

# ISSSV4500 – Evidence and Democracy in Times of Crisis

## Background for changes in the course description:

The course was offered for the first time in summer 2022. The students were overall very satisfied with the course. That said, the teaching and administrative staff discussed several aspects of the course and suggest a number of changes in the light of our experiences. The main changes are the following:

- More systematic inclusion of online lectures (blended learning) to familiarize students with the teaching staff and the substance of the course ahead of the physical meeting taking place.
- Adjustment of mandatory activities which do not include a report written on-site anymore but which include a group presentation and preparation of slides. Writing the report was very time intensive and preparing the project presentation came on top of the writing but was not included in the initial course description.
- The exam was changed to a more regular term paper, instead of an open-format communication (blog, podcast, etc) where formulating clear expectations (and agreeing on grading guidelines) turned out difficult. Moreover, having a term paper will also require more reading of the syllabus by the students and a more active use of theories and analytical frameworks.
- ISV suggested to investigate whether the number of credits could be increased from 5 to 10. This would require quite substantial changes in the course (much more comprehensive syllabus, longer term paper) which we do not find feasible given our experiences with the course and the constraints of teaching a one-week course.

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# ISSSV4500 – Evidence and Democracy in Times of Crisis

Course content

Level: Master

Credits: 5

Teaching: Summer 2023

Examination: Summer 2023

Teaching language: English

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 COVID-19 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 outcome

### **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 political and administrative contexts
- 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

### **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

# Prerequisites

## Recommended previous knowledge

The formal requirement for participation is a completed bachelor's degree, enrolment in a master's program at a Circle U. university, and a BA grade average equivalent to C on the Norwegian grade scale. The course setup is interdisciplinary including, amongst others, Health Science, Political Science, Public Administration, Sociology, Law, and Communication Studies.

## Teaching

- 10 lectures (8 lectures on-site, 2 online lectures before the course week)
- Project work equivalent to 12 seminars (1,5 hrs per seminar)
- This course will use Canvas as a digital learning platform. [Read more about Canvas.](#)

## Examination

### **Mandatory Activities**

- Active participation in class
- Reading course syllabus
- Physical presence during the course (students cannot miss more than one lecture)
- Project presentation (on-site, group work): during the summer school, small groups of students will produce a project presentation and orally present their findings (in English). The project work must be informed by the course syllabus. The students will be guided by teaching staff in their project work.

### **Exam**

- Term paper (off-site, individual): participants will write a term paper on a topic related to the course (1800-2200 words, excluding references). The term paper may be related to the project work done by students on-site, but it can also be on another topic. The individual communication is due one month after the end of the course at the latest.

- The exam must be submitted in English.
- The exam is graded with a pass/fail grade.
- It is not possible to resit the exam in another semester.

## Submit assignments in Inspira

You submit your assignment in the digital examination system Inspira. [Read about how to submit your assignment.](#)

## Use of sources and citation

You should familiarize yourself with the rules that apply to [the use of sources and citations](#). If you violate the rules, you may be suspected of [cheating/attempted cheating](#).

## Explanations and appeals

- [Explanation of grades and appeals](#)

## Resit an examination

- [Illness at exams / postponed exams](#)
- [Resitting an examination](#)

## Special examination arrangements

Application form, deadline and requirements for [special examination arrangements](#).