

Course analysis of AK3101 Perspectives course spring 2020

This analysis is based on the responses from 6 students who filled out the survey, which was sent to 11 students, and a conversation with Kati at the last session.

Data

The course was offered between January 14th and March 31st 2020, with 13 sessions discussing 13 books. The last five sessions were on-line due to Covid-19. At the end of the semester, 10 students had passed the course. Apart from Division students, there were two external students and one visitor who sat in on a few sessions.

The course was changed substantially compared to when it was given two years ago. This involved a lot of work and several meetings with the faculty and teachers, which took longer than expected.

Summary

From survey: The course ran full time, but no one answered that they spent 40 hours a week. In general, students were content with the course. All except one agreed or strongly agreed that they worked with interesting issues, all agreed that the course was challenging in a stimulating way and that they were able to learn by collaborating and discussing with others. On the issue of feedback without grading the answers were positive and indifferent. Assessment was fair and only one was not able to learn through collaboration with others. (Note, however, that these are only 6 out of 11 students.)

From discussion in class: At the last session several students mentioned that they really liked the course and one-book format. Even though it was sometimes challenging for those who were not historians to start with, the classics and whole books setup was considered motivating. And even though page count was also very big, it was easier to read one book of many pages than five different articles because a book is a coherent text with its own logic and an overarching argument.

Classics really gave a nice appreciation of how the field has developed. Best moments were when the lecturers placed the book in the field and explained what had happened before and what had happened after - it would be great if all lecturers could do this, so that you really get a feeling of these three fields that we try to cover.

That the assignments had been assessed and read and brought into discussions was appreciated and an improvement compared with earlier courses and made a big difference.

Some constructive comments

With full understanding for how complicated setting up this schedule and the course has been, the students (and here several persons reiterated the same) suggested that:

- 2 books/week is too tight, especially for those who are originally not historians and especially if close reading is the purpose.
- Books could be clustered according to sub-fields or some other way, so that the students get a more coherent understanding of the development of the field.
- The list of books should go out earlier to leave more time for preparations.
- A positioning of the book in the field by the lecturer is appreciated. Otherwise one has to try to figure this out alone.
- All lecturers seemed to presume that the students had already understood the arguments in the book and perhaps this is not always the case. Perhaps it would be good to work with the actual text as well?
- There were too much white American/ English-speaking men - a problem when we want to do a course of classics, but perhaps we could still find more non-American, non-European works. The book of Bray was highly appreciated exactly because it gave an understanding of a different region and different perspective (even if written by an English-speaker).

Analysis

A general conclusion is that aims and expectations seem to be better aligned this time.

Students were in general appreciative of the course. Even though some were hesitant to the idea of books as readings before the course started, they in general seem to have gotten the point with this approach.

The readings were circulated too late according to several students. The list of readings was circulated December 17th and at that point the first reading for January 14th was enclosed. That is four weeks, but with Christmas and New Year between. The actual schedule was circulated to the students already November 14th, after several iterations inquiring into their availability, starting mid October.

The course is 15 hp which corresponds to 10 weeks full time. The course ran for 11 weeks. Students who responded to the survey, however, put on average half time. Still, the feedback was that two sessions in one week was too much. This is a bit surprising and illustrates the importance of being able to plan ahead and distribute your workload.

Student suggestions on clustering and chronology might be very hard to meet as scheduling teachers is difficult, but is a worth-while change to take into account. To contextualise further is an easier instruction to pass on.

Finally, the reading list was discussed in a very constructive and reflexive way, also illustrating the problem with a classics course, in itself a learning experience. In many courses we can indeed balance the readings, but in a classics course this is harder.

Changes for next time

We should have the reading list and full memo ready four weeks before without holidays between.

We should underscore the importance of planning ahead so that a tight schedule does not become overwhelming.

We should strive to balance the reading list at the same time as we recognise that we cannot simply make books that are not classics into such. A different setup of the course might be a way, with classics and comments.

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