

SV 9108 Philosophy of Science Course Evaluation 2022

Andrea J. Nightingale, Department of Sociology and Human Geography
Gaute Torsvik, Department of Economics

This is a required PhD course for all students in the Faculty of Social Sciences. As such, the background students have in the topic varies widely as does the level of interest and motivation for the course. Attendance is mandatory. It is a challenging course to teach for that reason and also means that student experience of the course can be variable. The course was offered hybrid and feedback indicates this was highly appreciated by students.

Based on the content of the course essays, all but a few students found something in the course that was either interesting for them to pursue further, or useful for deepening their understanding of their own thesis topic. The overall quality was good with some outstanding and fewer that were marginal.

Feedback for this course was solicited by three main mechanisms. First, during small group discussions wherein students could more freely express things they did not understand or felt frustrated by during course sessions. These took place throughout the week. The lecturers made an attempt to respond to this form of informal feedback during the course itself by adjusting content and teaching style. Second, by a standard survey sent to all students towards the end of the teaching week. Third, by encouraging students to communicate over email or the chat in Zoom for hybrid students. Responses were elicited through all three mechanisms. A total of 36 students answered the anonymous evaluation out of an enrolment of 81 so the remarks do not capture the experience of all students. In general, the comments on the survey were either very positive or very negative which is typical when fewer than half the students respond to the evaluation survey. The other forms of feedback tended to be more positive with some useful remarks about improving the hybrid teaching.

Many of the comments reflected on the challenging nature of the course, but also its departure from their other courses, usually in a positive manner:

“Wake up call! Very rewarding and incredibly important to become aware of our ontological and epistemological baggage”

“I really enjoyed the course! In general, I think there was a balanced presentation regarding different epistemological and ontological positioning within the social sciences. Especially, I think the focus on the practicalities of "what do I think there is? and what do I think there is to be known about it?" helped a lot in making the material concrete. Designing the course to be as participative as possible helped a lot in working through the week.”

Other remarks were about the very different teaching styles and emphasis between the two lecturers. This is an on-going challenge which we are working on improving every year. This year we made a big improvement over last year, but we can still do more. There were also concerns about the volume of expected readings which will we address going forward.

