Course analysis GeoN06, autumn 2018
Course leader: Anne Birgitte Nielsen

GeoN06 is a master’s level course open to students from geology, archaeology, geography 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.

Fifteen out of the sixteen students on the course answered the course evaluation, where they were asked to score different course elements on a scale from 1 (bad) to 5 (excellent). The scores are shown below. In addition, the students could write free text comments.

Over-all scores for total impression of the course are high, between four and five on the five-grade scale. The exercises, fieldwork, excursions, literature and project work get scores of three to five, the lectures three to four. The opinion of the seminars are slightly more divided, with points from two to five.

The points reflect that the students seem to be happy with the content and overall structure of the course, which we will therefore maintain next year.
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.

Regarding the workload, no students found it too low, most found it appropriate, and three students too high. The deadlines for the group work and individual reports have been spread out more this year compared to the past, which seemed to work better for the students and make the workload more balanced than last year.

Regarding the level of the course, four found it high compared to their previous knowledge, the rest good. Considering the diverse backgrounds of the students on this course, it is difficult to match everyone’s previous knowledge perfectly, but (also considering the overall satisfaction with the course) the balance seems to be quite good. One aspect that might be improved is encouraging the students to study the course literature more during the course and in preparation for lectures, rather than just before the exam. This might be achieved by providing a better reading guide to which book chapters relate to which lectures at the beginning of the course.

The number of literature seminars have been increased this year compared to previously, partly because they have been very popular with the students in the
past. This also gave the opportunity to include seminars relating to more of the subjects covered in the different lectures. This of course adds to the work load of the course, perhaps contributing to the slight decrease in the score for the seminars. However, it is a good way to introduce scientific articles on subjects across the course content, as also commented by some students. And in terms of workload, it largely pays back, as many of the seminar articles are useful references for the project work. A few students remarked that they would like more feedback on the presentations they give at the seminars, which is a good point that will be implemented next year.

In the comments it was remarked that the range of subjects covered in the lectures is quite wide, which could be confusing. This is on the other hand also part of the nature of the course, which aims to cover a wide range of palaeoecological methods.

The subjects of cosmogenic radionuclides and radiocarbon dating were pointed out to be somewhat difficult for some students. Some suggested to have more time for this subject, for example in the form of a Q&A session to clarify difficult concepts. We will test that next year to see if it helps with understanding.

Another topic identified as difficult was the statistical analysis of proxy data. This is introduced in a lecture, and then included in a practical exercise using the project data. However, the results of the practical were considered difficult to interpret. The practical will therefore next year be expanded with a smaller example dataset for illustration before application to the more noisy actual dataset.

A new set-up for the excursion was introduced this year, with two overnight stays in Småland, to get more out of the long drive, and allow more time for active work in the field at Linnés Råshult. This worked very well, and we plan to repeat it. One student suggested having a bit fewer (a presumably longer) stops on the excursion, which is something we are considering. The optimal length of stops also depends on the weather conditions, which in November are unpredictable by nature.

In conclusion, we will keep the course outline for HT 2019 much like it was this year, and improve on details where we can.