

SV9108 Philosophy of Science Course Feedback Summary 2026

This is a required course for all PhD students in the Faculty of Social Sciences, which included a combination of lectures, small group activities, and large group discussions over four days. The lectures were delivered by Daniel Quintana (Department of Psychology), Gaute Torsvik (Department of Economics) and Andrea J. Nightingale, (Department of Sociology and Human Geography). This year, a mixture of pre-recorded and in-person lectures were used. The in-person small groups were facilitated by three course assistants, and the in-person large group discussions were facilitated by Daniel Quintana and Gaute Torsvik. Two group formats were used: one in which students were placed with other students in their discipline, and another where students got to choose a discussion topic (leading to a mix of disciplines in each group).

Course feedback was primarily collected via an anonymous form filled out by students at the end of the course. Out of the 48 students enrolled in the course, 36 completed the survey. In addition, course assistants collected informal feedback during the small group session. Most respondents reported a high level of participation in the course.

Learning outcome goals

Feedback revealed that a majority of students felt able to recognize different ontological and epistemological frameworks in their own work to a large extent. At least half of the students reported that they became familiar with the dominant philosophical debates in the social sciences and how these compare to the physical sciences. A majority of students found the group work to be useful to a large extent, whereas this percentage was lower for the lectures.

Having this as a Faculty level course brings both challenges and opportunities. Perhaps the most apparent challenge is the wide difference in philosophy of science experience and ontologies across the student group. Some students are very familiar with the course content (e.g., some had already been taught these concepts at a Master level), whereas for others, they were introduced to many philosophy of science concepts for the first time. The course is designed to be broad and to cater to a wide range of backgrounds, but a consequence of this is that some students would prefer a deeper discussion of topics. However, the risk of going deeper would be that some students

would be left behind as about 20% of respondents reported the curriculum difficult to understand. However, these differences in backgrounds and ontologies can be better harnessed to fulfil course outcomes in future years by better *making use* of the student differing ontologies, as one student explicitly suggested. This could be done by tweaking the group work and lectures to better reflect and capitalise on these differences.

Curriculum

Most students reported that the curriculum difficulty was appropriate but that the amount of reading should be reduced. Several students noted that more of the curriculum could be considered 'recommended' rather than 'required'. Therefore, future courses may benefit from a tiered reading list, with core texts, advanced texts, and background texts. In this scenario, both the advanced and background texts would be optional, whereas all students would be required to read the core texts.

Teaching

There were mixed responses regarding the mix of pre-recorded and in-person lectures. Some students appreciated the flexibility of pre-recorded lectures and the ability to rewatch lectures to better understand concepts. However, others indicated that they would have preferred to have all lectures in person.

Overall themes

Many students indicated a high workload, particularly regarding the readings and the overall format of the course. Some students remarked how the course helped them reflect on their own stances and how this influences how they conduct research. Related to this, some students reported that the structure and format of the group work could have benefited from simplification. However, students particularly valued the group work and resulting discussions, especially when they heard different perspectives from other students. Therefore, future courses may benefit to a more streamlined design that better harnesses students' ontological differences.