

UniPID Virtual Studies

Internal Evaluation Report 2017



**UniPID Virtual Studies
Internal Evaluation Report 2017
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The Finnish University Partnership for International Development
(UniPID)
University of Jyväskylä
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Summary

This internal evaluation analyzes the experiences of students and coordinators that have taken part in UniPID Virtual Studies courses. UniPID Virtual Studies are a selection of courses organized by UniPID member universities, dealing with topics related to international development. After completing 5 courses students can compile them into a Minor in Sustainable Development. The language of all courses is English, and they are all organized through an online learning environment.

The objective of the evaluation is to assess the quality of the Virtual Studies program. The data for this evaluation was gathered through two questionnaires, one for students and one for course coordinators, which were sent out twice, once in 2014 and once in 2015.

The central results that emerge from the evaluation suggest that students enjoy the topics of the courses and find them useful for their own studies. Learning results are also satisfactory; nearly all students report understanding the topic of the course better after having completed it.

The evaluation does also highlight some problems that impact the overall quality of the Virtual Studies. These include

- problems with administrative processes;
- confusion with the general/specialized distinction of the courses;
- inconsistencies in course quality;
- quality of student interaction; and
- lack of feedback from course coordinators.

The report formulates some recommendations based on these results that can be used to further develop the quality of the UniPID Virtual Studies.

Recommendations include clear communication of administrative guidelines, reformulation of the general/specialized distinction in the module, drafting of quality guidelines and standards, workshops on virtual pedagogies, workshops that focus on sharing best practices, and peer feedback and self-assessment.

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction | 5 |
| 1.1. Evaluation process | 6 |
| 1.2. Background information on courses and students..... | 7 |
| 1.3. Course Feedback..... | 9 |
| 1.3.1. Student experience in general | 10 |
| 1.3.2. Course design: schedule and structure..... | 11 |
| 1.3.3. Course content: material and assignments | 12 |
| 1.3.4. Student interaction | 13 |
| 1.3.5. Instruction and pedagogy | 14 |
| 1.3.6. Assessment and feedback..... | 15 |
| 1.3.7. Course technology: online platform | 16 |
| 1.3.8. Coordinators' course feedback | 16 |
| 2. Results from the student questionnaire | 19 |
| 2.1. Respondent profile | 19 |
| 2.2. General student experience..... | 21 |
| 2.2.1. Highlights of the Virtual Studies | 21 |
| 2.2.2. Downfalls of the Virtual Studies | 23 |
| 2.3. Course design, schedule and structure..... | 28 |
| 2.4. Course content: assignments and material | 32 |
| 2.5. Student interaction | 38 |
| 2.6. Course descriptions and expectations | 42 |
| 2.7. Instruction and pedagogy, student-teacher interaction..... | 47 |
| 2.8. Assessment and feedback..... | 49 |
| 2.9. Technical issues & language..... | 52 |
| 2.10. Relevance to studies and career | 55 |
| 2.11. Future courses | 56 |
| 3. Results from the coordinator questionnaire | 58 |
| 3.1. General coordination experience | 59 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 3.2. Call for Course Proposals | 61 |
| 3.3. Course design: schedule & structure | 64 |
| 3.4. Course content: assignments and material | 67 |
| 3.5. Student interaction | 69 |
| 3.6. Teacher-student interaction and instruction..... | 71 |
| 3.7. Virtual Pedagogies | 73 |
| 3.8. Assessment & Feedback | 75 |
| 3.9. Coordinators' workload | 77 |
| 3.10. Student feedback | 79 |
| 4. Conclusions and recommendations..... | 79 |
| 4.1. Issue 1: Problems with administrative processes | 80 |
| 4.2. Issue 2: The general/specialized distinction is not clear..... | 81 |
| 4.3. Issue 3: Inconsistencies in course quality | 83 |
| 4.4. Issue 4: Amount and quality of student interaction | 84 |
| 4.5. Issue 5: Feedback from coordinators..... | 85 |
| References | 86 |
| Appendix 1 | 87 |
| Appendix 2 | 91 |
| Appendix 3 | 93 |
| Appendix 4 | 99 |

1. Introduction

UniPID is a network of Finnish universities that strengthens universities' global responsibility. Through institutional cooperation, UniPID advances the interdisciplinary education, research and societal impact of universities on global development.

UniPID advances partnerships between researchers and institutions specialized in global challenges. UniPID supports researchers' participation in international research projects and awards grants for and organizes seminars relating to global challenges. In addition, UniPID supports the interdisciplinary training and networking of development studies doctoral students in Finland.

UniPID promotes research-based policymaking and highlights the importance of higher education and research in facing global challenges. The network markets and applies the expertise of its member universities by facilitating researchers' contribution to development and higher education policy, as well as to the national and international research agenda and funding priorities.

UniPID coordinates and funds a joint virtual studies minor programme in sustainable development and encourages studies and specialization in the field by awarding a yearly Master's award in Development Studies. In addition, UniPID also promotes the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Finnish higher education.

UniPID Virtual Studies are a 25 ECTS minor module in multidisciplinary development studies, titled *Sustainability in Development*, which is a flexible option for students of UniPID member universities, as they are held entirely in an online environment. UniPID offers 10-20 virtual courses every academic year. The courses are free of charge and students are free to choose courses that most interest them. There are two types of courses based on how much prior knowledge they require from students: general and specialized courses.

To complete the 25-credit module, students can pick and choose five UniPID courses for their syllabus. At least two of the chosen courses should be on the general level. In order to ensure that the Virtual Studies stay up-to-date and relevant, UniPID holds an annual funding call for new courses and for updates to existing courses. Students can also complete individual courses without needing to complete the module.

In 2014, UniPID undertook an initiative to assess and improve the quality of the Virtual Studies. As the first step in the overall evaluation, UniPID prepared a questionnaire to gather data on the experiences of both students and course coordinators regarding the study program. The first set of data was gathered during fall 2014. At the end of Fall semester 2015, a second data set was gathered to ensure the results' relevance and timeliness. Based on this data, the report was compiled in 2016.

The evaluation was built to focus on the experienced benefits and usefulness of the studies. Therefore, the evaluation was mostly targeted to concern the course contents, virtual pedagogies and study structures. Both the students and course coordinators were questioned on these topics. This was understood to benefit the evaluation through enabling comparisons between the sets of obtained information.

This report is the outcome of the evaluation process, consisting of the evaluation process description, results and recommendations. The report also includes a summary of the previously gathered information and statistics on course participation and course feedback. This information was used as the baseline on which the first assumptions and objectives of the evaluation were based on.

1.1. Evaluation process

It was decided early on in the evaluation process that the overall objective of the evaluation was the assessment of the quality of the program. Therefore, it was decided that in this evaluation the focus is on course content, as well as on the usefulness of the Virtual Studies from a student perspective.

Consequently, information that was already available was inspected. This information was used to construct a basic understanding of how courses are run, how things have changed over the years and of how students have experienced and experience the studies. The background information included various statistics from 2008 to 2014 as well as course feedback from the academic year 2013-2014.

The evaluation focused on some aspects the program that were identified based on the information that was available. These aspects were:

- Course design: schedule and structure
- Course content: assignments and material
- Student interaction

- Course descriptions and course offerings
- Instruction and pedagogy, student-teacher interaction
- Assessment and feedback
- Technical issues and language
- Relevance to studies and career

Once the background information had been analyzed and aspects identified, two comprehensive questionnaires were compiled: one for the course coordinators and one for the course participants. Though the questionnaires were tailored for the needs of each group, they were also modified to make comparisons between two datasets possible.

The surveys were designed to be anonymous and to focus on the students' overall experience of the Virtual Studies, not on their experiences of individual courses. The questionnaires included a variety of open questions as well as a number of numeral assessments. To increase the number of responses, a small incentive was offered to the participants.

Once the questionnaire data was available it was analyzed and formulated into results and recommendations. The goal was to highlight problematic issues and to craft suggestions on how the Virtual Studies could be further developed.

1.2. Background information on courses and students

Statistics on the number of participants and courses as well as a summary of the course feedback were used to provide a baseline for the evaluation. This data was gathered from existing sources of information for UniPID's internal use.

UniPID member universities had organized 35 courses between 2008 and summer 2014, when the background data for this evaluation was gathered. Twenty of these courses were on the general level, and fifteen on the specialized level. "A course" in this sense is a set of three course instances, one semester each, which is the length of a single course funding contract.

It is to be noted that the numbers in this section are drawn from the UniPID course registration database and the course reporting done by course coordinators after a course is completed. Some courses also accept registrations for their courses through other registration systems, which makes the numbers presented here indicative.

The annual number of course completions stayed generally between 300 and 500 from 2008 to 2015. For example, in 2015, 458 students completed credits as a part of UniPID Virtual Studies. By January 2016 459 people had registered to complete the UniPID minor since April 2012, and at least 70 registered students had received their certificates for successfully completing the minor.

The amount of students taking the Virtual Studies varies significantly between universities and from year to year. Overall, the highest number of students comes from the universities of Helsinki and Tampere. The lowest numbers of students are from Aalto University, Tampere University of Technology¹ and University of Lapland. The reasons for this variation have been understood to be based on the institutions' relative sizes, ranges of study offerings and efforts in promoting the UniPID Virtual Studies.

During the academic year 2014-2015, the courses with the highest number of applicants were Good Governance, Corruption and Development (174), Concepts of Sustainability (116), UN, Peace and Security (111) and Introduction to the United Nations (104). The average amount of people applying for a course during the academic year was 87.4.

The amount of students taking a course has, on average, been around 40 to 50. In the academic year 2014 – 2015 the number of students completing a course varied from 7 to 60. The average amount of students completing a course was 31, which is approximately half of the course participants.

It is to be noted that high drop-out rates are something that plague instances of online learning more generally. Tyler-Smith (2006) reported that attrition rates from 20 percent to 80 percent have been reported on online courses. Because of these high drop-out rates some specific questions were included in the evaluation regarding the reasons students chose specific courses. These were hoped to shed light on the accuracy of course descriptions and the clarity of the general/specialized-distinction and to help obtain more information on the motivations of students when it comes to registering for course and dropping out from a course.

¹ Since 2015, Tampere University of Technology is no longer a UniPID member university.

1.3. Course Feedback

Between 21 October 2013 and 30 December 2015 a total of 338 students filled out the UniPID course feedback form. The feedback concerns 13 different courses. Students were most active in giving feedback during the academic year 2013-2014, when they provided a total of 206 replies. This section of the evaluation is based on these replies.

The overall trends in course feedback indicate that the courses as well as their contents are highly appreciated. Assignments and materials are generally thought to be beneficial to the courses' learning objectives and the courses seem to meet the expectations of the participants rather well. That being said, the results are not fully conclusive for the Virtual Studies programme as response rate is not a hundred percent and the replies concern only one course, not the programme as a whole.

The course feedback form (Appendix 1) contained various statements that the respondents had to grade on a scale of Strongly disagree/Disagree/Neutral/Agree/Strongly agree. There were also two statements that had to be assessed on a three-point scale of Too low/Just right/Too high and Too easy/Just right/Too difficult. There were also some open questions and multiple-choice questions. For the purposes of quantifying the results, the options were given numeric values, e.g. Strongly disagree = 1, Neutral = 3 and Strongly agree = 5.

The feedback does form a good baseline for the evaluation and the questionnaires. Some issues that stand out from the feedback require addressing in the evaluation process. These topics include interaction and communication taking place during the course, feedback, teaching methods and course material. Some picks regarding these aspects are presented in the sections below.

1.3.1. Student experience in general

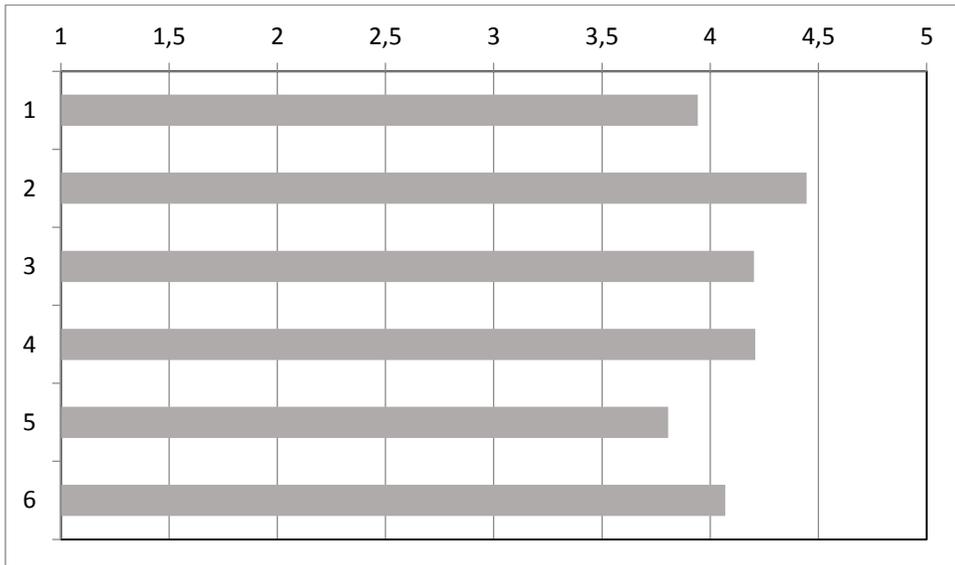


Diagram 1: Student experience in general, 2013-2015, n = 333-336.

1. I have a better understanding of sustainable development as a result of the course
2. I have a better understanding of the subject of the course than I did before the course.
3. I have a better understanding of the concepts taught during the course.
4. I found the course interesting.
5. The course met my expectations.
6. The course was a useful part of my studies.

The responses imply that the courses increase the understanding of the students when compared with the amount of knowledge they had before the beginning of the courses. The replies in this section are grouped around the 4.0 mark, implying that they to an extent have a positive general experience of the courses. Most strongly they agree to understanding the subject of the course better than before taking the course, and the least strongly to the course meeting their expectations.

1.3.2. Course design: schedule and structure

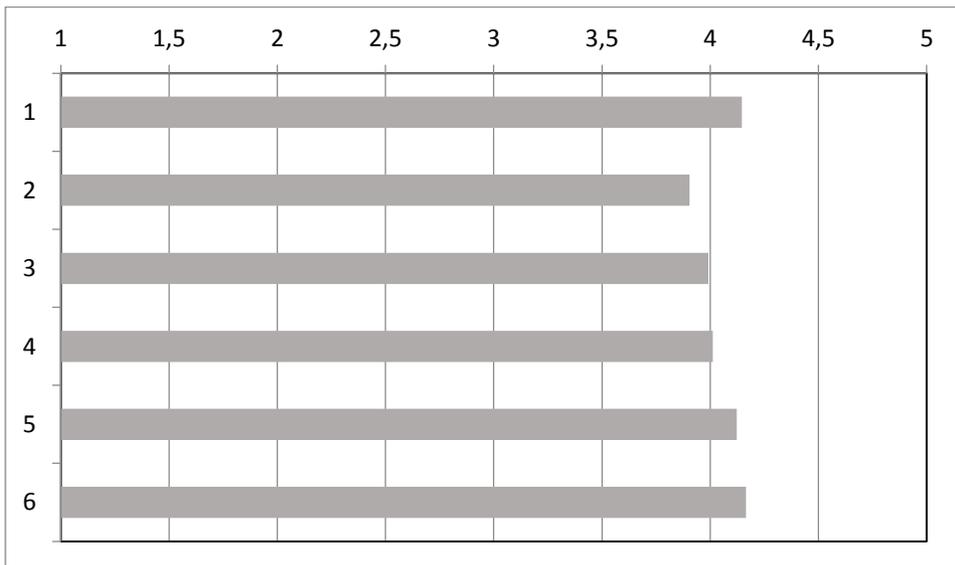


Diagram 2: Course design, 2013-2015, n = 334-337.

1. The course fits into my study programme.
2. The objectives of the course were clear to me.
3. The course met the stated objectives.
4. There was enough time to complete the assignment(s).
5. The course was well planned in advance.
6. The duration of the course was sufficient.

Again, the respondents' scores cluster around the 4.0 (Agree) mark of the scale. There are no large deviations, and it can be concluded that the students found the courses generally well designed and suitable for them.

1.3.3. Course content: material and assignments

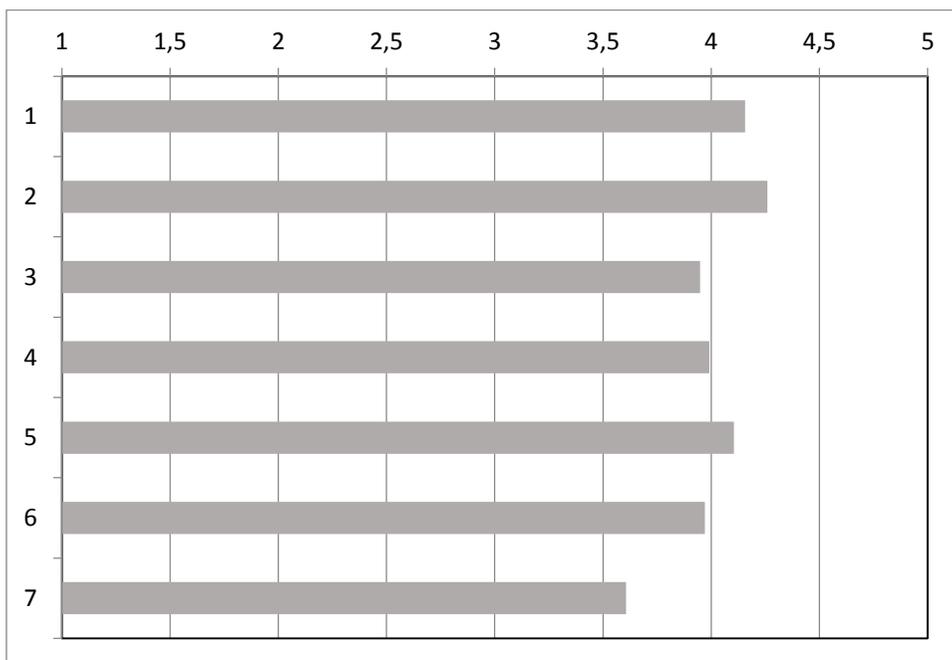


Diagram 3: Course content, 2013-2015, n = 332-335.

1. I found the contents of the course interesting.
2. I learned from the contents of the course
3. Course material was presented clearly.
4. The course material was interesting.
5. The course material contributed to my understanding of the subject or concepts presented in the course.
6. The assignments/group work helped me to better understand the subject/concepts presented in the course.
7. The quality of virtual material (video lectures) was high.

In this section, the marks again cluster around the 4.0 (Agree) mark of the scale, except for the last statement, which has a lower average score. The statement “I learned from the contents of the course” gained the highest average score of statements in this section. Even though the average is still well above neutral, the quality of virtual material (video lectures) received the lowest average score in the students’ feedback related to the course contents.

Based on the replies, the course material was most often thought to be well-chosen and tailored to fit the subjects and module at hand. In their freeform replies, the students specified that materials that brought up something new and recent on the topic were considered more interesting. More practical papers and case studies were especially thought to benefit one's learning better than more theory-centered articles.

However, some students found the provided material more useful and successful than others. Most common point of critique towards the course materials presented in the freeform replies was their lack of variety and arrangement. Students generally hoped to gain information from various points of view, instead of focusing on only one or two aspects of the topic. Additionally, some students were disappointed in the materials when they were not given an opportunity to reflect on what they had learned through an assignment or a discussion. Generally, the course participants hoped to see more video material and an increased variety of assignments.

1.3.4. Student interaction

There were no Likert scale questions in student feedback that investigated student interaction, but we can draw some conclusions based on the replies students provided to the freeform questions.

Student interaction is generally appreciated by the students as it enables the students to reflect on the given assignments and topics with others with a different life experience. Online discussions are the most commonly used and recognized form of student interaction used on the courses. However, student interaction and online discussions also divided opinions.

Discussions were mentioned by students both as their favorite and least favorite part of the course. All in all, 36 students mentioned group work and/or student interaction when they thought of their favorite part of the course. 40 students mentioned student interaction and/or group work as their least favorite part of the course. The total number of replies was 336.

Student interaction was chosen as one of the focus areas of the evaluation questionnaires. Multiple questions were dedicated to student interaction, including ones relating to encouragement towards it, as well as its success and sufficiency. Through the coordinators' questionnaire, it was hoped that an insight

could be gained to what extent the course coordinators consider student interaction necessary and successful.

1.3.5. Instruction and pedagogy

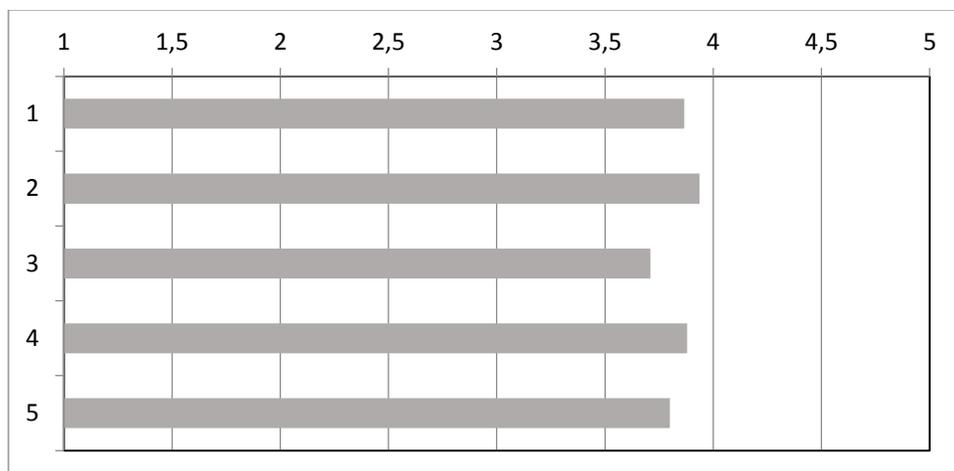


Diagram 4: Instruction and Pedagogy, 2013-2015, n = 324 – 336.

1. Instructions were clear and useful.
2. Teaching was qualified.
3. Teaching supported my learning during the course.
4. Teaching was well planned and organized.
5. Illustration (equipment used) was clear and useful.

When compared to the statements in the previous sections, it can be noticed that the average scores of the statements dealing with instruction have slightly lower average scores.

According to course feedback the course coordinators use varying teaching methods, the success of which varies from course to course, time to time and person to person. Therefore, students identified a variety of factors when asked what they learned the most from. Some enjoyed the course materials while others did not, some complimented the group discussions that others disliked.

However, the replies seem mostly to relate to the assignments they had completed during the course and not the teaching in its traditional form. The assignments were sometimes perhaps the only thing the students identified as something that had supported their learning during the course. This may be due to

the virtual nature of the studies which makes it hard to identify teaching and pedagogics in their non-physical form.

In the evaluation, the main emphasis has been on virtual pedagogies and teaching methods. As the Virtual Studies are held online, the pedagogical elements employed during the courses become even more crucial – especially when the quality of studies is considered. Teaching is, however, a topic of which everyone has an individual opinion and which in turn presented a great challenge to this evaluation process whose goal it is to produce somewhat generalizable data instead of scattered verdicts.

1.3.6. Assessment and feedback

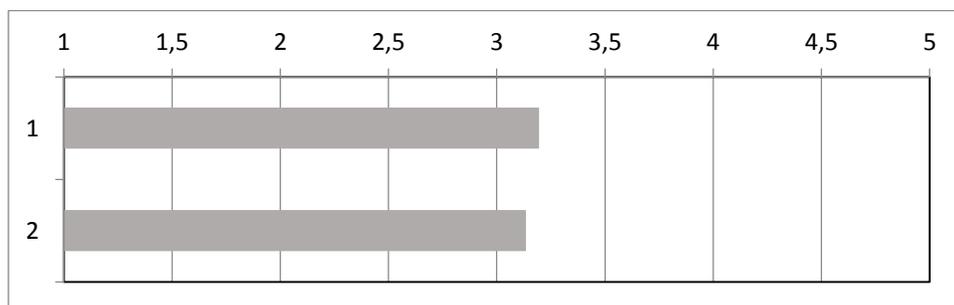


Diagram 5: Assessment and feedback, 2013-2015, n= 333-337.

1. I received sufficient feedback and direction during the course.
2. I learned from the feedback and direction given during the course.

The assessment and feedback that the students received from the teachers during courses were scored the lowest of all the aspects included in the course feedback, and indeed the only one whose average was closest to 3 (Neutral).

In the freeform section, the students expressed their feeling of not having enough constructive feedback during the course to support their learning. The students often felt that the feedback given after the final assignment/as the course was ending was not sufficient and hoped to receive more individual feedback, for example on their assignments throughout the course. Some students also brought up the teacher's overall lack of participation and interaction with the students as well as the lack of sufficient instruction. These were experienced as obstacles on their way to successful learning. Students hoped for more information on the

expectations the teachers have regarding the assignments as well as the assessment criteria they use.

These responses imply that there is definitely room for improvement in the feedback and assessment aspect of the Virtual Studies, and that this aspect should be considered in more detail in the analysis of the evaluation results.

1.3.7. Course technology: online platform

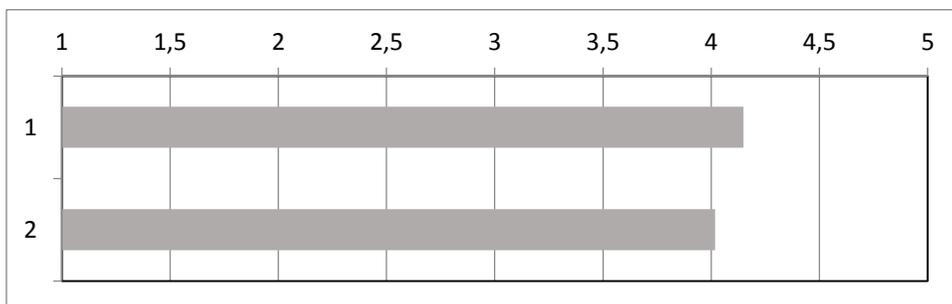


Diagram 6: Course technology, 2013-2015, n = 331-334.

1. The virtual learning environment was easy to use.
2. Instructions for the virtual learning environment were clear and useful.

Based on the average scores that cluster around 4.0 related to course technology, it can be stated that the students generally find the virtual learning environment easy to use and the instructions for its use clear and useful.

1.3.8. Coordinators' course feedback

A course feedback form was also created for course coordinators (Appendix 2). There was a total of seven replies to this form between 2013 and 2014. The coordinators' course feedback was shorter than the students' feedback form, and it included only three questions which had to be assessed on a three-point scale. The coordinators were given more opportunities for freeform replies than the students.

Based on their course feedback, the coordinators seemed to be especially puzzled by the motivation and motives of course participants. Some thought that a number of students were not taking the course seriously enough and therefore a negative effect on the discussions, assignments and the learning of others. Additionally, many of the coordinators paid attention to the cumbersome process of selecting

students and the high drop-out rates. Course coordinators found it very irritating and annoying that the students registered for a course but did not follow through, especially when the students were registered to the UniPID Minor Programme and could “jump the registration queue” in cases where a course was overbooked.

In their course feedback, course coordinators paid attention to many of the same things the students had brought up in their feedback, such as student interaction and teacher to student communication. They also identified that some students get easily overwhelmed by the amount of information. On the other hand, they occasionally felt overloaded with questions from students who had not read the instructions.

Conclusion: Course feedback

To conclude the section on course feedback with, it can be stated that the students who gave feedback had overall a positive perception of the courses they had attended. The students gained better understanding of the course topic as a result of attending the course. Students found the courses interesting, the courses mostly met their expectations and were useful. The course objectives seemed generally clearly formulated and were met successfully, the courses were well planned and scheduled, and the courses fit the students' study program.

According to the students, the contents of the courses were interesting, useful for learning and presented clearly. The course material was interesting and contributed to their understanding of the topic of the course. They found the assignments useful as well. Some students were slightly critical of the quality of video lectures, but still more people found their quality high than criticized them.

Student interaction and/or group work was considered equally as the students' least favorite and most favorite parts of the course. Many students appreciated the chance to reflect on the tasks and content of the course together with other students. On the other hand, others referenced problems with scheduling group work and motivation of fellow group members.

Course instruction and pedagogy was valued slightly lower than the general experience, course design and contents. There seems to be some challenges in providing sufficient support for students learning, even though the instructions were mostly seen as clear and useful, and teaching was considered qualified, well planned and organized and the illustration clear and useful.

The assessment and feedback the students received in the courses was scored lowest of all the aspects in the student feedback. Many students brought up the problems that they had with grading and receiving feedback in their replies to open questions. This implies that there is room for improvement in the feedback and assessment aspect of the Virtual Studies.

The virtual learning environment was found easy to use and the instructions for its use were considered clear and useful.

2. Results from the student questionnaire

As said, the evaluation information presented in the previous chapter was used as the baseline for the evaluation questionnaire (Appendix 3). The evaluation questionnaire contained short answer questions, freeform questions that permitted longer answers, multiple choice questions, scaled questions and statements that had to be evaluated on a Likert scale.

In the analysis of the responses, the structure of the questionnaire and its succession was broken down, and the data was grouped under wider sections that focus on the quality of certain aspects of the virtual studies programme. For example, responses that dealt with course content, material and assignments were grouped under one section.

The full list of aspects under which the data was grouped includes:

- Course design: schedule and structure;
- Course content: assignments and material;
- Student interaction;
- Course descriptions and course offerings;
- Instruction and pedagogy, student-teacher interaction;
- Assessment and feedback;
- Technical issues and language;
- Relevance to studies and career; and
- Future courses.

In this evaluation report, the questions that produced a numeric output are handled through average scores that range from 1 to 5. The average score gives an indication of the opinion of the students as a group. Another factor that plays into the interpretation of the results is standard deviation, which measures how far on average the replies lay from the overall average score. A high standard deviation indicates divided opinion, while a low standard deviation shows that students gave similar replies to the question.

2.1. Respondent profile

This chapter serves as the introduction to the evaluation, characterizing the respondents who responded to the questionnaire and outlining issues related to

students' general experience of the programme. Many of the issues outlined in this chapter will be dwelt upon in more detail later in this evaluation.

In 2014 the questionnaire was sent to students who were registered for the UniPID Minor on the UniPID website. The e-mail was sent out to a total of 316 addresses. The amount of replies was 26, which makes the final response rate about 8.2 %.

In 2015, the questionnaire was sent to all who had registered on a UniPID course since the end of the last data collection period. The e-mail was sent out to a total of 1906 addresses. As the amount of replies was 18, accounting for expired and duplicate addresses, the final response rate was about 1 %.

The total number of student replies was 44. In general, the respondents were evenly spread out between different age categories and home institutions. The largest amount of responses (9) was received from University of Turku and the smallest (1) from Tampere University of Technology. The largest age group was 22-25 years old (13 respondents) closely followed by 26-29 years old (12 respondents). The smallest age group, with only one respondent, was 18-21 years old.

Out of the 44 students who replied, the major subjects of 36 could be found out from the UniPID internal study database. The largest groups among were those who majored in a field of study belonging to humanities (9 respondents) and social sciences (8 respondents). Five students majored in a field related to education, while four listed a major having to do with business and/or economics. Students majoring in Environmental and Biosciences numbered three, while two students studied law. Other fields of study received at most one mention.

The age spectrum of the respondents was also reflected in the students' stage of studies. The majority (66 %) were studying for their Master's degree when the questionnaire took place. 18 % were pursuing their Bachelor's degree, while 7 % worked on a post-graduate degree. 9 % were not actively pursuing their studies at the time of the questionnaire. About half (52 %) had started UniPID Virtual Studies while studying for their Master's degree, with 41 % and 7 % starting Virtual studies during their Bachelor's and post-graduate degrees, respectively.

The respondents represented a spectrum of experienced and relatively new Virtual Studies students. 16 % had taken one UniPID course while 25 % had taken two. 9 % had taken three and 11 % four courses. 30 % had completed five, thus probably

completing the Minor Programme. 9 % of the respondents had completed more than five courses.

In general, students had not been very familiar with UniPID before beginning the Virtual Studies, testified an average score of 1.92 on a scale of 1 to 5. This was the question that received by far the lowest average score, and it also had a fairly high standard deviation which implicates that students provided a wide range of answers to the question.

According to their responses, students use internet sources, either university websites or pages of networks such as UniPID, to look for information on possible minors and courses. Students had heard about the UniPID Virtual Studies from a variety of sources, the most important ones being their home faculty (16 respondents), the UniPID website (16 respondents), other students (9 respondents) and their home university website (9 respondents). 7 respondents said that they had heard about the Virtual Studies from another source which was not specified.

Students identified interest in sustainable development as the most important reason they were taking UniPID Virtual Studies (91 % of respondents). Other important reasons that students specified were the desire to complete the Minor Programme (61 %) and the convenience of studying online (59 %). Some students indicated that they took Virtual Studies because their home university had little or no courses available on development topics of their interest (36 %) or because of the fact that the Virtual Studies courses complement their own study plan (30 %).

The overwhelming majority of students agreed that the most important aspects influencing their choice of which course to pick were the course topic (82 %) and the course content (77 %). Course dates (55 %) were also considered important.

2.2. General student experience

2.2.1. Highlights of the Virtual Studies

When describing their overall experience of the Virtual Studies, more than half of the students characterized the experience as positive, motivating and educative. 2 of 44 respondents (5 %) described their experience as somewhat negative, while the remaining portion of students said that their overall experience was somewhat mixed, with variance between courses and some aspects that worked well, some which did not.

One of the most praised aspects of the virtual studies in this section was their flexibility and the convenience of studying in an online environment. Students remarked:

“Virtual Studies are an excellent way to study because students have a freedom to choose when they do the tasks, read materials and so on.”

“It was a good option to complete your minor studies conveniently in less than one academic year. On one hand, it was good to be able to do everything online and mostly in your own time[...].”

When considering the main benefits of the Virtual Studies, the main points that students brought up were the convenience of studying online, flexibility, interaction with students and professors from other institutions and different backgrounds, variety of courses on offer that are unavailable in one’s own university and the international aspect of studies. One student remarked:

“Flexibility: it was really easy to fit it into my schedule even when I had many courses where I had to be present. I could also do UniPID courses while I was abroad doing an internship. Now that I think of it, I think it also gave a sense of safety. I really didn’t know much about the subjects I took the courses on, and I think I might have been expressing my opinions and understandings of things more freely than I would have if I was talking with other students face to face.”

Other benefits that were mentioned were the development of practical skills, academic excellence and relevance of the course content. A couple of students pointed out that the studies were relevant to their career/study aspirations as well.

When asked about the highlights of the courses, students mostly discussed materials and assignments as the highlights of the courses. After the course content, the next most popular highlight was student interaction, followed by feedback and assessment, challenges the courses provided and course content in general. A student commented:

“The courses encouraged me to state my own opinions and thoughts to others in a written form. This encouraged me to state my opinions later on in my studies. As a student of International Relations, the UniPID courses gave me valuable insights into more practical aspects of international

politics. This crucially benefited me in my major studies and later on during my Master's level studies."

The majority of students who replied to the question dealing with the easiest aspect of studying online thought that it was the flexibility and convenience of the Virtual Studies. As a related aspect, many mentioned their personal scheduling as one of the easiest aspects. The third most-often mentioned aspect were assignments and the preparation for assignments. Other aspects that were mentioned included language, instructions for assignments, materials, student interaction and finding information about courses. One student remarked:

[The easiest aspect was] "papers that also include personal opinion. In my opinion the virtual studies should be undergone out of personal interest and furthermore help broaden it. Therefore, thinking about the personal opinion can be as satisfying as it is challenging."

The fact that few UniPID member universities have the opportunity to offer a range of courses on development topics increases the value of UniPID Virtual Studies for students from those universities. One student said:

"It's great to have the possibility to learn development studies even if they don't offer those in my department, and to be able to learn from other Finnish universities."

2.2.2. Downfalls of the Virtual Studies

When asked about the aspects of the Virtual Studies that they think should be developed, the students pointed to virtual pedagogies and teaching (45 %), course material (39 %) and course structures (39 %). Another aspect that was mentioned by a significant number of students was course platform & technology (27 %).

Respondents were also asked to specify any other aspects that needed development. Students brought up the view that there is room for development with issues such as course structure, virtual platform, outdated materials, assessment, student interaction, pedagogic methods suitable for virtual learning, consistency between courses, course scheduling and workload management.

One of the aspects that was mentioned time and time again was the variance between courses. While praising the flexibility of the module structure student remarked:

“Overall experience was positive. The possibility to choose freely among all the courses offered enabled me to concentrate on issues I thought interesting. The only negative thing was the variable quality of individual courses.”

Another student commented:

“Some courses are really extremely good and motivate to dig deeper into the topic, whereas some others are just completely too loaded with work and demand an almost 24/7 concentration on them. This is just way too much for virtual studies and a minor program. However, I believe that this is a common problem in all kinds of studies.”

Some students experienced problems with the administrative processes surrounding the Virtual Studies and remarked that this affected their overall experience:

“Courses are really good but getting the grades to my university has been really, really hard. I always need to send several e-mails to get my grades to WebOodi.”

The previous quote is from the 2014 replies, which means that it can be partly explained by the overhaul in administrative processes that UniPID was going through at that point in 2014. More attention has been paid to the fluency of the administrative processes since then, but whether that translates to improved student perception of the administrative processes remains to be seen. Another student in 2015 echoed with similar sentiments:

“Well, some of it has been really good and some of it has been so bad that I sometimes regret that I started this program. My main issue is with the credit transfer which seems impossible to get right with each course. Also, the level of work varies so much that you never know how much you have to do for those 5 credits.”

The question dealing with the challenging aspects of studying online attracted varied responses. The aspects that were mentioned most often were student interaction and group work, and other interactional and communicational aspects. Students remarked:

“Discussions and groups work are dependent of other people. If my group members don’t finish their work on time, I can’t finish my own work on time.”

“Many times long ‘conversations’ in Moodle are not so easy to participate in. Quite often people are not actually conversing but only trying to prove that they’ve read the course material. I prefer other kinds of tasks, and work in small groups if interaction is needed.”

Other challenging aspects that warranted more than one mention were workload, instruction, assignments and materials, and scheduling. A student said:

“If the course wasn’t well structured, it was really difficult to manage time. I even dropped out from one course because of this. Some of the course pages were badly built and it was difficult to use/find info.”

The evaluation questionnaire also included a question that investigated the downfalls of the courses. Only 28 of 44 respondents replied to this question. The most referenced aspects in this group of replies were student interaction and group work. It is followed by feedback and assessment, teacher-student interaction, out-of-date and inadequate materials, workload, scheduling and assignments. All of these aspects were mentioned by more than one student each. Students commented:

“Previously mentioned lack of activity of some students in a group activity that requires everyone’s participation. Very demanding or time consuming essays or learning issues“

“A ridiculous number of students trying to have conversations together. Outdated materials. Now when I think about it, it might also have been problematic that some students really started from the basics (according to the course description, and some know quite a lot already.”

Twelve students altogether replied to this non-compulsory question that asked them to add anything else that they would like UniPID to know. Below are some of the comments people provided:

“I feel many students still do not know about the possibility of studying UniPID studies or about the minor program possibility. There should be more ‘marketing’ of the program within universities.“

“If you offer courses, please make sure they are well compiled. Also, if you don’t have enough teachers then maybe you should reduce the number of students on the course (as harsh as it sounds). Your topics I find very interesting.”

Conclusions: Student experience in general

It can be concluded that the students' overall experience is mostly positive, but nearly all students can come up with some point of criticism or an aspect that needs development, the most prominent of which are the variance between courses, difficulties with administrative processes, excessive workload and poor course planning.

To outline the main benefits, students seemed to appreciate most the convenience of studying online, regardless of location. The opportunity to study a topic which was not available at their home university was also a major selling point to many students. Being able to study in English and to interact with people from various international backgrounds was also appreciated.

When thinking of the easiest aspects of studying online, students highlight flexibility and convenience of the studies, followed by course material and assignments. Assignments and material seem to be the highlight of most students' course experience. Student to student interaction was also a popular choice, with assessment and feedback, when done well, being the third.

Based on students' responses, the most prominent challenging issues are student interaction and group work. Discussions among course participants, for example, require moderation to be effective tools of learning. Group work is both liked and disliked by students.

Scheduling and adapting one's personal schedule to the schedule of the online course was also difficult for some students. This is the counterpart of the convenience of studying online: these kinds of methods do not suit all students equally.

It is clear that the main point of criticism that students present as the downfall of the courses seem to be that group work and student-to-student interaction. Many mentioned their frustration with group work and Moodle discussions.

Every now and then students mentioned outdated and/or inadequate materials and assignments as problematic. Lapses in communication with the course coordinator, and lack of effective assessment and feedback received multiple mentions as well. Another point that was mentioned more than once was the amount of work for the 5 ECTS credits that students receive. Poor planning and structures were referred to occasionally as well.

2.3. Course design, schedule and structure

This section investigates how well the courses have been planned beforehand in the students' view. From here on out, the questions that provide a numeric output will be presented in a diagram such as below (Diagram 7). The questions and statements are numbered, and the diagram shows the average score in question from the combined replies given in 2014 and 2015. Students could provide scores from 1 to 5.

Where it is appropriate, more in-depth diagrams will be used to investigate individual statements.

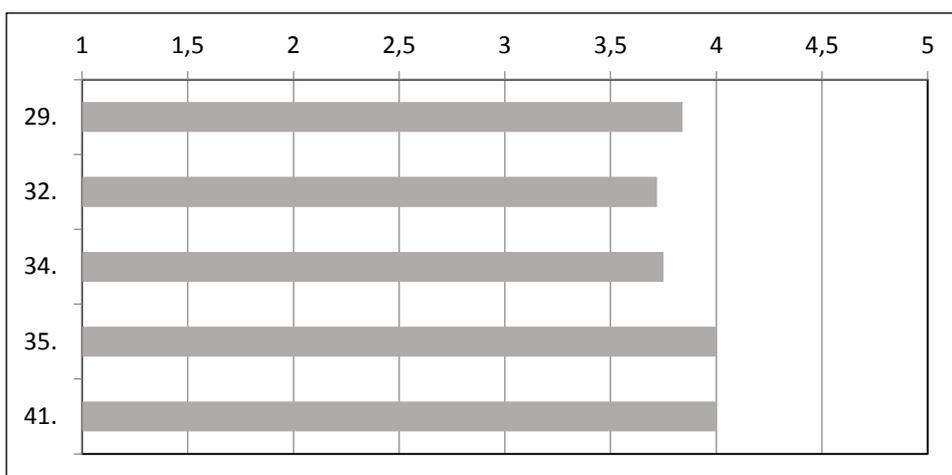


Diagram 7: Statements dealing with course design, 2014-2015, n=43-44.

- 29. The course timeframes have fit well into my personal study plans
- 32. The mount of coursework has been equivalent to 5 ECTS
- 34. The course objectives and structure have been clear and detailed
- 35. The course objectives and structure were followed through during the course
- 41. The timeframes and deadlines given during the course(s) have been achievable and clearly defined

Students seemed to agree that the course timeframes fit their personal study plans fairly well, as they replied with an average score of 3.84.

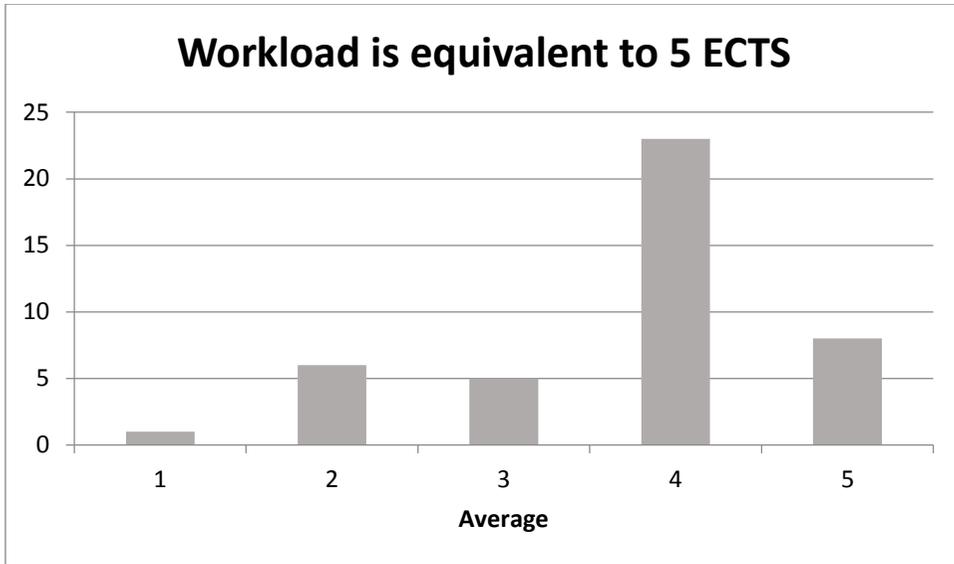


Diagram 8: Responses to "Workload is equivalent to 5 ECTS", 2014-2015, n=43.

As for the coursework's equivalence to 5 ECTS, a combined average score from both years was 3.72, which is neither very high nor very low when compared with replies to other statements. What is interesting about this question, though, is that in the 2015 batch of replies this question had the overall highest standard deviation out of all questions. Thus, it can be stated that while 2014 students were fairly unified in their replies, some of the 2015 respondents very strongly disagreed with the majority of respondents. The diagram (see Diagram 8), which shows results from both 2014 and 2015 datasets, shows that even though the most typical reply from students was a rating of 4 (Good), there are a division of ratings spread throughout the scale, which is somewhat atypical when compared to the results from other statements.

The students rated the clarity and level of detail of the course objectives and structure at an average score of 3.75, with a fairly low standard deviation. This implies that in general the students thought that the course objectives and course structures were quite detailed and clear.

As to how well the course objectives and structure were implemented, the rather low standard deviation testifies that students were fairly unified in their responses. The respondents rated it at an average of 4.0, "Good". The conclusion is that the students think that the course objectives and structure were followed through well.

Students seemed to agree that the timeframes and deadlines given during the Virtual Studies courses had been well achievable and fairly clear, as they replied to the statement that investigated these aspects with an average score of 4.0 “Good”, and a low standard deviation.

This section also included an open question that explored the students’ opinion on the effect of the number of students on a course on the implementation of the course. The amount of students participating on UniPID courses varies from less than 20 to more than 100. It was hoped that the student perspective would shed some light on how this influences pedagogic mechanics on the courses. A large portion of the students who replied to this question said that they have not noticed that increasing the number of participants on a course would have any significant effect on the implementation of the course. Some pointed out that increased group sizes affected especially the difficulty of effective student interaction and the amount of feedback an individual receives, but also highlighted the increased amount of drop-outs on large courses and the overall lower quality of the course with large amounts of participants. Students said:

“As long as students are divided into smaller groups for discussion, I think large amounts of students work well. With large groups I understand that teachers don’t have time to give individual feedback that much or to participate in discussions. In that sense I think the quality of the course might be higher with fewer students.”

“Approximately 20 people per specialized course is the best number, in my opinion. For courses at the general level 50 to 60 students should be the maximum.”

“In courses without interaction between students, the number of students doesn’t seem to affect it much. In courses with a lot of discussions, a large number of students makes it hard to follow all the discussion threads. This is not necessarily bad because it means that there are a lot of interesting discussions happening at once. However, it does mean that students have to pick and choose which discussions to focus on.”

Conclusions: Course design, schedule and structure

To conclude this section with, students are fairly happy with the fit of the course timeframes to their own schedules, the clarity and level of detail of the course objectives and structure, the operationalization of the course objectives and structure, and the clarity and achievability of the course timeframes and deadlines.

As for the workload, it is interesting that there are differing opinions implied by a high standard deviation. While in general students thought that the course workload was equivalent to 5 ECTS fairly well, there were some students that disagreed, considering the workload either too large or too small. Most likely, this is influenced by the various disciplines that the students represent, as the amount of work per ECTS credit varies across different subjects.

Slightly more than half of the students thought that large numbers of students had no consequences to the implementation of the course. Those in the minority, who thought that the number of students had a significant effect agreed that it mostly affects negatively the quality of student to student interaction and the quality and amount of the feedback they receive.

2.4. Course content: assignments and material

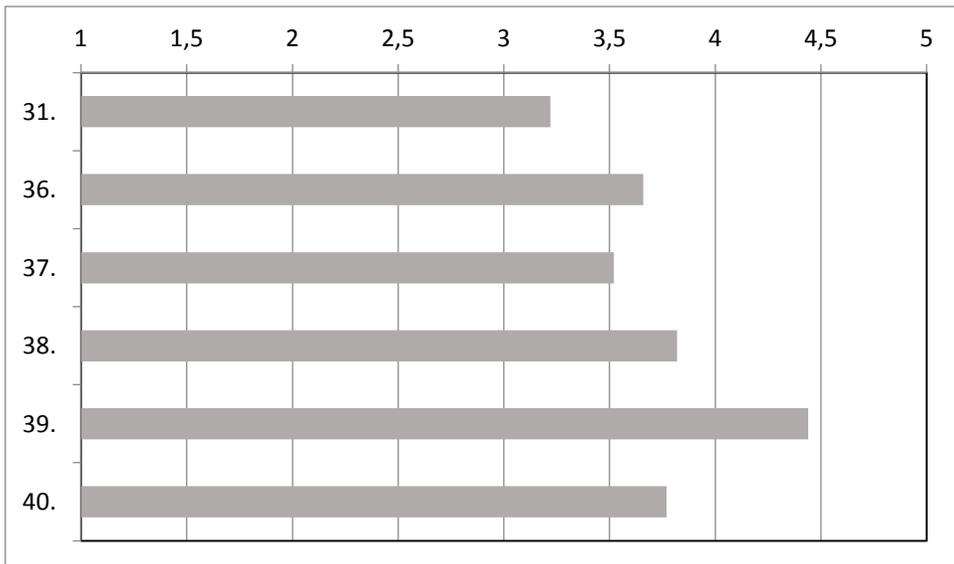


Diagram 9: Course content, 2014-2015, n= 41-44.

- 31. The quality of the course contents has been consistent between courses
- 36. The instructions given have been clear and detailed
- 37. The assignments have been motivating
- 38. I have been given clear instructions on how to complete given assignments
- 39. The topics and contents of the course(s) are interesting and educational
- 40. The course materials have been of good quality

The aspects of courses handled in this section under the rubric 'course content' include materials, assignments and concrete instructions handed out on courses. As can be seen from Diagram 9, the performance of aspects related to course content is quite varied.

The students rated the consistency of course contents between courses with the overall fifth-lowest average score of 3.22, "Average", with a rather high standard deviation of 0.9. There was no significant difference between the 2014 and 2015 batches of replies. The implication is that some students thought that the course contents were fairly consistent between courses, while others thought that there was room for improvement in this sector. Overall, an average cannot be

considered satisfactory when it comes to the consistency of course content across the spectrum of Virtual Studies.

With an average score of 3.66, "Average" to "Good", students were still somewhat divided on whether the instructions given on the courses had been clear and detailed. Especially in the case of the 2015 dataset, the replies had a fairly high standard deviation. The 2014 replies were not nearly as divided, as their dataset's standard deviation was very low. Thus, it seems that even though students in general thought the instructions had been more clear and detailed than not, the 2015 students were divided on the issue, some thinking that the instruction had not been that clear or detailed.

The statement "the assignments have been motivating" got an average score of 3.52, midway between "Average" and "Good". The 2014 average score, 3.65, was slightly higher than the 2015 average, 3.33. The implication is that the 2014 students were happier with the motivation the assignments provided than the 2015 students, who were more divided on the issue. However, to understand this difference, a more profound comparison of yearly course offerings and their feedback would be needed, which is not within the scope of this evaluation.

The same trend was visible as with the assessment of the clarity of the instructions for assignments as with the previous statement. The average rating was 3.82, "Good". The 2014 students rated the statement at an average of 4.0, while the 2015 students rated it at 3.56. This implies a drop in the students' satisfaction with the clarity of assignment instructions from 2014 to 2015.

The statement "topics and contents of the course(s) are interesting and educational" received the overall highest average score from students, 4.44, halfway between "Good" and "Excellent". The standard deviation was also the lowest out of all the questions. Thus, it is safe to say that nearly all of the students who took the questionnaire thought that the topics of the courses were interesting and educational, to a smaller or a larger extent. All but two of the respondents rated this question with a grade of 4 or 5, not counting the empty replies.

The students' score for the quality of course materials was 3.77, "Good". This result falls in line with the rest of the student replies in the evaluation questionnaire, having a rather typical average score and deviation for the dataset.

Students were asked two freeform questions that dealt with the materials and assignments they had encountered on UniPID courses. The first question mapped

what kinds of materials and assignments they had encountered and asked them to comment on them. The second question investigated what kinds of materials and assignments they preferred, what they thought was most useful for their own learning.

34 students in total replied to both of these questions investigating the materials and assignments used during the courses. Students listed a broad spectrum of materials and assignments that had been utilized on the courses, most of which they considered useful and educational.

Students seemed to agree that in general the assignments and material were useful from a learning-oriented perspective. There were, however, also types of materials and assignments which the students did not appreciate that much. Some specific assignment types were criticized, but on the other hand some students remarked that varied assignments promoted learning.

The list of materials the students had encountered included

- Course books,
- Video lectures and presentations,
- Practical material such as reports from organizations,
- Articles,
- YouTube videos,
- Websites,
- UN documents,
- Links to websites and videos, and
- Lecture memos.

One student remarked in length that the courses incorporated

“Mostly reading, but on some courses the teacher had put together video lectures. Both worked; while with written materials one can more easily go back and find necessary bits of information, video lectures made it necessary to take notes, which makes one pay more attention. However, watching a video where someone talks through an entire hour in barely understandable broken English is rather painstaking and not very useful. Assignments varied between short questions to long report-type essays, some based plainly on given material and others requiring personal thought and further research;

some of our contributions were meant only for the teacher, and in other cases evaluating each other's work was an integral part of the course."

Students were in general happy with articles, textbooks, online reading material, UN and other agency reports and declarations, video lectures, websites, academic articles, research papers and other readings. They only types of course materials that were criticized were video lectures (when their quality was poor) and lists of links to websites.

The list of assignment types the students had encountered included

- Questionnaires,
- Small assignments,
- Interactive assignments,
- Forum discussions,
- Shorter and longer essays,
- Reviews,
- Quizzes,
- Reflections,
- Terminology tasks,
- Peer feedback,
- Longer research papers, and
- Multiple-choice questions.

As far as assignments go, some students thought that research papers, learning diaries and individual assignments were the most useful. Some students also listed discussions as something that were useful and educational. Assignments types which were criticized by students included mini-essays and quizzes.

In assessing what was most useful, the students highlighted assignments that required some own commitment, successful group discussions, quizzes and both short and long essays. The replies were fairly evenly spread between individual reading tasks, individual writing assignments, and to a lesser extent, video lectures, discussions and group work. Some commented that discussions which all students did not take seriously were not very educative. Below you find some comments provided by students regarding course content.

Readings:

“Educational value [of the material] was not always good. Sometimes, it was not easy to see the connection between the given material and the subject of teaching. Everything has mainly been good; I would have loved more academic sources because they really take you deeper into the subject.”

“The long research papers were especially helpful because they allowed one to study a single topic.”

Pedagogics and teaching methodologies:

“Some courses had very high level pedagogics, while others did not. Good assignments had something to think about. Quizzes were very bad.”

“I have to say that the particular course I took was somewhat messy. The person in charge told us students that the course is about to change. I understand that things were “under construction”, but in my opinion that’s merely an excuse. The topic was interesting, but some of the tasks given did not necessarily fill their purpose.”

One student expressed their fondness for practical methodologies:

“Courses used some practical scenarios, where students were expected to make solutions on the basis of taught theoretical background. In my opinion, this worked well with theories handled by presentations, but poorly with reading the book as a material (book was partly out of course topic).”

A student said regarding assignments:

“In general the assignments have been useful, though sometimes very tedious (e.g. [a course] had a very time-consuming terminology definition assignment).”

Conclusions: Course content – assignments and material

To conclude the section on course content with, some points can be made. The courses employ a wide spectrum of material and assignment types to handle topics. Students seem to think that there is room for improvement in the consistency of the quality of the Virtual Studies. The clarity and level of detail in instruction received a passable assessment.

The students are happy with the topics and contents of the virtual courses. They are also fairly happy with the quality of the course material.

Most students do not seem to think that there is anything glaringly wrong with the material and assignments used in the Virtual Studies courses. Main assignment type that received criticism was the quiz. The material type that received the most criticism was the link list, students complained that just by providing a list of links to relevant websites the teacher would not well enough specify what the students had to learn from those websites.

It is to be noted that there was a discrepancy between the average scores of the statements related to instructions and assignments when the dataset is divided into two, handling the 2014 replies separately from the 2015 ones. It can be noticed that the average scores of these statements fell from 2014 to 2015, indicating that the 2015 students thought that the clarity of instruction and the motivation drawn from assignments were at a poorer state than the 2014 students did.

2.5. Student interaction

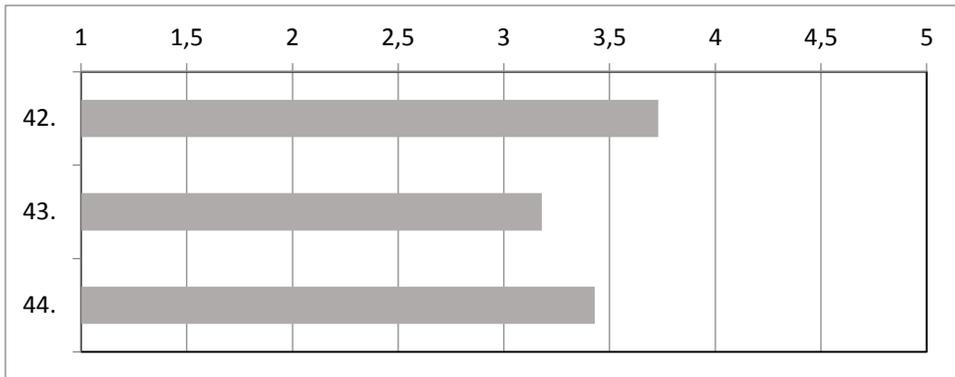


Diagram 10: Student interaction, 2014-2015, n=44.

42. Student interaction during the course(s) has been encouraged.

43. In my experience, the modes of student interaction have been successful.

44. The amount of student interaction during the course(s) has been sufficient.

The statements and questions dealing with student interaction received scores that seem to imply that the students thought this aspect of the Virtual Studies performed more poorly than other aspects, despite all the average scores that exceeded 3.0 “Average”. Consistency of the modes and quality of student interaction between courses was also criticized by some students.

The replies to “Student interaction during the course(s) has been encouraged” had an average score of 3.73 “Average” to “Good” with a relatively high standard deviation. This was the question with the largest differences between 2014 and 2015, so it pays off to look at these annual datasets separately.

In 2014, the average score was 3.92 “Good” and in 2015, it was 3.44 “Average” to “Good”. In 2014, the standard deviation was low, while in 2015 it was very high. Thus, it can be said that in 2014 the students agreed that interaction was organized well during the courses. In 2015, though, the fourth-highest standard deviation shows that the students disagreed with one another. Some thought that interaction had been encouraged, while others thought that this had not been the case.

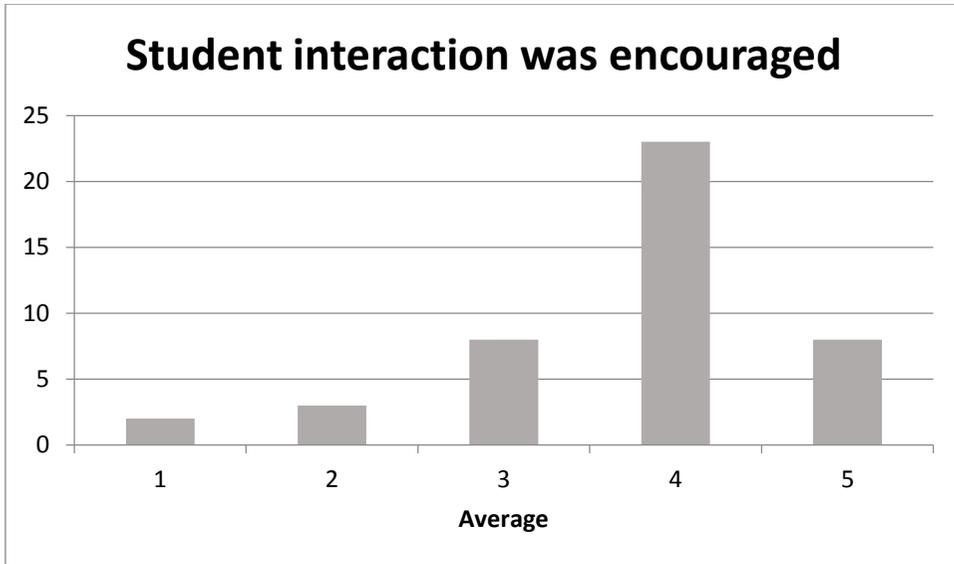


Diagram 11: Student interaction was encouraged, 2014 – 2015, n=44.

The respondents rated the success of the modes of student interaction with an average score of 3.18, “Average”, the fourth lowest out of all the questions. The standard deviation was 1.01, the fifth highest. Thus it can be said that the students’ opinions were divided when it comes to this issue, some thinking that student interaction had been successful, and others thinking that it had not been that successful. The average score was still above the expected value (theoretical average) of the scale, 3.0, which means that a larger portion of respondents had a positive opinion, but not by much. There was no significant difference between 2014 and 2015.

The students also rated the sufficiency of the amount of student interaction below the averages of other questions in this study, at 3.43 “Average” to “Good”. Again, there was a significant difference between the annual datasets, the 2014 students replied with a higher average (3.62) than the 2015 students (3.17). The standard deviation in the 2015 batch of answers was also higher than in the 2014 batch. The implication, therefore, is that the 2014 students had a more positive view of the sufficiency of student interaction, while the 2015 students had a divided opinion, some thinking that the amount had been sufficient and some not.

It is to be noted that the wording of the previous statement was not perfect, as it does not cater to the students who think that student interaction is not needed on virtual courses. Some of the respondents would likely have wanted to say that

there was too much student interaction on courses, but the questionnaire design would not let them do that in this instance, only accepting answers of “the amount has been/has not been sufficient”.

This section also included an open question that asked how the student interaction was organized. Students specified that on most courses student interaction was organized through online discussion forums. Less frequently, group work, e-mail discussions and peer feedback were used to initiate student interaction. A point that was highlighted often was that the way student interaction was organized and supported varied from course to course. Students said:

“In some courses it [student interaction] was an essential and compulsory part; in some others it was largely ignored. I preferred the first”.

“In general I think that the student interaction should be supported in general discussions, but that virtual studies should be more ‘individual studies’ as it is also hard to work together over computers. It is basically only time-consuming and exhausting.”

Conclusions: Student interaction

Some students clearly took the question “How was student interaction organized and supported during the courses?” to mean “Was student interaction organized and supported during the courses?” while others understood it as “Through what means was student interaction organized and supported?” Thus, it is not easy to draw any definitive conclusions from the replies. However, the average scores and standard deviations from the statements above can be used to support the formulation of conclusions and implications.

All of the numeric indicators dealing with student interaction, while exceeding the expected value of 3.0, are nevertheless rather low for this evaluation (see Diagram 10). The success of the modes of interaction was rated especially low. It is fair to say that students were divided on the issue of student interaction, some thinking that there are sufficient amounts of it and/or that it functions well, while others thought that there is too much or too little of it, or that it was not all that successful.

The point can also be made that there is a significant drop between the average score when moving from the 2014 dataset to the 2015 dataset in the encouragement of student interaction and the sufficiency of the amount of student interaction, which implies a decrease in student interaction in general from 2014 to 2015.

2.6. Course descriptions and expectations

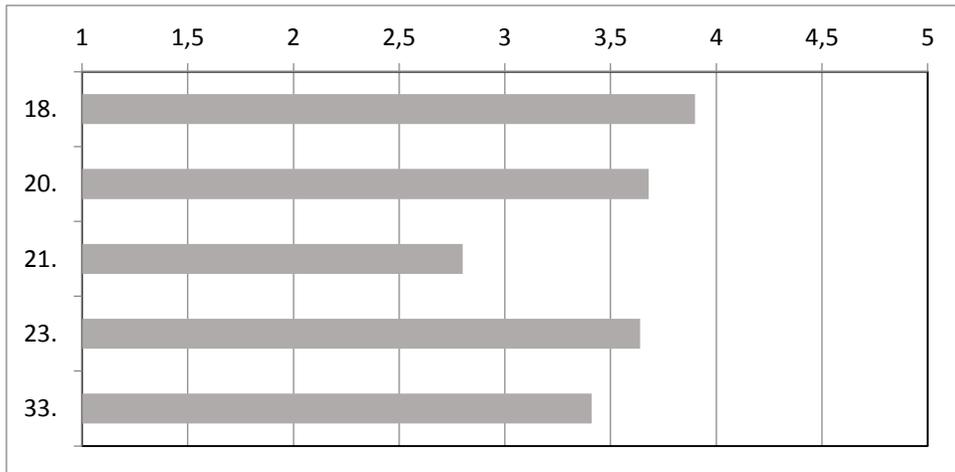


Diagram 12: Course descriptions and course offerings, 2014-2015, n=39-44.

- 18. How easy has it been to find information on the upcoming courses?
- 20. In your experience, how accurate was the information given in advance of the course?
- 21. In your experience, how clear is the difference between general and specialized courses?
- 23. How have the courses met you expectations?
- 33. The courses' level (general or specialized) has accurately described the level of the course.

In their assessment of the information given beforehand about courses and its relationship to their expectations, they gave rather typical ratings in the “Average” to “Good” range. The question and statement dealing with the general/specialized distinction draw attention as they received the lowest average scores among the statements that deal with this theme.

When the students evaluated how easy finding information about the courses had been the replies had an average score of 3.9, “Good”, with the fourth highest standard deviation overall. In looking at the 2014 dataset only, the replies had the highest standard deviation of all questions, implying that while students' replies had a high average score, they were still divided in their opinion.

When assessing the accuracy of the pre-given information about courses, the students gave an average score of 3.68, a fairly typical average score for this

evaluation. It seems to imply that students thought that the information was rather accurate, but not always a hundred percent accurate.

In case the students did not find the information sufficient or accurate, they were encouraged to describe what could be improved. Only ten students replied to this question, implying that the majority thought that course information had been sufficient and accurate. Half of the people who replied discussed the general/specialized distinction and the level or prior knowledge the courses require. These students said they would have liked to have more information on what the distinction meant and on who can sign up for which courses. Other aspects that respondents mentioned were course scheduling, materials, teaching methods, admittance criteria and feedback and assessment. In one student's words:

“Sometimes, more information would have been needed in order to decide whether you want to take the course or not. Some courses, which were marked as general, were rather specialized and required some overall understanding on the field which not everyone (including me!) had. If there are certain basic concepts needed even for general courses, it should be mentioned in the initial course description to make it possible for students to familiarize themselves with it in advance, or at least when needed during the course.”

The students were also asked to describe whether the variety of courses had met their needs and what things had met their needs and what not. The majority of respondents indicated that the variety of courses had been good and that it had met their expectations. Out of the 33 students who replied to the question, only six implied that their needs had been either not met, or that in some cases they had been met and in others not. Two students hoped specifically for an introductory course in international co-operation or development co-operation. Students said:

“I took UniPID courses when I started to be interested in development issues. It did give some insight and I appreciated everything I learned. However, I think I would have liked to get more specific examples from the field. Also, sometimes there was way too much guessing and speculation going on on behalf of the students about how things work. It would have been good to get more answers from the teachers.”

“[Course 1], [Course 2] and [Course 3] were the most useful. All of them combined a variety of pedagogical methods with useful assignments that helped me to think more deeply about the topic and to apply the knowledge in the lectures and videos.”

When rating how well their expectations regarding courses had been met, the students’ replies averaged a score of 3.63 (“Average” to “Good”) with a low standard deviation. What is interesting that the average score fell from 3.76 in 2014 to 3.47 in 2015, while the standard deviation increased at the same time. What this tells us is that most students thought that courses met their expectations fairly well, although there was a group of students in 2015 who disagreed. Again, to understand the reason for the differences between the datasets in 2014 and 2015, a more detailed analysis of the course offering and their feedback should be conducted, which is not possible within the scope of this particular evaluation.

UniPID Virtual Studies courses are separated into two categories: general and specialized courses. The students were asked how clear the difference between these two categories is. The result was the overall second lowest average score, 2.8. The question also had the highest standard deviation out of all the questions, implying divided opinion. Notably, the 2014 students rated the question at an average of 2.64, while the 2015 students rated it at an average of 3.07. The result, which is lower than the expected value of 3.0, suggests that the students were mildly displeased with the clarity of the distinction.

While the largest amount (15 respondents) responded by moving the slider to the middle, only a slightly smaller amount used the second position from the left (14 respondents). There was a scattering of opinions also in other positions: all the way to the left, “Not at all clear” (4 respondents), 4th position (5 respondents) and all the way to the right, “Very clear” (4 respondents).

Further investigating the general/specialized distinction, the students were asked how accurately the label described the level of the course. The students replied to this statement with an average score of 3.41, which is between “Average” and “Good”. The average is fairly low compared to the results of other statements in this evaluation, while the standard deviation is rather low as well, implying a unified opinion.

These results are supported by the mentions of the general/specialized distinction in replies to “If you have not found the information on the courses sufficient or accurate, please describe what could be improved.”, where the students opined that the distinction was one of the aspects that was left unclear.

The problematic nature of the course level and the accuracy of the course description was also mentioned in the students’ replies to an open question. A student said:

“Regarding the course level: I have found that the course description contains rather general themes and requirements and only the mention of “specialized” reveals that the course might actually be very hard work for a person without specialized knowledge already. This happened to me with ‘Human Right and Development’, I thought that with previous knowledge of both I could manage the course, but it was actually very specialized teaching of international law.”

Conclusions: Course descriptions and course offerings

To summarize, it can be seen that nearly all students thought that it was easy to find information on upcoming courses. As to how accurate the information given in advance was, the average score was in line with the averages of the rest of the statements in this evaluation. Students think that pre-given information about courses is generally rather accurate. However, the results show that the distinction between general and specialized courses is not very clear to the students and these labels do not always seem to offer very accurate descriptions for the courses. Similarly, of the respondents who thought the pre-information had not been accurate or sufficient, the majority discussed the distinction between general and specialized courses. Other aspects that were mentioned include course scheduling, materials, teaching methods, admittance criteria and feedback and assessment.

The results related to the course descriptions and course offerings imply that there is room for some improvement related to the accuracy of the course descriptions, specifically the definition of the course level. It would be best if the information on the course website regarding the abovementioned course aspects was articulated as clearly as possible. Such practices would most likely decrease the drop-down rate of courses as the students would have a better idea of what they are signing up for already in the beginning of the study process.

2.7. Instruction and pedagogy, student-teacher interaction

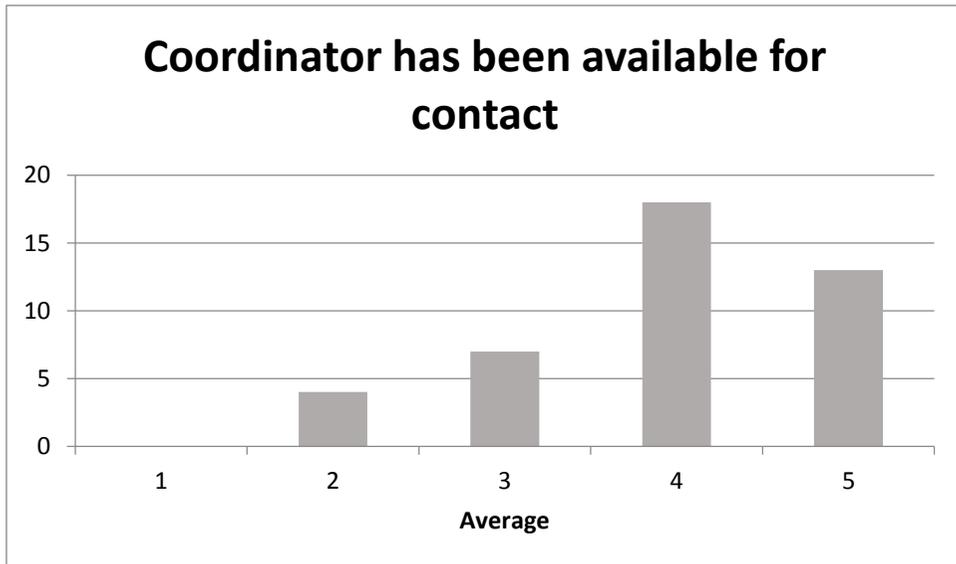


Diagram 13: Coordinator has been available, 2014-2015, n=42.

The only item that provided a numeric output regarding this theme dealt with whether the Course Coordinator had been available for the students during the course. Respondents replied to it with the sixth-highest average score of 3.95, equivalent to “Good”. While the average scores in 2014 and 2015 were similar, the 2015 standard deviation was a lot higher than 2014. This means that the students seemed to agree that the course coordinator had been easy to reach and available, but a small amount of 2015 students had had some problems with contacting their coordinator.

One student remarked:

“It really depends on the course; on one course there was no opportunity to discuss on the topics whatsoever or even post concerns and questions, so the only way to contact the teacher was via e-mail. A lot of the time, even if there is a ‘questions and concerns’ box, the teacher doesn’t answer those questions on time.”

In an open question dealing with how well the teacher-student communication works, majority of respondents reported that communication works well. A handful of students thought that in some cases the communication works well and

in other cases not. A total of three respondents disagreed and thought that there are problems with the communication between teacher and students, for example in providing adequate feedback.

Students said:

“In general, it was good. Naturally, some teachers were more active than others in engaging in discussions and answering students’ questions.”

“The forum was always open and people would constantly write and even share outside material. The teachers were present too, via forum and e-mail, so I thought it was very easy.”

The students were also asked in what types of situations they felt that they would have needed more guidance than they got. Of the 28 students who replied to this question, most discussed assignments. Many students said that they would have liked to have had more guidance when it came to assignments. Some would also have liked more guidance when it comes to student interaction, technical issues and writing guidelines. A student said:

“Some assignments were vague or hard to understand. In cases where the assignment is complicated, teachers should post an example of a completed assignment to help students understand it better.”

When asked how well the virtual nature of the studies was taken into consideration on the courses, 17 of the 35 people who replied said that in the virtual aspect had been taken into consideration rather well. A total of 10 students highlighted the variance between courses, that some courses had taken the virtual aspect into account well, while others had not been so successful. Students said:

“It was taken into consideration very well in some courses, I appreciated very much e.g. getting feedback on my tasks during the course, since it was otherwise very hard to know how one was managing the task or knowing what the teachers expected.”

“Depending on the course. As already said before, some found a brilliant balance in considering all the aspects of a virtual course and some were just way too overloaded with work and therefore quite demotivating.”

“In other courses not it was not taken into consideration so well, e.g. with long lectures with teachers just reading from their papers. It was nice when

teachers were active online, answered questions fast and participated in discussions and helped to bring discussion forward. That gave a feeling of having a teacher close, even though the courses were in a virtual environment.”

Conclusions: Instruction and pedagogy, student-teacher interaction

It can be concluded that in general students thought that the course coordinator has been available for the students to contact during the course and that the communication between them has been taken care of rather well. The high standard deviation in the 2015 dataset, though, shows that some students thought that the coordinator had not been available for contact when they were needed.

Regarding the need for more guidance, it is clear that the largest cohort of students would have liked to receive more guidance when it comes to completing assignments. The second and third aspects where students would have liked to receive more guidance were instances of student interaction and technical issues with the course platform and/or IT equipment.

Most students thought that the virtual aspect had been taken into account well. A large minority, though, was very vocal about their view that this varied greatly between courses. This ties in well with the consistency points that have been made elsewhere in this report.

2.8. Assessment and feedback

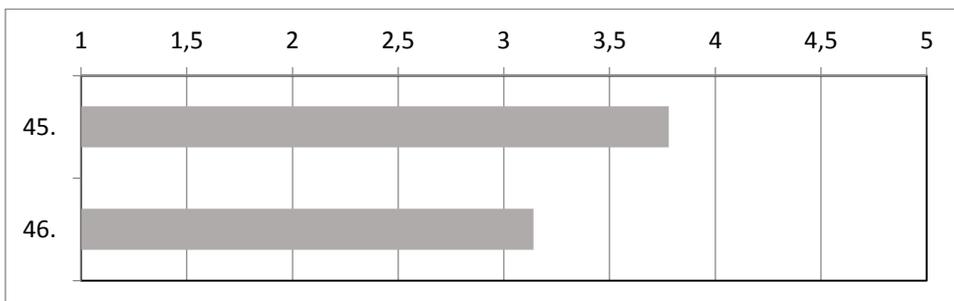


Diagram 14: Assessment and feedback, 2014-2015, n=41-44

- 45. My performance has been evaluated with explicit criteria.
- 46. The amount of feedback was sufficient.

When evaluating whether explicit criteria had been used in assessing students' performance, the students replied to this statement with an average score of 3.78, "Good". No significant difference exists between 2014 and 2015, implying that students thought this aspect of the Virtual Studies had performed relatively well during both years. Both the standard deviation and average score are typical in the dataset used in this evaluation, which could imply that students had no strong feelings one way or the other.

There was also an open question, which asked whether the evaluation process had been clear and understandable. Out of the 34 students who replied to this question, 25 said that the evaluation process was at least somewhat clear and understandable, with 8 respondents saying that it had not been completely clear and understandable.

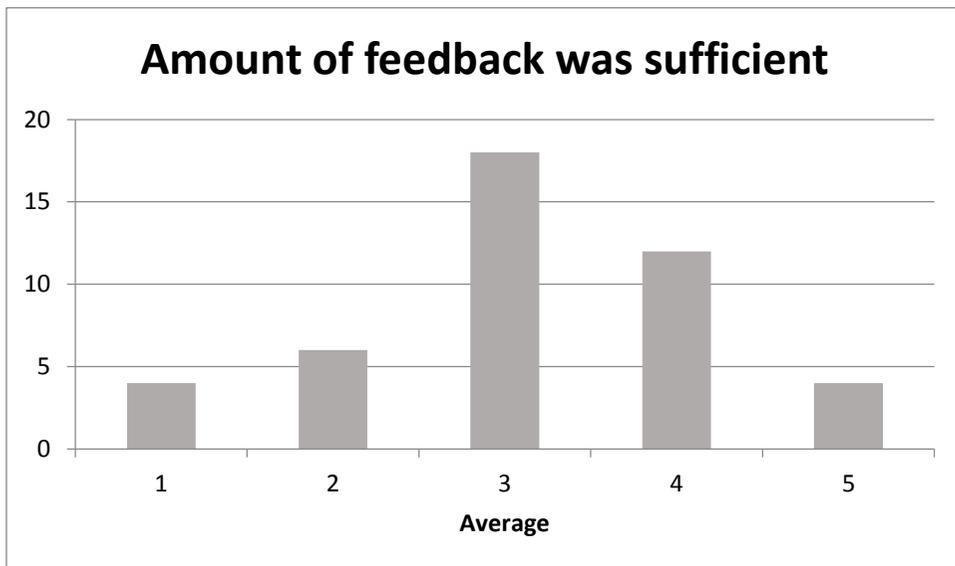


Diagram 15: Amount of feedback was sufficient, 2014-2015, n=44.

The statement assessing whether the amount of constructive feedback given on courses had been sufficient received the overall third lowest average score, 3.14, with the third highest standard deviation. As the average score narrowly exceeds the expected value (theoretical average) of 3.0, it cannot be said that students were as a group either satisfied or dissatisfied with the amount of constructive

feedback. More interesting insights emerge when the annual datasets are separated.

The 2014 students replied with an average score of 3.35 (fifth lowest) and a high standard deviation, showing that the amount of those who thought that the amount of constructive feedback was somewhat sufficient was slightly larger than those who did not. The 2015 results, with an average of 2.83 and a high standard deviation, testify that some of the students were indeed mildly or very displeased with the amount of (or lack of) constructive feedback they received. The amount of students that were displeased with the amount of feedback exceeded the amount of students who were pleased with the amount of feedback in 2015.

There was also a freeform question that dealt with the issue, asking how helpful the given feedback had been. Out of the 33 students who replied to this question, 13 expressed their displeasure with the feedback (or lack thereof) they had encountered on their course(s). 11 students said that the feedback they had received was helpful and/or useful, and they did not offer any criticism. 5 students highlighted the variance between courses, saying that some provided enough quality feedback, and some did not. The rest of the students left blank or ambivalent replies. Students said:

“Extremely helpful, when feedback has been for individuals or small groups. General feedback hardly helps.”

“Not very helpful. Although there are clear evaluation criteria, it is hard to know the reasons behind a certain grade, what could have been done better or whether there was something wrong. More individual feedback, be it short and general but at least some is needed.”

“NOT AT ALL. The teachers refused to give me feedback of any kind so I wasn’t able to improve my assignments.”

“The greatest weakness of the UniPID courses I’ve taken is the lack of feedback. Most of the courses had little or no feedback from the professor on submitted assignments.”

Conclusions: Assessment and feedback

It can be concluded that students were mostly happy with the criteria that were used for assessment and the clarity of the assessment process. There were small amounts of students that thought that the assessment criteria and process had not been clear enough.

Students' satisfaction with the amount of feedback they received on courses was among the poorest performing aspects in this evaluation. The result, which mimics a randomly distributed normal curve (see Diagram 15), produces 3 "Average" as the typical response. The wide spectrum of replies to the freeform question further reinforces the view that feedback in general is an aspect in which there is room for improvement in the Virtual Studies.

2.9. Technical issues & language

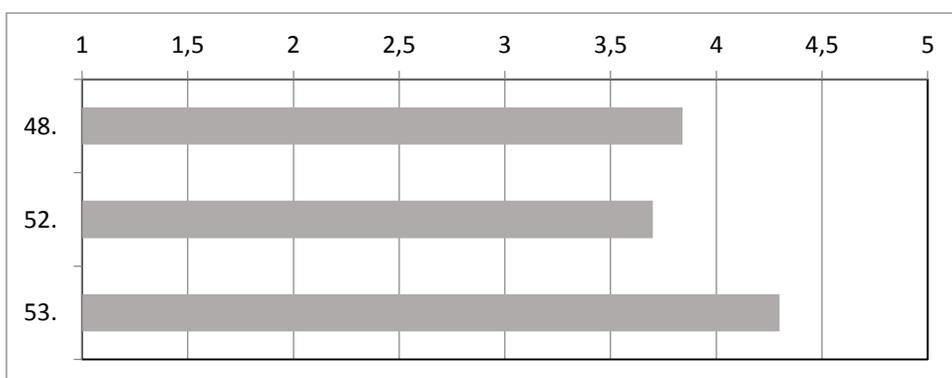


Diagram 16: Technical issues & language, 2014-2015, n=43-44.

48. Moodle has been used effectively to support learning.

52. In your experience, how functional were the course platform and technical arrangements used in the courses?

53. How easy has it been to understand the language used in the course instructions and materials?

When looking at the technical and linguistic aspects of course implementation, students' replies indicate that they are mostly happy with them.

The average score for the assessment of the efficiency of Moodle use in supporting learning received an average score of 3.84, “Good”, with a high standard deviation. The 2014 average of 4.0 was higher than the 2015 average of 3.61. The standard deviations of both years were among the highest in the datasets. Thus, it can be stated that most students thought that Moodle had been used either well or in an excellent manner to support learning, but the size of the cohort of people who disagreed and rated the statement either “Average” or below should not be ignored. The 2015 students were slightly more displeased with the use of Moodle than the 2014 students were. The functionality of the course platform and technical arrangements used in the courses were rated at an average score of 3.7, “Average” to “Good”.

When it comes to the language used on courses, a question was dedicated to how easy it had been for students to understand the language used in the course instructions and materials. Average score from the replies was 4.3, “Good” to “Excellent”, the second highest of all questions. The standard deviation was low. The implication is that students were fairly unified in their view that the language was easy to understand.

Nine people responded to the following statement, which dealt with difficulties in understanding language use on courses. Seven of them referred to the specialized vocabulary that certain courses utilized. However, they did not see it as a problem that could not be overcome. One student remarked that some lecturers had accents that were somewhat difficult to understand. A student commented:

“All the words can be found from a dictionary. Sometimes it takes more time to read but isn’t that the reason why we study? Also to learn terminology.”

Conclusions: Technical issues and language

In conclusion, it can be said that most students thought that the course platform (Moodle, most often) and technical arrangements had been used adequately to support learning.

It can also be inferred that most UniPID students experience no difficulties in understanding language used on courses, and those who do, do not consider it as something that would affect their learning experience severely.

2.10. Relevance to studies and career

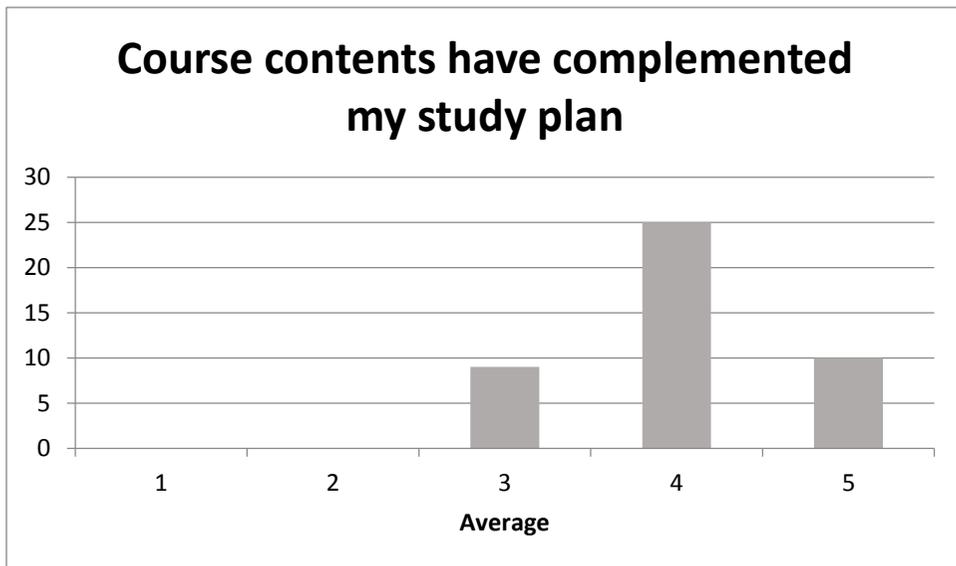


Diagram 17: Course contents complemented my study plan, 2014-2015, n=44.

Based on their responses, it can be said that the students find the UniPID Virtual Studies generally relevant for their educational and career aspirations.

The students' assessment of whether the course content complemented their study plan received an average score of 4.02, "Good", with a second lowest standard deviation overall. Thus, the low standard deviation and the relatively high average score show that students largely agreed that the course contents complemented their personal study plans well (see Diagram 17).

Students said the following, relating the Virtual Studies to their career prospects:

"UniPID Virtual Studies opened a couple of doors for me in both a tangible and an intangible sense. I intend to take my 2nd Master's in Human Rights, and as the requirement I have to complete a certain amount of ECTS in law courses and other relevant courses. UniPID gave me the opportunity to pursue this goal while studying for my 1st Master's and working at the same time."

"The courses encouraged me to state my own opinions and thoughts to others in a written form. This encouraged me to state my opinions later on in my studies. As a student of International Relations, the UniPID courses

gave me valuable insights into more practical aspects of international politics. This crucially benefited me in my major studies and later on during my Master's level studies.”

“UniPID courses offer a chance to study subjects that are unavailable in my home university. They also help to widen perspectives through the presence of international students. Overall, the UniPID curriculum has great variety, and the difference courses sum up to providing good knowledge about sustainable development.”

Conclusions: Relevance to studies and career

To conclude this section with, students seem happy with the way Virtual Studies supported their personal study plans. Some of the students also thought that the courses would help them in their current or upcoming career as well.

2.11. Future courses

An open question was dedicated to investigating what topics and themes the student would like to see included in the Virtual Studies in the future. The replies varied across a wide spectrum, with some highlights listed below. The list includes replies from both 2014 and 2015. The responses are classified under academic fields to make better sense of the extensive list of suggested courses. The categories are, however, rough and not always entirely satisfactory.

Humanities

- Linguistics
- Culture
- African studies
- Protection of cultural heritage in the developing world
- Anthropological perspectives into sustainable development

Education

- Designing education systems to promote development and sustainability
- Global citizenship education

Social and political sciences

- Politics
- Poverty
- Transparency
- Basics of international co-operation
- Political developments that affect sustainable development
- New environmental movements e.g. downshifting and slow life
- Sustainability in daily life
- Sustainability and happiness
- Peace research
- Humanitarian issues in sustainable development
- Courses about humanitarian interventions
- Science and technology

Economics and entrepreneurship

- Sustainability in economics
- Follow-up course on development economics
- Sustainable tourism
- Community and sustainable entrepreneurship

Environmental sciences

- Sustainability of built environment
- Climate change and sustainable development
- Local natural resource management and agriculture
- Sea and sustainability
- International environmental cooperation
- Sustainability of alternative food resources

Development studies

- Technical courses (matrices)
- Connecting the theory and practice in development cooperation
- General development policy and its history
- Development in terms of theory and practice

- Evaluation, measuring impact of development cooperation
- Project management cycle
- Critical views into development cooperation
- Specialized methodology courses

Other

- Courses in collaboration with Finland Futures Academy
- Interdisciplinary courses
- More UN courses
- More basic level courses

This concludes our analysis of the results of the student questionnaire. The following section of this report handles the results from the coordinators' questionnaire, after which (see Chapter 4), the results are discussed and a conclusion drawn.

3.Results from the coordinator questionnaire

In 2014, the course coordinators' questionnaire (Appendix 4) was sent out to all coordinators who had working e-mail addresses and whose information was available in UniPID's internal databases. In 2015, the same questionnaire was sent out to all people who had acted as coordinators since the beginning of Fall semester 2014 with the note that they were not allowed to fill it out if they filled it out in 2014.

The questionnaire received 6 replies from coordinators in 2014 and 2 replies from coordinators in 2015, for a total of 8 replies.

The questionnaire was structured to first include an overview of the coordinators' experience of the Virtual Studies and the module's benefits. In the following section they were questioned on aspects of the course proposal process. This included mainly questions on the experienced clarity and transparency of the process handled by the UniPID Coordination Unit. In the last two sections, the focus was on running of the course and teaching. The coordinators were asked to share their experiences with any difficulties relating to virtual teaching and to assess their own success as teachers from various perspectives.

In a similar manner to the students' questionnaire, during writing this evaluation report the questionnaire's structure was broken down and replies to questions that dealt with the same issues were grouped together to improve readability (e.g. questions that dealt with feedback and assessment were grouped under the same heading).

Since there were only two respondents in the 2015 data set, it was not worth handling the sets separately.

3.1. General coordination experience

When the coordinators had to specify how familiar they had been with UniPID before beginning the coordination of a Virtual Studies course, they responded with an average score of 3.83. Half of the respondents were also coordinating a course at the time of the questionnaire.

An open question investigated how many semesters of VS courses the coordinators had been involved with. Two respondents said they had coordinated 1 semester, while three coordinators said they had coordinated two semesters. Two respondents had coordinated three semesters' worth of courses, while one respondent had coordinated four or more semesters. Thus, the experience level of course coordinator varied from the experienced to the relatively new.

A large majority, seven out of eight respondents said they were not primarily employed to coordinate a Virtual Studies course. Seven out of eight respondents also thought that their university had gained tangible benefits from the Virtual Studies.

When asked whether they were primarily employed to coordinate the Virtual Studies courses, 7 respondents replied "No" (87.5 %) and one "Yes" (12.5 %). When they were asked whether, in their opinion, their university had gained tangible benefits from the Virtual Studies, 7 (87.5 %) said "Yes" and one "No" (12.5 %).

When the course coordinators were asked what aspects of the Virtual Studies they thought should be developed, the replies were evenly spread between different categories. The options that gathered the most votes were "Course participants' selection criteria" (3), "Course material" (3), "Virtual pedagogies & teaching" (3) and "Virtual Studies' internationalization" (4). "Course platform & technology"

received two votes, as well as “Virtual Studies’ marketing”. Other issues received scattered mentions. In the open category, coordinators said:

I think the level of communication and exchange of knowledge between course coordinators is very low and there should be a platform to discuss methodologies and contents, and if possible to make a joint seminar/conference every 5 years, where there can be produced a joint book reflecting on the topics of these courses.”

An open question had the coordinators describing their overall experience of being a course coordinator. All eight coordinators responded to this question. Below are some of the coordinators’ replies which are worth highlighting.

“Good, although I find one of the hardest components being student selection, and the fairly laborious task of entering results, then having to print out a spread sheet that has to be sent as an attachment.”

Furthermore, two coordinators commented on the unfamiliarity of the experience:

“Certainly a new experience for me to coordinate such a course where there was no contact teaching at all.”

“Extreme experience with students of different faculties and cultures.”

Like the students, the coordinators were also asked what themes should be included in the Virtual Studies. They highlighted the following topics and themes:

- Food, livelihoods, GIS, culture, Western culture
- Social and economic basis for Sustainability
- The Economics of Poverty
- Perceptions of Development in Africa
- Frames and perspectives of North South cooperation for Development
- Child protection and family welfare in developing countries
- Culture and Development: what are the roles of North-South cooperation
- Introduction to Development Studies
- Development theory
- Development and global political economy

3.2. Call for Course Proposals

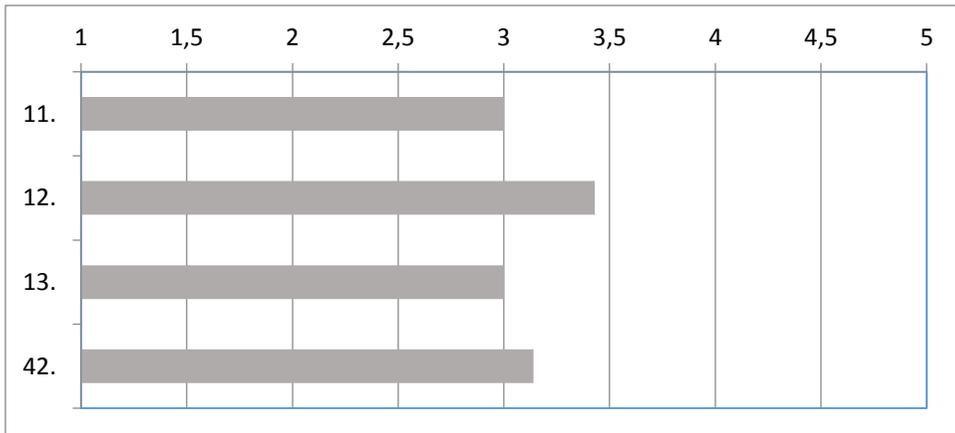


Diagram 18: Call for proposals, 2014-2015, n= 7.

- 11. How transparent was the course proposal process?
- 12. How clear was the Call for Proposals and the instructions for submitting a proposal?
- 13. In your opinion, how appropriately is the new course selection process handled?
- 42. How easy was the course proposal process?

The questionnaire included seven questions on the Call for Course Proposals process, which takes place every year and through which UniPID funds new Virtual Studies courses. As one of the course coordinators who responded was not involved at all with the call for proposals process or the pedagogical aspects of the courses, their scores and replies were removed this section and the next section on Course Coordination.

Seven coordinators replied to the question dealing with the perceived transparency of the course proposal process. Rating it on a scale from 1 “Not transparent” to 5 “Very transparent”, two coordinator gave it a 2, three coordinators rated it a 3 and two coordinators rated it a 4, indicating that the coordinators had no strong opinions either way.

Another question was dedicated to how clear the call document was and how clear the instructions attached to it were. The scale ranged from 1 “Very unclear” to 5 “Very clear”. One coordinator rated it a 2, while three coordinators gave it a 3 and

three coordinators rated it a 4. Thus, the most typical opinion seems to be that the call document and instructions were either somewhat or quite clear.

A question examined how appropriately the course proposal process was handled in the coordinators' opinion. The scale ranged from 1 "Very inappropriately" to 5 "Very Appropriately". Two coordinators rated it a 2, three coordinators gave it a 3 and two coordinators gave it a 4. The implication is that some coordinators thought the process had been handled somewhat inappropriately and some that it had been handled somewhat appropriately. Again, there were no strong opinions either way.

The coordinators had to assess how easy the course proposal process was, and grade it on a scale from 1 "Very difficult" to 5 "Very easy". One coordinator rated the question a 2, four respondents gave it a 3 and two coordinators gave it a 4. This shows that as a group they did not think strongly that it was neither too easy nor excessively difficult.

When asked whether the sum of money granted for planning and implementing a Virtual Studies course was sufficient, four coordinators replied "Yes" and three "No".

A freeform question asked the coordinators to specify what aspects would have benefited from increased funding if it was available. This statement urged the coordinators who replied "No" to the previous question to elaborate on their answer. Nevertheless, this question received more replies than there were "No" replies, five replies.

The coordinators would have used the hypothetical increased funding to offer the course twice a year, to admit more students, to hire experts, to renew course content or to hire more teaching staff. One coordinator said:

"We had a huge number of applicants and wanted to include them, thus, I employed a co-teacher. Even with two teachers the work load was enormous. I used most of the funding for her salary, then had almost nothing for myself, which was not that motivating. There could be a reward if the course accepts more participants!"

When the respondents were asked what could be done to improve the course proposal process, they hoped for an application form, support for publications, more good basic courses, and active engagement and collaboration with existing courses in UniPID universities to guarantee high levels of pedagogical expertise. One coordinator said:

“Support the publishing of the proceedings of the course. Coordinators can use the course materials as a research platform.”

Another open question was concerned with the overall experience of the course proposal process. Out of the five coordinators who replied to this question, three did not provide a definitive answer, just answering briefly “good” or “ok”. One coordinator said:

“I had very good support from the [discipline] department at [university]. However, it is very simple and very effective.”

An open question was dedicated to asking the coordinator how they decided whether a course was general or specialized in the UniPID context. Six coordinators replied to this question. Coordinators who replied, said they base the distinction on the level of academic content, the required amount of previous knowledge/studies needed to pass the course, the topics of the lectures, and the course name and aims.

Conclusions: Call for Proposals from the coordinators' perspective

To conclude the section on the Call for Proposals with, it seems that coordinators do not really have strong feelings about the Call for Proposals process. They did not feel that the process was either clearly transparent or not transparent, and they did not think that the process was handled very appropriately nor very inappropriately. As far as the Call for Proposals instructions go, they felt that they were fairly clear.

Four out of seven respondents thought that the amount of money granted for a course was sufficient, while the rest thought that it was not. Even the coordinators who thought that the money was sufficient had good ideas on how to utilize any extra funding that could become available.

Some coordinators did not seem to have a clear idea why they classified their course as either general or specialized, or at least they were not able to put it to words. Other coordinators provided well-founded reasoning for why they chose the level for the course they did.

3.3. Course design: schedule & structure

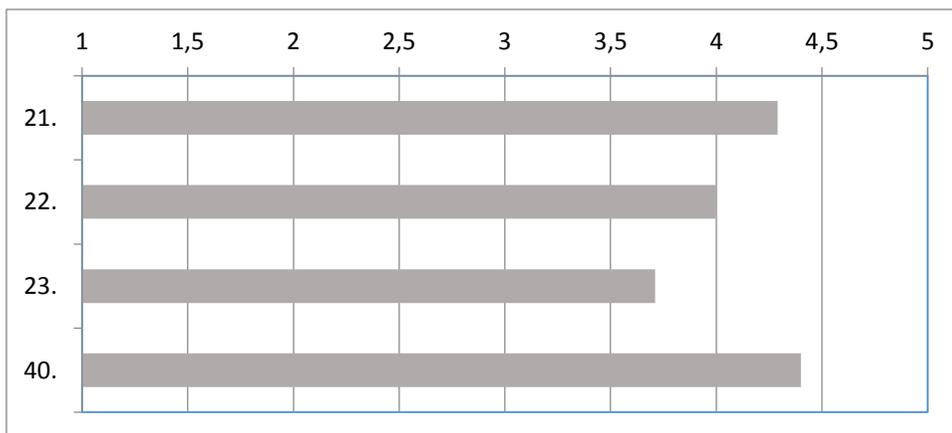


Diagram 19: Course design, 2014-2015, n=7-8.

- 21. I have assessed my course to be equivalent to 5 ECTS.
- 22. I have clearly outlined the course objectives and structure.
- 23. I followed the outlined course objectives and structure through with precision.
- 40. I have planned my course timeframes and deadlines successfully.

In this section, the coordinators had to evaluate their own performance through four questions graded on a scale from 1 (Unsuccessful) to 5 (Excellent). The first question dealt with the equivalence of their course's workload to 5 ECTS credits. Out of the seven coordinators who replied to this question, five gave the statement a 4, "Good", while two gave it a 5, "Excellent". The conclusion is that in the coordinators view, the courses are equivalent to 5 ECTS.

The coordinators also assessed how clearly they had outlined the course objectives and structure. The great majority, six out of seven coordinators thought they had succeeded well in outlining the course objectives and structure rating themselves with a score of 4, "Good", or 5, "Excellent". One coordinator seems to have struggled somewhat with this aspect of the courses, rating the statement with a score of 2, "Moderate".

Another statement had the respondents evaluating how well the course objectives and structure had been followed through. One coordinator rated this statement a 2, "Moderate", while one respondent rated it a 3, "Average". Three coordinators gave it a 4, "Good", while one coordinator rated it a 5, "Excellent". The implication

is that majority of coordinators thought the objectives and structure had been followed through rather well, but some disagreed.

Five respondents replied to the question that dealt with the success of scheduling on the course. All who responded gave it either a 4, "Good" or 5, "Excellent". Thus, all coordinators who responded thought that they had planned the timeframes and deadlines well.

As for what things the coordinators paid particular attention to while constructing a Virtual Studies course, they provided varied answers which handled the structure and schedule of the course, the students' varied backgrounds and their effect on course material, overall content and context, assignments, literature and the objectives of the course. Coordinators said:

"If there is a lot of heterogeneity among the students' background (e.g. anthropology vs engineering), it is difficult to adjust the material accordingly."

"The objectives of the course, the relation between objectives and the topics to be discussed, the time-frame of the course and pedagogical methodology of coordination."

When the respondents explained what they found easy and/or challenging in designing the course activities and contents, three coordinators remarked on the difficulty to come up with suitable material for a virtual course. One said:

"Good readings are hard to select; sometimes hard to estimate student input and time use. Also, the problem of keeping the groups working and avoiding last-minute fake 'discussions'."

The coordinators were also asked what effect does the amount of students on a course have on the implementation of a course. They seem to agree that while the number of students grows, coordination becomes more difficult and laborious and the need to share the workload with a co-teacher or someone else rises. One coordinator opined that especially having more than 50 students from different backgrounds and disciplines makes coordination harder. Coordinators said:

"When the number of students is over 35, it is very difficult to follow the discussion carefully. I think the limit of students participating on the course should be set to 35 maximum."

"The number of important and interesting assignments would have to be decreased if we would be expected to increase the number of student per

course. Virtual courses always demand more work than regular class room teaching.”

Conclusions: Course design and structure in the coordinators’ perspective

As a general conclusion, it can be said that the coordinators rated their own performance when it comes to course design and structure highly.

Nearly all of the respondents thought their courses have been equivalent to 5 eCTs. The majority of the coordinators also thought they have clearly outlined the course objectives and structure, with only a single coordinator disagreeing. Similarly, most of them opined that they followed the outlined course objectives and structure through with precision. The coordinators also thought they had planned the timeframes and deadlines of the course successfully.

In designing the course, the coordinators paid special attention to the structure and schedule of the course, the various backgrounds of the students and their effects on course design, the content and context, assignments, literature and course objectives.

The coordinators seemed to agree that it was challenging to plan a course for a group of students from different backgrounds. Materials and their selection process were also aspects that was mentioned as challenging.

Coordinators presented varied views as to how many students are an ideal number at a course. Some set the perfect amount to be at 20-30, others stated 35 or 50 as the absolute maximum. It was clear that, in their view, when the amount of students increased the coordinators’ workload increased correspondingly.

3.4. Course content: assignments and material

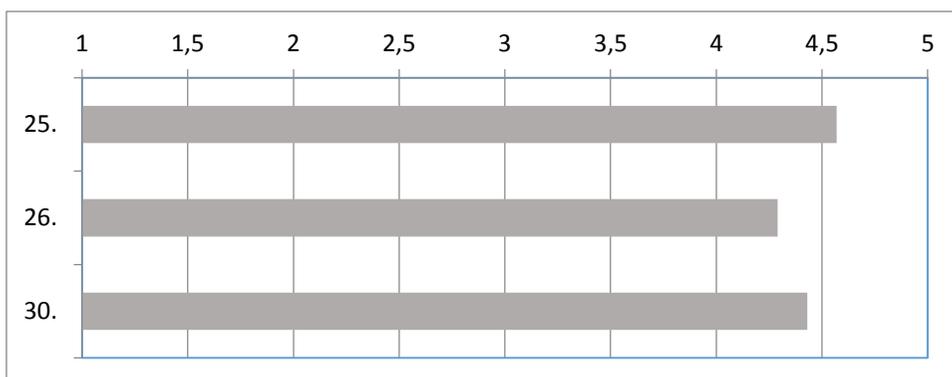


Diagram 20: Course content, 2014-2015, n=7.

25. The assignments in the course are motivating to students.

26. I have given clear instructions on the completion of assignments.

30. The course materials were of good quality.

Firstly, this section mapped the types of material and assignments that course coordinators used on courses. The seven coordinators who replied to this question had used the following assignments:

- Individual and group assignments
- Essays
- Direct conversations on Skype and other platforms
- Selection assignment at the beginning of the course, sub-assignments during the course, final assignments
- Quizzes

They also specified the use of following materials:

- Written lectures
- PowerPoint presentations
- Videos, including video lectures and videos made in workshops, during seminars and visits
- Online lectures
- Reports
- Articles, including articles from teachers
- Links to the most important data sources and documents

A statement had the coordinators assessing whether their course's assignments are motivating to students. Three coordinators rated it a 4, "Good", while four respondents gave it a 5, "Excellent". They seemed to agree that the assignments were motivating to students.

The coordinators also had to rate the clarity of their instruction that was related to assignments. Two coordinators rated the statement a 3, "Average", while one coordinator rated it a 4, "Good". Four respondents rated it a 5 "Excellent". The implication is majority of the course coordinators thought that the instructions given had been clear or very clear, while two disagreed somewhat.

Coordinators seemed to be content with the quality of course materials. One coordinator rated the statement investigating this aspect a 3 "Average", while two coordinators rated it a 4, "Good". Four coordinators gave the statement a 5, "Excellent".

Based on the replies to an open question, it seems that the coordinators chose course materials based on their own experience, familiarity with the topic, academic knowledge, colleagues' advice, knowledge of experts through own networks, students' suggestions, knowledge of video lectures from the best available international and national lecturers, and the reading of journals.

Conclusions: Course content from the coordinators' perspective

Great majority of the coordinators thought that the assignments in the course are motivating to students and that they have given clear instructions on the completion of the assignments.

As far as materials go, the coordinators largely agreed that they were of good quality. The coordinators chose the materials they used based on their own experience, familiarity with the topic, academic knowledge, colleagues' advice, experts' advice, students' suggestions, reading of journals and knowledge of where to look and find appropriate video materials online.

3.5. Student interaction

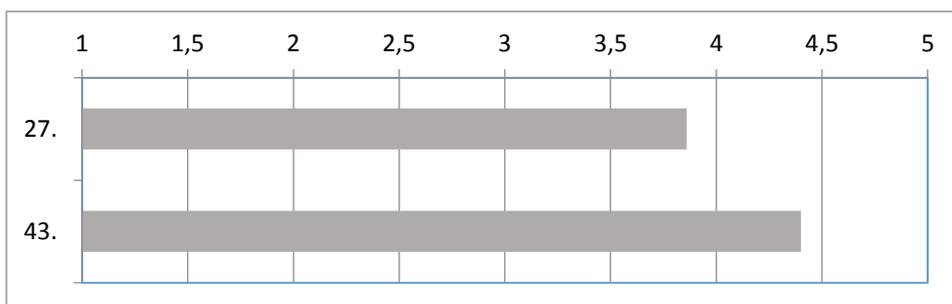


Diagram 21: Student interaction, 2014-2015, n=5-7.

27. In my experience, the modes of student interaction have been successful.

43. I have encouraged student interaction during the courses.

As seen in the students' questionnaire, student interaction is a central part of the methodology of many virtual studies courses. The coordinators rated the success of the modes of student interaction on their courses as "Good" overall, two respondents rating the statement investigating this aspect a 3, "Average", four giving it a 4, "Good" and one respondent rating it a 5, "Excellent".

The coordinators also had to rate how well they had encouraged student interaction on courses. The five coordinators who replied gave it a rating of 4, "Good" or 5, "Excellent". It seems that all coordinators who replied thought they had encouraged student interaction either well or in an excellent manner.

The implication is that the coordinators found both the modes of student interaction and the encouragement of it very successful. Out of the seven respondents, only one seemed to disagree, stating that

"Student interaction is never good on a virtual course."

Conclusions: Student interaction from the coordinators' perspective

It can be concluded that coordinators are generally happy with the modes of student interaction on courses and the extent to which they have encouraged student interaction on their courses.

3.6. Teacher-student interaction and instruction

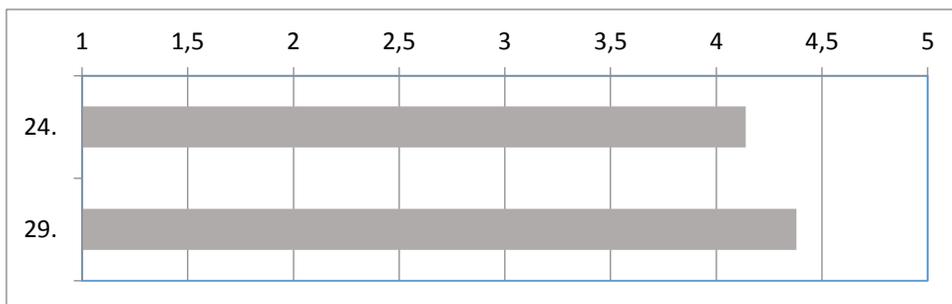


Diagram 22: Teacher-student interaction & instruction, 2014-2015, n=7-8.

24. I have been available for the students for questions and directions.

29. My instructions have been clear and detailed.

The perceived ease of communication between the teacher and the students obviously is a central factor in determining the success of a virtual course. In assessing their availability towards the students for questions and directions, one coordinator rated the statement a 2, “Moderate”, and two rated it a 4, “Good”. Five respondents rated their availability as “Excellent” giving it a 5. One coordinator added:

“I would have liked to be more available for the students.”

The coordinators also assessed the clarity and level of detail in their own instruction. Two respondents rated the statement a 3, “Average”, while two rated it a 4, “Good”. Three respondents rated the statement a 5, “Excellent”. Thus, most coordinators thought they had taken care of the clarity and level of detail in instruction well.

The coordinators were asked to describe types of situations in which students approach the course coordinator. Students had approached the coordinators in general matters, course matters, requests for more information, essay writing, future studies, problems with network connections and timetable issues, administrative questions, technical problems, concerns over assessment, availability for extra guidance, availability for thesis supervision and registration of ECTS. One coordinator said:

“Admin questions regarding access to Moodle - this particularly applies to non-Finnish students, and there seems to be some confusion about who can access Moodle (even when guest access is provided). UniPID should be clearer on who can register for the courses.”

In addition, the coordinators were asked to describe the ease of communication between them and the students. It is worth noting that the question design seems to have a flaw in that the expectation that the communication is easy has already been voiced, which most likely had an effect on the replies. Nevertheless, some of the coordinators who replied to this question highlighted some problematic instances of communication, but mostly people thought the communication had been good and easy. One coordinator referred to the e-mails and discussions as “sometimes messy”. Another said that differences in academic cultures sometimes required private discussions with the student. A third lamented at their own inability to communicate enough with the students. One coordinator said:

“Generally no problems. Cultural differences in study methods and academic writing have occasionally showed up with students from outside Europe, but it can be handled via discussion and information about our academic rules.”

Conclusions: Student-teacher interaction, instruction from the coordinators’ perspective

It seems that the coordinators were happy with the extent to which they had been available for students, and with the clarity and level of detail of their own instruction. In both cases, though, there were coordinators that rated the statements “Average” or lower.

The students had approached the coordinators mostly asking for technical and administrative support, but also when it comes to advice on future studies, thesis supervision and concerns over assessment. In general, the coordinators thought the communication between them and the students had been easy.

3.7. Virtual Pedagogies

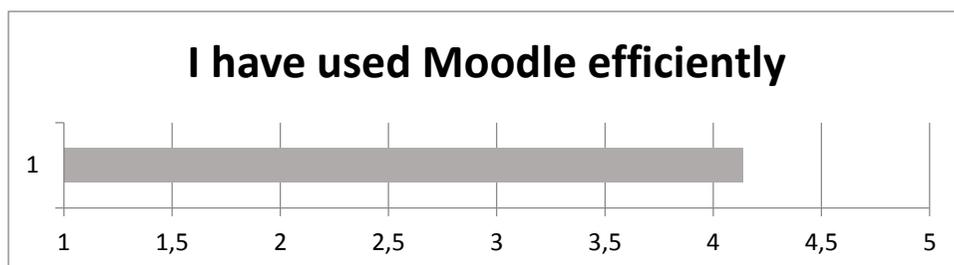


Diagram 23: I have used Moodle as a platform efficiently, 2014-2015, n=7.

When rating the efficiency of their Moodle to support students' learning, the coordinators thought that they had used Moodle well, but some disagreed. One coordinator rated the statement a 2 "Moderate", while three gave it a 4, "Good". Three respondents rated the statement a 5, "Excellent". A coordinator said:

"I had the opportunity to develop skills on the use of the Moodle platform, however the objective and structure of the course were very demanding to control quality of the performance of students."

An open question asked how the coordinators have taken the virtual aspect of the course(s) into consideration. All 7 coordinators who replied to this question agreed that they had taken the virtual aspect of the course into consideration and provided examples of how they had done that. Coordinators said:

"I try to be as clear and unambiguous as possible."

"[by] controlling the thematic of the course, so that students do not discuss topics that are out of the course, providing guiding questionnaire to each topic."

The respondents were also asked to consider what they found easy and what they found difficult in teaching a virtual course. In their replies to what was considered easy, the coordinators referred to aspects such as providing video lectures, maintaining the information flow of the course, flexibility of the work hours and reaching students from around the world.

A coordinators said:

"It feels easy when they feel engaged."

One coordinators implied that the motivation of some groups makes teaching a virtual course easy:

“They [the students] really read and reflect, some groups are very inspiring.”

As for the aspects that coordinators found difficult, two coordinators referred to the lack of face to face contact with students. A coordinator said:

“Not seeing the students. Not being able to ‘feel their response’ ad hoc. Some students do not like Internet-based courses since they would like to have immediate opportunities to comment and ask further questions, and study in a social situation.”

Other aspects that the coordinators mentioned as being difficult were the flexibility of work hours, the technical details of the platform and the making of videos, controlling the level of students’ own responsibility of their own learning, assessment and evaluation and finding the time to monitor and support discussions throughout the course.

Conclusions: Virtual pedagogies from the coordinators’ perspective

Most coordinators felt that they had used the Moodle platform efficiently to support students’ learning.

The coordinators said they had taken the virtual aspect of the course(s) into consideration, for instance by supervising students and providing instructions that were as clear and unambiguous as possible.

Aspects of teaching a virtual course that were easy included flexibility of working hours, providing video lectures, maintaining the information flow of the course and interacting with students from around the world. Teaching motivated students was also mentioned as something that is easy.

The most prominent difficult aspect of teaching a virtual course for the coordinators was the lack of face to face contact with the students. Coordinators also reported problems with technical issues, controlling the extent to which students had to take responsibility over their own learning, assessment and evaluation, and finding enough time to moderate and support group discussions.

3.8. Assessment & Feedback

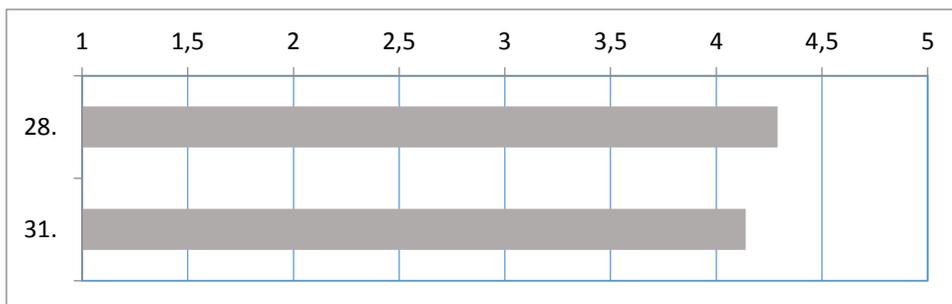


Diagram 24: Assessment and feedback, 2014-2015, n=7.

28. Assessment of students' performance was based on definite criteria throughout the course.

31. I have given the course participants constructive feedback.

The coordinators were asked to evaluate to what extent the assessment of the students' performance was based on definite criteria applied throughout the course. Two coordinators rated this aspect a 3, "Average" while one respondent gave it a 4, "Good". Four respondents rated it a 5, "Excellent".

The coordinators were also asked to estimate whether they had given students constructive feedback. One coordinator responded with a 1, "Unsuccessful", while two coordinators gave it a 4, "Good". Four respondents gave the statement a 5, "Excellent". It seems that most respondents felt like they gave constructive feedback, but one coordinator was not happy with the feedback they had given.

An open question mapped what methods and criteria the coordinators used to evaluate the students' assignments, participation and overall performance. The coordinators said they evaluate the students based on their performance under different course modules and on different assignments, as well as according to their level of activity during the courses.

The students' performance and participation is also evaluated against the objectives of the course. It was mentioned by a respondent that developing the criteria according based on experience is essential. One coordinator also said they use peer evaluation among students. What is more important than developing assessment criteria, in one respondent's view, is the clear communication of said criteria to the students. Coordinators said:

“I controlled the number of their contributions on the discussion forum (5), I also checked the presence and content of the discussion and see if it is related to the topic in case. The final evaluation was a final essay based on 1 or more lectures.”

“A list of criteria has been developed over the years, the list clearly stated for the students too; they also grade their group members.”

As for why the coordinators used the specified evaluation methods, they referred to advice from a virtual education expert, their own experience, academic suitability of the chosen methods, as well as their will to provide varied tasks/assignments and to give room for individual reflection. Coordinators said:

“The most important outcome of the course is the awareness raising. It is difficult to compare apples and oranges.”

“The essay was the common way of evaluation, however the other methods were based on the performance of the students during the first quarter of the course and I noticed that students were not active enough and in order to make them participate actively, I introduced these methods.”

A question was included that asked what was the main evaluation criteria that the coordinators used. The main evaluation criteria that the coordinators used were (active) participation, learning, completion of tasks, contribution to the entire group’s learning, and performance in specific assignments, e.g. essays.

The last open question in this section asked on what basis the coordinators decide what kinds of feedback and how much feedback they give the students. In their responses to this question, most common factor that coordinators specified that limited the amount of feedback they gave was the amount of time available.

Coordinators said:

“I try to be as supportive as possible.

“Besides grading all the assignments of different modules individually as soon as possible, the personal feedback would be highly appreciated by students. However, there are limits with time and energy.”

Conclusions: Assessment and feedback from the coordinators' perspective

To conclude with, according to the coordinators, the assessment of students had mostly been based on definite criteria, and most of them had given constructive feedback to students.

Coordinators said they base their assessment of student performance on factors such as how active the students were, their learning, contribution to others' learning, how well they performed academically under different course modules, the final assignment and course objectives. Some also utilized peer assessment.

The coordinators chose these assessment methods they used based on advice from virtual education specialists, their own experience, the will to provide students with varied tasks and assignments and to give room to individual reflection.

When asked what they based the amount of feedback they gave to students on, they mostly discussed the amount of time they had available and its constraints. They strived to provide supportive individual feedback to enhance learning when it was possible.

The coordinators brought up the amount of time they had available and its constraints as the major limiting factors to the amount of feedback they gave to students. They strived to provide supportive individual feedback when it was possible.

3.9. Coordinators' workload

One goal of the evaluation process was to investigate the workload that coordinating a virtual course causes for course coordinators. Half (4 of 8) of respondents said they spend "less than 20 hours per week" coordinating the course. Three coordinators said they spend 20-30 hours a week coordinating their course. One coordinator said that they spend more than 40 hours a week coordinating a course.

The coordinators said that the most work-heavy aspects of coordinating a course were evaluating essays and tasks, going through course materials and

administrative issues, each of which was mentioned by more than one coordinator. It is also worth mentioned that earlier many coordinators agreed that larger amounts of students on courses increase the coordinator's workload (See chapter 3.3).

Other work-heavy aspects that received mentions were answering unnecessary questions, responding to assignments, teaching, technical issues with Moodle, examination, following Moodle discussions, planning, setting the course up, answering students' questions, making summaries of student feedback and following up on the students' performance.

Another question investigated what things required the most coordination during courses. Aspects that were mentioned included assisting with tasks that could have been solved by reading instructions, group assignments, notifying and keeping in touch with students participating in discussions, student participation and the registration of credits.

Conclusions: Coordinators' workload

What can be concluded about the coordinators' workload is that they spent considerable portions of their working hours focusing on the coordination of the course, one coordinator even saying that they spent more than 40 hours a week focusing on UniPID Virtual Studies.

The coordinators spent most of their time evaluating essays and tasks, going through materials and with administrative issues. The things that required the most coordination during courses were group assignments, keeping up with student discussions, student participation and issues related to the registration of credits.

3.10. Student feedback

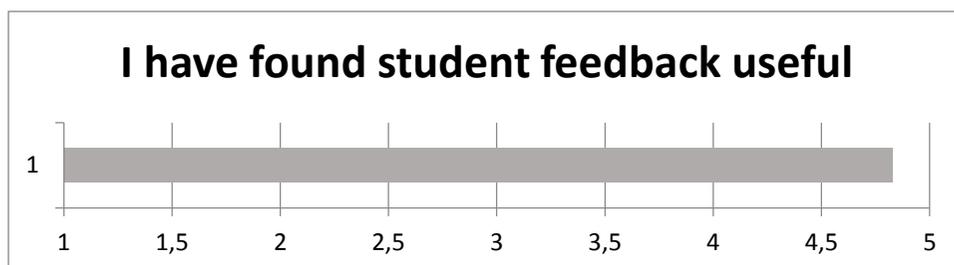


Diagram 25: *I have found the feedback from the students useful, 2014-2015, n=6.*

The coordinators were asked whether they had found student feedback useful. One coordinator rated it a 4, “Good”, while five respondents rated it a 5, “Excellent”. They thus seem to agree that feedback from student was very useful.

When asked how beneficial the feedback given on the courses was, only two coordinators replied to this question, saying:

“Even if the majority of students thought the coordination was very good, I had the opportunity to identify my weaknesses in terms of intercultural communication. Sometimes when I said something I was understood differently... It was important to have a multicultural understanding to address students from different cultural settings and thus make decisions on how they would interact to take as much as possible profit from the course.”

Conclusions: Student feedback from the coordinators’ perspective

The coordinators thought that student feedback was very useful. In a coordinator’s words, it gave them the opportunity to identify their own weaknesses, even if the students thought the coordination and the course were very good.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

After presenting the results of both the students’ and coordinators’ evaluation questionnaires and course feedback, we can begin thinking about their implications for the future of the Virtual Studies. Going back to the premise of this

evaluation, the overall objective is to assess the quality of UniPID Virtual Studies, focusing on course content and usefulness of the studies from the students' perspective.

Based on the evaluation, it can be concluded that the overall experience of UniPID Virtual Studies is positive. It can also be pointed out that most negative experiences that have surfaced in the course of this evaluation are the like of which plague university studies and online studies in general, and not only the UniPID Virtual Studies Programme. The perspectives that students have shared in the course of this evaluation also tend to be very subjective, and the attitudes towards different assignment types, material types, group work and feedback tend to vary from person to person. Thus, in this section will focus on the aspects whose overhaul is both fruitful and feasible within the scope of the UniPID Virtual Studies Programme.

In the conclusions the most problematic areas are highlighted. Were the goal to provide solutions that guaranteed good quality of the UniPID Virtual Studies across the board, nearly all aspects included in this evaluation would have to be scrutinized, as most of the average scores in this evaluation fell short from 4.0 which corresponds to "Good" performance. However, in this concluding section the focus will be on the areas that received the very lowest average scores and the largest amounts of criticism in replies to open questions, in order to tackle the most urgent issues. After the problematic issue itself is presented, recommendations that can be taken up either by the UniPID Virtual Studies Working Group, the UniPID Coordination Unit or the course coordinators are suggested.

4.1. Issue 1: Problems with administrative processes

A number of students reported problems with administrative issues in their replies to the evaluation questionnaire and course feedback questionnaire. It is to be noted that during the period when the data for the evaluation was gathered, UniPID Virtual Studies was either undergoing or had just recently undergone an administrative overhaul.

The goal of the administrative overhaul itself was to make the administrative processes easier for the students and coordinators. UniPID staff and course coordinators should take measures in the future to ensure that the processes that

relate to grade transfer from one university to another in the context of the UniPID Virtual Studies remains as effortless and clear as possible.

Recommendations:

For the UniPID Coordination Unit:

- *Identification of relevant administrative staff in member universities who can support the Virtual Studies' administrative processes*
- *Maintenance of a network of administrative and non-administrative contact people at member universities for the purposes of UniPID Virtual Studies*
- *Continued communication with the administrative staff of UniPID member universities which ensures that the staff is up to date with practices related to the Virtual Studies*
- *Clear communication of administrative procedures from the coordination unit to the coordinator in the beginning of a course*

For the course coordinators:

- *Clear communication of administrative procedures to the students at*

4.2. Issue 2: The general/specialized distinction is not clear

The UniPID website says the following regarding the distinction between general and specialized courses:

The courses are divided into general and specialized courses. General courses address fundamental issues in global development studies. The courses address the theories and practice of development and offer an introduction to the topic.

Specialized courses delve deeper into specific concepts and themes of sustainable development, such as biodiversity, corporate responsibility, sanitation, and the role of international organizations. Together, the course curriculum offers a well-rounded view on development work and research.

Furthermore, the UniPID Virtual Studies student guide states the following:

Please note that some specialized courses require background studies in the topic as a prerequisite for admission. The course description outlines these additional requirements.

According to the students' replies to the evaluation questionnaire's sections that deal with the general/specialized distinction, it can be seen that this distinction is not very clear to them and that the level of the course has not always been very clearly communicated.

In their replies, the course coordinators did not seem to agree on any criteria for general or specialized courses. Some did not reply to the question investigating their reason at all, while others could not well put to words what had influenced their choice.

Recommendations:

For actions to be taken by UniPID Virtual Studies working groups and Coordination Unit:

- *Revision of the standards for the distinction between general and specialized courses in UniPID Virtual Studies to avoid misunderstandings. This task can be undertaken by the UniPID Virtual Studies' quality and core curriculum working groups.*
- *After the revision, raising awareness about the general/specialized distinction among both UniPID students and coordinators. The standards and description of the general/specialized distinction should be communicated efficiently, making sure that it reaches students in various contexts and that coordinators encounter it while preparing course proposals as well as throughout the implementation of the course.*

To enable this this, the following actions can be taken:

- *E-mail communication to course coordinators informing them of new terms for the distinction*
 - *Modification of the guides that are sent out to students and coordinators to include a passage on the differences between general and specialized course*
 - *Addition of a passage to the UniPID website which details what the labels 'general' and 'specialized' mean.*
- *Designing a clearer core curriculum for the programme can help resolve the confusion in the distinction between general and specialized courses in UniPID Virtual Studies*

4.3. Issue 3: Inconsistencies in course quality

An issue that is less apparent in a reading of the evaluation data, but nevertheless comes through in multiple contexts throughout the evaluation is the issue of consistency of quality between courses.

It is worth stressing that the goal is not to have Virtual Studies courses that are identical in terms of their methods and pedagogics but to achieve a streamlining

approach to these aspects of the Virtual Studies and provide a foundation that ensures a certain level of quality.

Recommendations:

For the UniPID Virtual Studies quality working group and Coordination Unit:

- *Dissemination of this evaluation report to the course coordinators to guide course planning and implementation*
- *Drafting of clear quality standards and guidelines on basis of this evaluation and a more detailed analysis of course-by-course feedback to support the course coordinators' work*
- *Designing a clear core curriculum for the Virtual Studies programme and increasing the UniPID's control over course design may help to resolve the inconsistencies of quality between the courses to some extent*

Even though it is challenging to engage academics who live all over the country and who are used to their own methods of working, UniPID should offer the coordinators training on virtual pedagogies. This can be done by:

- *Organizing workshops on virtual teaching methods and pedagogies*
- *Organizing workshops to share best practices to enable coordinators to learn from one another*

4.4. Issue 4: Amount and quality of student interaction

It is difficult to discuss and draw conclusions on student interaction based on this evaluation as the data is rich with contradictory student accounts. This fact was already apparent in the analysis of the course feedback, where students listed group work and student interaction under both their favorite and least favorite parts of the course.

Student interaction, in the sense we have handled it in this report, covers both group work and discussions that some courses use as compulsory exercises. In principle, discussions are a great way for the course coordinator to reduce their own workload and to share some pedagogical responsibility with the students by encouraging them to teach one another. Problems seem to arise when instructions are unclear or when support from the teacher is lacking.

Discussions, like other assignments, require good instruction and teacher participation, but also equal amounts of participation from every group member. Without these discussions may stay superficial or get derailed off topic.

Recommendations for course coordinators:

Successful student interaction and group work address the given topic and require equal amounts of participation from every group member. To guarantee this, the course coordinators should:

- *Give clear instructions on group work and discussions, and make sure that the instructions are understood*
- *Participate and moderate the discussions regularly*

4.5. Issue 5: Feedback from coordinators

Assessment criteria and the nature of the given feedback during UniPID courses highly depend on the course coordinator's individual practices. Likewise, every student has individual needs and preferences when it comes to feedback.

However, the issue of feedback stood out both from the course feedback and the evaluation results. In both contexts, students expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount of feedback they had received. In addition to being a common problem in all university studies, the lack of constructive individual feedback in UniPID studies most likely has to do with the large amounts of students on most UniPID courses. One coordinator explicitly stated that they would have liked to spend more time on giving personal feedback to the students, but the workload and large amount of students on the course made it impossible for them to do so.

One way that some course coordinators tackled this problem was by utilizing peer feedback, requiring that students give each other feedback during or after their group work had been completed.

Recommendations:

For course coordinators: The diversity in students' needs and preferences related to feedback needs to be overcome as assessment is one of the aspects that is expected to have a high impact on the experienced usefulness of studies. Constructive feedback and informed assessment should be used to support the students' learning. Every student should receive some individual feedback. To ease the workload created by large amounts of students peer assessment, peer feedback, and self-assessment can be used.

References

- Tyler-Smith, K. (2006). Early Attrition among First Time eLearners: A Review of Factors that Contribute to Drop-out, Withdrawal and Non-completion Rates of Adult Learners undertaking eLearning Programmes. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching* [online] 2 (2).
http://jolt.merlot.org/Vol2_No2_TylerSmith.htm

Appendix 1: Students' course feedback form

2/16/2017

Course Feedback Form

Course Feedback Form

Please give feedback on the UniPID virtual course you attended!

Course title *

Please Select ▼

Course dates *

Your home university *

Please Select ▼

Course concepts

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| I have a better understanding of sustainable development as a result of the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| I have a better understanding of the subject of the course than I did before the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| I have a better understanding of the concepts taught during the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| I found the course interesting. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The course fits into my study programme. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

Course content

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| The objectives of the course were clear to me. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| I found the contents of the course interesting. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| I learned from the contents of the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| Course material was presented clearly. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The course material was interesting. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The course material contributed to my understanding of the subject or concepts presented in the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

<https://unipid.wufoo.eu/forms/course-feedback-form/>

1/4

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| I received sufficient feedback and direction during the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| I learned from the feedback and direction given during the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The course met the stated objectives. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The course met my expectations. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

Assignments/group work

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| The assignments/group work helped me to better understand the subject/concepts presented in the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| Instructions were clear and useful. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| There was enough time to complete the assignment(s). | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

Practical arrangements

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| The course was well planned in advance. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The duration of the course was sufficient. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The course was a useful part of my studies. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The quality of virtual material (video lectures) was high. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| The virtual learning environment was easy to use. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| Instructions for the virtual learning environment were clear and useful. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

Teaching

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Teaching was qualified. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Teaching supported my learning during the course. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| Teaching was well planned and organised. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| Illustration (equipment used) was clear and useful. | <input type="radio"/> 1 | <input type="radio"/> 2 | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |

How did you find the level of the course?

- Too easy
 Just right
 Too difficult

In relation to the credits received, the workload was...

- Too low
 Just right
 Too high

From which aspect of the course did you learn the most? (For example, course materials, the teaching, other students, assignments, online discussion, etc.)

What was your favorite part of the course?

What was your least favorite part of the course?

What should be developed/changed in this course?

How did you find out about the UniPID virtual studies?

- Home university
- Search engine (eg Google)
- Other students
- Friends/family
- At an event
- Other, please specify

What (if any) other theme would you like to be included under the UniPID virtual studies?

Any other comments?

Powered

Appendix 2: Coordinators' course feedback form

2/17/2017

Course Feedback Form for Coordinators

Course Feedback Form for Coordinators

Please give us some feedback on the practical aspects of your course.

Course Information

Please provide us with information on your course.

Course title *

Course dates *

Name *

University

Course Logistics

Please provide us with information on the logistics of running your course.

How difficult was the student registration process?

- Easy
 Moderately difficult
 Difficult

Comments

How difficult was using Overview?

- Easy
 Moderately difficult
 Difficult

Comments

How was the process of registering credits?

- Easy

<https://unipid.wufoo.eu/forms/course-feedback-form-for-coordinators/>

1/2

- Moderately difficult
- Difficult

Comments

Did you receive enough support from the UniPID Coordination Unit?

- Yes
- No

Comments

Your Course

Describe some of the successes and challenges of your course.

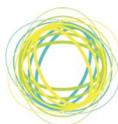
Did you experience any problems with the use of Moodle?

- Yes
- No

Any other comments or suggestions for UniPID?

Powered

UniPID ; Virtual Studies Evaluation 2015 | Students



Section 1 | General Information

Age*

Home University*

How many UniPID courses have you taken?*

At what point of your studies did you start the UniPID Virtual Studies?*

At what point in your studies are you now?*

How familiar were you with UniPID before taking up the Virtual Studies?*

Not at all Very familiar

How would you describe your overall experience of the Virtual Studies?*

How did you hear about the UniPID Virtual Studies?*

- From my home faculty
- From the UniPID website
- From other students
- From my home university's website
- From the international office of my home university
- Other

Please specify other sources not mentioned above.

What are your main reasons for taking UniPID Virtual Studies courses?*

- I need the ECTS for my degree
- I want to complete the UniPID minor
- I am interested in sustainable development
- It is convenient for me to take courses online
- The course contents complement my overall study plan
- My home university offers a limited number of courses on the development topics of my interests
- I want to take a course/courses in English
- I want to interact with students from other universities
- I want to interact with international students
- Other

Please specify other reasons not mentioned above.

In your experience, what are the main benefits of the UniPID Virtual Studies?*

What aspects of the Virtual Studies do you think should be developed?*

- Course participant's selection criteria
- Course structures
- Course platform & technology
- Course material
- Virtual pedagogies & teaching
- Minor structure
- Virtual Studies' marketing
- Virtual Studies' internationalization

Please mention here the aspects you would like to develop that were not mentioned above.

Please describe what specifically could be developed and, if possible, why it needs to be developed.*

Section 2 | Course Enrollment

When choosing a course, which aspects of the course influence your decision the most?*

- Course dates
- Coordinator/Coordinating university
- Course level (general/specialized)
- Course topic
- Course content
- Course objectives
- Learning methods
- Study materials
- Evaluation criteria

Please specify other factors influencing your decision not mentioned above.*

How easy has it been to find information on the up-coming courses?
*

Not at all Very easy

Where do you look for information on the possible minors/courses?

In your experience, how accurate was the information given in advance of the course?*

Not at all Very Accurate

In your experience, how clear is the difference between general and specialized courses?*

Not at all Very Clear

If you have not found the information on the courses sufficient or accurate, please describe what could be improved.

How have the courses met your expectations?*

Not at all Very well

Have you found the variety of courses to match your individual needs and interests?
What things have met your needs and what have not? *

What topics or themes would you like UniPID to include in the Virtual Studies?*

Section 3 | Overall Experience

What aspects of studying online do you find easy?*

What aspects of studying online do you find challenging?*

In your experience, how was the virtual aspect of the course(s) taken into consideration?*

Please rate the following statements.

If you have taken more than one course, please base your answer on your overall experience.

| | Not at all | Moderate | Average | Good | Excellent | N/A |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The course timeframes have fit well into my personal study plans.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The course contents have complemented my personal study plans.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The quality of the course contents has been consistent between courses.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The amount of coursework has been equivalent to 5 ECTS.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The courses' level (general or specialized) have accurately described the level of the course.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The course objectives and structure have been clear and detailed.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The course objectives and structure were followed through during the course.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The instructions given have been clear and detailed.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The assignments have been motivating.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| I have been given clear instructions on how to complete given assignments.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The topics and contents of the course(s) are interesting and educational.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The course materials have been of good quality.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The timeframes and deadlines given during the course(s) have been achievable and clearly defined.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| Student interaction during the course(s) has been encouraged.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| In my experience, the modes of student interaction have been successful.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| The amount of student interaction during the course(s) has been sufficient.* | <input type="radio"/> |
| My performance has been evaluated with explicit criteria.* | <input type="radio"/> |

The amount of constructive feedback was sufficient.*



The Course Coordinator has been available for the students to contact throughout the course.*



Moodle has been used efficiently to support learning.*



Please feel free to comment in more detail on any of the statements above.

In your experience, what have been the highlights of the course(s)?*

In your experience, what have been the downfalls of the course(s)?*

Section 4 | Course contents

In your experience, how functional were the course platform and technical arrangements used in the course(s)?*

Not at all

Very functional

How easy has it been to understand the language used in the course instructions and materials?*

Very difficult

Very easy

If you have experienced difficulties in understanding the language used in the course, please specify what has made it difficult.

How would you describe the ease of communication between the teacher and the students?*

In what kinds of situations did you feel like you would have needed more guidance?*

How was student interaction organized and supported during the courses?*

In your experience, how does the number of students affect the implementation of the course?*

What kinds of materials and assignments were used on the courses? How would you describe their usefulness and educational value?*

In your experience, what kinds of materials and assignments have been the most useful and educational?*

In your experience, how helpful was the feedback given in the course(s)?*

In your experience, was the evaluation process clear and understandable?*

Please include here anything about the UniPID Virtual Studies you would like us to know!

Would you like to receive a pair of movie tickets?

We will raffle four pairs of movie tickets for those who answer the questionnaire. If you want to participate in the lottery, please fill in your contact information below. The information given will not be used in the analysis of the answers of the questionnaire.

Name

Email

Would you like to be interviewed?

The UniPID evaluation team is looking for participants to be interviewed on the topics introduced in this questionnaire. If you are willing to participate, please fill out your contact information below and we will contact you as soon as possible. The interviewees will also have an additional chance to participate in the lottery and win a pair movie tickets.

The interviews can be carried out in person or via i.e. phone or Skype. The data gathered from the interviews will be handled confidentially.

Name

I prefer for you to contact me

Email

Phone

Skype

Other

HUOM! Lomakkeen lähettäminen onnistuu ainoastaan vastaajanäkymässä.

Please press the SEND-button when you have answered the questions.

UniPID; Virtual Studies Evaluation 2015 | Course Coordinators



Section 1 | Overview

How many UniPID Virtual Studies courses have you coordinated?
(Here, one course is the equivalent to one course offering. If you have coordinated the same course three times, then you have coordinated 3 courses.)*

Are you currently coordinating a course?*

Are you primarily employed to coordinate the Virtual Studies courses?*

How familiar were you with UniPID before coordinating a Virtual Studies course?*

Not at all

Very familiar

In your opinion, has your home university gained tangible benefits from the Virtual Studies?*

How would you describe your overall experience of being a course coordinator?*

What topics or themes would you like to include in the Virtual Studies?*

What aspects of the Virtual Studies do you think should be developed?*

- The proposal process
- Course participant's selection criteria
- Course structures
- Course platform & technology
- Course material
- Virtual pedagogies & teaching
- Minor structure
- Virtual Studies' marketing
- Virtual Studies' internationalization
- Cooperation with UniPID
- Cooperation with the administrative staff
- Cooperation with the other course coordinators

Please mention here the aspects you would like to develop that were not mentioned above.

Please describe what specifically could be developed and, if possible, why it needs to be developed.*

Section 2 | Call for Proposals

How transparent was the course proposal process?

Not Transparent Clearly Transparent

How clear was the Call for Proposals and the instructions for submitting a proposal? *

Very Unclear Very Clear

In your opinion, how appropriately is the new course selection process handled? *

Very Inappropriately Very Appropriately

Was the amount awarded to you for the preparation and offering of your Virtual Studies course sufficient?*

If no, please describe what would have benefited from increased funding.

What could be done to improve the course proposal process?*

What kind of criteria have you used to determine whether the proposed course is on the general or specialized level?*

Section 3 | Course Coordination

Approximately how much time do/did you spend coordinating your course?*

What are the most work-heavy aspects of coordinating a course?*

In your experience, what are the things that require the most coordination during a course?*

Please evaluate your performance on the following topics on a scale from unsuccessful to excellent.

I have assessed my course to be equivalent to 5 ETCs.*

| Unsuccessful | Moderate | Average | Good | Excellent | N/A |
|--------------|----------|---------|------|-----------|-----|
| ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ● | | | | | |
| ● | | | | | |

I have clearly outlined the course objectives and structure.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

I followed the outlined course objectives and structure through with precision.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

My instructions on the course have been clear and detailed.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

The assignments in the course are motivating to students.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

I have given clear instructions on the completion of the assignments.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

In my experience, the modes of student interaction have been successful.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

Assessment of students' performance was based on definite criteria applied throughout the course.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

I have been available for the students for questions and directions.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

The course materials were of good quality.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

I have given the course participants constructive feedback.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

I have used Moodle as a platform efficiently, to support the students' learning.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

I have found the feedback from the students useful.*

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> |

Please feel free to comment in more detail on any of the topics above.

In your experience, how does the number of students affect the coordination of the course?*

In what kinds of situations have the students approached you?*

Section 4

What was your overall experience of the course proposal process?*

In particular, what things do you pay attention to when constructing a Virtual Studies course? *

Please include anything else about the Virtual Studies you would like us to know!

How would you describe the ease of communication between you and the students?*

How easy was the course proposal process?*

Very Difficult Very Easy

What kinds of materials and assignments have you had during the course(s)? In your experience, what kinds of materials and assignments are the most useful?

In your experience, how beneficial was the feedback given on the course(s)?

In your experience, how clear was the evaluation process?

Section 4 | Virtual Pedagogies

How have you taken the virtual aspect of the course(s) into consideration?*

What things do you find easy in teaching a virtual course?*

What things do you find difficult in teaching a virtual course?*

What have you found easy and/or challenging when designing the course activities and contents?*

What kinds of materials & assignments have you used in your courses?*

How did you select the course materials?*

What methods or criteria have you used to evaluate the students' assignments or participation in a course? The students' overall performance?*

Why have you decided to use the chosen evaluation methods?*

What has been your main evaluation criteria for evaluating the students during the courses?*

On what basis do you decide how much and what kind of feedback you will give students?*

Are you interested in receiving more support or teacher development from UniPID on issues such as virtual pedagogy, the Moodle platform, etc.?*

What issues would you like more support on?*

Would you like to receive a pair of movie tickets?

We will raffle two pairs of movie tickets for those who answer the questionnaire. If you want to participate in the lottery, please fill in your contact information below. The information given will not be used in the analysis of the answers of the questionnaire.

Name

Email

Would you like to be interviewed?

The UniPID evaluation team is looking for participants to be interviewed on the topics introduced in this questionnaire. If you are willing to participate, please fill out your contact information below and we will contact you as soon as possible. The interviewees will have an additional chance to participate in the lottery and win a pair movie tickets.

The interviews can be carried out in person or via i.e. phone or Skype. The data gathered from the interviews will be handled confidentially.

Name

I prefer for you to contact me

E-mail

Phone

Skype

Other

HUOM! Lomakkeen lähettäminen onnistuu ainoastaan vastaajanäkymässä.