

Course Evaluation

HGO4010 – Qualitative Methods in Human Geography

Course overview

The general goal of the course is to introduce students to a variety of qualitative research methods. It aims to give students the skills to design a qualitative study in a way that is analytically powerful and practically feasible. The course aims to increase students' understanding of the choices involved in conducting qualitative research, including the assessment of what methods are suited to deal with different research questions. The course also seeks to provide students with techniques for analyzing qualitative data, and give them the capacity to reflect on and assess ethical aspects in all the different stages of the qualitative research process.

The student body in this class is primarily made up of students from Human Geography (17) and Teknologj, innovasjon of kunnskap (17), with the addition of a few students from the program in Gender Studies (4). The primary focus is on qualitative methods used by human geographers, but the course seeks to be wide and general enough to meet all participating students' needs.

Teaching in the spring of 2018 consisted of 10 lectures and 7 seminars.

The examination form is a 6 hour written final exam. In addition, there is a requirement of two completed seminar assignments.

Course Results 2018

No. of Students completing the course: 37

Grade Distribution

A: 9, B: 12, C:14, D:2, E:0, F:0,

Course Evaluation

The course was evaluated using an online survey consisting of three open-ended questions and an opportunity to submit additional comments. Response rate was relatively low, as only 8 students out of 38 responded.

Question 1: What did you find most useful about the course?

Representative answer:

“Overviewing different approaches within qualitative method as well as an abundant discussion on ethics and reflexivity during the seminars”

The following statement captures the general sentiment of students that provided an answer to this question. Most expressed how they found particular value in becoming more familiarized with a variety of different methods and approaches to qualitative research.

Question 2: What do think could be improved?

Representative answer:

“No more 6 hour exams, and better structure on the seminar form”

Although the answers differ a bit more here, 4 out of 8 students mentioned how they thought that the current organization of the seminars could be improved upon. Several students explicitly suggested making seminars required in order to improve attendance.

Question 3: What form of engagement was of most value to you with regards to learning about qualitative methods (lectures, seminars, assignments, discussion with peers, independent study etc)?

Representative answer:

“Lectures”

Confirming the fact that students found the seminars somewhat wanting, lectures were mentioned by all responding students as the most valuable engagement form for their learning.

Question 4: Additional comments/feedback/ideas?

“Several of the lecturers has been so helpful, and their interest and sharing their experiences has been great!”

An important sentiment captured by this answer is that several students expressed how they found value not only in the diversity of methods introduced, but also in the diversity of voices in the course (6 lecturers for 10 lectures). One student also suggested the need for an exam seminar, as they found the exam form confusing. In the weeks leading up the final exam, a relatively large number of students contacted me with questions about the final exam. This was despite the fact that the students had been given examples of exams from previous years to help them prepare. This suggests that the current exam format is perhaps a bit confusing.

Recommendations

Overall, the overall feedback from students who responded to the course evaluation was positive. However, based on the evaluation as well as my experience from being course coordinator, I would recommend the following changes:

- *Revise seminar form.* Make participation in 80-90% of the seminars a requirement in order to ensure that they are productive for attendees.
- *Replace written exam with a final paper in the form of a research proposal.* My sense is that the class would be more useful for students, and would benefit from better student engagement, if the current 6 hour written exam was replaced by a final paper. Making this final paper be in the form of a research proposal could potentially bring a number of benefits: 1) facilitate more in-depth thinking around research design and how to integrate research questions, methods and techniques for analysis; 2) have the students walk away from the course with written text that can

be used in the development of their MA-thesis; 3) train students in the format of proposal-writing, which is a practical skill that has utility beyond the course and study program.

- *Revise reading list and lecture themes to match with available competencies among staff.*

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