

HGO 4011 Philosophy and Methodology of Geography Course Evaluation Autumn 2021

Summary

This course is the flagship introductory course of the MA program in Human Geography. This year the syllabus was completely redesigned for three main purposes: i.) to better capture current, cutting edge debates in Human Geography; ii.) to provide students with an overview of staff interests in the department; iii.) to emphasise more the application of theory in Human Geography research.

The course was organised around the theme of 'borders' in order to provide a thread running across diverse topics. Each topic looked at current debates within the sub-discipline and used the idea of borders to help show the way theory is constructed and applied. The course was coordinated by Andrea Nightingale with contributions from nearly all permanent staff members covering: economic, urban, labour/development, political, environmental, and feminist and decolonial geographies. A final concluding session focused on ethics and the theme of borders specifically.

Overall outcomes

The course was generally well received. The response rate on the course evaluation was too low to be statistically representative, but showed overwhelming good or very good in terms of the quality of teaching. Students especially liked the diversity of topics and lecturers.

Verbal feedback from a wide spectrum of students indicated that borders were well explained and integrated by the time the course concluded. Many used it in their course essays as well to good effect.

Course evaluation outcomes were fed back to the students verbally at the final seminar and over Canvas.

Conclusions

1. The redesign of the course was overall very successful. It achieved all its aims.
2. Students find the beginning of the MA program to be very intense and required encouragement to keep engaging fully.
3. The after effects of COVID and the stresses it has generated have elevated students overall stress levels.
4. Students would like more seminars. There may not capacity to add more, but we can think about designing student-led seminars.

Changes to be implemented

1. The theme of borders worked, but perhaps needs a bit more elaboration at the beginning of the course. Its relevance was clear by the end, but students struggled to latch onto it mid-way through.
2. Students prefer recorded lectures so they can revisit them. This course had only a couple recorded lectures but we will endeavour to have them all recorded next year.
3. The final panel debate on borders was very well received but both students and staff felt it was too short. Next year an entire 2 hour slot will be devoted to the panel debate.