



Research Methods for People and Environment Studies MP0003, 30169.2021

15 Hp

Pace of study = 50%

Education cycle = Advanced

Course leader = Mats Gyllin

Evaluation report

Evaluation period: 2021-05-30 - 2021-06-20

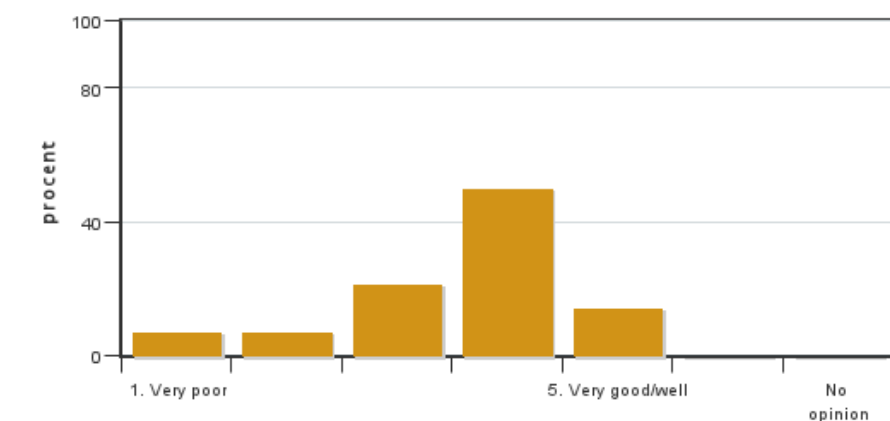
Answers 14

Number of students 31

Answer frequency 45 %

Mandatory standard questions

1. My overall impression of the course is:



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,6

Median: 4

1: 1

2: 1

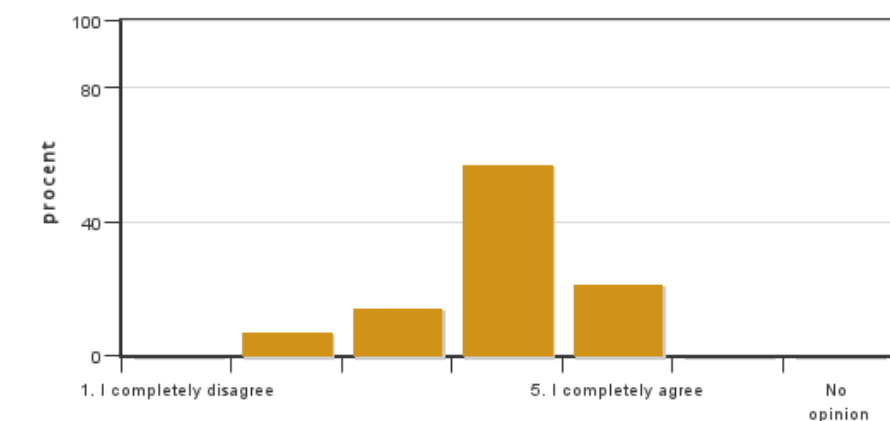
3: 3

4: 7

5: 2

No opinion: 0

2. I found the course content to have clear links to the learning objectives of the course.



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,9

Median: 4

1: 0

2: 1

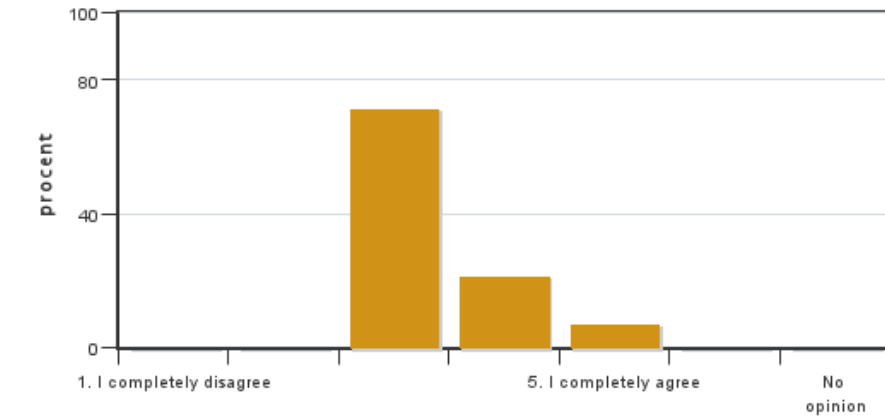
3: 2

4: 8

5: 3

No opinion: 0

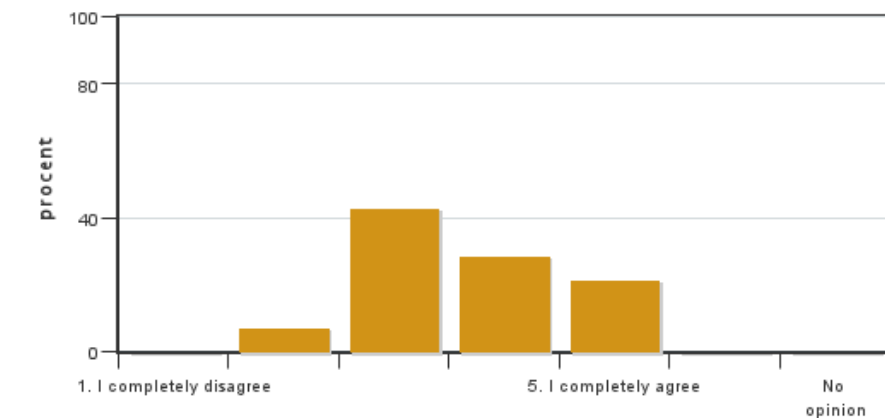
3. My prior knowledge was sufficient for me to benefit from the course.



Answers: 14
 Medel: 3,4
 Median: 3

1: 0
 2: 0
 3: 10
 4: 3
 5: 1
 No opinion: 0

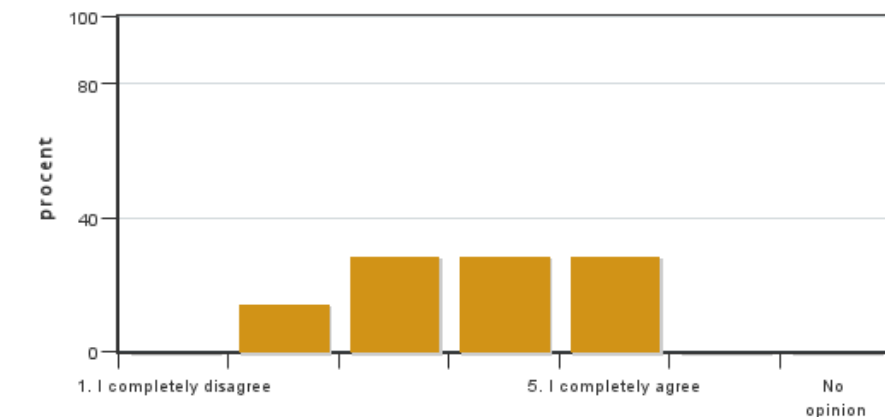
4. The information about the course was easily accessible.



Answers: 14
 Medel: 3,6
 Median: 3

1: 0
 2: 1
 3: 6
 4: 4
 5: 3
 No opinion: 0

5. The various course components (lectures, course literature, exercises etc.) have supported my learning.



Answers: 14
 Medel: 3,7
 Median: 4

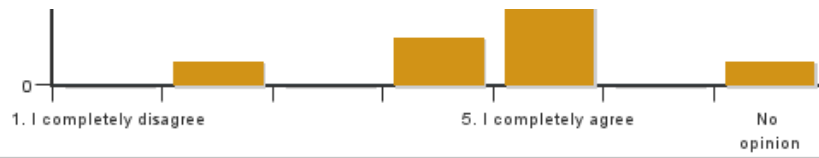
1: 0
 2: 2
 3: 4
 4: 4
 5: 4
 No opinion: 0

6. The social learning environment has been inclusive, respecting differences of opinion.



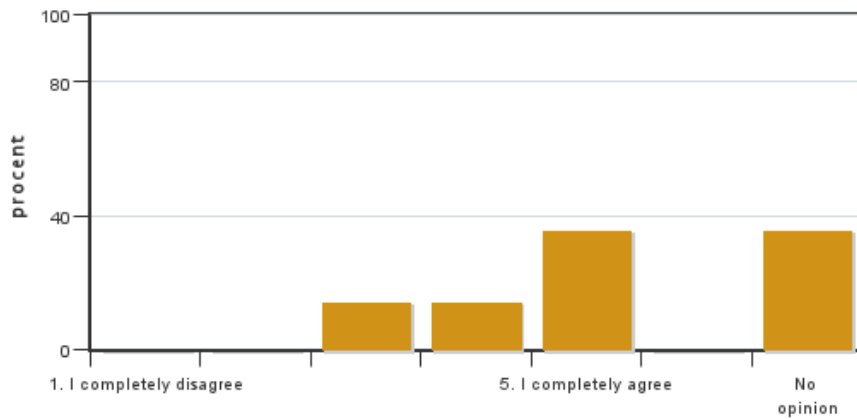
Answers: 14
 Medel: 4,6
 Median: 5

1: 0
 2: 1
 3: 0
 4: 2
 5: 10



No opinion: 1

7. The physical learning environment (facilities, equipment etc.) has been satisfactory.



Answers: 14

Medel: 4,3

Median: 5

1: 0

2: 0

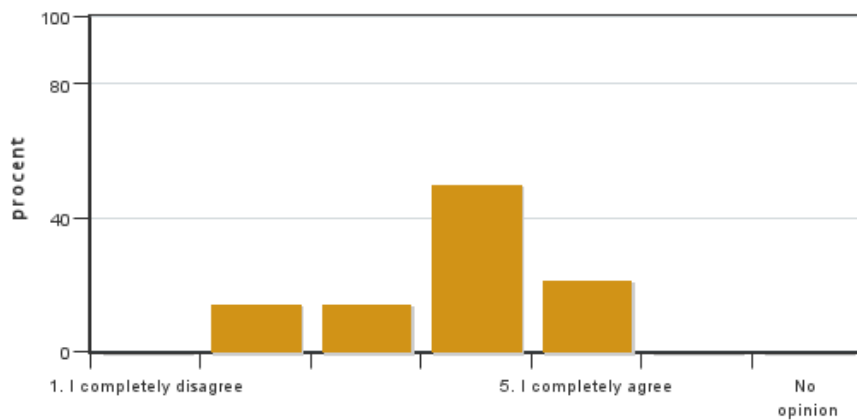
3: 2

4: 2

5: 5

No opinion: 5

8. The examination(s) provided opportunity to demonstrate what I had learnt during the course (see the learning objectives).



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,8

Median: 4

1: 0

2: 2

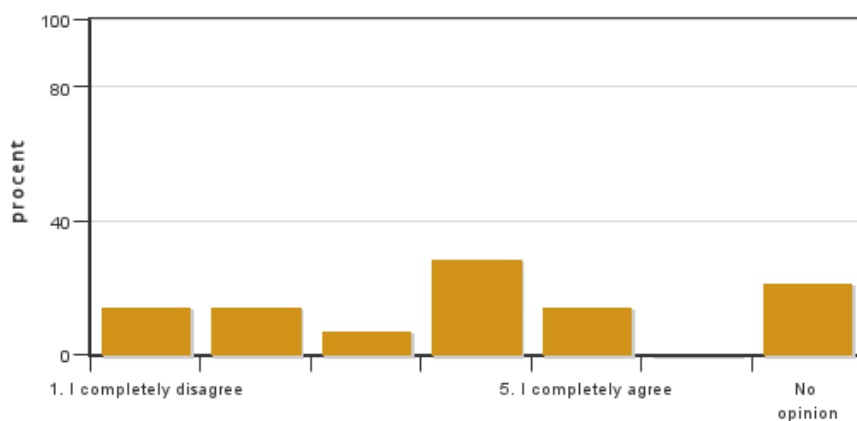
3: 2

4: 7

5: 3

No opinion: 0

9. The course covered the sustainable development aspect (environmental, social and/or financial sustainability).



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,2

Median: 4

1: 2

2: 2

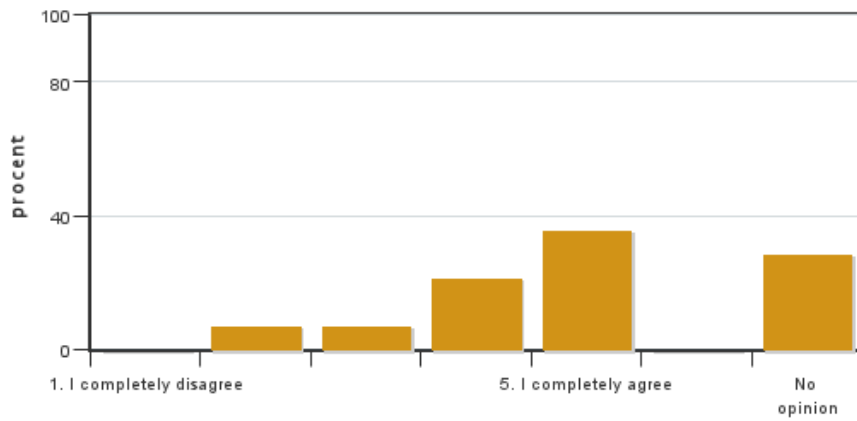
3: 1

4: 4

5: 2

No opinion: 3

10. I believe the course has included a gender and equality aspect, regarding content as well as teaching practices (e.g. perspective on the subject, reading list, allocation of speaking time and the use of master suppression techniques).

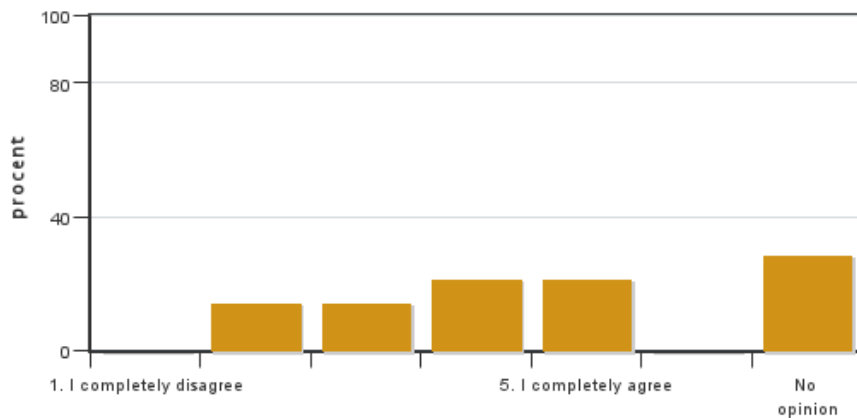


Answers: 14
 Medel: 4,2
 Median: 4

1: 0
 2: 1
 3: 1
 4: 3
 5: 5

No opinion: 4

11. The course covered international perspectives.

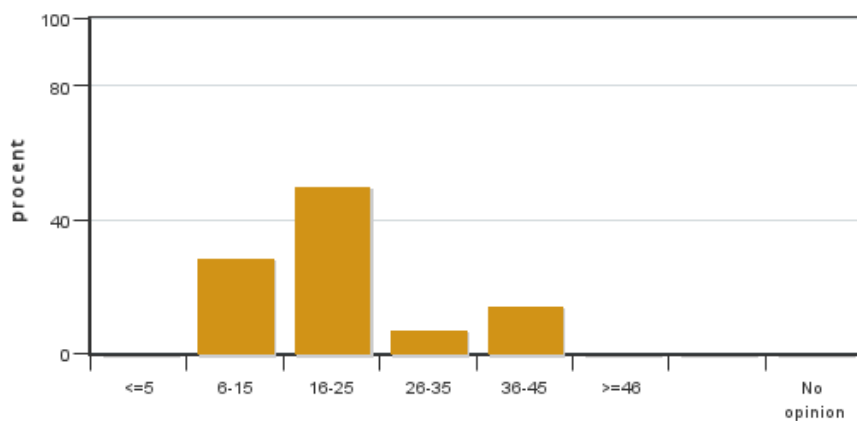


Answers: 14
 Medel: 3,7
 Median: 4

1: 0
 2: 2
 3: 2
 4: 3
 5: 3

No opinion: 4

12. On average, I have spent ... hours/week on the course (including timetabled hours).

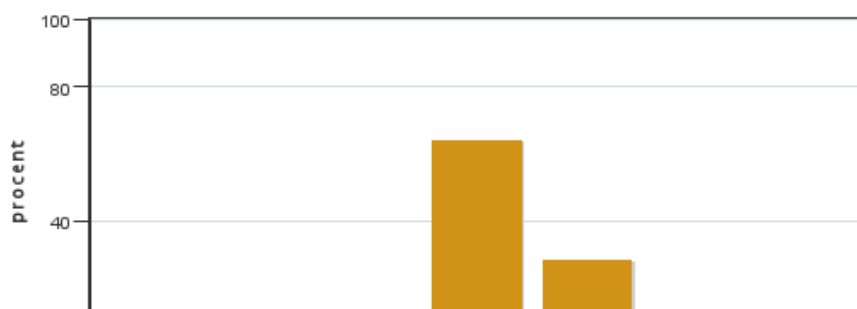


Answers: 14
 Medel: 20,7
 Median: 16-25

≤5: 0
 6-15: 4
 16-25: 7
 26-35: 1
 36-45: 2
 ≥46: 0

No opinion: 0

13. If relevant, what is your overall experience of participating in all or part of your course online?



Answers: 14
 Medel: 4,2
 Median: 4

1: 0
 2: 0
 3: 1
 4: 9
 5: 4

No opinion: 0



14. If relevant, please share what worked well when participating in teaching on distance

15. If relevant, please share what worked less well when participating in teaching on distance

Course leaders comments

No comments from the teacher

Student representatives comments

Summary of students' evaluations based on the questionnaire

14 out of 31 students responded to the course evaluation, which translates to a 45% response rate. The majority of students who responded to the course evaluation had a good overall impression of the course.

11 out of 14 respondents assessed that the course content had clear links to the course's learning objectives, while 2 students agreed to some extent and 1 disagreed.

4 respondents answered that their prior knowledge was sufficient for them to benefit from the course. This is in clear contrast with another response criteria where 71.43% of the students felt neutral.

7 respondents experienced no or very little difficulty in accessing most of the information about the course, while the remaining 7 other students experienced some issues such as problems accessing some of the mandatory qualitative readings.

4 respondents confirmed that the various course components (e.g. lectures, course literature, exercises) had supported their learning to a very high degree. There is, nonetheless, a clear contrast with other response criteria. 4 other students agreed to some extent, 4 others felt neutral, and 2 disagreed.

10 respondents experienced that the social learning environment was inclusive and respected differences of opinion. 2 students, however, only experienced it to a certain extent, 1 did not experience it at all, and 1 other opted for "no opinion".

7 respondents answered that they were to a high or very high degree satisfied with the physical learning environment (e.g. facilities, equipment). However, there is a clear contrast with other response criteria. 2 felt neutral and 5 opted for "no opinion".

3 respondents acknowledged that the examinations provided an opportunity to demonstrate what they had learnt during the course. This is also in a clear contrast with other response criteria where 7 agreed to some extent, 2 felt neutral, and 2 disagreed.

6 respondents were of the opinion that the course covered one or more aspects of sustainable development (environmental, social, or financial sustainability) to a high or very high degree, while 1 student felt neutral, 4 disagreed or completely disagreed, and 3 opted for "no opinion".

3 respondents concurred that the course covered international perspectives. This is in a clear contrast with other response criteria where 3 agreed to a certain extent, 2 felt neutral, another 2 disagreed, and 4 opted for "no opinion".

5 respondents reckoned the course to have included aspects of gender and equality, both in content and teaching practices (e.g. perspectives on the subject, reading list, allocation of speaking time), while 3 agreed to a certain extent, 1 felt neutral, another 1 disagreed, and 4 opted for "no opinion".

13 respondents rated well or very well in their experience of participating in distance teaching, while 1 felt somewhat neutral.

Additionally, the respondents spent an average of 20.7 hours per week on the course (e.g. scheduled hours, self-study).

Summary of students' evaluations based on the open-ended survey and various discussions

What had emerged in the open-ended survey in this course evaluation and other evaluation occasions were, above all, the clear structure of the content for the qualitative part and the easy access and prompt responses from the course leader and co-leader for the quantitative part. All students highly valued that all the mandatory examinations for the qualitative part had been identified since the course introduction. This had helped students familiarise themselves with what to expect for the final grade. For the quantitative part, all students felt it greatly helped them to have both course leader and co-leader who were easily accessible and that they could opt for more than one individual supervision before the final examinations.

The majority of the students were quite positive about the MP0003 Research Methods for People and Environment Studies course at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). These students particularly appreciated that there was a great variety in the examinations for both quantitative and qualitative parts. Most students, however, found the course to be imbalanced between the qualitative and quantitative parts, with the latter being of very limited course length. These students suggested replacing qualitative assignment II with more quantitative parts (e.g. for lectures or individual supervisions, to give the students individual time to process the quantitative part). They argued that this assignment was not important compared to the time they needed to learn quantitative methods. They added, in doing so, it would have made the course have a better structure with a better proportion between qualitative and quantitative parts. In addition, all students felt that qualitative and quantitative parts were too divided, causing them to feel that they were taking two different courses.

While many students highly appreciated the clear structure of the qualitative part, all students wished to obtain more in-depth knowledge of the most important qualitative methods within the field of Environmental Psychology. These students felt they did not learn enough as only two qualitative methods – thematic and phenomenological approaches – were taught comprehensively, with a very heavy emphasis on the latter one. Most were also disappointed that at the end they were only allowed to choose between the two methods even though at the very beginning it was specified that students may choose between the five qualitative traditions within this field: thematic analysis, phenomenology, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. The majority of students also recommended having more quantitative parts since Block II – not only the introductory lecture that was given during the block. They suggested it would be more helpful for them if the lecturers could provide them with a list of important terms within the quantitative world by the end of Block II so that they could have enough time to familiarise themselves with these before Block IV. A few students proposed it might be a good idea to create an ungraded and optional quiz in Canvas to help them remember these terms.

All students highly appreciated the specific schedule for the qualitative part from the very beginning. For the quantitative part, most students found it really difficult not having a clear schedule since the very beginning nor mandatory readings, particularly for SPSS. These students reasoned that they were not familiar with SPSS nor quantitative methods in general. In consequence, they were having a hard time scheduling their individual learning process. This was very unfortunate as the majority of students considered SPSS to be a very useful tool to write the Master's thesis for the *Outdoor Environments for Health and Well-Being* (OHW) programme. Because of this, they strongly suggested that students should have been given more time to work with SPSS – not just in 2-3 weeks.

A clear majority of the students emphasized the benefits of distance learning, such as how they felt very safe not having to travel to a physical location due to the ongoing pandemic situation, and how online learning helped them adapt to their individual learning environments which had contributed to the improvement of their own learning process. Some even highlighted that they would not be able to take the course if it was not held entirely online. All students appreciated the lecturers and course leaders who seemed to be trying their best to adapt to online learning due to the ongoing pandemic situation. Some have also strongly encouraged the Department of People and Society to make the course entirely available on the distance even after the pandemic has ended. These students argued that the course will be accessible to more international students around the world if that is the case.

The majority of the students considered Zoom and Canvas to be user-friendly platforms that have provided excellent opportunities to learn, regardless of the ongoing pandemic situation. They also revealed that group discussions in Zoom's breakout rooms worked very well and that they highly valued the opportunities to discuss their individual assignments with the course leader for the quantitative part. These students felt they learnt much more effectively by obtaining such valuable individual feedback from the professionals (i.e. the quantitative course leader and co-leader).

Some students experienced difficulties in gaining access to some of the mandatory readings for the qualitative part as these were not available in the library, neither in physical nor electronic version. These students argued that these readings were supposed to be clearly informed from the very beginning, not a few weeks before Assignment II's deadline which had to be written based on one of the obligatory readings. A few students added that it took time for a book to arrive, especially when they resided outside of Sweden, and this situation had become worsened during the pandemic as it takes much longer time to buy a book online from Sweden.

A clear majority of the students highly recommended the course not only to focus on the Western world, especially Sweden. These students felt that there should be a wider perspective within the field of Environmental Psychology, including in this course.

All students cherished the compact schedule (e.g. full 2.5-day lectures/seminars per module rather than spreading them out over several weeks) with a good balance of the breaks from one lecture to another as well as more short breaks within a lecture. They further clarified that it was really helpful for them to maintain focus during the tightly scheduled lectures. These students also pointed out that the last individual presentation day was one of the negative sides of the qualitative part. While they noted that it was good with smaller groups for the last presentation, they

found it very fruitless to present their results without the presence of the course leader nor receiving feedback from the professionals (i.e. the qualitative course leader who was also the course examiner).

Most felt inclusivity in the social learning environment, although some students disagreed. These students gave an example that the qualitative course leader oftentimes responded in Swedish even during Q&A sessions during the lectures – despite that the official language of the course is English.

The majority of the students were pretty satisfied with the course content itself. All students also highly valued prompt and useful feedback from the quantitative course leader and co-leader. Nevertheless, they wished to receive prompt and meaningful responses as well as constructive feedback delivered within the promised time from the qualitative course leader. One of the examples was that the qualitative course leader clearly expressed during a lecture that she would give everyone short feedback for Assignment I within a week after Block I. However, most students who reminded the course leader about this via email claimed that the course leader either gave no response or said that she would not give any feedback for this assignment. Everyone finally received the short feedback more than a month later. These students argued that it was really challenging for them to continue to the next qualitative assignments before receiving feedback from Assignment I. Some also wished that both course leaders made it possible for completely anonymous evaluation by not having a discussion led by the course leaders at the end of the course.

The majority of the students highly appreciated the qualitative workshop as it had helped them to try one of the two qualitative methods taught during the course. However, they noted that they were more interested in seeing how the course leader implemented both methods when she did her research studies. They mentioned that it was highly challenging for them to use qualitative methods where there is no set of correct answers in the qualitative world. They further added that it would be more beneficial for them to be able to see how the professionals (e.g. the qualitative course leader) use both methods in practice. These students also pointed out how it really stressed them out receiving too much information during the quantitative lectures. They wished there could be one workshop at the beginning of the course where they could be introduced to both qualitative and quantitative methods at the same time. Nonetheless, all students underlined the possibilities to explore their individual interests or expertise through various assignments from both qualitative and quantitative parts.

Suggestions for improvements

Provide course literature, lectures, and examples that do not only focus on the Swedish perspectives. Since this course is one of the mandatory courses within the international OHW Master's programme, there should be a balance of learning material from broader international perspectives. All readings should be in English to create inclusivity for everyone taking this international course. Articles in Swedish can be provided in the optional list – but only if there are no articles in English that are deemed to have better quality.

Offer optional relevant readings that touch on more aspects of sustainable development. One of the university's environmental policies states, "SLU contributes to ecologically, socially, and financially sustainable development", and therefore, more students will be particularly interested in delving deeper into these aspects related to course content.

Coordinate with the library to ensure all mandatory readings are made available for the students. If the electronic version is impossible to obtain, there should be a reasonable number of copies of the physical books (i.e. the number of physical books should be well-balanced with the number of students). It is also very important to inform the students if a certain assignment must only be based on a certain mandatory book so that they have enough time to obtain the book (e.g. buy, borrow). Additionally, SPSS Survival Manual (7th ed.) by Julie Pallant could be a great idea to have as a mandatory book for the quantitative part. The book is internationally recognised and the number 1 best-seller of all time for the beginner to medium level in SPSS.

Provide adequate knowledge of the five qualitative traditions within the field of Environmental Psychology. If the qualitative course leader does not have the in-depth knowledge of narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and grounded theory, perhaps employ other (guest) lecturers that can provide students with such knowledge. Students should also be given the freedom to choose within these five traditions, especially since this was promised at the beginning of the course.

During quantitative lectures, present examples clearly relevant to the field of Environmental Psychology. Most students found the examples provided during the lectures highly irrelevant to this field. If the given examples were relevant to this field, these students assumed they would have an easier time to understand how to implement quantitative methods in this field.

Record some of the lectures: some of the less important qualitative lectures and the most arduous quantitative lectures. This way, there are more available times for the students to have the quantitative part (e.g. lectures, individual supervisions) and to digest all the more challenging quantitative parts.

Set up optional sessions via Zoom for students who need help acquainting themselves with technical matters (e.g. SPSS, Netigate). Although detailed instructions have been provided by the course leader and via the SLU webpage, it can be more helpful for these students to video chat with the quantitative course leader or the IT staff (e.g. via Zoom's sharing screen). All students should already be able to use SPSS on their own PC before the main quantitative lectures. We learn the best by doing; therefore, it is very important to give the students the chance to do it together with the lecturer during the lecture – not just the lecturer showing how to use SPSS with the students only looking at their screens.

Keep qualitative Assignment II by making it an optional exercise where students can voluntarily write their own individual reflections in connection to the literature. Such practice may help them to train themselves on critical thinking from the obligatory book that they have read. This exercise should be made available via Canvas discussions so that classmates may have the alternative to comment if they want to. In this case, the qualitative course leader should still give individual feedback but as a brief comment in the Canvas discussions.

For quantitative Assignment 2b, give options for students if they want to do the assignment alone, with another student, or in a group of 3-4 students. It should be noted that many students clearly stated that if they were paired with a student(s) who was familiar with SPSS, they felt that they would not even give an effort to learn SPSS because they would not be forced to learn by themselves. However, some other students claimed that they learned faster from other students in a small group. Therefore, giving such options would be an ideal solution because each individual knows their learning process the best.

Try to run both quantitative and qualitative parts of the course as a unity from the very beginning. Although it might be challenging, the course leaders of both parts can work together where students can choose one same research topic but with different research questions: one set for quantitative and another set for the qualitative part. The examinations can still be done separately but with the same topic. This way students can learn and be more focused on how to implement both methods for research topics in the field of Environmental Psychology.

As soon as the evaluation link is available, remind students regularly (e.g. once a week) to help respond to the course evaluation. The student representative had already reminded the students through at least 2 different occasions on her own initiative, such as by announcing it at the last course meeting and via Canvas inbox to each student. The course leaders have also reminded students a few times before the last day to access the link. Yet, the response rate is still low. When sending out the reminders, it should be mentioned that the course evaluation is anonymous and that more responses are needed to improve the course even though it is not mandatory. More students appear to be participating in course evaluations when anonymity is guaranteed and the students may feel they are contributing even though they are not obliged to.

Discuss with the Department of People and Society the possibility of making the course available completely online even after the pandemic has ended.

Kei Nilsson

Student Representative for MP0003 Course
Spring semester of 2021