



STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING IN A FLEXIBLE BLENDED MODE ENVIRONMENT

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Summary

*In connection with the establishment of joint master's programmes with partner universities, the Faculty of Sciences at Lund University has developed online courses within its international programme in Global Studies. The aim is to further enhance physical as well as virtual exchange of teachers and students and promote joint delivery of courses among partner universities. Within this framework we have developed the course *Social Welfare in a Global Context*. The purpose is that exchange students will be able to take parts of their master's programme online and hereby increase the flexibility of studies within a joint programme, for instance by shortening the period of physical presence at partner universities. It also increases the possibilities for campus students to study abroad for a longer period of time when courses are taught online. As part of the development of this blended mode course we have included an online research tool, the "Global Research Gateway", a multi-disciplinary research tool that provides students, faculty members, and researchers in the field of social sciences with an Internet-based gateway that integrates academic and non-academic information sources, with more than 600 direct links to statistical databases, reports, research studies, working papers, and articles.*

Educational Context

In connection with the establishment of joint master's programmes with partner universities, the Faculty of Sciences at Lund University has developed online courses within its international programme in Global Studies. The aim is to further enhance physical as well as virtual exchange of teachers and students and promote joint delivery of courses among partner universities. Within this framework we have developed the course *Social Welfare in a Global Context* (15 ECTS credits). The course has previously been taught as a campus course and is now being developed into a blended mode course.

The purpose of developing online and blended mode courses in this context is that exchange students will be able to take parts of their master's programme online and hereby increase the flexibility of studies within a joint programme, for instance by shortening the period of physical presence at partner universities. It also increases the possibilities for campus students to study abroad for a longer period of time when courses are taught online. The blended mode course *Social Welfare in a Global Context* will be offered for the first time in January 2010. The campus and online students will start the course at the same time and content, teaching and learning outcomes will be identical.

The course is primarily intended for fulltime students in Lund and students from partner universities, including students studying abroad as part of their programme.

Course design

This blended mode course can be followed on a full-time as well as part-time basis. The different student groups will participate in the same tutorials, seminars and assignments that will be repeated at a number of occasions during the academic year. The course structure enables to a certain degree students to choose their own pace for seminar participation and submission of assignments. A full-time student following the course entirely online presents the contributions together with full-time "campus" students. And a "campus" student who fulfils their assignments after the scheduled time is allowed to submit these assignments at the same time as "online" students at a later point in time.

"Social Welfare in a Global Context" is a course where the ambition is to balance the different aspects of learning, teaching and assessing. Our prime focus is a student centered model to promote a productive learning environment. In the course students choose to work on a welfare problem of interest which they will explore during the course. The main objective is to learn about social welfare theory and policy. A secondary objective is to learn how to write a research proposal.

The course provides a structure for the students to discuss their work in supervised groups. Proactive instructions are made through a careful preparation of assignments and other instruments used to clarify the objectives and procedures of the course.

The content of the assignments is related to the steps of producing a research proposal. Campus students meet once every week and Internet students meet online at stipulated sessions. Each phase of the course ends with seminar. The structure of the course shall guarantee that students keep deadlines and work progress in accordance with the learning outcomes, including application of the course literature.

The second part of the course relates to the students' individual research proposals. The tutors give continuous feedback and a draft of the proposal is reviewed by a teacher other than the group tutors. This is done both as a collective feedback and, in a more limited form, as personal feedback. Having received the feedback the students are requested to finalise their proposals and submit them for grading.

The final part of the course consists of poster presentations of selected research proposals. This poster seminar opens for a discussion of policy recommendations regarding welfare issues.

The written work produced during the course is published online in individual and group portfolios. In the course online seminars, blogs, wikis, films, and chats will be used. As part of

the development of this blended mode course we have included an online research tool, the “Global Research Gateway”.

Global Research Gateway

The “Global Research Gateway” (GRG) has been developed in cooperation with the Social Science Faculty Library. This gateway will become an integral part of all master programmes and courses (national as well as international) at the social science faculty. It has been included among the Faculty of Social Sciences’ learning outcomes for information literacy and internationalisation. Global Research Gateway is a multi-disciplinary research tool that provides students, faculty members, and researchers in the field of social sciences with an Internet-based gateway that integrates academic and non-academic information sources, with more than 600 direct links to statistical databases, reports, research studies, working papers, and articles. See <http://global.sam.lu.se/>

The main objective of the GRP is to enhance quality and relevance of research being conducted by providing students, faculty and PhD students with updated, academic as well as non-academic research findings. The goal is to stimulate increased use of updated academic and non-academic information in both teaching and research

Work is underway with the Centre for Educational Development (CED) at Lund University to further improve the functionality of GRG. Work is also currently done on the production of film-clips of lectures and other tutorials.

The challenges

As the course has been developed some challenges have been identified. One has to do with the relations between the campus and online students. Both groups will reach the same learning outcomes but within different time frames. Another challenge is related to the first one and has to do with how to create a learning environment for both campus and Internet students and enable them to interact with each other even if they are following the course at different pace. The solution to this has been a repetition of the assignments during the academic year. Another solution has to do with providing the learning environment that includes resources like GRG, writing assignments in wiki mode, etc. The use of for instance wiki for group assignments will enable us to identify individual contribution to collective work. Finally, as the course is part of master degree programmes it must have the same quality and learning outcomes for campus and online students.