

Student evaluation of GLODE 301 (Critical Approaches to Global Development)

The course started on 14th August, and ended on 27th October with the submission of two essays (1000 words and 2500 words) for a portfolio assessment. The course included 12 double lectures, 9 seminars/workshops (including library courses), and six PBL sessions (including the presentation day). Of the four permanent GLODE staff who were involved in the course, two had joined UiB very recently.

The organization of the evaluation

The evaluation had a written and an oral part, and two hours were set aside for this. The students were given a questionnaire with open and closed questions and could decide for themselves whether they wanted to fill it in by hand, or digitally. Those who filled it in digitally were asked to send it to the class representative, who later sent all the responses to the course coordinator anonymously.

The questionnaire covered six themes: the lectures, Problem Based Learning (PBL), group work/interactive learning (other than PBL), the literature, feedback on written work and number of essays in the portfolio, as well as an open section for other viewpoints and recommendations for how the course can be improved. Under each of the themes, there were three to seven sub questions. The students who filled in the form in class spent approximately 45 minutes. After the written evaluation we had a discussion where the students' own viewpoints and comments were in focus.

Of the 22 students, only nine showed up, while six filled in the form later via MyUiB. In total, fourteen students (65%) participated in the written part, while nine (41%) took part in the oral part of the evaluation. The evaluation took place 2-3 days before the deadline for submission of the two course essays. This probably had a negative effect on participation.

Main findings

Overall, the students are very satisfied with the course. However, one student was very critical of the fact that there have been some administrative challenges (conflicting or wrong information), and also argued that the evaluation was done in an unprofessional way (since those students who did not show up in class but delivered their response through MyUiB could not do so anonymously).

The students come from very different backgrounds. Approximately half of them (11) have their backgrounds from low-income countries and have all of, or the greater part of, their education from their home country. While one of the students who have English as his/her mother tongue argued that the work load on the course had been very light, many others expressed that the literature was complicated, and that the assessment (writing essays) was a new thing to them. There is also a gap between those who wish the course to be practical first of all, and those who are more academically oriented. One student suggested that there should be field visits to organizations/research institutes working on development issues, as well as welfare institutions like for example orphanages.

Several students argued that the lectures on gender and health promotion should have come earlier in the course, and not after the last essay assignment had been given.

Interactive learning

Several of the students argued that they wanted more time in class for discussions and practical examples. They found the discussions to be too rushed.

Two students noted that group work and discussions were sometimes dominated by one or two students. Two students also commented that it was sometimes hard for students from the North to contribute with examples based on their own experience/their home country.

As for the question whether group work should be done in class, or in the students' own time (in order to have more time for lectures), the respondents were divided 50-50. Half of the students answered that time should be given in class to do *both* group work and presentations, while the other half agreed that the students should meet in their own time to do the group work, and only do the presentations in class.

The students were by and large very enthusiastic about Problem Based Learning, but some mentioned that the work load was unevenly distributed within the groups. One student noted that the time that was allocated to each PBL session was too long, and that it would have been better with more and shorter sessions.

The literature

The evaluation revealed that the students only to a limited degree read the recommended course literature. A little more than half of the respondents, eight of the fourteen, answered that they read *some* of the literature for all the classes, five reported that they read *some* of the literature for *some* of the classes, while only *one* said that he/she had read *all* the recommended literature. The majority reported time pressure and/or economic constraints as reasons for not reading more. Some felt that the literature was too complicated, and one student felt that the recommended literature was not very relevant.

Some commented that the failure to read before class had a negative effect on group work, particularly in group work that involved two students only. One student suggested that groups should consist of 4-5 students to increase the chance that at least some of the participants were prepared for the discussion or group work. Another respondent suggested that the students themselves should present the recommended readings for each other in class, to ensure that everyone had read at least some of the recommended readings.

Written work

The students were generally very happy with receiving feedback on their annotations and they felt that this exercise helped them to get the reading done. They also highly appreciated the feedback that they received on their draft for essay 1. (In both cases, one or two students were not satisfied with the feedback he/she had received.) There was unanimous agreement that it was better to be assessed on the basis of two essays, rather than one (which was the case in 2016). However, many of the students felt that the assignment that was given for essay 2 was too wide/open, and that this made it hard to get started.

Suggested changes to the course (based on the student evaluation and the teacher's own judgement)

- The lectures on 'gender' and 'health promotion' should be moved to an earlier point in the course. They can for example swap places with the lectures on education, climate change, or migration and acculturation.

- The teachers should make efforts to explain that many of the problems that are discussed are relevant globally, not only in the South.
- The use of various forms of group work (including PBL) should be continued, and interactive learning methods should be further developed.
- Lecturers should try to find new ways to encourage students to read as much as possible of the recommended literature before class. This will make interactive learning more fruitful, and one will avoid a situation where students spend the time reading rather than writing after they have been given their essay assignment. One option is to ask the students to present articles/book chapters for the class.
- The number of articles/book chapters that the students write annotations from should be adjusted from around 120 pages (2017) to around 200, and the literature should be the same for all, to ensure a broad overview of the field and avoid early specialization. There should be at least one annotation from each theme. In order to avoid a high work load on the staff, one should consider whether the students can give comments to each other. A draw-back with this model is that the students are at very different academic levels.
- The assignments for the essays should not be too wide/open.
- The course evaluation should be done in a way that ensures full anonymity for all the respondents, not only those who attend the evaluation session in class.

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