

Planning and running a project-based intensive course: Human Rights and Economic Law for the Green Transition

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Introduction

This poster provides an overview of the plan for the project, which concerns the development and running of a new 7.5 ECTS intensive course, 'Human Rights and Economic Law for the Green Transition'. The course will run between 30/6 - 8/7 2022, with 4 hours of teaching per day. The course is open to MA/LLM-level students and no prior knowledge is required. The course is being offered for a number of reasons. First, human rights and economic law are now at the forefront of legal action on climate change, given the ambition and enforcement gaps in international climate change law (van Asselt, 2021). Yet, no courses at the Faculty of Law, KU account for this legal development. Knowledge of how climate change is regulated through these areas of law will be critical for the next generation of lawyers (Mehling et al, 2020). The course caters to this need. At the same time, increasing education on climate change and sustainability is aligned with the Faculty strategy. Second, there are limited intensive courses offered at the Faculty. The course is one of six courses offered in the summer block, and the only one covering sustainability themes. Yet, students need summer courses to make up for credits missed when taking semesters off to do internships, for example. Third, the topic is particularly suited to intensive learning because regulating climate change through multiple regimes is an extremely complex issue. By fully immersing in the topic for seven days, students can better develop their understanding of the topic and draw connections between the issues covered, being able to focus on this course alone (Saenger et al, 1998).

Background and scope

The project aims to advance the understanding of how an intensive programme, in which classes are concentrated over ten days, affects the perception of learning by students, as well as their motivation. In doing so, it will address the following research question: *How does an intensive course influence students' perceived learning and motivation?* The design of this project has been informed by and will contribute to several areas of pedagogical scholarship, which include: (i) the factors influencing students' perceived learning (Deslauriers et al, 2019); (ii) the advantages and disadvantages of an intensive course in legal education (Saenger et al, 1998), and (iii) the design of course experience questionnaires (Wilson et al, 1997). In addition, it will contribute to knowledge about sustainability education, by acquiring data on how to best design a course that examines the complex interactions between climate change law and other areas of international law.

Limitations

The project is affected by a number of limitations:

1. The project will only assess perceived learning, which does not necessarily reflect actual learning (Deslauriers et al, 2019)
2. There is no baseline data to compare an intensive 7.5 ECTS course (7 days) with the same course taking place over 6 weeks instead.
3. There is no baseline data to assess the impact of the intensive course design on perceived learning, because it is the first iteration of the course

Project design and activities

In order to investigate the research question, we have designed the project as a cycle of activities to be repeated for as long as the course is offered (once per year).

The activities cut across the entire course process: before, during, and after. They concern respectively:

1. **Before:** course design. This involves developing the learning objectives, designing in-class activities, and the final evaluation.

Learning objectives - sample:

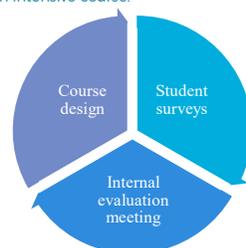
- **Knowledge** of law and policy developments in human rights law, international trade law and international investment law to address climate change
- **Skills** to identify relevant arguments and counter-arguments on the role of human rights and economic law in the green transition
- **Competences** to critically analyse the potential of legal regimes to address climate change with regard to its political and scientific dimensions

In-class activities: case studies, group discussions on designated questions, presentations, padlet and quizzes. The amount of time spent on student activities will be higher than in a regular semester course, as compared to time spent lecturing.

Final assessment: Assigned written individual assignment (1 day)

2. **During:** three anonymous student surveys, taking place on day 1 before teaching starts, at the end of day 3, and at the end of day 7 respectively. These are designed to measure how students perceive their learning and motivation as an outcome of the intensive nature of the course. We have chosen to conduct surveys due to the size of the group and time constraints and because we want information at three points in time. Surveys will be anonymous to ensure that students answer honestly. (See methodology box). The third survey will serve to enable the iterative course development process. (See point 3 below.)

3. **After:** internal evaluation meeting. The outcomes from the surveys will be discussed amongst the teaching group and fed into an iterative course design process to inform the design of the following year's course. (See methodology box.) The methods and the results will be presented internally to the Faculty of Law and made available for staff considering developing an intensive course.



Methodology

Survey questions

Survey 1. Expectations and motivation (day 1)

- 1.1. What motivated you to choose this course? (free text)
- 1.2. How would you assess your motivation to achieve the learning objectives of the course? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all motivated, 5 = extremely motivated)
- 1.3. What do you expect to learn during this course? (free text)
- 1.4. To what extent did the intensive nature (7 day programme vs regular semester) of the course affect your decision to enrol? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all, 5 = very much)
- 1.5. Have you taken any courses on climate change, human rights, or economic law previously? (multiple choice - ability to choose more than one option)

Survey 2. Half-way reflection (day 3)

- 2.1. Do you feel that the course workload is more or less manageable compared to a regular 7.5 ECTS course taking place during the autumn or spring semester? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all manageable - 5 = very manageable)
- 2.2. Do the in-class activities facilitate your learning? How? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all, 5 = very much + free text)
- 2.3. How do you feel that your understanding of the role that human rights law plays in addressing climate change has improved? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all, 5 = very much + free text)
- 2.4. How do you feel that your understanding of the role that economic law plays in addressing climate change has improved? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all, 5 = very much + free text)
- 2.5. How has your motivation to learn about the topics covered changed since we started the course? (1-5 scale, 1 = decreased, 5 = increased)

Survey 3. Final reflection (day 7)

- 3.1. Can you list three things you have learned during the course? (free text)
- 3.2. To what extent do you feel that the intensive nature of the course facilitated your learning? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all, 5 = very much + free text)
- 3.3. If you were given the choice between taking this course in the current format (intensive) or as a regular semester course (6 weeks), which would you prefer? Why? (multiple choice + free text)
- 3.4. How motivated do you feel to further engage with any of the topics covered in the course? Which topics? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all motivated, 5 = extremely motivated + free text)
- 3.5. How likely is it that you would choose to write your MA/LLM thesis on one of the topics covered in the course? Which topics? (1-5 scale, 1 = not at all likely, 5 = very likely + free text)

Internal evaluation meeting

- To what extent do the results of the surveys match the expected outcomes?
- How can the feedback be best integrated into the course design for next year?
- Should the course be offered as an intensive course or a regular semester course next year?
- Does the perceived learning as identified by the survey results match the outcome of the final assessment?
- Which factors contributed the most to student motivation?

Expected outcomes

We have identified a series of expected outcomes regarding students' perceived learning in the course. The expected outcomes will be compared to the student answers to the surveys.

The expected outcomes are as follows:

- The majority of answers for the quantifiable questions on perceived learning (Q. 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 3.2) will be between 3-5 on average.
- Students will initially be favourable to the intensive character of the course (Q. 1.1 and 1.4), but will perceive the workload as too high half-way through the course (question 2.1).
- Students will perceive their overall learning as high and be favourable to the format at the end (questions 3.2 and 3.3).
- Students motivation is expected to be high at beginning of the course (Q. 1.2 - between 3-5 average), decrease in the half-way reflection (Q. 2.5 - between 1-3 average), and increase again in the final reflection (Q. 3.4 and 3.5 - between 3-5 average).
- In the half-way reflection, students will perceive their understanding of human rights law better than economic law, because it is a required subject at BA-level (Q. 2.3 and 2.4).

References

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ENACT

Enhancing Climate Action through International Law

