



## Forest Ecosystem Ecology BI1369, 20021.2122

15 Hp

Pace of study = 100%

Education cycle = Advanced

Course leader = Maria Myrstener, Paul Kardol

### Evaluation report

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**Evaluation period: 2022-01-14 - 2022-01-30**

Answers 14

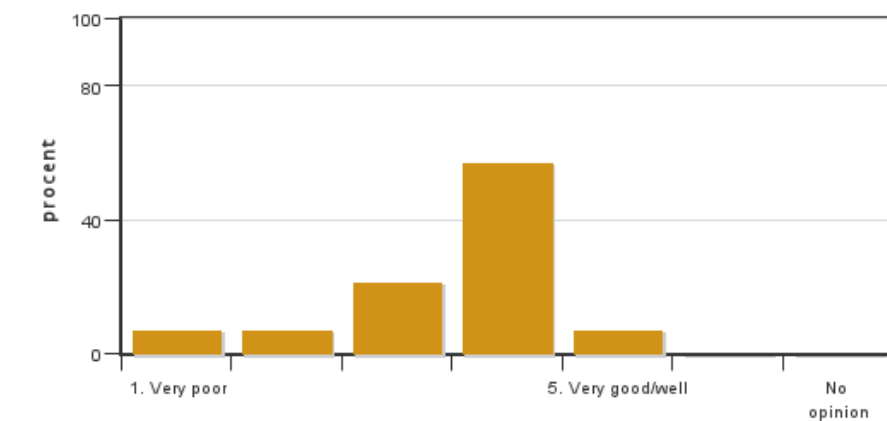
Number of students 26

Answer frequency 53 %

### Mandatory standard questions

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#### 1. My overall impression of the course is:



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,5

Median: 4

1: 1

2: 1

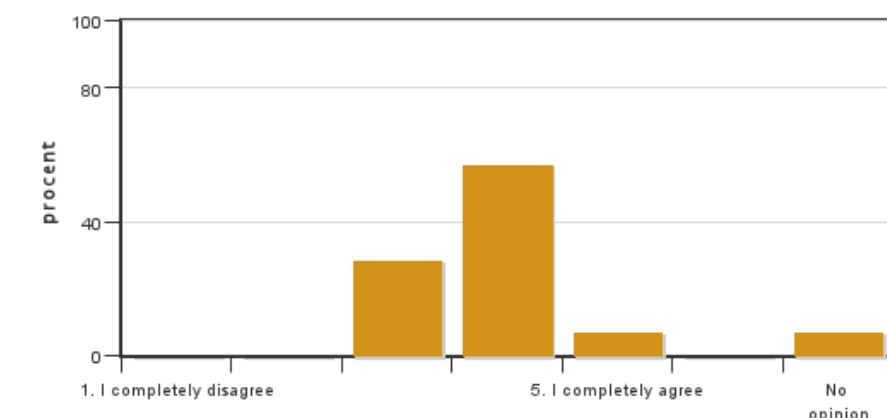
3: 3

4: 8

5: 1

No opinion: 0

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



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,8

Median: 4

1: 0

2: 0

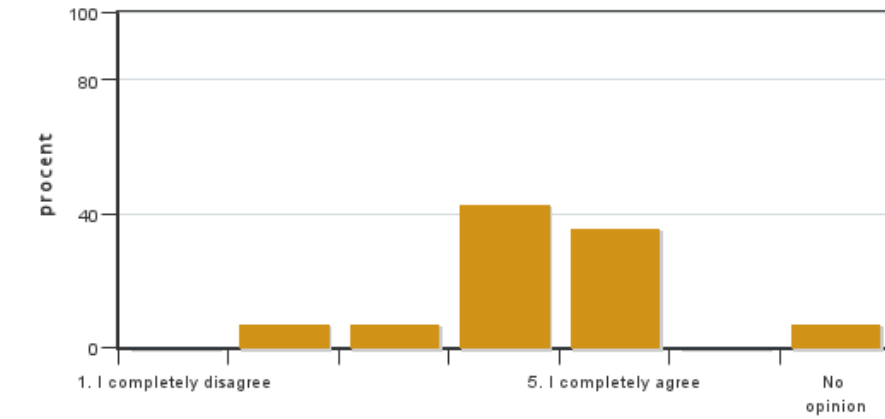
3: 4

4: 8

5: 1

No opinion: 1

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

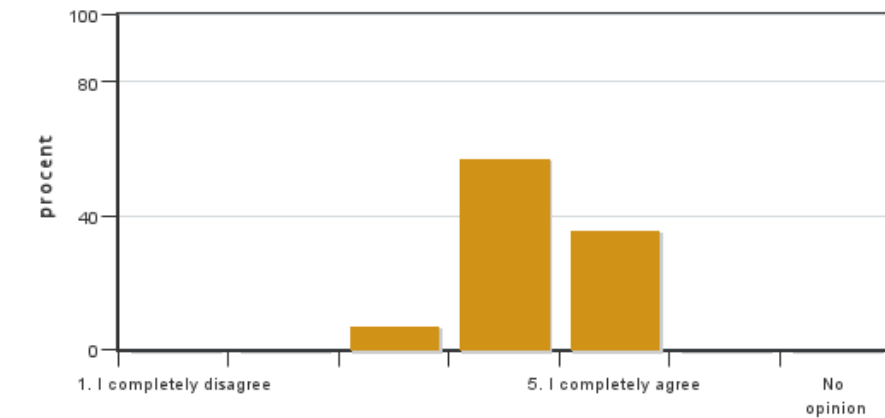


Answers: 14  
 Medel: 4,2  
 Median: 4

1: 0  
 2: 1  
 3: 1  
 4: 6  
 5: 5

No opinion: 1

**4. The information about the course was easily accessible.**

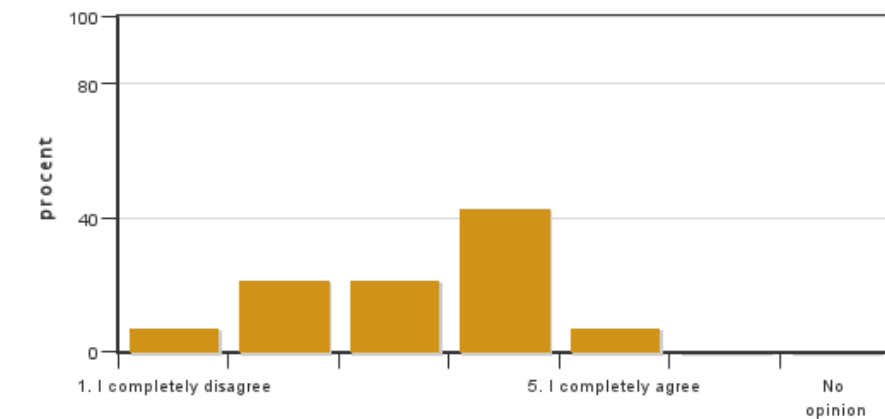


Answers: 14  
 Medel: 4,3  
 Median: 4

1: 0  
 2: 0  
 3: 1  
 4: 8  
 5: 5

No opinion: 0

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

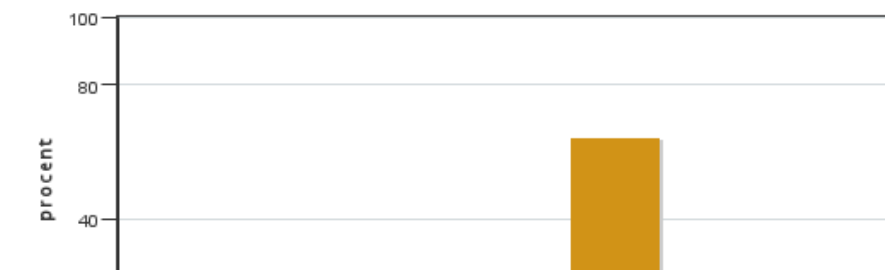


Answers: 14  
 Medel: 3,2  
 Median: 3

1: 1  
 2: 3  
 3: 3  
 4: 6  
 5: 1

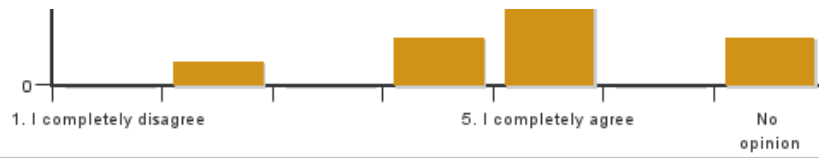
No opinion: 0

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



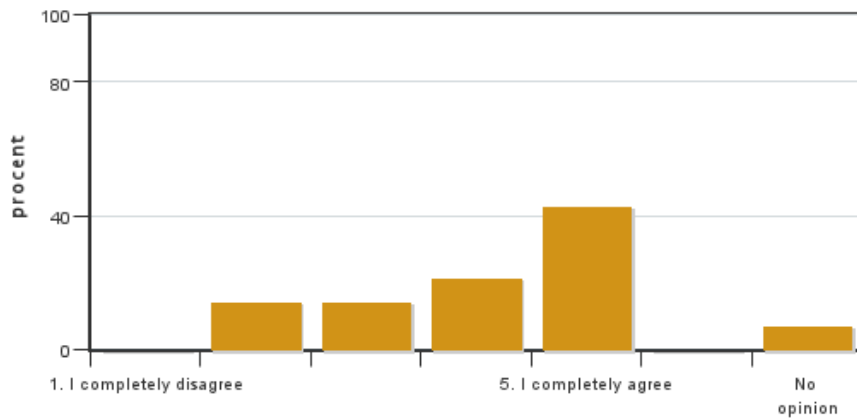
Answers: 14  
 Medel: 4,6  
 Median: 5

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



No opinion: 2

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



Answers: 14

Medel: 4,0

Median: 4

1: 0

2: 2

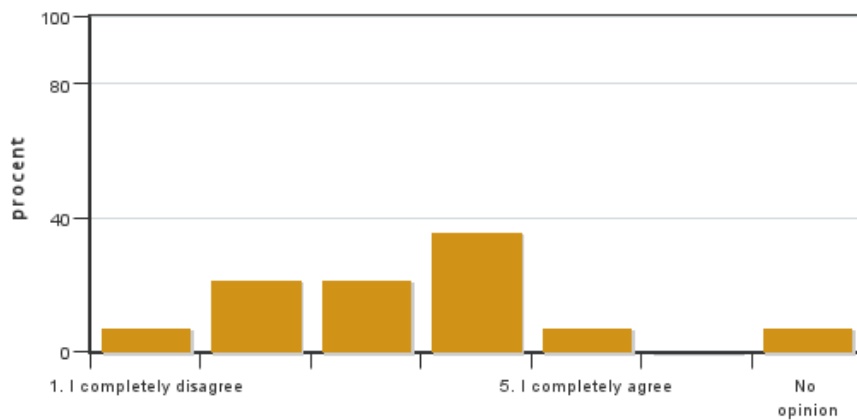
3: 2

4: 3

5: 6

No opinion: 1

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



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,2

Median: 3

1: 1

2: 3

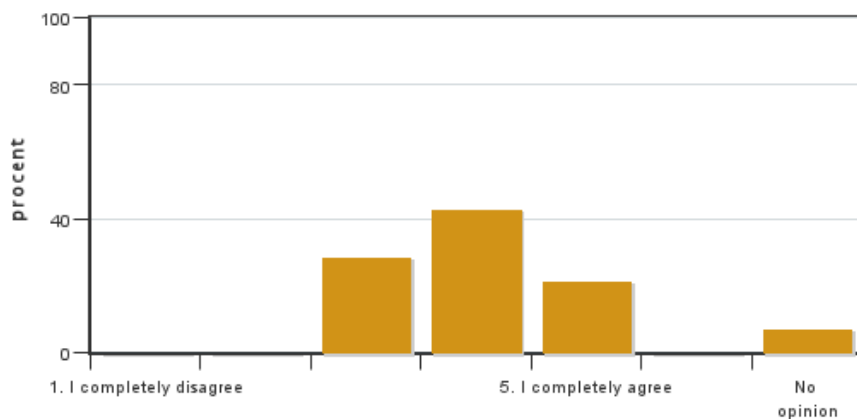
3: 3

4: 5

5: 1

No opinion: 1

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



Answers: 14

Medel: 3,9

Median: 4

1: 0

2: 0

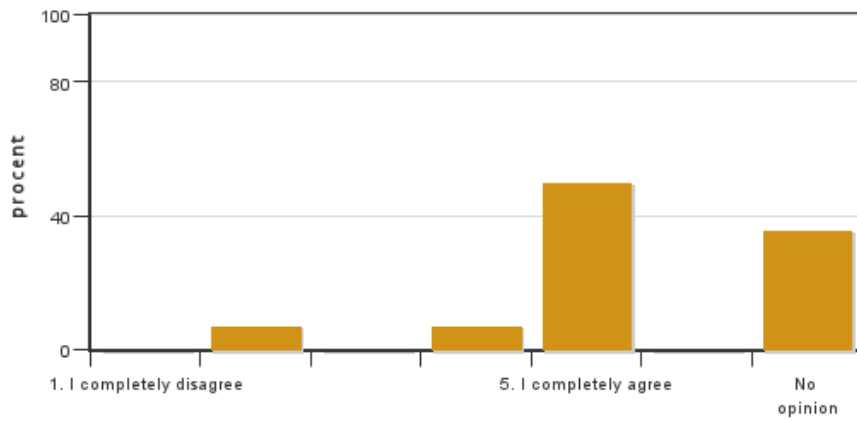
3: 4

4: 6

5: 3

No opinion: 1

**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).**

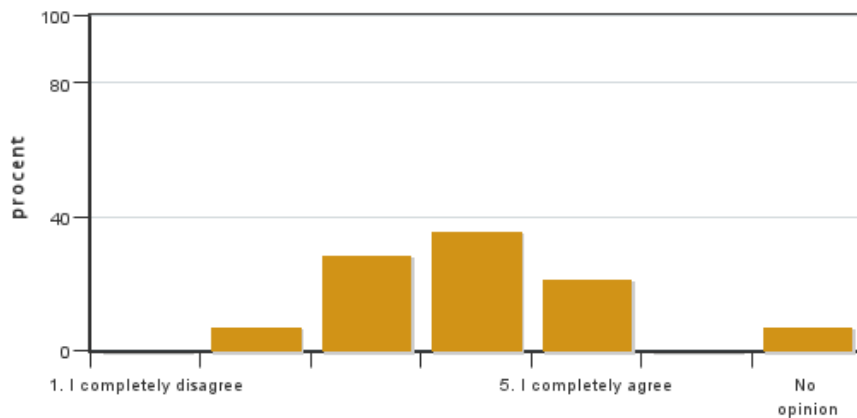


Answers: 14  
 Medel: 4,6  
 Median: 5

1: 0  
 2: 1  
 3: 0  
 4: 1  
 5: 7

No opinion: 5

**11. The course covered international perspectives.**

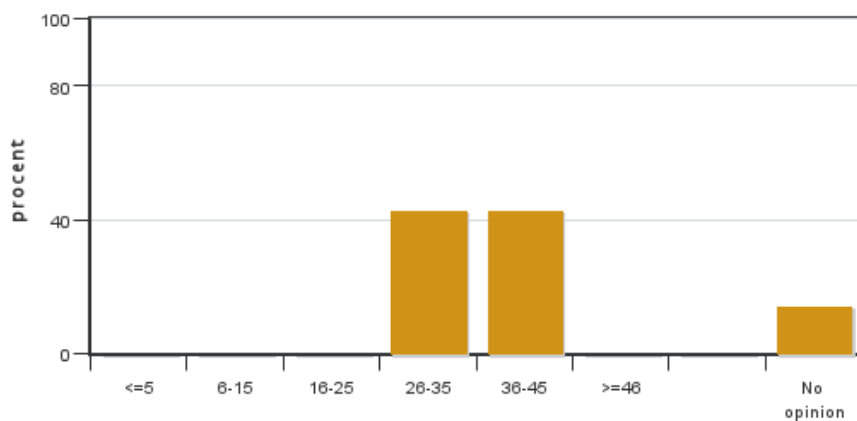


Answers: 14  
 Medel: 3,8  
 Median: 4

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

No opinion: 1

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

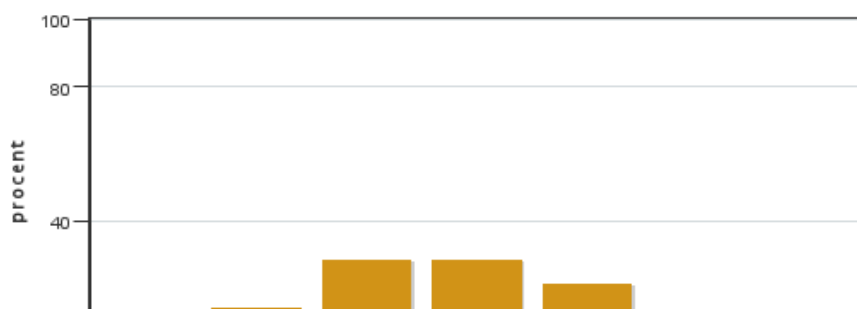


Answers: 14  
 Medel: 35,0  
 Median: 26-35

≤5: 0  
 6-15: 0  
 16-25: 0  
 26-35: 6  
 36-45: 6  
 ≥46: 0

No opinion: 2

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



Answers: 14  
 Medel: 3,4  
 Median: 3

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

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

### Student comments

#### Course leader comments – Forest Ecosystem Ecology (BI1369) 2021-2022

We organized this course for the third time as part of SLU's new MSc program 'Forest Ecology and Sustainable Management'. The course was attended by 26 students of which 14 submitted the evaluation report (= 53%). We wished more students would have filled in the evaluation; we sent out multiple reminders.

The course was largely taught on campus, with the possibility to follow lectures over Zoom for those student who were not able to come to campus because of Covid symptoms. After the Christmas/New Year break, several students tested positive for Covid just after they had been in class. Following this, also some of the teachers tested positive for Covid. After discussion with the Head of Department, it was then decided to do all remaining course activities by Zoom only. This was not ideal.

Student attendance of the lectures and other activities was generally very high. For the last part of the course, teaching from distance, however, was somewhat challenging, both for teachers and for students. And most students much prefer on-campus teaching.

Overall, the students are positive regarding the administration, organization, social learning environment, and particularly also the equality aspects. We were very happy to read that.

Although it is a rather busy course with many different activities (we are aware of this), the work load has been evaluated as appropriate. The students spent, on average, between 26-45 hours on the course, which corresponds well to a normal work week.

A few students thought that the course was too easy and would have liked to dig deeper into some of the topics. Given the broad subject of this course (forest ecosystem ecology) and given the very large differences in the prior knowledge amongst the Swedish and international students, we must make sure that everybody is 'on board' and this means that we sometimes start with the basics before going into depth. But, we do go into depth. And, the far majority of the students thought that the level of the course fitted well to the student's background knowledge.

Also, many of the assignments provide great opportunities to go into depth if students want to by using and applying the information provided in the lectures and reading material. We also expect that students carefully read the instructions for the assignments and the grading criteria, and if anything is unclear ask the teachers for clarification. For a MSc level course, we expect the students to be able to apply new knowledge to complex ecological questions – this course provide ample opportunities for that. However, for next year, we will spend more time during the first day of the course in discussing what it means to study at the MSc level. This apparently has not always been clear to all students.

Importantly, we like to emphasize that the comment that “barely any new information was added to the knowledge I acquired in the first year of my bachelors” simply is incorrect. Similarly, comments that “some assignment did really not teach me anything” are not substantiated. And, suggesting that the Soil Food Web assignment was only graded for creativity and “without the need for scientific commentary” is also simply not true. If they would have read the assignment instructions and grading criteria they would have known better. *Comments like this are very disrespectful to the teachers and course leaders.* This borders verbal harassment. Teachers have spent much time and effort in adding new knowledge to their lectures, including the latest findings of their own research as well as results from recently published papers. Yet, we do want to acknowledge students who do not feel challenged enough. This could be done by further updating assignments and think about an extra assignment (for a higher grade) for next year's course. We will also provide additional reading material.

Just as last year the 'module structure' was generally much appreciated, but with a few constructive suggestions for improvement. We happily take these. First, we agree that the Carbon module did not work so well this year. This was because of a change in the team of teachers, with some of them working from home because of family circumstances and others working from distance because of a recent move to another university. We are hopeful that next years these problems will be solved. Second, the links between modules are emphasized during first day of the course and also during the later modules where knowledge from the previous modules should be integrated.

But, for next year, we will give a stronger mandate to all module leaders to very clearly explain the links during the first day of each module and also explain how all previous modules feed into the subsequent modules. Third, some students suggested to merge some of the modules. We already did that last year (merging the module “The role of species and trophic interactions in ecosystem functioning” and the module “Biodiversity and multi-functionality of forest ecosystems”), and there is little room further reducing the number of modules. But, we will discuss with the module leaders whether there are improvements that can be made. Fourth, a few students felt that the workload was not always equally divided among the modules with some modules and some assignments being heavier than others. Here, it is important to note that some assignments may seem easier or take less time, but if performed well, would require them to apply all knowledge obtained in the lectures and reading material. Here, we will better emphasize what we would expect from the students for each of the assignments when it comes to work load, time commitment, and depth.

Most students really liked the Group Projects, although a few were more critical. This can probably largely be explained by the broad variety of topics that the different groups worked on and by the different supervision styles of the teachers leading the projects. Every year there will be some new projects (largely depending on the availability of group leaders), and we will make sure that all group projects will be comparable with regards to learning objectives, work load, and learning outcomes.

The comments that “this group project is being top3 most boring things I have ever done on SLU. Group projects overall is really boring” is *very disrespectful to the teachers (and also to their fellow students)* and merely reflects the student’s lack of interest in forest ecosystem ecology (and also that the student is not willing to learn how to work in a collaborative working environment). In the Group Projects, we let the students plan and perform scientific studies with data collection, analyses and writing – with a choice from basic research to more applied projects. This is often the most appreciated part of the class.

The examination system (i.e., module by module) has generally been evaluated positively, allowing a broad range of examination forms. So, we will keep this in future years. Also, the very diverse set of assignments during the different course modules is generally appreciated by the students. And, we think the diversity of assignments testing for different skills and accommodating for different learning styles are essential for a MSc level course and prepare the student for their future careers.

One student felt that some individual assignments were not graded fairly or equally. All teachers always do their very best to grade assignments fairly and equally based on the pre-defined grading criteria. If students do not agree with their grade, the teachers are always available for discussion and feedback. And, assignments of similar quality never differed much in grades. But, sometimes what students see as small differences actually reflects a larger difference in understanding or independent thinking. Here, the student gives the example of students working together on \*individual\* assignments. This is obviously not the point of individual assignments, which should be done individually, so that we can assess each student’s individual performance. The students know this: individual assignment should be done individually. When students who work together on individual assignments submit work that is for 90% is the same, then the teachers are forced to distinguish between individual student’s performance on the remaining 10%. Hence, working on individual assignments by yourself (i.e., submitting original, independent work) makes a much better impression.

Paul Kardol & Maria Myrstener – Course leaders

## Student representatives comments

No comments from the student representatives