

Evaluation BIO250 Palaeoecology – autumn 2016

This is the first semester that the course was run by Anne E. Bjune and Alistair Seddon. The course schedule was changed a lot compared to previous year's courses, allowing for more student activity and practical work. 15 students were following the course this year. A normal week had three lectures (Mon-Wed-Fri).

Compulsory parts; field trip, lab work, poster presentation, paper presentation, and written take-home exam.

After one week with lectures, the course had a three-day field trip to Lyngheisenteret at Lygra where the focus was set on site selection, peat coring, sediment description, and establishing possible research questions for the students to address in the subsequent laboratory work (students were split into 4 groups for this). After field work the groups continued to work on setting their research topic and question, and sediment samples were collected to give answers to the questions. The two following weeks the students were working in the lab more or less on their own, but with supervision from us. When the lab work was done the results and the interpretations were presented as a poster to the rest of the group during one lecture.

The group work went fine; it seems like the students enjoyed this. One challenge was that other courses had organised field trips at the same time as our planned laboratory work, which put added time pressure on the students to get enough lab work done. In the next iteration of the course we are thinking about including more time for lab work and possibly one more practical session with instructions before they started working on their own samples. What certainly needs doing next year is one or two introductory lectures about heathlands and its history before go away to do field work. Next year we will also place more emphasis on defining the research questions before the field trip so that the groups are working on more different topics- in this year's course 3 of the 4 groups converged on a similar research question - it would be beneficial to introduce more proxies/ topics for the students to work on in future versions of the course.

After the practical work the rest of the semester were mainly lectures. They covered a large variety of topics within palaeoecology, some of them had a practical part or discussions. In addition to us, 3 others gave one or a few lectures on selected topics. A challenge to us is that many students were not present at the lectures. We have asked about this in the survey hoping to get some input for next year.

Two of the lectures were set aside for student presentations. They selected one paper to present each and gave a 5-minute presentation to the others followed by a short discussion. This worked really fine. All students gave good presentations that were well prepared, and we had some good discussions afterwards.

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Anne Bjune and Alistair Seddon