

Course Analysis: Swedish Society, Culture and Industry in Historical Perspective

(AK1213, VT2023, 7.5 credits)

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1. Description of the course evaluation process

An electronic LEQ - Survey was sent out to the students of the course using the KTH LEQ online survey tool. During this course offering we do not have students with learning or other disabilities as far as the teaching team is aware. Using the LEQ online tool, male and female students had same and equal conditions to participate in the course evaluation and put forward their views about the course. The response rate to the survey has been low (10% of students responded to the survey). In following iterations of the course it would be preferred to have printed out evaluations that are shared in class to improve participation the evaluation.

That said, the course evaluation here also brings insights from the course responsible and interactions of the course responsible with other teachers and seminar leaders in the course as well as student insights from the survey responses received.

2. Description of meetings with students

Meetings with students where course feedback was received was primarily during seminars of the course, which were also obligatory for the students to follow. Feedback was further received by students in a more continuous and voluntary fashion.

3. Course design

The course AK1213 is aimed towards international exchange students and international master's students at KTH with an important mission to broaden their knowledge of Swedish society, politics, city planning, culture, and industry. The teaching formats of the course include lectures, excursions, and seminars which are all held in English.

The teaching activities were divided into three main course modules: 1) Sweden and the Arctic, 2) Urban transformation and Sustainability, 3) Swedish History and Politics. Each course module consisted of two lectures, one seminar and one field excursion in the Stockholm region. Depending on planning considerations the order of these modules are changed periodically between different iterations of the course but the themes of the modules have been largely the same during the course development.

The examination consisted of a final multiple choice exam (based on all course modules) and the optional submission of a final course essay (3.5 credits, grading scale A-F). In addition, seminar based assignments were submitted (4.0 credits, grading scale: A, B, C, D, E, Fx, F.).

In order to pass the course, the student was required to pass the multiple choice exam, attend seminars, and complete all the seminar assignments (a total of 7,5 credits are given for passing the course).

4. Students' workload

As per the students responses to the LEQ survey we identified that the workload was generally perceived as proportionate to the learning objectives. Some areas that were identified as posing extra work load for some students included time spent on required readings and attendance to seminars. This could be a point to look into in following iterations to see if it appears as a more consistent concern.

5. Students' results on the course

In this iteration of the course 54 students were registered. 81% of the registered students succeeded in passing the course. The results therefore for this iteration are similar to previous iterations of the course. We notice however that the number of long essays submitted are generally a low proportion of the students, which suggests that few students are motivated to improve the examination grade beyond a D (note pass of multiple choice exam on its own can only yield a grade of D).

6. Students' answers to open questions

From the survey we can extract some interesting points regarding the experience of the students from the course. A strength of the course according to students has been 'learning more about Sweden from different aspects typically not exposed to' highlighting that the course addresses an important gap in KTH education by introducing international students to interesting themes about Swedish culture, planning and history.

A few students commented on various aspects of course design in a positive way. For instance that lectures were very interesting and combined with 'relevant and engaging' readings. Another student commented on the planned excursions as being very 'eye opening'.

Some students would have appreciated more structure in the seminars. For instance a student identified some opportunities for making the seminars more structured and with more concrete objectives. Similarly one student remarked on the opportunities to improve or rethink some lectures with regards to content.

7. Summary of students' opinions

The general impression of the course by the students was positive. While there have been some comments around issues to improve around seminar structure and lecture content which can be taken into account as areas for future course development.

8. Overall impression

This is a course that has been offered over several iterations and so a lot of experience has been in-built in giving this course to students. Overall, as teachers we perceive the course to be filling an important gap in first cycle courses by bringing a focus on Sweden from a societal, historical and cultural vantage point.

In this term as well as the previous autumn term (HT2022) some adjustments have been made to make the teaching load more fairly distributed amongst teachers, seminar leaders, course responsible and the examiner. Hence the new structure now involves a division of tasks between course responsible and three course module leaders (for each of the three modules). This new structure has worked well and should be continued. Although some more attention can be placed on communication with seminar leaders and providing clearer guidance to them about how they can prepare for seminars (this task should be taken up by the course module leaders). Furthermore, course module leaders need to communicate in good time with the course responsible in relation to module content and any changes to that, so as to avoid students getting necessary information about the course in a delayed manner. Specific guidance on these issues has been developed in the form of a guidance memo for teachers in this course and is available on the KTH cloud folder for this course.

During the last module of the term, Swedish History and Politics we noticed very low attendance in the two lectures and the excursion as compared to previous years. This can be because this was the last module of the term and some of the students were deprioritising the module in relation to competing course demands. Other factors could be that the lectures and excursions need to be updated and students need to be more strongly reminded about the importance of attending lectures and excursions (even if these are not mandatory for passing the course).

9. Analysis

The strongest part of the course is that it brings to the foreground Sweden's historical and cultural development, looking at a number of interesting topics such as the role of the Arctic, political processes such as Sweden's role as a neutral actor in international negotiations or ideas and practices that have shaped the formation of Swedish cities and towns. In general terms the students appreciate this diversity and also the range of learning activities that inform the teaching of these topics through a combination of seminars, lectures and excursions. A setback here perhaps is that the students do not necessarily achieve great depth in any of the key modules, but rather achieve a more holistic and broad view of many aspects of Swedish society. This can be seen as both a strength and a weakness of the course. More generally, students seem to be positively inclined towards a balance of topics rather than specialising in one of them.

That said some attention can be placed on all the learning activities for improvements. For example, lecture topics need to be revisited and discussed more regularly in terms of wider interest to the students. Some critical comments suggest that some lectures are appreciated more than others and so updating more regularly course lectures is important.

The seminar is a great space for peer to peer learning during this course. But some more attention can be placed on introducing learning exercises that are more stimulating for the students. Currently the seminars are heavily based on discussion of readings but for instance in one of the seminars, the seminar leaders did a role playing exercise with the students and

reduced the focus a bit on the discussion of readings and this was appreciated by many students.

10. Prioritized course development

Attention will continue to be placed on course content to ensure that lectures, seminars and excursions are updated (or entirely changed) in accordance to student needs and preferences as well as meeting important learning objectives of the course.

Some areas that can be useful to look at is the number of required readings (some students and seminar leaders indicated these may need to be reduced somewhat) as well as the structure of seminars (introducing for instance some new group learning exercises).

While the level of students that pass the course is relatively high, there are few students that become motivated to write the final essay and hence improve their grade above a D. This can be looked at in terms of why few students decide to write the essay. It could be an issue that the essay needs to be introduced earlier on in the course. In the current course design there is not much emphasis on peer to peer discussion around the long essay for instance and the deadline for submission is one of the last milestones of the course. Another issue could be that the essay topics and questions need to be updated so that they are more interesting for the students and hence students might feel more motivated to write the long essay.

An area that can also be looked at is the role of guest lecturers so that their lectures are best integrated with the overall course. In this course we have relied on several guest lecturers (either from other KTH departments or external). We have noticed that it has been at time a challenge to provide adequate support to guest lectures such as in terms of IT support or ensuring the presence of a course teacher (such as course module leader) during the guest lecture or organising the payment of external lecturers. These more practical matters need to be looked at to ensure a smoother implementation of guest lectures. Furthermore, while the guest lecturer has the primary responsibility for the lecture, course module leaders have the responsibility that the guest lectures are well aligned with the learning objectives of the course.