

Course title: Evidence and Democracy in Times of Crisis (Circle U. Summer School in Democracy)

Level: Master

Credits: 5 ECTS

Teaching: Summer 2022

Teaching format: 5 days on-site in Oslo (August 8-12) + online activities

Prerequisites: undergraduate degree & enrolment in a regular MA program at one of the Circle U. universities

Coordinator: Tobias Bach and Eivind Engebretsen

Teaching language: English

Course content:

The systematic use of knowledge in the public sphere – politics, administration, and public services more generally – is usually discussed under the label of evidence-based or evidence-informed policymaking.

Despite its theoretical appeal, the normative ideal of evidence-based policymaking encounters multiple challenges when faced with acute crises. Acute crises such as the current pandemic confront political and administrative decision-makers with an urgent imperative to act. They must make decisions under conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty and without a solid knowledge base. Both climate science and epidemiological knowledge have also become increasingly polarized sites of controversy in which evidence is continuously discussed and contested. Hence, democratic decisions are not simply informed by evidence, but become sites of the construction and social negotiation of evidence.

Recent developments trigger several fundamental questions regarding the role of evidence and expertise in modern democratic settings, which will be addressed in this course:

- What is the role of evidence – and what should be its role – when urgent decisions must be taken? How do political and administrative decision-makers balance “hard” scientific evidence with other types of evidence and other legitimate concerns?
- How can scientific evidence be communicated to the wider public without unduly antagonizing significant parts of the population?
- What are the implications of the contestation of scientific evidence and academic experts by populist politicians and parties?
- How to weigh and implement evidence-based measures that involve trade-offs with fundamental principles of democratic societies such as freedom of movement or expression

Learning outcomes:

Knowledge

Having completed this course, students:

- have knowledge of the principles of evidence-based/evidence-informed policy
- have knowledge about different theoretical approaches to and understandings of evidence in a political context
- have knowledge about how the production and use of evidence is influenced by situations of emergency and crises
- have knowledge about the role of evidence and evidence-based decisions in sustaining democratic institutions

Skills

Having completed this course, students can:

- conduct independent empirical studies on evidence-based decisions in situations of crisis
- contribute to policy debates on the role of experts and the use of evidence in decision-making
- engage with relevant stakeholders in defining and addressing real-world challenges
- contextualize and present academic knowledge to a broader audience

Competence

Having completed this course, students can:

- cooperate with others in analyzing and interpreting empirical data in the light of theoretical concepts
- compare decision-making actors and processes across different contexts and conditions
- identify different types of evidence in decision-process

Teaching

9 lectures (8 lectures on-site, 1 online lecture before the course week)

Project work equivalent to 12 seminars (1,5 hrs per seminar)

Mandatory activities:

- Active participation in class
- Reading course syllabus

- Physical presence during the course
- Project report (on-site, group work): during the summer school, small groups of students will produce a project report (approximately 2500 words, references and appendix excluded, written in English) and orally present their findings (in English). The project work must be informed by the course syllabus. Student groups can select among a limited number of topics. The topics will be presented to the students on the first day by course teachers and practitioners representing different organizations. This ensures that students can get started with their projects immediately. The students will be guided by teaching staff in their project work.

Exam:

- Popular science communication (off-site, individual): based on the project report, participants will produce a blog post, podcast or video. The communication informs about the project work and will put the project into a scientific context (what are relevant scientific debates? what are open research questions in those debates?) and contextualize the project work (why and how is this relevant for the student's country context?). Students may also produce their communications in other formats, after consultation with course teachers. The individual communication is due one month after the end of the course at the latest.
- The exam can be submitted in English, a Scandinavian language, German or French (which are the teaching languages used in Circle U. besides English). If you submit your exam in another language, you are required to provide an English translation.
- The exam is graded with a pass/fail grade.
- It is not possible to resit the exam in another semester.

Tentative overview of course:

	Monday (8.8.)	Tuesday (9.8.)	Wednesday (10.8.)	Thursday (11.8.)	Friday (12.8.)
09:00-10:30	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture	Project team work
11:00-12:30	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture	Lecture	Project team work
13:30-15:00	Project topic presentation	Project team work	Project team work	Project team work	Project presentation
15:30-17:00	Project topic presentation	Project team work	Project team work	Project team work	Project presentation
Evening	Social program		Social program		

Lecturers (confirmed):

David Aubin, Professor, UCLouvain (Political Science)

Tobias Bach, Professor, UiO (Political Science)

Dorothea Bohle, Professor, University of Vienna (Political Science)

Eivind Engebretsen, Professor, UiO (Global Health)

Emiliano Frediani, Professor, University of Pisa (Administrative Law)

Lecturers (to be contacted):

Cathrine Holst, Professor, Sociology (UiO)

Syllabus (preliminary & incomplete):

Bach, T. (2021). Bureaucracies and Policy Ideas. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1421>

Christensen, J. (2021). Expert knowledge and policymaking: a multi-disciplinary research agenda. *Policy & Politics*, 49(3), 455-471.

<https://doi.org/10.1332/030557320X15898190680037>

Craft, J., & Halligan, J. (2017). Assessing 30 years of Westminster policy advisory system experience. *Policy Sciences*, 50(1), 47-62. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-016-9256-y>

Page, E. C. (2010). Bureaucrats and expertise: Elucidating a problematic relationship in three tableaux and six jurisdictions. *Sociologie du travail*, 52(2), 255-273.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41931528>

Sager, F., Mavrot, C., Hinterleitner, M., Kaufmann, D., Grosjean, M., & Stocker, T. F. (2020). Utilization-focused scientific policy advice: a six-point checklist. *Climate Policy*, 20(10), 1336-1343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2020.1757399>