

## COURSE REPORT – Summary of course evaluation

### Background information (To be completed by the course administrator)

<b>Course LADOK code:</b> GP225L	<b>Scope (hp):</b> 15
<b>Course title:</b> Territorial Conflicts and Nationalism in Post-Soviet Eurasia	
<b>Course coordinator:</b> Christofer Berglund	<b>Number of registered students:</b> 51
<b>Semester in which the course is conducted:</b> VT24	
<b>Is the course an independent course, programme course or contract course? If the course has been completed within a programme, enter the programme name.</b> Independent course	

### Forms of evaluation and feedback (To be completed by the course coordinator)

<b>Formative course evaluation, for example dialogue during the course (optional)</b> This is a distance-based course, which runs online. However, I do meet most students in connection to information sessions and seminars that are arranged over Zoom. I also receive regular emails and messages over the Canvas learning platform. This helps ensure that channels for feedback are available, which is important to sort out technical issues and other specific queries that can arise at short notice.	<b>Approx. number of students who participated in formative course evaluation(s):</b> I received several dozen written queries from students throughout the course, covering issues ranging from access to assigned readings, opportunities for late re-submissions, instructions for references, to numerous other topics.
<b>Summative course evaluation (obligatory)</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Only via Canvas <input type="checkbox"/> Canvas and other form <input type="checkbox"/> Only other form (written and/or oral)	<b>Number of students who participated in the summative course evaluation:</b> 10

### Student's perspective (To be completed by the course coordinator)

<p><b>Summary of the students' oral and written feedback:</b> 20.4% of registered students (10/49) completed the poll. This sample is much too small to generalize from. In all likelihood, the opinions voiced reflects a subset of the most engaged or otherwise invested students.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent do you feel you have achieved the course's intended learning outcomes? <u>Mean:</u> 5.3 on a 6-point scale from a very small extent (1) to a very large extent (6)</li> <li>To what extent do you feel the course's working methods/learning activities have been a support in your learning to achieve the intended learning outcomes? <u>Mean:</u> 4.7 on a 6-point scale from a very small extent (1) to a very large extent (6)</li> <li>To what extent do you feel the course's examination forms have given you the opportunity to show how well you have achieved the intended learning outcomes? <u>Mean:</u> 5.2 on a 6-point scale from a very small extent (1) to a very large extent (6)</li> <li>To what extent do you feel the course has met your expectations in general? <u>Mean:</u> 5.3 on a 6-point scale from a very small extent (1) to a very large extent (6)</li> </ol>
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5. To what extent has the course given you the opportunity to take responsibility for your own learning?

Mean: 5.3 on a 6-point scale from a very small extent (1) to a very large extent (6)

6. What has been especially good about the course?

- “The flexibility to do lectures at my own time but then having the seminars to discuss and go over any questions.”
- “Dr. Berglund has turned out to be a very talented scholar and teacher. The Humboldt model really works in practice. The syllabus was also very interesting, and broadening horizons.”
- “The interaction”
- “The teacher”
- “Christofer is very nice, super responsive via email and fast at grading. It was really nice (and unusual compared to lots of other courses, esp. online) knowing the person we had contact with was so helpful and reliable. Articles were interesting. Exam was a good length and gave the opportunity to incorporate a super wide range of theoretical perspectives Really nice that all the articles were free, esp in this economy! Super appreciated”
- “Expertise, relevant case studies, current.”
- “its so well organizes it puts all other courses to shame.”
- “The course was structured in an excellent way. A very informative introduction for each lecture followed by relevant readings. The Zoom meetings were also an important part. In my opinion the teacher engagement, highly appreciated, also contributed to a very good overall assessment”
- “Learning about different theories and solutions to ethnic conflicts”

7. What can be developed in the course?

- “I think the group essay task can be developed into a different assessment. It was rather challenging to write that together. Maybe a more extended presentation / project type assessment would benefit this game.”
- Central Asia deserves to be included in the term "post-Soviet Eurasia". Something needs to be done with the group assignment. It is primarily about the free rider problem. (...) The other problem was that the group did not function as a group. There were no group dynamics, no synergistic effects. (...) The educational yield (learning curves) is equal to zero for the free riders, and unfair for the “workhorses”. I would therefore recommend making changes to the scheme, if the academic community believes that such compulsory group assignments should still have a place in this course. As of today, group assignments have almost zero educational value and tend to be deeply unfair (the free rider problem).”
- “Less emphasis on assigned readings, and more emphasis on relevant up to date knowledge and information. Removal of irrelevant group project essay. More clear instructions from teacher.”
- “More lessons perhaps. The teacher was very knowledgeable and it would be interesting to hear more from him, in addition to reading.”
- “No group project would be super appreciated. It was cool to learn so many theories but the number of articles was overwhelming and in the end i definitely didn't get through them all. Downloading them all took a long time too. Maybe a few of them could be switched out for books? This course seems advanced considering that a few people seem to not have studied before, at least not social sciences. An intro lecture, text on canvas, or more links to guides on correct referencing, academic honour, plagiarism, academic writing etc. might have been good. I think seeing examples of previous exams at different grade levels also helps people understand what they're supposed to look like.”
- “Clarity, communication, more time.”
- “a bit more clear about how to use contradicting sources and create the clearly desire comparative analysis.”
- “Maybe consider 50% given the large volume of readings and facilitating higher flexibility. I am not suggesting less volume readings.”

- “Inclusion of guest lecturers.”

8. How much time (hours) per week have you spent on the course?

- 40% less than 20 hours; 30% between 20 and 30 hours; 30% 40 hours or more

9. Please summarise your overall experience of the learning infrastructure

- 5 positive assessments; 2 neutral assessments; 1 negative assessment.

### **Teacher’s perspective (To be completed by the course coordinator)**

#### **Summary of the teacher’s views:**

- GP225L ran for the first time in spring 2024 but was designed in light of prior feedback from students enrolled in IM113L and prior feedback from colleagues at the Centre for Teaching and Learning. It is designed as an online course taught in English through Canvas. This format enables us to reach a larger pool of interested students, including those residing far from campus or working part-time. Students are often dispersed across numerous time-zones. It builds on expertise within the Department of Global Political Studies and its Platform for Russia, Ukraine, and Caucasus Regional Research (RUCARR).
- The course is organized into three modules. The first module introduces predictions and findings from earlier research on territorial conflicts. The second module focuses on the separatist and irredentist wars that erupted in Eurasia after the Soviet collapse. The third module is about subjecting theories or cases to critical evaluation in light of the other.
- A substantial number of candidates applied to the course. Close to 50 were added to the Canvas platform. However, as is common with online courses, there is a problem with drop-out rates and with students not engaging. Just about half of the registered students participated in learning activities through seminar discussions or written submissions.
- Participants come from different backgrounds and enter the course with different levels of academic preparedness. Meeting disparate learning needs and establishing common expectations is a challenge in online courses because there are less opportunities for in-class socialization and peer-to-peer learning. Experiences might differ since some “hit the ground running” whereas others struggle to move from rote learning to critical thinking.
- Another challenge revolved around choosing assessment forms that disintertivize rote learning and use of AI. To this end, I opted for mixed forms, ranging from seminar discussions and a PBL exercise to the written exam, which required students to analyze authentic challenges and demonstrate how the course readings led them to their answers.
- Most students appear quite content – and often outright pleased – with GP225L. In the five initial close ended questions, students rate the course around 5 along the 6-point scale. In the subsequent two open ended questions, students mentioned several positives: the course’s organization and flexible structure; the lecturer and his engagement; the readings which presented different perspectives; and most assessment forms. However, students also criticized: the problem-based group exercise in particular; as well as the omission of cases from Central Asia; and asked for more guidance through teacher-led sessions and recommended running the course on 50% over a full semester instead. Despite the large number of assigned readings, most students estimated spending less than 40 hours per week on the course. Most seem satisfied with the Canvas platform.

### **Action plan (To be completed by the course coordinator)**

The aforesaid diagnosis helps us single out three main problem areas: student disengagement,

uneven academic preparedness, and coordination problems surrounding the group assignment.

In their evaluation, students do not reflect much on the problem of drop-out rates but this is a major concern for the department since a sufficient number of students need to complete the course for it to be sustainable. This speaks in favour of maintaining the distance-based organization and flexible structure of the course. However, two changes should be considered:

- To increase the likelihood that a sufficient number of students complete GP225L, it might be better to accept a larger number of applicants at the outset. Between 1/3 and 1/2 of accepted students can be expected to finalize the course.
- To accommodate students who work part time or attend GP225L in parallel to other studies, it might be better to run the course at 50% pace over the full semester rather than at 100% pace over half the semester.

Addressing problems arising from students' disparate learning needs is more challenging. Online courses enable us to widen participation but the learning activities therein often disadvantage the least prepared students. I've tried to accommodate these competing imperatives – for a flexible design and for more teacher-led guidance – through the organization of an optional Zoom sessions, where I go through the knowledge and skills that students are expected to master in the course. I also offer the students the option of handing in written assignments in connection to module one and two, although seminar participation is preferred and encouraged. Paradoxically, students who might benefit most from more teacher-led guidance and peer-to-peer learning are often the ones opting out of attendance. A potential change to consider is therefore:

- To reduce the disparate learning needs, it might be better to raise the entry requirements from G1F to G2F, although this needs to be balanced against possible detrimental effects on the number of potential applicants to the course.

Student disengagement and uneven levels of academic preparedness also have repercussions for the group exercise. The aim behind this task is to introduce students to authentic problems that can be solved through the application of course materials and to encourage peer-learning and engagement through collaboration. It is dubious if these aims were met. Some students appear to have been either unwilling or unable to pull their weight, and thus left others to pick up the slack.

- To lessen coordination problems, it might be better to skip the group report and let students focus on the group seminar; paired with stricter instructions concerning individual contributions during the latter, when I am present to monitor performance.

I am not prepared to remove the PBL task altogether. It is the sole session in the otherwise flexible course where attendance is required; and is therefore needed to foster a minimum of in-class socialization. The goal is to enhance the common learning environment – not to eliminate it.