Summary mid-term evaluation ANTH4010 2022.

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15 answers out of about 50 registered students.

Midterm evaluation questions and answers

The mid-term was sent for publication 7 October. It was published Monday 17 October and closed 25 October.

The evaluation consisted of 5 scalable questions with comment options and 4 open ended question:

1. To what extent do you feel that the course has helped prepare you for the research you want to do?
2. To what degree has the class sessions supported your learning process and helped you understand the texts and core issues of the course?
3. To what degree has course work, study materials and assignments supported your learning process?
4. To what degree has the structure of the session (lecture, discussion, mini-seminars) helped your learning and motivation?
5. Do what extent have you contributed to making the class engaging and valuable for yourself and your peers?
6. Which session topics did you find particularly interesting, or which text on the reading list did you like best/least and why?
7. Were there any theoretical debates you would have wished we had covered?
8. What could we (teachers and SAI) improve the next time we teach this course?
9. Do you have any other comments?

Corresponding to the picture of this mid-term evaluation, I experienced some challenges teaching the class this year. I sensed some dissatisfaction, and some of the issues were communicated to me in person. I tried out some adjustments under way but not to my full satisfaction.

The mid-term evolution provides insight into why this proved difficult. The comments point in all directions. While part of the dissatisfaction can be explained by my shortcomings as an instructor and the framework of the course, the heterogeneity of the answers stands out:

- Some students really enjoy group work and mini-seminars. Others express it was a waste of time because they were not focused enough or because they have social anxiety.
- Some students enjoyed the lectures, others thought they were on a too basic level and yet others thought they were hard to follow.
- Some students ask for more focus on texts in class, others for more focus on cases and applications.
- The most consistent critique relates to my poor time-keeping skills and organizing group work in an efficient way.

The answers illustrate some of the challenges I experienced when teaching, which are related to the MA program rather than this particular course:

1. Priorities and learning outcomes of the MA program: individual research projects vs. general anthropological knowledge
2. Varied student background in anthropology.

It is however imperative to take these issues into consideration when thinking about future changes to this course.

Possible future measures for ANTH4010

- Consider "traditional pedagogy": this year, 2/3 of each class session was structured according to interactive learning pedagogy: student participation, student led learning and open class discussion. My sense, which is strengthened by the mid-term evaluation, is that interactive pedagogy is not the optional choice with this varied degree when it comes to student background in anthropology. Traditional pedagogy with structured lectures and teacher-led seminars will give the instructor more control over content, focus and direction of discussions.
- Bring back individual assignments to ensure that students get feedback on their adequate level. Last year, we agreed to remove assignment from ANTH4010 last year to allow more time for development of individual projects in the other classes.
- Consider formalization. Some students are adamant that a 120-word assignment must be formalized to be obligatory. (I am of a different opinion.)
- Consider the lecture hall in relation to format: 50 students in a lecture hall makes it difficult to have seminars and group work in an efficient way. A lot of time is lost when students are to be divided into groups and find a place where they can talk. The group system I tried this year was not efficient.
- Consider the degree to which this course should or should not be related to students' individual projects.
- Students want to read more about more-than-human anthropology. Given SAI's prominence in this field, it is strange that there is no such articles on the reading list.

Challenges in the context of the MA program

MA thesis vs general skills and knowledge: Students complain that they do not see a link between the course and their individual project. This is not strange. The two other MA courses are designed with students' individual project in mind. ANTH4010 is a class focused on theory *in general*. The learning goals are centred around general anthropological issues on theory. The examination is a classic take-home exam on theory and text analysis. I have communicated this to students many times but with little effect. My sense is that students tend to think that the MA program is primarily about their individual research project.

Last year we decided to limit assignments in ANTH4010 to allow students more time to work on their individual projects in the other two classes. But perhaps we pushed this line too hard. Has there been an over emphasis on the individual research projects in the MA in general?

Student background: Students do not need to have a BA in anthropology to be admitted to the MA program. Their degree of anthropology knowledge varies, to say the least. This year it has been a challenge to find a level that inspires students with a BA in anthropology and that allow students with no or little background in anthropology to gain an insight into theory. Students without background in anthropology have expressed high levels of stress.

Possible measures for the MA program

Extra activities for students without anthropology backgrounds:

- Compose a reading list with admission letter with essential readings (10 books/articles) for incoming students without anthropology background. This gives students a chance to prepare before the semester starts. It also sets a tone by underlining that students without

anthropology backgrounds will have to and are expected to work harder to reach expected levels.

- Consider offering a four week's intense reading course before the start of the semester.
- Set up a structure where students without anthropology background audit BA-classes in anthropology. (SOSANT1000 is unfortunately given in Norwegian).
- Set up a structure where students without anthropology background meet and discuss during the first semester. It could be designed as a self-study course where they together cover key issues.

Structure of the MA program

- Move some of the "research oriented" courses in spring to give students some footing in anthropology by studying traditional classes in the fall. Having studied an MA in anthropology without a previous background in anthropology myself, I see some problems with this setup from a student learning perspective. We task students to develop their projects in anthropology without knowing what anthropology is. Traditional reading courses may help closing the gap quicker, which would also be beneficial for those MA students who do have a background in anthropology.

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