Course evaluation BIO 250 Palaeoecology, autumn 2020

About the course

Bio 250 is a 10-credit course giving the students' general knowledge and skills in common methods and proxies used in palaeoecological studies. They should be able to design a relevant palaeoecological study after completing the course.

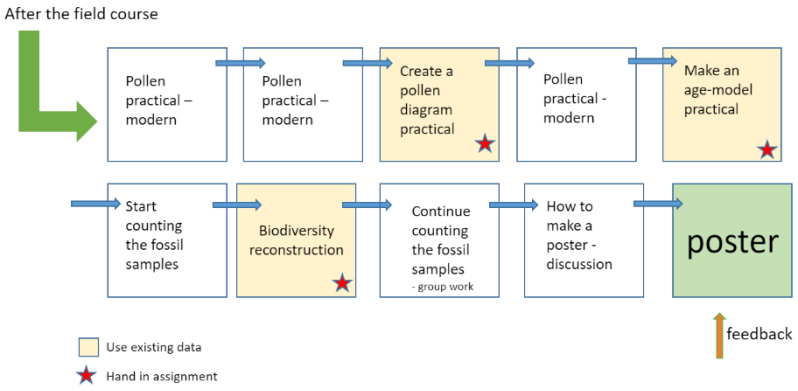
In 2020, 16 students completed the course. 11 students responded on the student evaluation.

Learning outcomes, course content and outline

- Students should be able to define ´Palaeoecology´
- They should appreciate the breadth and diversity of the subject
- They should know how to carry out a palaeoecological study
- They should know how to identify lake-sediment components and their environmental significance
- They should be able to identify different proxies (i.e pollen, charcoal, plant macrofossils, chironomids) and interpret results from the analysis
- They should be able to synthesise their knowledge to make cross-connections between different proxy data and studies
- They should be able to interpret raw palaeoecological data
- Be able to present their own data in a small research assignment
- They should be able to apply palaeoecological knowledge to present and future environmental situations, including conservation and the climate debate

Changes compared to previous years

From this semester, the course has two lectures each week. This gives more time between each teaching session and more time for the students to prepare. This year we had 3 compulsory assignments for the students (see figure), all related to practical sessions included in the time schedule. Student evaluations from previous years have asked for more work that is practical.



Course activities

This year, the filed course could not be arranged due to COVID-19. The planned laboratory work could be arranged as normal. Luckily, we have samples collected in 2018 that could be used for the group work. When the lab work has finished, the groups presented their main findings as a poster to the

other students in the course and at the BIO poster day (https://www.uib.no/bio/140684/biologistudentenes-postersesjon) where they also got feedback on the poster and the presentation.

Due to COVID-19 one lecture per week was on-campus and one was planned online, but we had to rearrange this according to the guidelines given by UiB. Teaching is based on lectures given by different teachers depending on the topic. Not all lectures are lecture only, but also discussions, computer sessions and work with assignments, and student presentations of small assignments. In 2020, the course included the course responsible, Anne Bjune, and three other teachers. PhD student Maaike Zwier assisted during the lab course and the practical sessions.

The course syllabus is based on papers, lectures, and discussions taking place in the lectures.

Evaluation

This year the group work in the lab, the poster, three assignments and one presentation of a selected scientific paper was compulsory parts of the course. For the assignments and the presentation no grade were given, but it was marked as pass/fail. All students handed in all their assignments and all had the paper presentation. No grades are given for the poster specifically, but the group and poster work was evaluated and feedback given to each of the groups. Points for the group work were added for this that counted on the final grade (A-F).

Evaluation of this year's course

It was a pity that we could not include the fieldwork. The laboratory work went well, both when using reference material and when the students worked in groups. The groups spent some time to set their research question and to make a strategy for their project. With the practical sessions and the assignments, we tried to give the students some more background knowledge and skills before the group work started. The group work went fine, it seemed like the work was divided equally among the group members.

The poster presentations and the individual student presentation (of a paper they selected themselves) went fine. They all showed that they had acquired a good understanding of the topics covered by the course. The poster presentation with the other BIO courses (BIO299, BIO300A) made it more realistic – like at a conference.

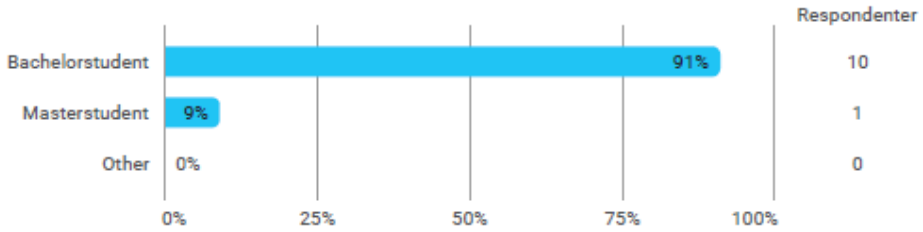
During many lectures, the students had to prepare for discussion. This went better this year than previous years, but still more can be done to improve this. Also in the online sessions the discussions went fine. All the assignments were all handed in, and seems to have been helpful for all students. One part of the exam was to use the methods from the practicals with a new dataset.

Reflections

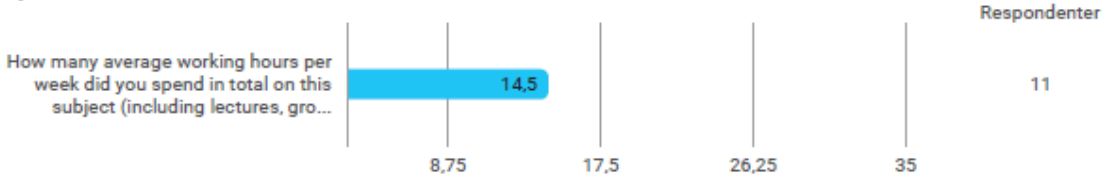
The focus change from details to a more general understanding of the topic palaeoecology seems to work fine. It was a challenge with all the changes due to COVID-19. This year we had more practical sessions and even if the student evaluations have some comments on this part it worked fine. For next year hopefully we can have a field course and more discussions in groups.

Comments to the student evaluation(s) – the students seems in general to be happy with the course, especially the practical part. They missed the field course, but do also understand that it had to be cancelled. The workload is not overwhelming. The group work is reported as positive and helpful. As many times before, more introduction to R is asked for by the students.

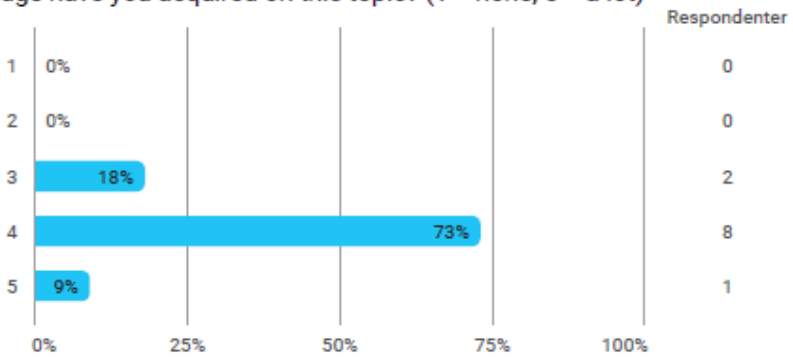
Are you?



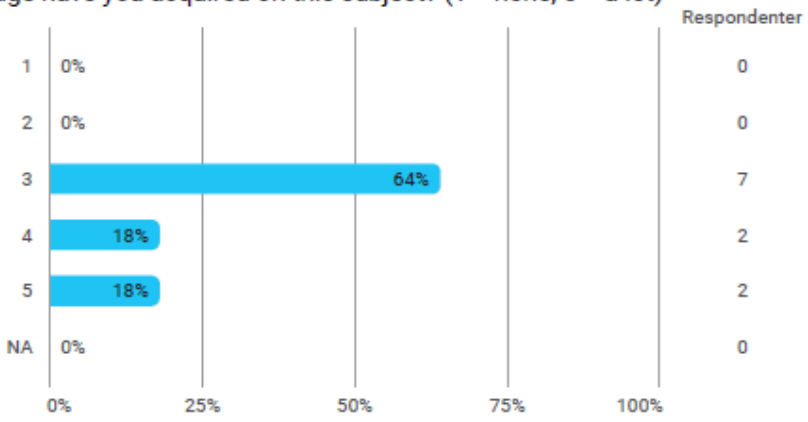
Are you? - Other

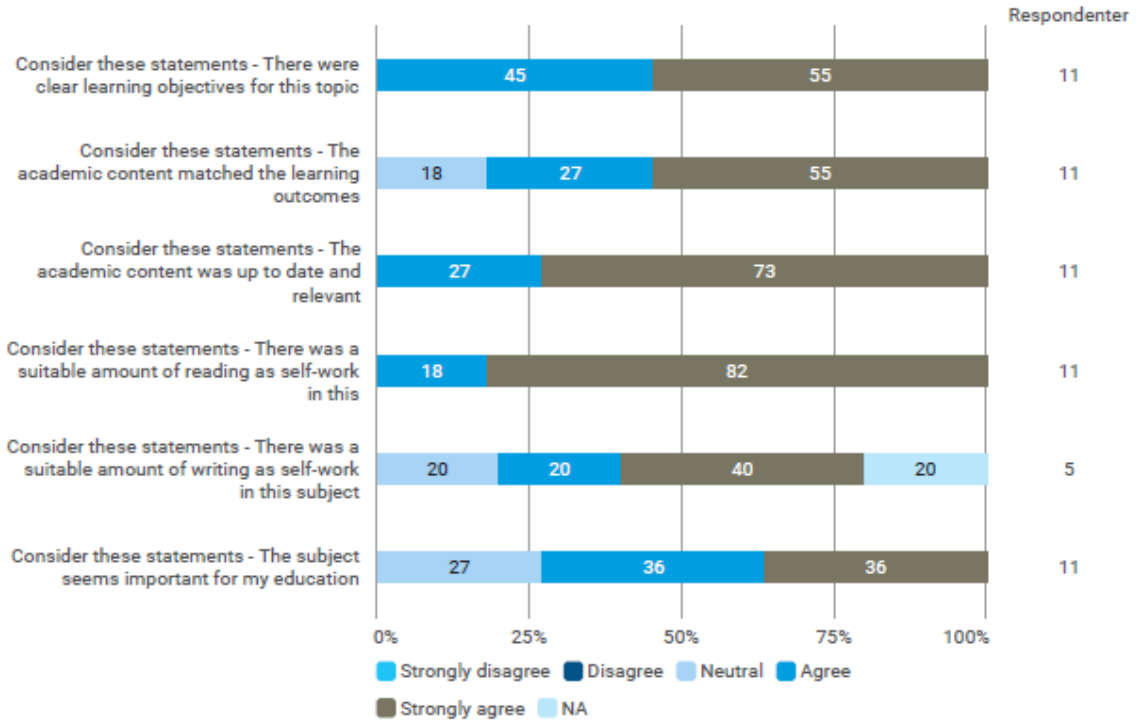


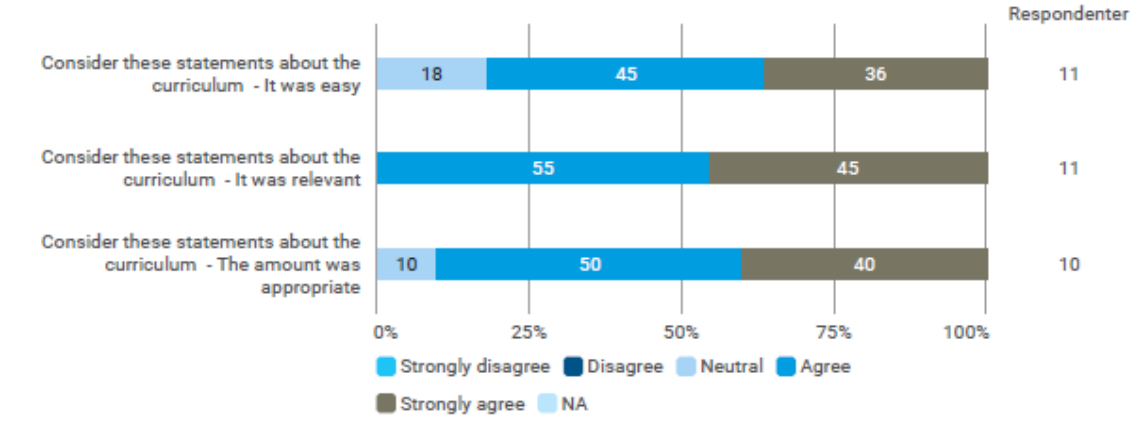
How much theoretical knowledge have you acquired on this topic? (1 = none, 5 = a lot)



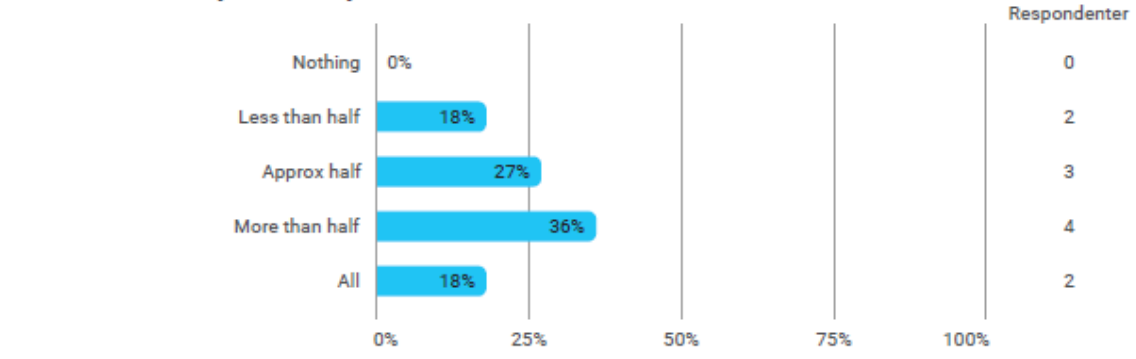
How much practical knowledge have you acquired on this subject? (1 = none, 5 = a lot)



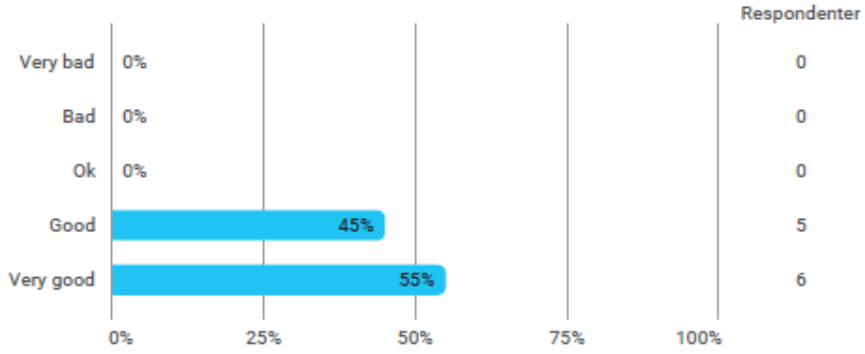




How much of the syllabus did you read?



How would you evaluate the course as a whole?



What did you like most about this course?

- I really appreciated when we shared the review, the presentation was stressful but that was really good !
  And the teacher is really understanding, it's very pleasant
- The laboratory work - learning how to identify pollen species.
- The best thing was probably when we shared our paper with the class because we discovered a lot of new papers and topics
- I enjoyed the group discussions in the lecture. I also think Anne is a very good lecturer who made the topic very accessible and interesting.
- Til tross for at kurset har en relativt lav arbeidsbelstning, så har jeg hatt et enormt læringsutbytte. Tror dette er fordi jeg aldri har "druknet" i pensum, men har kunne bearbeidet og fordøyd pensumet jevnt gjennom kurset hvor vi også har blitt oppmuntret til å tenke mye selv.
- I really liked the lab. And I also liked the lectures especially the first ones and the last ones.
- Correct amount of work. Nothing to do "on short notice". Overall interesting course

What did you like least about this course?

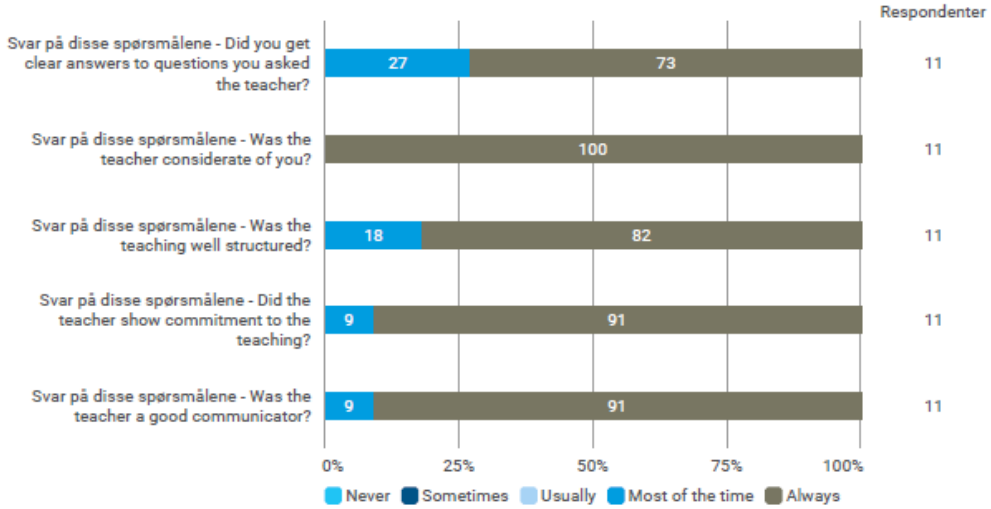
- R-studio, I knew this program. But i'm not sure to understand all of the thing on this one.
- Information on how to do field work was presented, but it would have been nice to actually get some hands on experience of palaeoecological field work (unfortunately this was not possible due to covid).
- I didn't like Rstudio, i know it is necessary but it was a bit complicated especially for exchange students without any knowledge about it
- After a while counting a lot of pollen under a microscope was a bit much. Also R Bacon.
- I did not like the exercises where we had to work with R...
- R studio could have been a bit more presented: the mechanics, etc.. for people how never used it.

Do you have suggestions for how the course can be improved?

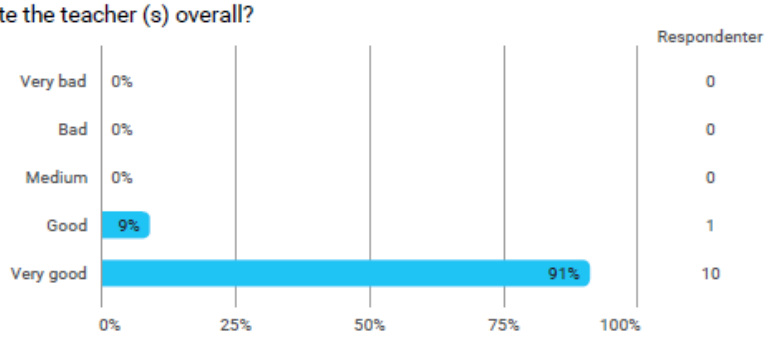
- Maybe to relate more the explication to our present.
  And the poster presentation at the end of the course is quite fast. We didn't have the time to really appreciate and focus on the poster who was presented
- Perhaps if there was a textbook for the course, not only articles.
- I think it would have been thousand time better without corona, but it was already super interesting!
- IMaybe you could something else instead of the R exercises.
- Improve the R studio presentation.

Feedback on organized practical teaching?

- The lab work was hard to start, but I think only cause of my level in english.
  And we didn't have field work, But i think it's really an added value for the course.
- Group discussions were a good way for me to better understand the content, it helped me a lot.
- The practicals felt very interesting and enticing , and were a great way to put the knowledge that we gain into use
- The group work was great.
- Selv om det har vært en rekke ekstra utfordringer dette semester pga covid-situasjonen, så har det praktiske arbeidet blitt vel gjennomført. Har følt meg trygg og ivaretatt, samt har stort læringsutbytte. Bare synd felt-turen ble avlyst, men det var nok ikke til å unngå
- I think they very well done and very good and helpful advisors! I learned a lot about pollen!
- The pollen practical was a bit long and the objectives of the practical could eventually have been a bit clearer -> give a real objective to the practical



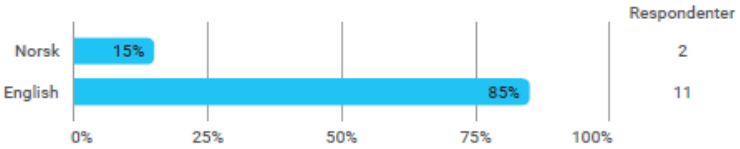
How would you evaluate the teacher (s) overall?



Do you have suggestions for how the teacher can improve the teaching?

- The instructors in this course are really nice ! All of them share their knowledge. The relationship with the instructors is more human than in my country.
  Maybe, The instructor for R-Studio should be more patient with the software because it's quite complicated.
- No, I was very happy with the teacher.
- Anne always responded to Emails quickly and tried to help us.
- I think the presentation of Richard was a bit confusing, maybe you can do something about that.

Språk



E-post

Samlet status