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: 72% of 90 students for DIR, and 44% of 16 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.

One of the courses is “Political Change and Development Theory”, which received lots of comments. Some comments are very positive while some are critical. 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.

**Project and semester evaluation**

Regarding the evaluation of the project process and the whole semester, the number of students participating in the questionnaires is even less than half of our student population: only 50% of 94 students for DIR, and 38% of 16 students for ES submitted their answers.

To most questionnaire statements regarding the project process in connection with supervision, the majority of the students choose “agreement”, but there are quite some “no position” (neither agree or disagree). 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.

One attention needs to be paid on the number of “hours” that students invest on study. Only 36% of the answers study full-time (30-40 hours per week) while 40% of them use only 20-30 hours on study. We do not know the factors behind this situation.

**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.