

Course analysis GeoN06, autumn 2021

Course leader: Anne Birgitte Nielsen

GeoN06 is a master's level course open to students from geology, archaeology, geography, biology and related subjects. The course is built around a project work running through the course and a series of lectures by different teachers, with different specializations within paleoecology and related methodologies.

A course evaluation questionnaire was handed out in paper form on the last day of the course, and afterwards made available to fill in online. 16 of the 18 students on the course have responded to the course evaluation questionnaire; 11 on paper and 5 online. Most have replied to all questions, a few have skipped one. The question about the course literature was by accident only included in the paper questionnaire, not online (but the response seems to be in line with earlier years).

Over-all scores for total impression of the course are high, three to five on the five-grade scale. The lectures, exercises and excursion likewise get scores of three to five. The course literature also get scores of three to five, but with a slightly lower average score. The most popular part of the course seems to be the fieldwork, which gets scores of four to five. The literature seminars score two to five points. The project work also scores two to five points.

The average scores are similar to previous years (2020 shown in figure 2 for comparison), but has a slightly larger spread, probably reflecting the larger number of participants in the course this year, and possibly also their more diverse background (there were no archaeology students and few international students in 2020). The lower scores for the seminars in 2021 may be related to the higher number of students. In 2020, every student gave two presentations of different papers, and had feedback in between which they should then incorporate in their second presentation. This was not possible in 2021 due to time constraints; however, a better system for constructive feedback on the seminars will be implemented next year regardless of student numbers, so the learning from the presentations can be maximised.

It is clear that the project work in 2021 for many students worked better than in 2020 (eight scores of "excellent" versus none in 2020). This is probably due to being back to on campus teaching. Due to the pandemic, the group work in 2020 took place almost entirely online, which was difficult to organise well. This contrasted with the seminars, which actually worked very well online. However, for a few students the project work was less well evaluated, with scores of average or below. This could still be related to the pandemic, where we saw a much higher than normal degree of absence due to illness/symptoms, which caused problems with the group work in some groups.

The point scores, as well as the open text comments reflect that the students are generally still very happy with the content and overall structure of the course, which we will therefore maintain next year.

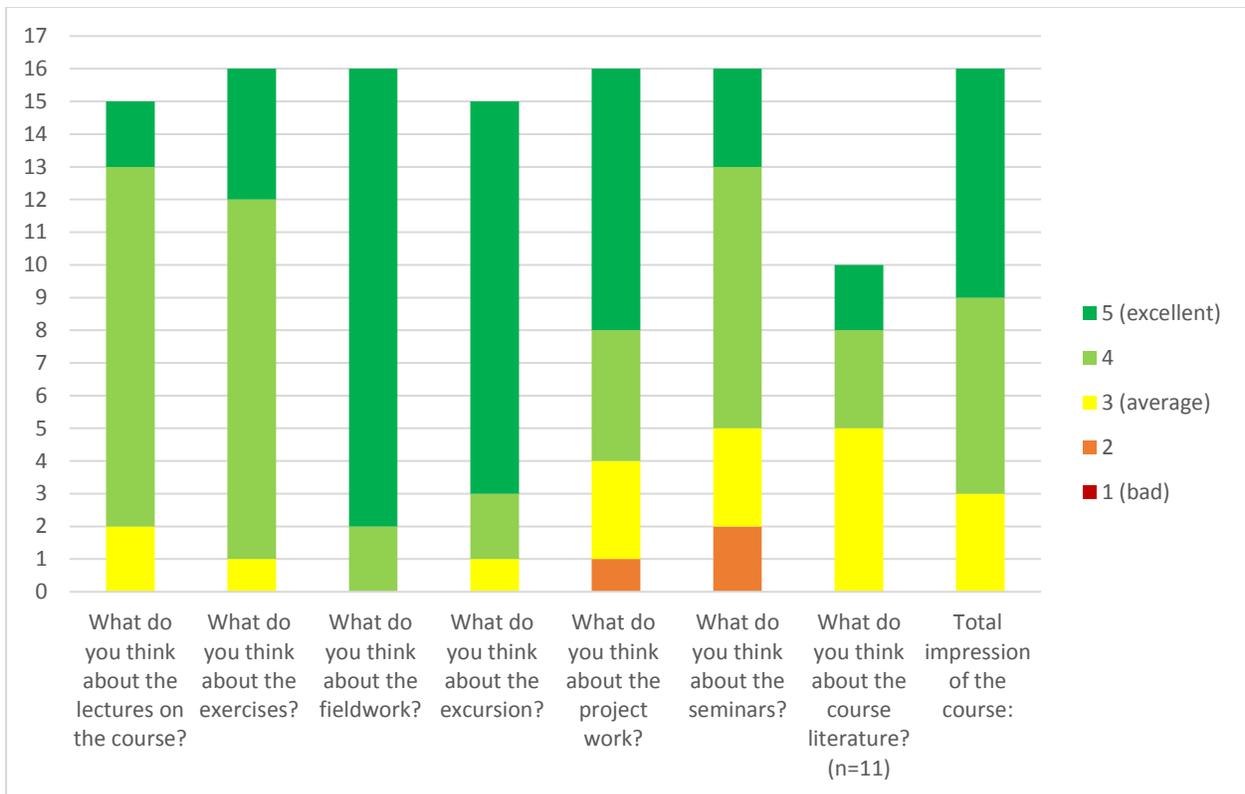


Figure 1: Point scores from the course evaluation questionnaire

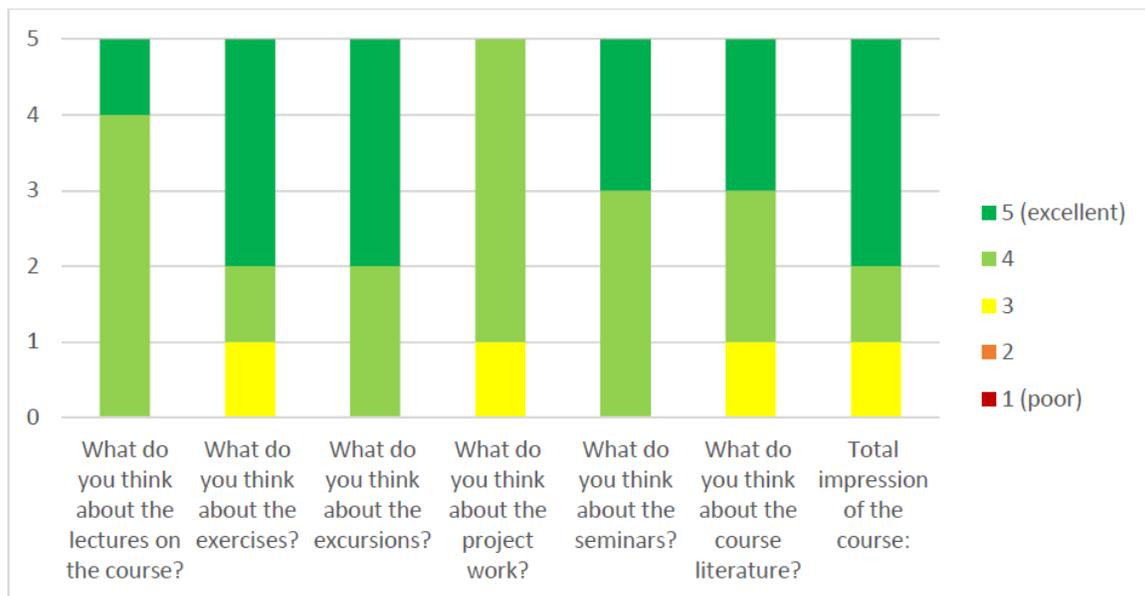


Figure 2: Points scores from the 2020 course evaluation.

In addition to the above questions, the students were asked to score the level of the course (compared to previous knowledge) and the workload as low, appropriate or high. The results are shown below:

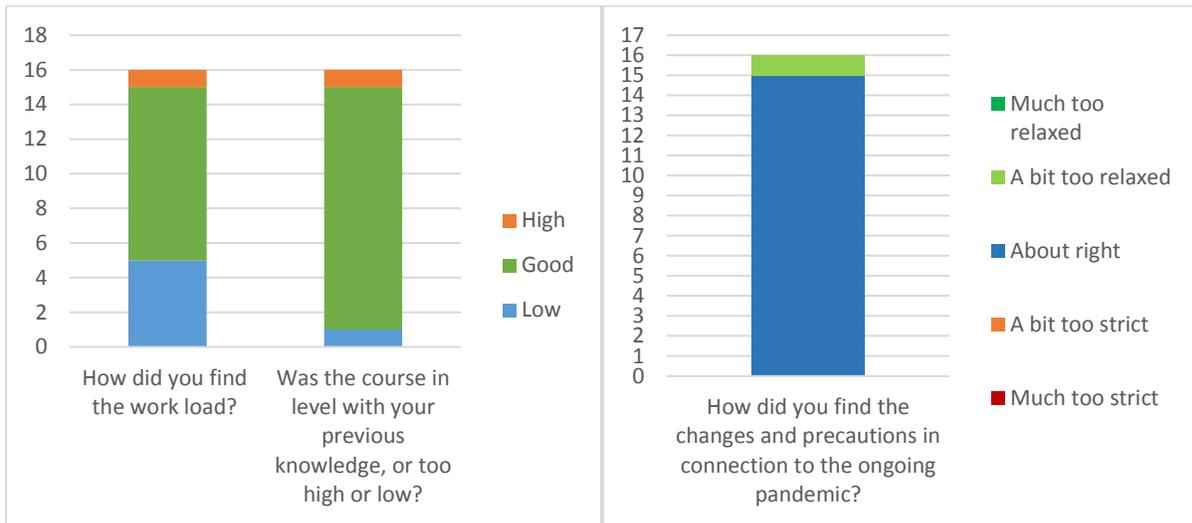


Figure 3: Scores for workload, previous knowledge and pandemic precautions

Regarding the workload, most students found it appropriate, one found it high, and a few thought it could have been higher. The deadlines for the group work and individual reports have been deliberately spread more the last two years compared to the past, which seems to work better for the students and make the workload more balanced. One student commented that more time was needed for reading the course literature and to understand the methods on a deeper level, while several commented that the course was relaxed and non-stressful, and one that they could have been made to do more. So it's probably not possible to make everyone happy, but the balance seems about right. For the students who find the workload too low, it might help if the teachers placed some more emphasis on the importance of also reading the course literature during the course.

As for the level of the course, most students found it appropriate, one too high and one too low. Especially considering the diverse backgrounds of the students on this course, this balance seems to be quite good and can probably not be improved much.

A new question in the course evaluation this year was about the corona restrictions. Most students found the level about right, one that it was a bit too relaxed, with the comment that people stand too close to each other in the hallways. This is something the department is aware of, but difficult to solve entirely.

Some useful ideas can be gained from the students' free text comments in the surveys. There were a few comments that it would be nice to place a bit more emphasis on the application of different methods, for example diatoms. This could be incorporated into the lectures.

In the question of what there could be more of on the course, several students mentioned geomagnetics. There has been more time set off for this in the past, and it is maybe something that we could possibly increase again. Otherwise, more time for microscope exercises, computer exercises, poster work and independent reading were all mentioned. Not all these wishes can of course be met at

the same time. Nothing was suggested to be taken out of the course, but it was suggested to modify the diatom part to focus more on application/ecological interpretations.

There were positive comments about the replacement assignment for the excursion, including that they learned a lot from it. As this is a new course element that has not been tried before, it is very good to hear that the format worked for those who were prevented from taking place in the excursion.

The subjects of cosmogenic radionuclides and radiocarbon dating have in the past proved somewhat difficult for some students. Therefore, a Q&A session was introduced last year to clarify difficult concepts. This seems to have helped, judging from comments (no-one commented that this is a particularly difficult subject this year).

One comment was raised that no examining component should be larger than 7,5 hp, which the project report is (8 hp). We are aware of this, and will update the next version of the course syllabus so that the report and exam will both be 7.5 hp (instead of 8 and 7 hp respectively as they are now).

Overall, the free text comments like the point scores were mostly very positive. Like this one: "Very fun course! Great teachers that are engaged and like to teach! That is something that not every course have!"

In conclusion, we will adjust the syllabus for points but keep the course outline for HT 2022 much like it was this year, and hopefully all teaching can again be on site.

Lund, 2022.02.23

Written by

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Read and approved by the student's course representative

Simon Eng