

Summary of Teaching SV 9104, Spring 2021

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This is our second COVID 19 SV9104 course teaching. With the pandemic disrupting regular academic timetables, we had, like our colleagues, to make adjustments. Almost instantaneously, professors in all disciplines have been expected to become skilled virtual instructors. To minimize the shift, we tried to stay as true as possible to the original timetable. Rather than seeing virtual methods as a poor facsimile or simulation of “real” class, we approached online spaces as inhabited places, in most ways as real as their physical counterparts. The test for us and the candidates was to realize digital place where education can continue to thrive despite unprecedented changes in our lives. When in doubt, we kept it simple.

Pruning the options involved trial and error. The time it takes to become comfortable with the new platforms and tailor quality course content was far more time-consuming than simply relying on our tried and trusted ways.

The course evaluations reflect a steep learning curve. In the overall feedback from last semester, the agreement to statements about how well organized and useful the course was, were in the range of 36%-64%, whilst this semester the same numbers had increased to 56%-88%. Students this semester found the course to be well-organized (88%), the lectures informative (84%), and they even perceived (the very same) group exercises to be more useful this semester (72%) compared to the students last semester (54%). Aside from the fact that different students perceive the world differently, this could also indicate a steep learning curve for the students in handling the digital format.

Ultimately, a mandatory PhD-level course with students from up to 6-7 very different disciplines is taxing. Suggested changes to the course from the student evaluations are often contradictory (longer/shorter course, more/less lectures, more/less time for discussion etc), and the students' perception of the course topic and motivation to engage varies significantly. We nevertheless read the evaluations carefully every semester and work consistently towards refining the quality and relevance of the course.