Teaching IEL in Africa: My Experience at the Trade Policy Training Center in Africa (TRAPCA)

By:

Markus Wagner

May 10, 2019

I have been teaching at TRAPCA (Arusha, Tanzania) over the last two years, each time for an intensive one week course. The students at TRAPCA are post-graduate students, often with impressive resumes and years of experience working in the public and private sectors. Students' educational backgrounds differ considerably, skewing quite heavily towards economics and business, followed by law students, although the latter were in the minority both times. The number of students was around 25 and 35 in 2017 and 2018, respectively with students hailing mostly from Eastern and Southern African countries, but also from West Africa. The composition of the class required modifying the approach I would usually take in a law school and include introductions to legal methodology on issues such as interpretation in international law, an introduction to subjects under international law, as well as how dispute settlement in general and the WTO and regional dispute settlement

mechanisms work in particular.

While the substance of the course varied somewhat between the 2017 and 2018 courses, they generally consisted of an introduction to international trade law, its policies and economics; the relevant multilateral and regional institutions; as well as dispute settlement processes. Substantively, the courses covered the GATT (most-favored national and national treatment principles, quantitative restrictions, justifications including those in Article XX GATT as well as regional and national security exceptions) and trade remedies (covering subsidies, dumping, and safeguards), and in one instance also trade in agricultural products.

The selection of readings were dictated by the availability of materials at TRAPCA's host institution, ESAMI. This meant using introductory texts such as Peter van Bossche's and Werner Zdouc's *The Law and Policy of the World Trade Organization* or Mitsuo Matsushita et al's *The World Trade Organization: Law, Practice and Policy*. Where possible, I made materials from the latest editions available from these works to students. These materials were supplemented by additional readings, some of which were required while others were optional.

Wherever possible, I provide students – after setting out the basic structure – with Africa-specific materials, case studies and readings. Moreover, I also introduced recent events such as the "trade war" between China and the United States and the ramifications for international trade governance in general, but also for African countries in particular. It was also interesting to observe a marked shift in attitude in the two cohorts with respect to China. While the 2017 group was evenly divided between support and criticism towards Chinese engagement in Africa, the 2018 cohort was considerably more critical, owing largely to the experience of countries like Zambia and Sri Lanka, but also – according to course participants – experience in many countries on the ground with Chinese companies and government officials. Moreover, in both years I placed a heavy emphasis on the prospects for a future development of some form of pan-African economic integration mechanism.

My teaching style is as conversational as possible: while providing an introduction through lecture style, class generally turns into a hybrid between

lecture and debate between myself and the students, but also among the students. I regularly divided students up into groups with specific tasks (such as taking on particular viewpoints or positions within negotiations), which they had to develop among themselves and then present arguments to the group as a whole. I also tasked students to find relevant materials for group discussions. Both strategies are designed to break up the relatively long days that the course runs (7-8 hours per day, five consecutive days, plus a day for examination). Furthermore, I sometimes ask students with particular expertise to provide a brief one hour lecture in order to expose the other students to the often extremely valuable work that students are undertaking in their positions.

Grades were largely determined after the submission of written work. In 2017, the grades were based on an exam that students took on the last day of the course, while in 2018 grades were determined on a more diverse set of submissions, including short essays prior to and during the week and exams at the end of the week. Ideally, I would have included participation grades so as to incentivize students to participate in class, but the grading structure at TRAPCA made that difficult. That said, for the very large majority of students that simply wasn't necessary, as most engaged quite closely with the materials, and came prepared for class presentations and discussions. If anything, it was sometimes necessary to temper students with sometimes quite diverse and differing points of views so as to cover the assigned subject matters.

The reception of the course was – I think – very positive. The class composition necessitated teaching to and a conversation with and among students with varying backgrounds. On the one hand that made teaching the course challenging, but also more rewarding. On a personal note, I benefitted greatly from teaching in Arusha, both professionally and personally as students regularly challenged each other's and my own point(s) of view (the latter after some encouragement). I look forward to teaching at TRAPCA as well as at other venues in African countries.

View online: Teaching IEL in Africa: My Experience at the Trade Policy Training Center in Africa (TRAPCA)

Provided by Afronomicslaw