

SV 9108 Philosophy of Science Course Evaluation 2023

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 is highly variable. The course was offered in person only although due to illness a couple of students joined individual sessions hybrid.

Feedback for this course was solicited by two 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 at the end of the teaching week. A total of 31 students answered the anonymous evaluation out of an enrolment of 81 so the remarks do not capture the experience of all students. In addition, a number of students gave informal feedback through emails and in person during the course.

In general, the comments on the survey were most positive with some who did not like the course, 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 the usefulness of the group work in particular. The survey shows that a large majority of the students felt the course met the learning outcome goals and that they gained an ability to understand their own philosophical positions. It also shows that the group work was preferred to the lectures, although scores here are also good. The vast majority found the level of difficulty to be appropriate.

Informal feedback was overwhelmingly positive with one student remarking about what a great day they had with the group work and others remarking on the value they placed on some of the lectures. Many expressed how they found it inspiring and useful. In the written feedback, responses were more negative with a number indicating they did not understand why they needed the course. One said their supervisor had told them not to put any energy into the course, and the average of the survey responses rank their own participation as medium (6.52).

Other remarks were about the overall load of the course which a number of students feel is too heavy. This year the number of readings was significantly reduced as well as shifting two lectures to group work without adding content. Those who complained on the written survey reference the entire reading list rather than just those that were required. This indicates that they did not engage with the course information properly as they were advised to do through four different channels (Canvas notification, Canvas information page, two emails, verbally in class). Students also remark on 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. We made a big improvement over last year, but we can still do more.