

## Legal Systems and Methods (Autumn term 2022)

### Course Evaluation Report

After the case exercise was completed, students were asked to fill out a course evaluation form in Athena. Despite the evaluation not being scheduled, the answer rate was remarkable good (89 % or eight out of nine students). The course evaluation was conducted anonymously.

Due to a shortage of in-coming students – the exchange programs are still not anywhere near pre-Covid numbers – we had the rare luxury of instructing a small group of students dedicated to their studies. The group was made up of four Swedish law students and six in-coming students (from Belgium, Germany, Schweiz, France, and China).

The course, *Legal systems and methods*, is taught blended. Most lectures were conducted in-person, while some were pre-recorded. Seminars were predominately conducted face-to-face. Due to logistical or didactical reasons a few seminars were, however, held on Zoom. A new element in the course, the panel on international lawyering, was for obvious reasons conducted online. Automated learning sequences structured the preparations ahead of seminars and organized the concluding case exercise. The technical development of the course's administration and the use of digital resources made it vital to include a specific question concerning the course's digital structure and remote learning in the questionnaire.

On the first question – **How well do you think the course corresponds with the learning objectives in the course's syllabus?** – 87.5 % of students answered, “very well” and 12.5 % percent “well.”

When asked **what they liked best with the course**, students stressed the authenticity of the teaching team, the interaction between the theoretical approach – which stresses legal method, institutions, and procedure rather than material law – and the practical application in seminars and exercises. The interactive mode of teaching also appealed to several students. In fact, students particularly highlight seminars that require a high degree of student participation, in particular the German law Moot court. In general, students put special emphasis on the quality of the teaching and the open and friendly attitude shown by the teaching team.

“Learning about the different systems and methods and also having the privilege of being taught by teachers from those countries has been an invaluable experience.”

My impression is that the main pedagogical asset of this course is its diversity, both in terms of the curriculum and the learning process: Students appreciate the opportunity to learn about a wide variety of legal traditions and systems from teachers who have a deeper understanding

of the topic – all within the taxonomy of comparative law. Concepts like legal traditions, families, and cultures provide a structured overview of the legal techniques, procedures, and institutions of the main legal systems of the world. The course's focus on legal culture, as opposed to material law, is considered a major strength and an overall rewarding view of law.

“The whole course was also a bit different than the usual set-up we are used to. Many different tutors, and different teaching techniques. Also, the focus was not on the material law, which allowed for a bit of a more "sociological" and open-ended problem solving. This versatility was very well-received by me. I enjoyed the wide variety of ideas, teachings, and classes.”

The collaboration between academia and practising lawyers at Mannheimer Swartling (MSA) makes it possible to offer insights into other aspects of law than the ones discussed in an academic setting.

“To be able to meet "real" lawyers was a treat. Their giving us a glimpse of their work and their daily challenges was both eye opening and inspiring for me as a law student.”

Students praised the case study and the preparations ahead of the exercise, in particular the panel and classes in international lawyering, including a crash course in M & A. Students also enjoyed the change of scenery (sic) as some classes were taught at MSA instead of on campus:

“The international lawyering part was also really interesting and offered a different perspective than what is usually taught at university, as did the case study, which was really fun! I know a lot of us really appreciated having lessons outside of the university as well.”

Another important aspect is the importance students attribute to the interaction within a diverse group of students. It provides an excellent opportunity to get to know different legal cultures by getting acquainted with the other participants: “In addition, since the class includes students from different countries, the communication and cooperation between classmates were also enjoyable and beneficial.”

One student found writing the home assignments – three essays on various aspects of legal traditions, families, and cultures - particularly enjoyable:

“I thoroughly enjoyed writing the home assignment since I found the questions very interesting and stimulating. I probably could have kept answering them for two more weeks.”

This comment is particularly gratifying, since it is a challenge to make students enjoy the intellectual challenge of examination. The topics ranged from “Are mixed legal systems in transition from one tradition to another or the beginning of a new legal culture?”, “To which legal tradition, family and system does this Supreme court ruling belong?” to “What are the trends and controversies surrounding the use of legislative history as a tool in statutory interpretation in US law.”

When asked, **which improvements to the course they would like to see**, several students mentioned issues concerning the administration of the course. I am aware of the problems and

would like to thank both the teaching team and the students for their patience and understanding. We have been promised an experienced administrator for next year's course.

The course is still clearly Eurocentric, and while there are valid reasons for the emphasis on Western legal traditions, the aim is to add other traditions to the curriculum. The panel on international lawyering, featuring experienced lawyers from South Africa, India, Argentina, and Japan, goes some way towards this goal. Students, however, pointed out that they need some preparation ahead of the panel to be able to participate more actively. This is a clever idea, which will be implemented in next year's course.

An interesting point raised by some students is the risk that a curriculum that comprises several different legal cultures tends towards the general and abstract. This is a valid criticism, in particular since the curriculum is geared towards the study of methods and techniques rather than material law. One student suggested that classes on a particular legal system should progress from a broad overview to the application of law. The idea is that the final class should focus on a precise and detailed legal issue. This is basically the structure of the classes in German law. Another student asked for translated rulings from the civil law tradition, primarily Italian and German, to be introduced into the course material. I will make sure to include them in the course material for next year's course.

The scheduling of the introduction to the case study was also mentioned. I agree that it would be optimal to schedule the introduction a few hours after the learning sequence, containing the case, opens in Athena, the digital platform.

One question concerned **the use of digital resources and online teaching**. Some take-aways are:

Students seem to agree that a mix between in-person and online classes is ideal, although several students stress the importance of face-to-face classes to get to know and bond with classmates. Others emphasize the flexibility of online teaching and conclude that they are more likely to attend non-mandatory classes online. Pre-recorded lectures seem to work well, since students can plan their studies freely and listen more than once to a lecture or parts of it. Zoom widens the scope of what is possible in a course; the international panel in international lawyering would not have been possible without online teaching. The learning sequences in Athena that structure the preparations ahead of some of the mandatory seminars seem to work well. The plan is to make sure that this tool is used throughout the course.

The penultimate question concerned **the case exercise**. All but one student found the case exercise instructive, stimulating and an effective way to connect the more theoretical issues to the practical aspects involved in transnational legal work. It is considered to be an effective way to evaluate students' skills. Others found that the teamwork required to solve the tasks gave them new insights into the knowledge and skills needed to navigate working in an international environment, or as one student put it:

“I loved the fact that we were in groups, each of us had different approaches, which was very enriching.”

The focus on collaboration is one of the key features of this exercise and it is particularly gratifying that students recognize and appreciate its importance, despite the obvious challenges involved in any kind of teamwork. Some students found it difficult to connect the

knowledge and skills that they had acquired during the first – “academic” – part of the course with the case study. Clearly more work needs to be done, to make the connection more transparent to students.

One student stressed that their lack of knowledge in M & A made the case exercise particularly challenging. Another noted that the instructions did not include any references to textbooks. These are valid remarks; however, the emphasis of the case exercise is explicitly placed on legal culture and international lawyering, not business culture or M & A as such.

One student appreciated the chance to develop his or her oral presentation:

“It was great fun! Firstly, because we got a bit of an insight into an expertise that could be useful in the future. Also, I think the SU law program in general has far too few exercises where we get to practice oral presentations. Since I think this is a very important skill, I was happy that we got to do that during this course.”

The fact that all students reported that they had had fun while working with the case, might be the most important aspect of the student’s assessment of the case study. Having fun makes learning much easier.

Finally, students were asked if, and in that case why, they would **recommend the course to other students**. Here are a few answers:

“I am really happy to have attended this course and therefore would recommend it. The teachers were super friendly and motivating.”

“It is a great way to gain an understanding of other legal cultures, something that is not taught in other courses. It makes you think about and question your own way of thinking and that what is obvious to you can be impossible for someone else.”

“It was really interesting. We learned a lot about the different systems, and I think it is useful in order to work with international jurists. Even if we have only a few classes per legal country, it feels like we have learned the fundamental basis in order to approach the countries legal tradition.”

“I personally enjoyed this course a lot. It was a course with a modern mindset that was not afraid to think outside the box in regard to teaching methods and creative exercises. It also gave us some real advice on how to maneuver our future legal careers in a modern, globalized, world.”

“I really enjoyed the international lawyering bit. For maybe the first time since starting my studies at SU i felt like a lawyer, and not a student. That is something very valuable for our self-esteem and hopes/dreams. Also, to meet the various teachers with different legal backgrounds (many of them with some serious CV's!) was also a treat. It was inspiring to say the least. So yes, I would recommend this course to other students. I appreciate all the hard work you have put in to make this hard puzzle fall into place!”

“Yes, absolutely! Mainly because courses regarding legal methodology and philosophy have given me much more appreciation and understanding of law as

a subject in general. For example, I think juridisk metodlära [legal methodology] should be a compulsory course at SU.”

In conclusion, well done, all (including lecturers, instructors, panellists and, of course, students)! Any comments or suggestions would be appreciated.

Marie Sandström

(Course Director)