

Report on Issues in Contemporary Metaphysics CEQ's for year 2009-10

Lecturer: Nikk Effingham

Question 1: Did you find the module... (1 = too difficult; 5= too easy)

25 respondents: 5 answered '1'; 15 answered '2'; 4 answered '3', 1 answered '4'.

Average Score: 2.04

Lecturer's Comments: Clearly the students thought it was pretty hard. This is because it was pretty hard. Weirdly, this doesn't correspond with the minimal lecture and seminar turn out.

Question 2: Did you find the module... (1= well organised; 5= badly organised)

25 respondents: 9 answered '1'; 15 answered '2'; 1 answered '3'.

Average Score: 1.68.

Lecturer's Comments: Nifty.

Question 3: Did you find the lecturer... (1=helpful; 5=unhelpful)

25 respondents: 8 answered '1'; 9 answered '2'; 8 answered '3'.

Average: 2.

Lecturer's Comments: Could be better. Not sure how.

Question 4 Did you find the lecturer... (1=clear; 5=unclear)

25 respondents: 9 answered '1'; 8 answered '2'; 7 answered '3'; 1 answered '4'.

Average: 2

Lecturer's Comments: Acceptable score.

Question 5: Did you find the lecturer... (1=enthusiastic; 5=unenthusiastic)

25 respondents: 13 answered '1'; 11 answered '2'; 1 answered '3'

Average: 1.52.

Lecturer's Comments: I demonstrate an acceptable level of enthusiasm for the thing I dedicate my entire life to. *sigh*

Question 6: Was the opportunity for discussion... (1=sufficient; 5=insufficient)

25 respondents: 10 answered '1'; 7 answered '2'; 3 answered '3'; 5 answered '4'.

Average: 2.12.

Lecturer's Comments: Alright.

Question 7: Did the series of lectures make sense as a whole? (1= well; 5=badly)

25 respondents: 5 answered '1'; 14 answered '2'; 4 answered '3'; 2 answered '4'.

Average: 2.12.

Lecturer's Comments: I would've liked much higher. Oh well.

Question 8: Did you prepare adequately? (1=always; 5=never)

25 respondents: 2 answered '1'; 7 answered '2'; 12 answered '3'; 3 answered '4'; 1 answered '5'.

Average: 2.84.

Lecturer's Comments: Holy crap. Erm... this is a pretty hard course so that only 9 people of those who responded prepare adequately is worrying. God only knows how well the people who *didn't even turn up to the lecture to fill in the CEQ* manage to prepare.

Question 9: Was the library provision (1=adequate; 5=inadequate)

24 respondents: 1 answered '1'; 6 answered '2'; 10 answered '3'; 5 answered '4'; 2 answered '5'. One answered 'unknown' (and hadn't come to any seminars. Scary stuff).

Average: 3

Lecturer's Comments: Pretty crappy. *However* see below.

Question 10 What was the most helpful aspect of the lectures/classes?

Handouts; concise explanations; lectures were especially useful – well organised and explained – esp. examples that were used made it much easier to understand; the lectures were helpful and explained well; lectures were well organised, always happy to go over thing if you don't understand; seminar discussions; handouts, slides, [illegible]; Nikk's enthusiasm and well organised lectures; Nikk!; Availability of handouts and slides was v. helpful to help recap (didn't always sink in 1st time during the lecture!); Everything was reasonably clear in terms of the structure of the course, Lowe book recommendation was v. good; very clear explanation of difficult concepts; lectures: clarifying difficult concepts/arguments in the literature; Nikk explained everything from the literature and clarified all the topics very well; thorough handouts with proper sentences – not just confusing notes; The fact Nikk recapped every so often in the lecture was very helpful; the handouts are very clear; Nikk is a really good lecturer – good powerpoints!; the general coherence.

Question 11 What, if anything, was least helpful about the lecture's/classes?

The length of them – too many different themes covered to take in; Length. Hard to maintain concentration over two hours; Seminars were difficult – felt slightly overshadowed by very smart students – other student's questions did not get answered – was just a time for them to vent their views when other have central problems. Should [be?] more discussion for everyone; I struggle more with the seminar reading content; there should be weekly seminars – especially considering the difficult of the lectures; topics too difficult, handouts not clear; very difficult and not enough seminar time [use the office hours?]; Making us print out the texts and waste money when we should get free printer credits [see my extensive rant on this below]; I found two hours of metaphysics a bit too much at once; perhaps too much material covered – more time on individual topics; N/A; Nikk's new “break every 20 mins” method – one break half way through was better [I'll try a proper ballot next lecture, I'm interested in seeing which is better]; Not all material needed for seminars was in coursepacks. We do not get printer credits so this week's reading will cost £2.40 to print out; I think there should have been a seminar each week with less reading all in one go – it would have been a lot easier to get on top of the material.

Question 12: Please comment on the small group discussions.

I find the discussion part very useful but there was a lot of reading for each when the assignment was due on the same day [tough, you know about deadlines in advance. Time management is your own business and a necessary life skill. You'll find that in a professional job there are often times when deadlines collide with the demands of day to day work, so this is just the first of many lessons from the school of hard knocks in how to prepare for such things]; Very useful; helpful, but not much discussion about all the texts; helpful – but if only concentrated on a couple of the readings in depth then the other reading could be discussed and something you have prepared isn't even mentioned; helpful – aids understanding to talk things through; Nice; Poorly attended therefore bad discussion; need to be once a week; it was lovely and very helpful; it was good that everyone had to prepare beforehand, as it made for more discussion and less awkward silences; quantity of things to read before the seminar was far too much – consequently I read too lightly and [illegible] understood the majority of the seminar; More time would be helpful – weekly seminars rather than fortnightly; N/A; The discussions were good although there were often sections/questions that went undiscussed because of there being too little time to cover it all; Lots of room for discussion and were allowed to discuss what we wanted to discuss which was beneficial to learning; Did not attend; Good – really helped to make the reading more clear – although there wasn't enough time to go over all the reading.

Question 13: How many hours a week, on average, did you spend preparing for classes/seminars?

0 hours: 1
1-2 hours: 2
3-4 hours: 7
5-6 hours: 5
7-8 hours: 3

9-10 hours: 2

11-12 hours: 1

Average: 5.6

Lecturer's Comments: Only 6 people are doing the requisite work per week (although I do feel sorry for the poor bugger doing 11.5 hours per week). So that'd be 6 people. Out of 25 surveyed (God knows what those who didn't turn up will say). That's pretty shocking, and might explain *why some people are finding it hard!*

Question 14: Were there any specific texts that it was difficult to get hold of? Please give details.

No; On the Plurality of Worlds – one copy available! [confused by this. There are three copies available. Unless they meant that when they turned up there was only one. But then it wouldn't have been hard to get hold of...]; Lewis – Counterfactuals. Short loan books usually available but library generally does not have enough copies of most texts; books for essays only being short loan [alas, the only way to deal with the library problem is using short loan]; books for essays are hard to get hold of in library; Any Lewis book. We need more than one copy in library [which one?]; N/A; Everything by Armstrong was impossible to get in the library; On the Plurality of Worlds. Short loan! [not entirely sure what that means – maybe that it shouldn't be?]; No; Lots of them. Not enough copies; Yes – for lots of things on the reading list there was only one copy in the library and it was long loan [remembering my reading list was 8 pages long, it is surely unsurprising that this is true?];

Question 15: What changes, if any, would you make to this aspect of teaching and learning?

Shorter lectures and weekly seminars; Just what I said about sem – maybe ability seminars as this is such a tough topic; rather than 3 articles every fortnight, reduce reading or increase no. of seminars; more seminars weekly instead of fortnightly; shorter lectures; seminars every week, too much to cover in bi-weekly seminar; Seminars should be weekly and not 2 hours. Lecture perhaps 2 lectures/week of 1 hour; more seminars, better handouts; n/a; perhaps 2 x 1 hour lectures; seminars every week dealing with fewer texts each; A two hour lecture seems too long to concentrate fully in; Everything we need to read should be in course packs and any which isn't should have 60 odd copies in the library for everyone so we don't have to print it off; Seminars once a week with half the reading; more focus on genuinely independent argument

Question 16: Please add any other comments.

Nikk's lectures extremely useful and the lectures notes = well done and easy to get a hand on lecture slides after the class; Necessary texts should be provided in course pack; You teach a difficult subject clearly and are obviously motivated to teach it, but the course was too big in quantity. Many thanks; There was a rule that for each seminar we must have at least 1 A4 page of notes, or we would be asked to leave. Although this was good in that it ensured we had something to say – often I found that I had to 'waffle' in order to teach 1 page. Surely $\frac{3}{4}$ page of good quality points is better than 1 page of waffle? [Surely that'd be $\frac{1}{4}$ page of waffle? And I'd have thought *a single side* of A4 wasn't hard to prepare once every two weeks]; Nikk was very enthusiastic; Perhaps weekly seminars and hour lectures would be better;

Overall

The scores are fine. Specific points include:

Library texts: People have complained about the library. I'm not sure what to do. We can't double the books available, so I can only stick them on short loan. I'm not even sure if this is a problem. I'm routinely meeting people and the conversation goes like this:

Student: 'There are no books in the library. The computer says they're there, but they aren't.'

Me: 'Are you sure you know how the library works?'

Student: 'Yes.'

Me: 'So you know where short loan is?'

Student: 'Yes.'

Me: 'Where?'

Student: 'On floor 3.'

Me: [edited for profanity]

I can't tell how many of these problems are legit, and how many problems stem from students not knowing how to use the eLibrary and the short loan facilities. With regards to the Lewis, I did point out that you should all probably invest in a further text and club together (esp. as the required cost of the set reading is ~£5 (*q.v.*)). I don't know how many people took that option, but I would suggest that if this option *had* been taken there would've been less problems. Henceforth I will refer to this CEQ when making that suggestion.

Free printer credits and coursepack: I believe someone's yanking my leash on this point. Students are financially responsible for purchasing course material, including set texts. The cost for this course is not £40, it's not £30, it's not £20, it's a two quid coursepack plus printing out about 116 pages of further material. At two pages a sheet, and 5p per print out, that's three quid. I advise students who can't afford five pound for the set reading of a 20 credit module to seek me out so they can apply for a hardship loan. Otherwise, I'd keep quiet. And pray the Tories don't get in.

Length of lectures: Two hours is extreme, although no lecture has run that far. The first two were gargantuan, at about an hour and three quarters. Since then I've aimed for an hour and a half (including around 10 minutes or so of breaks) which isn't that bad in my opinion. Given the material, that extra half hour for exposition is really useful. But, point taken, no more gargantuan lectures.

Difficulty, more seminars, attendance etc.: Lots of students said this was a difficult course, and needed more seminars etc. This ain't going to happen. Allow me to explain why. There are 46 students registered on this course, and for the last two weeks I've had 12 and 14 students attend respectively, that's about a 25% attendance rate. Office hours remain empty, and no-one comes to talk to me. *Under these conditions there is no way we could justify increasing contact hours given that the contact hours are so underused as it currently stands.* Moreover, I would imagine this (partly) ties into the issues people have with the course difficulty.

Too much material: I do have some sympathies with people who claim there is too much material to cover in one seminar. Hopefully the above paragraph explains why I won't change it to weekly seminars. However, whilst I freely admit that would be *better*, I deny that there's a huge problem here. It's good for you to read material, even if you don't talk about. Moreover, the odd comment that we don't get through the questions really upsets me. It's not about going through questions, or carrying out some pre-ordained tasks that make you feel that you've done something useful with regards to the readings. The questions are just a tool for your own preparation and for me to have something to look at when you demonstrate you've prepared. They are as far away as they can possibly be from being the *point* of the seminar. What we want is for you to have some points of discussion – those things most important to you. I would hope we cover all of *those* things during the seminar.