

Content and Format of the Course

The course “*The Cold War, Then and Now*” was offered as HIS116 in autumn 2025. The goal of the course was to provide an in-depth overview of the period and to reflect on its present-day legacies. The course was based on academic literature that introduced students to the global history of the Cold War, ranging from the classic binary model of American–Soviet rivalry to more historiographically recent topics such as the post-colonial struggle for the Third World, China’s imperial ambitions, and technological change and consumerism. The course consisted of lectures and seminars evenly distributed across six thematic blocks.

The lectures were interactive and included two to four small assignments using pair discussions and digitally-based questions (via Mentimeter and Google.Docs). The seminars were based on discussions of academic publications and primary sources (including one film, visual posters, correspondence, and official documents). Students were divided into small groups (usually five to seven people), with groups rotating each seminar. Each seminar consisted of three to five discussion rounds and included a variety of activities. These ranged from answering specific questions related to the readings and/or primary sources followed by short class presentations to producing posters, diagrams, and outlines within each group. Attendance was not compulsory. The language of instruction was English, but Norwegian was used by some students in seminar-level discussions. The course had one mandatory assignment, for which students could submit either a traditional essay or an alternative format such as a podcast, film, museum exhibition, etc. Approximately 40 percent of the students chose an alternative format. Some students also incorporated visual materials into their written essays.

Statistics

Before the course started, 72 students were registered (data from mitt.uib). Approximately 30–35 students regularly attended the classes. Fifty students submitted the mid-term assignment. The student group was diverse and included BA history students (both major and minor), exchange students, and voluntary attendees from the one-year study program. Students’ prior knowledge varied significantly—from those with little background in the topic to those who possessed deep knowledge of certain Cold War themes.

Evaluation Methods

The course was evaluated using two methods. First, a questionnaire was sent to students. It included 15 closed questions rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (e.g., “How much did you like the course?”, “Was the content clear?”, “Did you learn anything new?”, etc.; see below), and five open questions inviting more detailed reflections (“What did you like most about the course?”, “What did you like least?”, “How could the seminars be improved?”, “How could the lectures be improved?”, other feedback). Students could also list the topics they liked most and least. Twenty students completed the questionnaire.

Second, the instructor conducted individual conversations with four students who provided extended oral comments about the course.

Both methods were held at the end of the course, before and right after the final lecture. The overall response rate was 48%.

Student Evaluation: Main Points

Below is an overview of key course elements evaluated on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

The overall evaluation of the course is very positive.

55% of respondents rated the course with **5 points** (“I liked the course a lot”);

25% rated it with **4 points** (“I liked the course much”);

20% rated it with **3 points** (“I liked it”).

No student gave a score of 1.

Most students found the course content clear:

45% found it “absolutely clear” (5 points);

30% rated clarity with 4 (“very much clear”);

25% with 3 (“moderately clear”).

No student rated the content as unclear.

Regarding the question “Did you learn anything new? (1 = totally disagree; 5 = absolutely agree),”

45% chose 5 points;

40% chose 4 points;

10% chose 3 points;

5% chose 2 points.

No one said they learned nothing.

Most students found the course literature adequate:

30% absolutely agreed (5 points);

50% agreed (4 points);

15% moderately agreed (3 points);

5% little agreement (rated it with 2 points).

No one thought the literature was useless.

Regarding difficulty levels:

5% found the literature extremely difficult;

85% found it adequate to the course requirements;

10% found it easy.

This reflects the diversity of the student group and their differing prior knowledge.

75% liked the PowerPoint presentations a lot (5 and 4 points);

25% liked them moderately (3 and 2 points).

80% liked the seminar format a lot;

10% rated seminars with 3 points (“liked them moderately”);

10% liked them to some extent.

85% liked the course topics a lot;

15% liked them to some extent (2–3 points).

Regarding the overall difficulty of the course (1 = very easy; 5 = extremely difficult):
30% rated it with 4;
55% with 3;
15% with 2.
This indicates that students found the course moderately demanding. No student found it extremely difficult or too easy.

Questions on usefulness:
60% considered the course “absolutely useful” (5 points);
25% rated it as very useful (4 points);
15% rated it with “pretty useful” (3 points).
No student considered the course useless. Answering on the question “Do you think the course is/will be practical in your professional life?”, **70 %** found it as very useful.

75% found the instructor absolutely reachable and communicative;
20% rated this criterion with 4.

Regarding the mid-term assignment (“Was the mid-term assignment interesting?”):
55% chose 5 points (“extremely interesting”);
35% chose 4 (“very interesting”);
5% chose 3 (“pretty interesting”);
5% chose 2 (“not too much interesting”).

No student found the assignment useless.

Regarding the question “Would you take this course again, knowing what it is?”:
50% answered yes (5 points);
35% gave 4 (“more yes than no”);
10% gave 3 (“probably”);
5% (one student) chose 1 (“would not take it again”).

All respondents were satisfied with their own work in the course:
10% were absolutely satisfied (5 points);
60% very satisfied (4 points);
25% quite satisfied (3 points);
5% “pretty satisfied” (2 points).

Extended Comments on Key Aspects of the Course

Twenty students provided extended comments on different parts of the course in the questionnaire; four students delivered their feedback orally. Below is a summary of the most common points (selected to exclude repetitions) and unique comments. Spelling and punctuation have not been changed; mistypes were corrected.

*Evaluate the lectures and seminars:

“Lectures were interesting”

“They are really good”

“I liked the lectures a lot, and I appreciate the time set aside for discussion, but if I would change one thing, it would be slightly less discussion during the lectures. I felt like it took a lot of time away from the interesting lecture... Everything was great otherwise!”

“I could not make the last lecture due work obligation, but I wish to thank you for a fantastic and inspiring semester. Now I cannot look at a McDonalds without a million thoughts rushing through my head.”

*Say what you liked MOST about the course:

“Great lecturer and interesting topic!”

“Seminars, loved the Cubrik movie”

“The easy to get into material.”

“Even though I would have preferred two lectures every week and then a seminar in addition to that, I really enjoyed that we got to discuss the topics of the course with peers. I really think this is useful, and I hope that other history courses at uib do the same. Many of the tasks we were given generated truly thoughtful and interesting discussions”.

“The attention paid to decolonization (primarily in Africa) and China. Too often I find the Cold War reduced to just US-Soviet rivalry, while decolonization - arguably the basis of the Cold War, developing alongside the decline of British, French and German imperial power and the growing popularity of Marxism worldwide during and after WWII - is only mentioned or told as if it simply happened to occur simultaneously, which is unfortunately typical of Eurocentric history narratives. Such a narrative ends up telling an anachronism in which the reaction (policy) takes precedence ahead of what caused the reaction (event/process), and puts the political agency of struggling masses in the Third World in the background of a few Great Men (and Thatcher). I principally really liked the use of mentimeter and methods of student participation such as group discussions. The old listen-to-the-professor-for-two-hours approach is not suited for learning, but more so for simply depositing information on students. Group activities encourage critical discussion and exchange of differing viewpoints.”

“The focus on a diversity of top scorers and not just following the timeline of the Cold War”

“Group tasks”

“Professor was really engaged. And of course learning more about this Era helps me understand the problems we face now.”

“I liked the discussions in the seminars the most. I enjoy being able to discuss ideas and bounce of people in a group. It enables me to better understand and notice different perspectives than that of my own. I have a tendency to get "tunnel vision" with my own ideas, since I struggle thinking differently from myself. Loved it, 10/10. I wish it was done, or rather possible to do in other subjects (With more students in on the lectures and seminars.). It is invaluable, but it is hard to make a discussion group, with people from lectures, when you really never get to know them. It is usually just a lecturer without interaction with co-students. So I really appreciate it being done in His116.”

“the lectures were very good”

“Really liked it was various of topics”

“The interactive environment of the lectures and some parts of the literature helped very much in piecing together the course even more but i of course forgot to read some parts as the literature syllabus was sometimes hard to understand properly.”

“That it gave a broad and most importantly more nuanced perspective of the Cold War. Especially going away from the classic thought of US and Soviet Union as the only participants in the Cold War.”

“Engaging professor and very fun midterm assignment.”

“The freedom to choose what the mid term assignment was about and how to do it.”

“I like how the lectures did not only include the professor doing a monologue but also showing videos that serve historical relevance.”

“i think it is a really interesting topic and i liked that the lecturer seemed very interested in the topic herself which made it more engaging”

“I like how the lectures did not only include the professor doing a monologue but also showing videos that serve historical relevance.”

*Please, say what you liked LEAST or did not like about the course:

“I wish the course went even deeper into these and articulated the successes of contemporary revolutionary projects (literacy rates, increase in productive outputs, record technological developments, life expectancy, quality of education and health services, gender equality, worker emancipation, land reforms, national sovereignty, etc. etc.)”

“Some of the literature was very heavy.”

“I work and have a family so early courses were a bit chaotic running to work and stuff but it is not a professors issue.”

“the only thing i can think of is to have the seminars in another room”

“Didn`t like anything least”

“Ideally the seminars could be held in a room more suited for seminars. It could sometimes be a bit difficult to hear the other students when discussing, or sometimes it could be a strain on the neck to turn around in the auditorium. They were otherwise great!”

“Substance-wise, I think more attention could have been paid to the material forces driving the Cold War. I think many are familiar with the big policies of the time, so the course could have gone further into the decolonization processes, ideological developments, and the economic levels. This way, I think the course could have covered more countries.”

“I wish it spent more time on the geopolitics and concrete events of the Cold War, such as violent decolonization, events in Eastern Europe, proxy wars, etc.”

*Anything else:

“Loved the course, have a great day!”

“I really think the idea of watching video clips from the Cold War is a great idea, since it visualise things and make history «real».”

“Great course”

“Amazing professor, beautiful midterm essay with a lot of personal freedom which made it a delight to write.”

“I really loved being allowed creative options, when doing the mid-term obligatory task. I do wish you would allow the podcast and video option to, exceed (2-3 min) up to 5 minutes. It would allow for more creative solutions. Like making a intro jingle, a cold war themed "ad" segment etcetera. You can maybe instead put the limit as: "between 3-5 minutes". It would also allow to comfortably narrate/read the script and add showmanship. I had to almost speak on in and out breaths, In order to feel like I had something valuable to present. Again. I LOVE, that you allow more creative solutions, as well as traditional solutions, so that people can pick and choose what they feel comfortable with, Or something to challenge themselves! And, well, simply giving us a choise. :-)”

“Thank you for teaching us”

“I wish could attend more lectures and seminars”

“Probably a bit less more time for discussion.”

Overall Conclusion

In general, students perceived course as interesting, clear, and useful. The depth of some comments they left also reflects that it was thought-provoking. The highest ratings were given to the clarity of the course (4.20 out of 5), its usefulness (4.45 out of 5), the mid-term assignment (4.40 out of 5), as well as the availability of the instructor (4.70 out of 5). The evaluation of the literature and the difficulty of the course received the lowest rates. The literature was evaluated as useful and interesting, though sometimes challenging—the difficulty of the reading list was rated 3.45 out of 5. The overall difficulty of the course was rated 3.15 out of 5. These results highlight the significance and appeal of the course content.

Elena Kochetkova, AHKR

15 December 2025