Course analysis BIOR81 Evolutionary Animal Ecology autumn 2018

Course leader: Dennis Hasselquist, Susanne Åkesson

Number of students: 24 registered students

Grades: 2 Fail (U) (did not go up on exam), 16 Pass (G), 6 Pass with distinction (VG).

Evaluation
I. Summary of the course evaluation
Number of answers: 22

Short summary of the result: Overall the students were very pleased with the course (‘Overall, I am satisfied with the course’ grade 4.4; ‘What is your overall opinion about the course’ grade 4.5). The students especially appreciated that the teachers and assistants motivated them and that they received good help and feedback (4.6), that the level of the course was appropriate (4.7), that it increased their subject knowledge (4.7), and the Conference and the Literature project (both 4.6). The students suggested improvements regarding some aspects of information (e.g., related to what to bring to the written exam and about the last seminar). There was a change regarding which old exams that were available for the students, and that resulted in some confusion regarding what the students were allowed to bring to the exam. This was a completely new situation that arose during the course, making both teachers and students confused and frustrated. In the end it was solved – but for next year we have to think through how to deal with this issue before the course starts, so we can give good information already at the beginning of the course.

Overall, the student evaluation was one of the most positive the course has ever received!

II. Comments from the teachers team

The teachers on the course felt that the course went quite well this year. Compared to in 2017, the course contained a lower number of students (22-24 students), a course size that we know from before is close to perfect for this course (last year we had too many students (>30) and the evaluation was then less positive). The feeling we have is that the pre-knowledge of the students are lower than 3-6 years ago, and also that their training in evolutionary thinking as well as how to conduct and make use of group discussions are less advanced. This is becoming a bit of a problem as the pedagogic ideas for this advanced Master level course is based on that the students are well trained in using group work and to some extent trained in independent (evolutionary) thinking. Thus, the students are less independent than in courses 5-10 years back. This problem can also be seen in student comments on the course evaluation, where they now more frequently ask for more detailed information on how to conduct tasks, more follow up so they know they are on the right track, and more information about how to write answers to the questions of the written exam etc. This type of comments have gradually increased, in particular over the last 2-4 years. The problem with this is that we already have adjusted to this and tried to meet up the suggestions from the students. Thus,
presently we provide more information, preparation/follow up meetings and allow more time for reading etc. than we have done ever before on this course! We feel this is a bit worrysome. However, our overall impression is that the course went very well this year.

III. Evaluation of changes made since the previous course
After the previous course we did not change much (despite the, for this course, rather low evaluation grading) as we could not see any clear patterns in the suggestions from the students – comments went in all directions. This was apparently a good decision, because the student evaluation this year was more even and among the highest ever! We strongly feel that we have a very good course, that is well planned as regards time and level of demand, but still pose a reasonable challenge for the average student which is important for an advanced-level course. It is not an easy task to achieve this optimization, but we feel we have a close to optimal level presently.

IV. Suggested changes for the next course
Before the next course is given, we will have to think through how to deal with the new situation for the written exam. Maybe we need to do some changes regarding what material the students can bring to the exam? Otherwise, we see no reasons to make any changes – as far as we can see, the course functions exceptionally well!

2019-04-10, compiled by Dennis Hasselquist and Susanne Åkesson