

Course Analysis – DM2601, 2022

0. **Author:** ciolfi@kth.se (New course responsible for this course, starting in 2022)

1. Description of the course evaluation process

The course evaluation process includes data from three sources:

1. an informal mid-course collection of feedback via 2 student representatives
2. the anonymous course evaluations provided by KTH
3. the course responsible's own notes and reflections along the course.

This year, the study director and the master programme's director suggested course responsables to try an informal collection of feedback towards the middle of the course, through student representatives. Thus, I asked students to nominate two representatives. Only one student volunteered. After publishing reminders, I had to randomly select a second student, who accepted the role. The representatives collected feedback anonymously from the class and presented a summary to me in an online meeting. Gender and disability data was not collected. I responded to them in the meeting and I later published an announcement addressing the summary for the whole class to read.

I also reminded students about the anonymous course evaluations provided by KTH and explained the mechanism, at the beginning and at the end of the course. These were filled by 26.58% of the students (21/79); all of them International master students or International exchange students (Swedish students and other types of students are not shown in the polar diagram so they must have been less than 3 filling in the form). Regarding gender, this 26.58% includes students who are women and students who are men, but the gender distribution is not available in the generated report. Two students commented on gender aspects: "*I think the gender distribution in the class was quite equal*"; "*I can feel equality :)*". Only students without disabilities are present in the polar diagram, and they did not have specific comments related to disability.

2. Description of meetings with students

I had a meeting with the two student representatives mid-course, where they presented a summary of the feedback they got from their classmates. I then addressed this feedback and related action points in a Canvas announcement for the class to read. I include a summary below.

1) Students wanted to see under *Modules* all the activities in the course.

This information was already available in the Syllabus, linking to KTH Social and to more detail in the Kurs PM. Centralising this was a decision I had made in order to avoid duplication of information, which reduces the chances of contradiction and increases maintainability. In any case, given that this seemed important for this year's students, I decided to also publish all the modules at once (with placeholders when needed), and reminded students about where to find more detail.

2) Finding one specific file about affinity diagrams was tricky for some students.

I explained again that the files are all centralised in one Canvas page (which I had explained in the first class). To further adapt to this year's class, I also linked the file from the page that contains the lecture on that topic.

3) A few students wanted to know when lectures would take less than the 2 scheduled hours.

I reminded students that because lectures are interactive and not traditional lectures, the

duration also depends on their own participation. I also suggested that they use the remaining time to do group work when a lecture is shorter.

4) Some students suggested that the workshop on affinity diagrams could have a preparatory task to dedicate more time in class to work on the diagrams.

I answered that this sounds reasonable, but that in any case, they would have not finished the diagram in two hours, and that this was not the goal of the workshop. Next year, I will further clarify these expectations/goals before the workshop, and I will consider separating the workshop into a preparatory task and an in-class task.

Personally, I perceived towards the middle of the course that some students were struggling with the uncertainties of design, and with having to make decisions in groups rather than told by the teachers exactly what to do –which is normal in an interaction design course. This can explain their attention to low level detail such as where they can find a file efficiently, or whether they can finish a task during a workshop. By the end of the course, they had got a strong hold on the methods and felt comfortable talking about and justifying design choices and processes, and were able to have a more global vision of the situation. I believe that collecting feedback mid-term for this kind of course carries the risk of putting too much focus on students' struggles that tend to resolve organically as the course advances, but still can generate unnecessary anxiety when amplified, especially for the teaching staff.

3. Course design

This P/F course introduces students to design methods and processes for Media Technology and Interaction Design, so that they can run successful design processes. The course is delivered through lectures that draw from research and practice, workshops that allow students to get practical experience, group-based supervision meetings to follow their progress, design critique sessions for peer interaction, and a final presentation. Students work in groups (the last two years, arranged by the teachers) towards a prototype that responds to a design brief.

The examination combines group deliverables (a video prototype, final presentation slides, and a workbook) with individual assignments (three written reflections: two associated to reading seminars, and a final meta-reflection about the groups' design process). Students get continuous formative feedback about their project through supervision meetings and design critiques; and about the first two reflections through comments from the teachers in Canvas. The summative evaluation is done on their individual meta-reflection and the final group deliverables.

The lectures and the workshops are aligned in such a way that students get to practice the concepts introduced in the lecture. Supervision and critique sessions are alternated so that students get tailored feedback and assistance from their assigned project supervisor (one of the teachers) and can later present their progress to the class, and continue iterating their process.

This year, four lectures were delivered by Claudia Núñez-Pacheco (one of the teachers and previous course responsible), two were delivered by myself, and one was shared by the two of us. Seven workshops were lead by Stacy Hsueh and/or Charles Windlin (two of the teachers), and one was conducted by Claudia. Supervisions and critiques were led by Stacy and Charles. All the teachers were present in the final presentations, and we shared the formative feedback tasks along the course. As a course responsible, I was also in charge of planning, course memo, arranging groups, Canvas maintenance, communication with the students (including mid-term course feedback, mediating group dynamics when needed, etc.), and course evaluations. The summative evaluation of the group deliverables was done by me, and the meta-reflections were read by the other three teachers and later verified by me as an examiner before reporting the final grades.

The project groups were arranged by the teachers just as last year, in an attempt to form groups that balance the number of domestic students and international students. Several international/exchange students commented in the course evaluations that they appreciated being “*mixed with people from the masters*”, that they liked the “*communication between different cultures*” and felt “*harmony*”.

With respect to last year, we simplified the deliverables during the course (for example, uploading the slides from the design critique sessions was no longer a task) and the assignments related to INL1, going from 5 reflections to 3, and making two of these about the reading seminars rather than the methods, so that the students can deeply reflect about the methods in the meta-reflection at the end of the process. This allows teachers to make a better use of their time following up the groups rather than constantly marking incremental texts, and also freed time from the students to focus on the project work and going deeper into the readings for the seminars. We also added a greater variety of readings to choose from in the reading seminars.

4. Students’ workload

This year, the course had 4 hours of scheduled activities per week (lecture and workshop), during 7 weeks. They also had an extra workshop (2 hours), 2 supervision slots (half an hour per group), 2 design critique slots (8 hours in total) and the final presentations (4 hours). The course is 7.5 credits, which is around 200 hours, from which 43 are scheduled activities and the rest is for students to work on their assignments (readings, written reflections, and project work). The course runs for 10 weeks and thus it is expected that students spend 20 hours per week in average.

Most of the respondents (19/21) said in the evaluations that they estimate having spent 20 hours a week or less. Logically, a few students commented that the time spent in group work intensifies towards the end of the course. Two students indicated spending 8 hours or less have probably underestimated this time, given that groups attended the scheduled activities and students did the homework. Two students estimated spending more than 20 hours a week. None of these outliers (below 8 or above 20) commented on the workload, so I do not have additional detail. One student commented that it would have been good for their group to have officially scheduled time for group work, so that it gets done during school hours. I will consider this for next year, if it is possible for KTH’s Schema staff to find occasions where the relevant master programmes have empty slots.

5. Students’ results on the course

At this moment, 94.93% (75/79) students have passed the course successfully. Four students have obtained an Fx since they have not passed all the individual assignments (INL1) in spite of formative feedback, and have a resubmission deadline in January 2023 for re-examination.

6. Students’ answers to open questions

As the best aspect of the course, students highlighted: learning with a group; getting hands-on experience with design; the supervision/design critique sessions; the whole process; the examination format (“*it took the pressure of studying off from us and made us focus more on learning rather than stressing*”); the reading seminars; the course material (“*interesting*”, “*well connected*”); the freedom to create “*interesting things*”; the focus in method application rather than “*perfection*” of the output; the workshops. A student commented they would like to take this course again to produce even better work, which can be seen as a really good sign.

Regarding wished improvements, students mentioned: a narrower design brief and narrower

design feedback (this is not compatible with the ILOs and the nature of design, so it will not be implemented); classrooms for workshops that allow for more mobility (this requirement was already emphasised to Schema but there were no other rooms available); more emphasis at the beginning on how fast the course is paced; having the option of doing the project individually (this would not scale in terms of grading, and working in groups is a fundamental skill for the workplace) or with chosen mates (this had negative results in previous years; we were open anyways to accommodate students that wanted to change groups); being taught about how to work in groups; more critical approach to design thinking and human-centred design (this was already quite critical, and it also depends on the stance taken by students themselves); more time for iteration (this would be ideal but the course has to fit 7.5 credits); having an online space where to upload the design projects after the presentation to watch each others' videos again. One student was still struggling with the concept that the scheduled time for one of the workshops was not enough to finish practicing the method –a method that takes significantly more hours to complete even to professional designers. One student wanted more lecture material (going even deeper into design methods) while another student wanted less lecture material and merging the lectures with workshops. Some students wanted more activities in person (even mandatorily) while other students wanted more activities online, and one highlighted the hybrid setting as a plus.

The advice they would give to future participants mostly centres on scheduling time for group work, leveraging on group communication and ideation, and focusing on the learning and the process rather than the outcome. More specifically, students also mention not being scared of creating something that “*does not quite work*”, as it is the moment of taking risks. One student also recommends talking to the teachers as “*they help a lot*”.

Six students used the last open-ended question to thank the teachers for their time and dedication, as well as for providing different perspectives each, among other positive comments.

7. Summary of students' opinions

The course evaluations show that students appreciated the course. All respondents (21/21) said they worked with interesting issues and that they were able to learn by collaborating with others; most (19/21) said that the course was challenging in a stimulating way (the other 2 indicated that they had experience in the covered topics), that they were able to practice and get feedback without being graded (18/21), and that they got support if needed (20/21). Regarding the question on assessment being fair and honest, all students found it to be the case (there are 2 that answered 0 and two that answered X, and this is because they had not been graded so far; the rest of the students must have been referring to the formative feedback instead).

The rest of the students' opinions are captured in points 2, 4 and 5.

8. Overall impression

My overall impression is that the course was well received, taking into account not just the course evaluations but also students' attendance (considering that it was not a requirement) and participation in class, in Canvas, and via email. Simplifying the number of deliverables was crucial in helping students focus on key parts of the design project as well as in methods and the process itself. Adding a wider variety of readings to choose from resulted in interesting written reflections, engaged in-class debates, and designs/design processes more informed or inspired by relevant literature. Forming the groups ourselves also worked well, with several students highlighting this as a plus (and only one group having a student contributing less, which could have happened also in student-made teams). The hybrid setting also served the intended learning outcomes and the learning activities –even if some students

might prefer more activities online and some might prefer more in person. Having a course responsible that could take care of planning, coordination, examination and some material developing/delivering tasks plus three teachers that could take care of supervision, delivery and help with grading, was an efficient and balanced set up.

9. Analysis

I have not detected significant differences across genders nor other categories of students in the polar diagrams.

The fact that students point out to such a wide variety of activities as the best aspect of the course indicates that the course caters for different types of learning activities and learning styles and should be seen as a very good sign.

10. Prioritised course development

In response to student feedback and to my own notes along the course, a set of improvements will be prioritised as development for next round:

- I will publish all the Modules from the beginning even if some have placeholders because they might depend, e.g., on the availability of a guest speaker if any;
- Even more emphasis will be put at the beginning about how fast the course is paced;
- I will remind students about the goals of the workshops and that finishing the tasks within the scheduled time is not as important as practicing related skills;
- I will consider changing the design brief to avoid having the same 3 years in a row;
- Supervision will start the second week rather than the first, to give groups time to stabilise, as some new students join during the first week;
- I will consider adding an optional field to each assignment where the students get to critique the description of the assignment, as this method had excellent results in the other course for which I am responsible, and is appreciated by students;
- I will revise the level of guidance on the written reflections to strengthen even more the constructive alignment;
- Students will be invited to upload their videos/workbooks to Canvas after the final presentations;
- I will attempt to schedule time for group work along the course.

11. Other information you want to share

I have noticed that students at KTH (both in bachelor and master courses, and beyond the courses where I am involved) often report either not wanting to work in groups, or needing scheduled time for group work, or wanting to be coached on how to work in groups. I consider that this should be addressed at a more fundamental level and across courses. In my courses, I will be trying to address this topic on my own, but I cannot cover it in depth, given the number of other topics included in the course and already crucial to achieve the ILOs.