

Course analysis of Theory and Method 1 spring 2019

14 students participated. 13 answered an on-line survey afterwards. Archived with Nina.

Summary

In general, students were content with the course. All except one agreed or strongly agreed that they worked with interesting issues, 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 more scattered (also due to the unclarity from me on feedback, see below). All except two agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to get support if the needed it.

On the estimated weekly workload, how many hours spent on the course including scheduled hours, the answers vary between 4 hours and 180 hours which indicates that some must have misunderstood the question. The average is 42 hours and the mean is 28 hours. (The course ran full time which is 40 hours a week.)

The most common answer on the *best* aspect of the course was the broad set-up and the variety of topics and teachers. The only specific reading mentioned was Science in Action, characterized as "amazing". As for *improvements* one suggestion was to give feedback on the written assignments and that students should hand them in beforehand. Another was that there was too much reading and in general too much work. Among the advice to other students taking the course were to learn how to read and prepare.

The feedback on the three best seminars and the three that could be improved varied greatly. Space and materiality stands out as those most liked whereas views differ on the rest. Some pedagogical approaches are appreciated (like group discussions and flipped classroom) but more structure is suggested as the topic was difficult. Some think that more lecturing would be good whereas others prefer more group work. A few are discontent with not all texts being discussed. Some ask for more detailed assignments. One or two have disciplinary comments. And finally someone wants a streamlined course with equally long sessions on the same time and day of the week.

Everyone prefers continuous examination.

Analysis

A general conclusion is that aims and expectations need to be communicated more clearly. It was never the intention that the assignments were to be used by the teacher in class, nor that the teachers would provide feedback on them to the students (a few did anyway). The intention was for continuous learning and to assure that the students came well prepared for class. They also functioned as examination and were corrected afterwards by the teachers. It was also expected that the students' own writing would facilitate discussion. Surprisingly, the students seldom seemed to make explicit use of their preparations when they pertained to text.

Another general conclusion is that we need to stress that there are different ways of reading and that we cannot dive deep into all readings in class. Central to PhD training is a combination of broad and deep learning and we cannot just focus on deep learning of a very limited number of texts, not in the compulsory courses. The amount of reading must be ca 200 pages per credit on advanced level or 300 pages per full-time week. The question on what advice to give to future students, however, reveals that the art of reading has improved in the group, or at least the importance of reading has been realized.

Yet another general conclusion is to underscore the art of higher education where you take responsibility for your own learning. Detailed instructions are not necessarily fostering self-sufficient studying. Sometimes the teacher might ask for specific things, but in general the skill of pulling out the most interesting and important things out of a text is a skill that the courses are to develop.

We might also want to remind the students that they follow a PhD training programme in the History of Science, Technology and Environment and therefore *history* needs to take centre stage in the compulsory courses.

Changes for next time

Apart from the above general communication issues the format of the assignments should be standardized. Prose should be required. Students should be encouraged to language-check if English is not their native tongue.

Readings might be grouped in extensive and intensive reading, stressing that they read for their own sake and their own training.

To make connections between different readings is a skill that can be prepared before class and then practiced in class. We should stimulate the students to also discuss the texts that *they* find most interesting. Good preparation would allow for that kind of flexibility.

Some areas were considered difficult, like STS and to some extent feminist studies. Here more lecturing might be considered. Another way would also be to offer separate courses on these areas if interest is

Different pedagogical modes should be allowed and encouraged, but in some cases – like the flipped classroom for example – more instructions from the teacher is necessary.

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