Report - MH2450 - 2019-12-23

Please note that there is only one respondent to this form: the person that performs the course analysis.

Course analysis carried out by (name, e-mail):
Christopher Hulme-Smith (chrihs@kth.se)

COURSE DESIGN
Briefly describe the course design (learning activities, examinations) and any changes that have been implemented since the last course offering.

The course consists of five lectures on scientific communication and project planning, a large (120 h) project, carried out in groups of 1 or 2, a short presentation at KTH during the project and a seminar together with universities from other countries at the end of the project.

Examination is a single grade given for the project as a whole. This consists of a written report, oral presentation, slide show and poster that are graded together to give the grade.

Since the last course offering, lecture material has been added to cover project planning and poster design.

THE STUDENT'S WORKLOAD
Does the students' workload correspond to the expected level (40 hours/1.5 credits)? If there is a significant deviation from the expected, what can be the reason?

The course is worth 6 credits, so the total workload should by 160 h. The project is defined as 120 h, including the final seminar (which lasts 16 h in itself). The course runs for approximately 10 weeks, so the average workload should be 16 h/week. Of course, this is affected greatly by the project selected by the student, which may include some work performed over the summer as long as that work is not used towards any other examination.

Students reported that the average workload was somewhat lower than the intended amount, with 5/8 respondents reporting 8 h/week or fewer. 2/8 respondents reported 10-12 hours and one student reported over 30h/week. Clearly, the student with the high workload is a concern. However, it should be noted that such a high workload is not required by the course and is possibly a result of the student's enthusiasm for the work or a desire by the student to continue the work on as a master's degree project. There were no complaints during the course about high workload and no such comments in the LEQ. The students who reported lower-than-expected workload could be those who included work from the summer i their project, but did not count it as part of the workload or they may have forgotten to include the 16 h spent at the seminar. However, it is also possible that they simply worked less than intended. This should, hopefully, be reflected in the quality of their output - which will then affect their grades - and the impression they gave their supervisor.

Since the course is largely project-based, there is limited scope to control the workload. All supervisors are made aware of the expected student time commitment before the project. The only way to have more control would be to ask the student or supervisors to report the time spent on the project. However, this seems unsatisfactory in the context of academic research and it would be better to simply add some extra teaching content or make projects more demanding so that students would naturally spend more time to complete them.

THE STUDENTS' RESULTS
How well have the students succeeded on the course? If there are significant differences compared to previous course offerings, what can be the reason?

This year, the following results were obtained:
7 A (32%)
8 B (36%)
7 C (32%)
0 D
0 E
0 F

In 2018, the results were similar, but a higher fraction of students received a grade B and fewer received C (59% and 6%, respectively). This could be due to simple variation due to the small numbers of students in each sample, or it could be due to the new rubrics for each task that make it difficult to distinguish between different students fairly - the rubrics for 2019 were more detailed than in 2018 and more prescriptive. This could allow students to work to the grade boundaries, but they provide a rigorous and fair way to grade students. I would like to see a greater spread of grades and I will adjust the rubrics for the examination, accordingly, for 2020. It may be necessary to remove some detail to prevent "working to the grade descriptions", or to add detail to be more specific between grades "B" and "C", for example. I prefer the second solution and will use it, if possible.

OVERALL IMPRESSION OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
What is your overall impression of the learning environment in the polar diagrams, for example in terms of the students' experience of meaningfulness, comprehensibility and manageability? If there are significant differences between different groups of students, what can be the reason?

The learning environment was considered very positive. Both male and female students gave high scores for every question - the lowest was 6 /7 (for question 15: "I could practice and receive feedback without being graded"). There were very slight differences between male and female students to each question, but there was no consistent trend in the score given (some were higher for females, others were lower). I therefore believe there is no significant different between students based on gender identity. All other scores were higher. All respondents were international master's students and did not have disabilities, so no other subgroups were identified by the LEQ.

ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
Can you identify some stronger or weaker areas of the learning environment in the polar diagram - or in the response to each statement - respectively? Do they have an explanation?

Since all areas were given positive reviews, it is difficult to identify weaknesses in the learning environment from the student perspective. From my own perspective and as a result of pedagogical training, I will add content to improve student skills in information literacy and academic writing.

Apart from the slight shortcoming in receiving feedback, the least positive review was question 4 ("The course was challenging in a stimulating way"), which scored 6.4/7. This could correlate with the low number of hours reported by several students - the projects were simply not challenging enough to provide interest to the students or to demand sufficient work from them. Based on this feedback, I plan to ask supervisors to make projects more demanding in 2020 and beyond.

ANSWERS TO OPEN QUESTIONS
What emerges in the students' answers to the open questions? Is there any good advice to future course participants that you want to pass on?

The best aspect of the course was identified as the lectures by one student, the ongoing relationship with a supervisor by another and the seminar at the end of the course by two students. Outside the documented feedback, a student suggested to me in a conversation that I could use excerpts from past reports, posters, etc. as examples for future students to show good and bad examples. I will consider this idea, which actually matches a planned project between KTH and NTNU to provide such examples on a new learning service tied to the seminar.

Students suggest that the project is started early and aligned with other courses and the master's degree project. This is already our intention and this is already explained to both supervisors and students.

Some students also felt that the seminar required too much time spent as the audience. The initial plan was to have tow parallel sessions at the seminar, so that we would have time for other activities. However, the organisers at NTNU decided to revert to the previous format of two days of presentations. I will organise the next seminar at KTH and so I will ensure the presentations are given in parallel sessions and other activities are included. I agree with the student feedback in this matter.

PRIORITY COURSE DEVELOPMENT
What aspects of the course should primarily be developed? How could these aspects be developed in the short or long term?

Base don my experience as a project supervisor and examiner in this course, our students would benefit from specific training in information literacy and academic writing skills. I will investigate the possibility to use the resources at KTH to assist with this: KTH Biblioteket and the Centre for Academic writing. I plan to add one lecture to the course to cover information literacy and I will consider repurposing the current lecture on written communication away from what content is expected to writing style. The current lecture content could be moved to online learning for the students to do in their own time, which most of them seem to have to spare, based on the workload statistics collected in the LEQ.

OTHER INFORMATION
Is there anything else you would like to add?

I asked a custom question for specific suggestions for additional parts to the seminar. The only response was a after-party. I will consider this as a useful networking event for the attendees of the seminar, but I cannot make it a priority. There are already social events built into the seminar timetable. I have intended to organise a poster exhibition at KTH at the end of the semester and perhaps I can make this into an end-of-semester after-party and internal networking event for the department.