**MEVIT 4613 Self-evaluation, Spring 2016**

**MA level course**

**Number of students: 12**

**Instructor: Tijana Milosevic**

**Conducted midterm self-evaluation**

**Course description:** [**http://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/imk/MEVIT4613/v16/index.html**](http://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/imk/MEVIT4613/v16/index.html)

**Brief course and class description**

The goal of this course was to introduce students to children and teens’ relationship with digital media, focusing primarily on risks and opportunities. A significant portion of the course discussion also revolved around media coverage of children and teen’s use of digital media and students were introduced to the concept of moral panic and theory on institutionalized individualization. In every class, I aimed at teaching for one hour and then giving students an exercise where they were supposed to apply what they had read for that class and what they had heard in class, in a real world situation (e.g. an app that gains significant media attention and triggers public fears over its influence on children). I would give them several news articles, ask them to read them, and divide them in groups to discuss various positions on the topic and then present them to the rest of the class. This worked really well and students reported that they liked most of such exercises. Sometimes, I would give them too little time to execute it (which was a logistical omission on my part—e.g. it would take me more than an hour to deliver the lecture), and they gave me feedback that they wished they had more time to actually read the article and discuss them, without feeling rushed.

**Attendance**

I made attendance mandatory and kept collecting signatures throughout the course, explaining that attendance was necessary for understanding course material and passing the course, which worked very well –classes and lectures tended to have between 9 and 12 students. The second part of the course had to be pushed back because of my research, which upset the initial dates, which is why only about 8 students attended the second half of the course. The first part of the course was in February and then March was given to students to write draft term papers. If they submitted them by April 1st, I would give them written feedback in a week to ten days so that they could improve their final versions. Five students submitted the drafts, and this procedure seemed to be helpful. However, overall grades for the term papers were lower than what I had initially expected. No one failed (one student had to drop out because of personal reasons) and in mid-term evaluation almost no one had concerns about passing the course. Most students were very satisfied and noted that they were learning new and important concepts, but some of them observed I was going really fast and that there was a lot to take in. Yet, they, for the most part, liked the fact that they found it challenging.

**Course requirements and students’ reactions**

To be able to write the term paper, which was the final assignment and the only one that counted towards the grade, students first needed to write two position papers, each under 500 words, in the first three weeks of the course (these mirrored on a smaller scale what was expected from the students in their term papers). I read these and gave them feedback in track changes. We would discuss them in the subsequent seminar. One of the goals of the course was to improve students’ writing skills in a way that would help them in writing their MA theses. The position papers needed to have an argument, which would be backed by research-based evidence, and the goal of such an assignment was to foster independent thinking while exhibiting familiarity with the literature and sticking strictly to the word limit. A number of students struggled with this assignment and half of the students failed it the first time. I would then give them two weeks to revise it and resubmit it. Resubmissions exhibited significant improvement.

Students come from very different backgrounds and starting points –some are very skilled at academic thinking and writing, while others are less so. This type of an assignment was very new to some students. I realize with the benefit of the hindsight that I should have allowed students to examine each other’s submissions based on criteria that I would explain in detail in advance, rather than having me grade them. Since they are on different levels in terms of academic progress, such a procedure would help them realize where they stand and would involve more intellectual processes (e.g. active self-evaluation and assessment of the writing process), rather than just writing and submitting for grading to the instructor. I would advise instructors to do so in the future –at least for the second qualifying assignment. Several students observed that the purpose of this course should not be writing and said they wished there was less of it. However, a number of students appreciated the assignment even though most of them found it difficult to develop a well-rounded argument based on literature in 500 words. Some students also noted that there were a lot of readings, which made it difficult for them to read everything in advance of the class, which they were required to do. I would both lecture and engage them by asking them questions as to what they thought, based on the literature they had read. This, in my view, worked well as it kept them engaged. I wish there was a way to evaluate students based on the progress they had made and their participation in the class, rather than merely on the term paper. Some students had made significant progress and I wanted to reward that but the current grading system does not allow for that.

The course had two guest lectures: one by Elisabeth Staksrud and one by Sonia Livingstone, and this worked really well—it brought in diverse perspectives and students welcomed those. I asked them to prepare three questions for each quest lecturer based on the assigned readings ahead of the class and submit them as a qualifying assignment. I would definitely keep this procedure as it ensures that students come in prepared and can engage meaningfully. I would, however, like to find a way to reward them for this---i.e. not grade them only based on their final papers but include these questions in the final grade too.

**Changing the evaluation method?**

For the term paper, students needed to choose a topic of interest and using the literature from the class, and the literature they found on their own, develop a research-based argument about the topic, which they would engage with throughout the paper. Each student had to prepare a PPT of no more than five slides before the end of the first half of the course (before March 1st, which was the month designated for writing the draft term paper), and this was also the qualifying assignment. This procedure (dividing the class in two halves), worked well as it seemed meaningful to everyone and it was unfortunate that the second part of the course had to be postponed for later on. However, I would probably advise against using the Term paper as an evaluation tool in the next semester and it might be better to assign a take home exam where students would need to answer a question based on their understanding of the course literature. While Term papers might have been more interesting to students, as they allowed them to explore further a topic of interest, they did not measure so well how much students actually learned in the course and to what extent they understood the arguments. Furthermore, because all topics were different, it was difficult to grade objectively even though students were given clear guidelines as to what constituted a good paper.