

Comparative Law (Autumn 2023) Course Evaluation Report

After the delivery of the paper, students were asked to fill out a course evaluation form in Athena. Despite the course evaluation not being scheduled, the answer rate was good (52%). The course evaluation was carried out anonymously.

On the first question, “How well do you think the course corresponds with the learning objectives in the course’s syllabus?”, 86% of students responded “very well” or “well”, while 14% responded “reasonably well”.

When asked what they liked best with the course, students stressed the quality of the teaching, the subjects of the course and the level of the seminars.

Comments:

"Stimulation of critical thinking."

"Student led seminars was good! Essay was fun to do."

"The course felt quite free. This freedom obviously expressed itself in part by the fact that the grade-basing part of the course is an essay that allows for the student to choose quite freely what subject they want to write about and in what manner. This freedom, however, also came into play with the methodological nature of the course. Unlike many courses in material law, this course actually allowed the students time to think for themselves and reflect on and challenge the claims made in the literature."

"I liked the student discussions making comparisons between law in different countries and learning about different legal systems."

"I liked the content of the course, the interaction with the students."

"The entire idea of students having to present an unfamiliar legal tradition for an hour works on many levels. Challenging students to leave room for discussion in their presentations allows for an opportunity to compare the legal systems of the countries within the class very well. It also trains students in their presenting techniques. For the most part of the course students had to do their own research which is very good, because that is what comparative law is all about."

"The open discussions on many different topics."

"I think that the chill, however informal it may sound, that Filippo brought to the course, has created a wonderful atmosphere for us to learn and discuss."

"Learning about common law and its history and comparing it to civil law. I also appreciated the mock negotiations."

"Filipos knowledge; would be nice if it would be a bit more of that and less discussion about ethics and politics. A lot of discussion were about few students which were going in a direction what was not in favour of learning the subject of comparative law. the connection between the different legal systems and the discussions made between

us during the seminars.""

"Learning about different legal systems."

"It being in English. The interaction between the different systems."

"The time and space given for group discussions. And certain seminars because the topics were very interesting."

When asked, which improvements to the course they would like to see, some students criticized the student led seminars. It is mode of teaching which was introduced to activate the quieter students. This criticism, which was expressed the last year as well, centers on the (perfectly understandable) fact that some students find it more appealing to have the seminars led with a firm hand by their teacher. The matter touches upon the delicate balance between student activation and a well-polished structure. I have, since 2022, limited the time allotted to the seminar leaders for their introductory presentation and reserved more time to the teacher for summarizing comments. I may make some further adjustments next year.

The criticism about the age of the literature (expressed by one student) is harder to understand. Some of the literature is indeed old, but still relevant for the topics discussed during the course.

Comments:

"The literature is not updated and sometimes ober 30 years old. i think that is a BIG issue. I would've preferred to study more specific topics and substantial law of other countries."

"Maybe cut like 1/4th or 1/3rd of seminars, very many and hard to prepare fully for each one, especially in the end."

"I personally do not feel that the student led seminars added too much of a value to the course. They were hit and miss. Some of them were great, others were hard to get much worth out of, due to it sometimes being hard to concentrate on the presenting student. I personally don't think the highs of these seminars outweighed the lows. At the very least, the teacher should play a larger role in them."

"I would allow for footnotes to be excluded from the word-limit and/or allow for a greater word-limit within the essay. This would make sources used throughout the essay a lot easier track to avoid plagiarism. I'm used to being able to specify to each specific page where I found my information, but now I had to avoid this to be able to work more on the contents of the essay itself. This also made it to where I would leave of sources I found, because I felt like the information was already conveyed in other sources that I cited. Comparative law essays tend to be bigger than normal essays, because you're essentially writing essays on two topics and then having to compare them, so a bigger word-limit in general would be welcome."

"Maybe longer and more open discussion times, and less mandatory seminars per week. In my opinion, the core of the lecture should have focused more on the lecturer,

and students could proceed with the discussion."

"Although it was very fun to practice giving a presentation on a specific subject, I found that the presentations from other students could sometimes be quite lacking in information, and would have preferred to have the teacher give a better and more in depth explanation on how the different legal systems function. I feel like I didn't learn as much as I could have if the teacher had led the lesson."

"More speaking of the professor himself. Would be nice to learn more about how comparative law actually is used in the practice."

"The only thing that I would change is that student that do not attend even just one seminar have to send a essay. but it just to be fussy, I would not change anything Student led seminars are fine. But since there were no obligatory parts of each seminars most students did not actually prepare for the seminars. Which led to the problem that only a few students participated each class."

"The teachers should be stricter concerning the time limit for the student-held presentations. Because it is beneficial for the student's to also get the teacher's perspective on the topic since a presentation might be lacking in clarity and facts."

When asked **whether the mock negotiation was useful tool to improve their understanding of the course** (open question), a majority of students expressed appreciation. A couple of comments makes me think, however, that some revisions to the instructions are called for.

Comments:

"Not really".

"Yes."

"Yes it was a great part."

"The mock negotiation had some good attributes. The main thing to think of is that this was one of the few times there was really room for group-based activities. This is important and a good experience. However, it is something that we have had the chance to do in earlier courses, and is hence not essential. What I really did not like about the mock negotiation was how the problem was based on a real case, with a "correct" answer already existing more or less. That sort of took away some of the freedom and creativity that was otherwise very apparent in this course.

To sum up, it was useful for giving me experience when it comes to working with others, but it was not particularly necessary for the improvement of understanding of the course."

"Yes it was. Because i had to do researches about other legal systems. I think a good lawyer is good at making legal researches."

"Yes it was a good practical exercise."

"I would say so. I think it helped putting into perspective how different legal systems can tackle a problem within contract law."

"Would be, if not attended online by me. I think overall that professor have used a lot of differed approach to teach us, and I find this refreshing."

"Yes, I really appreciated the mock negotiation. Especially the discussion and explanation with Filippo in the end."

"Yes, I really enjoyed this one."

"Yes it was."

"While intresting i feel that since the partners was announced too late to actually matter. My partner was already gone and we did no prep."

"Not really, it was interesting to hear the teacher's response at the end of the negotiation though."

When asked whether **writing a paper is an adequate way of testing and applying the knowledge acquired during the course**, most students agreed.

Comments:

"Maybe expand the instructions a bit, they are quite knapphändiga and had to go to other courses for some (Förvaltningsrätt uppsatskompendium)."

"Putting the main emphasis on a paper certainly is adequate. It could be argued that the students, by not having a more classic exam, are not tested in their knowledge of the more general facts that are taught within the course. In my opinion, this is not necessarily a problem, because the essay still shows whether the most important aspect of the course has been communicated to the student, expressing itself in that the student is able to use comparative methodology in the authoring of an essay. If this seems insufficient, a multiple-choice exam could be incorporated to check that the basic facts have been acquired as well."

"Yes because it shows that the student have learned how to apply comparative legal method."

"Depends on how you view the course. Because a large part of the course was doing research for your presentation, the mock and preparing the seminars it is a good way to test your research-skills, but I would say that the vast majority of the topics in the lectures aren't tested well in an essay where you would only compare 2 countries."

"yes but I dont understand why we dont received a grade for the other assignments like the presentation because I guess some of the presentation would be a bit better if that were the case..."

"yes, it is, even more if the student chooses a challenging topic."

"Yes and no. I feel that a paper can be enough for an exam. But a 15 point course should perhaps have a smaller exam as well."

"Yes I think so, but I wish we learned more about methodology."

When asked **whether there are areas of the law that they would have liked to explore more deeply**, the students expressed a general satisfaction with the current structure of the course, with some exceptions.

Comments:

"I would have preferred to have certain topics of private or public law to dig deeper in, contract law for instance."

"Given the size of the course, no, not really. The only way a deeper dive could be accomplished, as I can see it, is by removing some of the areas, which would be undesirable. The way the course is divided up at the moment allows for a large variety of topics to be explored, which in turn gives the students a larger tray to pick and choose from when they start writing their essays."

"Maybe contract law."

"Personally I already had a background in comparing civil law and I felt that these topics were underexplored, but this wasn't a problem for me as I already knew most differences."

"Chinese law."

"Maybe because I felt like some of the student presentations were lacking in quality, I would have wanted to get a better understanding of the common law system."

"No not really; for me the best part were the first several weeks where we were talking about the basics of comparative law."

"I am in general interested in knowing more about new cultures and new legal systems, so I think that there is always something new to explore!"

"This is a difficult question. Since we only touched upon the different systems briefly we will only ever get a rudimentary understanding of them."

"I would have liked to learn even more about common law, but this is because i come from a civil law tradition. Most likely the common law students would be intrested in more civil law."

When asked **whether they would recommend the course to others and to motivate their answer**, the students showed great appreciation for the course.

Comments:

"Yes because the workload is adequate and the content is overall interesting."

"Yes because it offers valuable insight into different systems and cultures. Even more so in an international environment like ours."

"Yes, it's a good course if you are able to take own responsibility and have a will to

learn the subject. Maybe a bad course for those that needs more whip than free will."

"I would absolutely recommend this course. The free nature of the course is almost unchallenged compared to the courses that are enforced by the curriculum. The pace of the course, unlike many others, is relatively chill, making stress levels some of the lowest throughout the study of law thus far. The only people I maybe would not recommend the course to are those who don't feel comfortable communicating in English."

"Yes of course. I think i will have a great use of the knowledge i obtained during this course for the rest of my law career. It's a creative way to solve legal problems, to look at how other countries have solved it."

"Yes, because comparing other legal systems is crucial for a better understanding of our own legal system."

"I would recommend this course. Comparative law is almost tailor made for a class of students who all come from different legal backgrounds and the course's approach leaves room for comparing these systems. Systems like Chinese law and Sharia law aren't touched upon at my home university and they give you a very interesting perspective on how law works in non-western traditions. The course tackles many general topics that are very interesting to learn regarding different courses."

"Yes, because its very interesting and gives you insight into many different legal cultures, also it allows for culture exchange with other students."

"Both yes and no. I think there is greater potential for learning about the different systems by not having the student presentations. Although I personally really liked preparing it, I don't feel like I learnt as much as I could have if I had had a professor leading the seminars instead."

"Yes, in general, it was fun, but I would have really appreciated it if there weren't so many hours spent discussing "nonsense" and listening to a silly opinion from one of the students. It is a hard verdict but you know how to understand it."

"Yes, I will for sure."

"Yes. First and foremost it is an ""easy"" course. As long as you read the material provided you will understand and follow what the course is about. The exam is a essay, which you can almost freely choose your subject. This is all good."

"There are also alot of erasmus students which is intresting because you learn about their systems of law."

"And Filippo is a fantastic teacher who makes this subject intresting because of his vast knowledge. There are not many teachers who can simply sit at the front of the classroom for 2 hours on end and carry a lecture without resorting to notes or a powerpoint, while still getting the message across."

"Yes, because I really enjoyed the group discussions as it was more active and engaging than other courses i've had. Also, it is a managable course concerning the time and energy put into it. Further, it was truly interesting to learn about different

aspects of law in different legal systems."

Filippo Valguarnera
Course Director