and
implement what has been agreed.