

BIO312 Emnerapport 2014

Content

The course focused on two main topics:

- Theoretic ecology, modeling and life-history theory
- Reading, reviewing, writing and publishing scientific literature

Teaching techniques consisted of direct lecturing, guest talks, a programming exercise, and student contributions through oral presentation and discussion of scientific papers as well as written reviews of a scientific manuscript.

Transmitted knowledge and skills

The students deepened their knowledge in theoretic ecology and life-history theory, and gained a background of the different relevant steps of writing and publishing a paper. Furthermore, the students learned how to analyze and evaluate current scientific literature to use and transmit the information contained or act as a reviewer for scientific journals.

Discussion

The course succeeded mostly in its major goals, yet it was severely hamstrung by the low number of participating students (three originally, with one drop out during the semester). One positive point in particular was that the course offered a rare opportunity for students to learn in detail about the publishing and reviewing process, which was explicitly acknowledged by the students. However, since student contributions through presentation and discussion of papers was the original core/main content of the course, the lack of sufficient students required a re-design of the course (causing it to be “experimental” in some parts) and made the discussion parts challenging. Although strong participation efforts helped to mitigate this problem, the course was ultimately suboptimal in this regard. Additionally, the invested teaching time of several people (Øyvind Fiksen, Fabian Zimmermann, Mikko Heino (guest lecture)) seems unwarranted considering the low participation numbers and raises the question whether a course like this should be held with so few registrations.

In summary, given the difficult circumstances BIO312 2014 was mostly successful and useful for students attending the whole course, but their low number represented a serious challenge that should be avoided in the future. To look ahead, my personal recommendation for the future is therefore to maintain the positive elements of BIO312 2014 (in particular the topics of publishing, reviewing and discussing scientific papers) in a different framework that ensures sufficient numbers of students, for instance through merging or coupling BIO312 with other course(s).

Fabian Zimmermann, 30.06.2014