

Report on Issues in Contemporary Metaphysics CEQ's for year 2010-11
Lecturer: Nikk Effingham

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

21 respondents: 14 answered '2'; 7 answered '3'.

Average Score: 2.33

Lecturer's Comments: A small shift from last year. However, clearly the students thought it was hard. This is because it's hard. Oddly this doesn't tally with the abysmal lecture and seminar turn out.

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

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

Average Score: 2.29

Lecturer's Comments: It was not well organised, in the sense of there being some errors in the module guide (e.g. a requirement to read chapter 11 of a book when it was chapter 10 in the coursepack, and some of the coursepack articles were printed in the wrong order). Nothing too serious though, and obviously this shouldn't be a problem next year.

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

21 respondents: 9 answered '1'; 10 believed '2'; 1 answered '3'; 1 answered '4'.

Average: 1.71

Lecturer's Comments: Significant improvement on last year. Not sure why.

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

21 respondents: 8 answered '1'; 11 answered '2'; 1 answered '3'; 1 answered '4'.

Average: 1.76

Lecturer's Comments: Significant improvement on last year. Not sure why.

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

21 respondents: 15 answered '1'; 5 answered '2'; 1 answered '5'.

Average: 1.43

Lecturer's Comments: Not sure why I appeared unenthusiastic to that one person given I thought it'd be more of an objective thing. Either they suffer from familial Mediterranean fever which has brought about anhedonia, or I did something wrong. Either ways, I'm not sure how to make this score better.

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

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

Average: 1.90

Lecturer's Comments: Improvement on last year.

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

21 respondents: 7 answered '1'; 9 answered '2'; 4 answered '3'; 1 answered '5'.

Average: 2.00

Lecturer's Comments: I have absolutely no idea how to make the lecture set more cohesive. It boggles my mind to even imagine a more cohesive set of lectures. So I don't know how to change this score.

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

21 respondents: 1 answered '1'; 9 answered '2'; 9 answered '3'; 2 answered '2'.

Average Score: 2.57

Lecturer's Comments: This is pretty dire, especially given that this is only those who managed to turn up to the lecture. Those who didn't even make it to the class (one third of those signed onto the course) are, presumably, even worse at this bit. I can hope that they were present at student protests about fees, but given the past attendance, I find this unlikely.

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

19 respondents: 4 answered '1'; 6 answered '2'; 7 answered '3'; 1 answered '4'; 1 answered '5'.

Two respondents claimed 'N/A'.

Average: 2.19

Lecturer's Comments: Significant improvement on last year, even though none of the texts available changed. Once again, this indicates just one more reason not to trust these answers. For instance, unless the two people who answered 'N/A' are moronic I'm assuming that they *must* have used the library resources for their essay – I can't even imagine *how* one would write an essay without such thing. One person said that the library was not adequate (giving it a '3') but then made very clear that they had no problems getting hold of books (in fact, a few people did this). How does that even make sense? Clearly it was adequate in that case! All very confusing. One person said they went to the library three weeks before the deadline and couldn't find any books (although they don't say what text they found hard to get hold of). I'm wondering if they were looking in the right place – certainly at the three week stage, the short term loan section of the library was chokka with books, and the reading list listed – for every topic – a wide selection of articles available from the eLibrary. As the library server wasn't down for three weeks, I don't understand why the student couldn't get access to that material. If I had a clearer idea of what was hard to find (they said 'everything', which given what I've said has to be false) I might be able to remedy library issues. But this wasn't the case so, again and as with every year, I have no idea what to do.

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

Having a 2 hour time slot for a 1 ½ hour lecture is good to give time for discussion at end; ?; discussion in lectures was helpful (not as helpful as in seminars); accessibility, recaps; discussion at the end sometimes brings up problems I didn't consider; the time for asking questions immediately after the lecture; Nikk always being easy to find; the breakdown of information into smaller chunks; all lectures on web for recap, short breaks; detailed lecture handouts helpful because there's a lot to take down so it is useful to have a good basis; Nikk's clarity of explanation; the variation, clear lecture, good handouts; the adequate discussion period following the lecture; student-led we had to choose what to talk about and raise any issues we have; well organised, clear and Nikk's v. enthusiastic; clear summary of complex issues; seminar – v. good discussion, helps understanding a large amount; good handouts, going through things again if people are struggling

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

?; Nothing; there is a lot of difficult content packed into each lecture; not enough support for essays and workload; module guide and coursepack needed checking. There were quite a few admin mistakes; the problems with organisation, in particular the coursepack; length of lecture; N/A; seminar weekly not biweekly; not having enough time in seminars.

Question 12: Please comment on the small group discussions.

Were very small, with only 3-4 sometimes; helpful, but I'd prefer if they were weekly and there was less reading for each; I found them helpful; good for going into a deeper discussion of specific issues; very good; useful; Good for clarifying matters, although there is a lot of (difficult) reading; helpful, to aid understanding of certain points; often too difficult; Seminars would have been great had more people shown up. Obviously not the fault of the conveyer [sic]; We had a decent amount of freedom in the seminars but a little more of '[unintelligible] the issue' from the chairperson would have helped; helpful – Nikk's refusal to lead the debate makes for good student led seminars; constructive; very good but way too short. We pay the same as other courses but they get so much more, we get short seminars and can't get through everything [not entirely sure what the crack is here – most CAL courses are one hour lecture and an bi weekly seminar as far as I know, so ICM is offering more bang for your buck in that respect].

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

1-2 hours: 1

3-4 hours: 6

5-6 hours: 5
7-8 hours: 5
9-10 hours: 1

[one respondent said 5-10, I've averaged at 7.5, and one said 'A lot' so haven't been factored in]
Average: 5.4 hours

Lecturer's Comments: Students are required to spend 7 hours per week preparing for seminar. Of 21 respondents only 6 met this requirement (and God only knows what those who don't turn up for classes do). I suggest that the reason people found there to be 'a lot' of reading to get through is that they were spending too little time reading them.

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

Nope; N/A [with regards to comments for question 9, this student still believed the library to not be adequate]; Not really; No [again, student nevertheless ranked the library as not being adequate]; n/a; n/a [another who nonetheless ranked the library such that it wasn't adequate]; N/A; Pretty much everything, I went to the library 3 weeks before the essay was due in and I could only get one relevant book. Again, I pay the same as other courses but get a fraction of what they do [again, with no specific information regarding texts, I don't know what to do here. And I just find it impossible to believe that short term loan was empty three weeks before the essay deadline].

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

Seminars every week as not enough time in a seminar to go through 2 weeks reading; Helpful, but I'd prefer if they were weekly and there was less reading for each; I'd prefer seminars every week; Not really; Better seats; Less reading, and easier reading which explains content so that we can have more discussions in seminars; more structure to seminars; Although the variation was nice, perhaps it's just a couple less. It was sometimes difficult to keep up and distinguish between so many arguments; length of lecture; N/A; Less volume of seminar reading, more indepth discussion of smaller text; give us more for our money !!

Question 16: Please add any other comments.

It's all good; Good interesting module → lots of reading; interesting lectures; I do feel the two assessed essay should be weighted differently. Instead of 50/50 I propose 40/60. Most students grades are higher in the second essay of the module. This seems to be because of the time a student has to focus on the first essay (when there is still seminar work and other modules during term time) in comparison with the second essay (holiday: easter or xmas) [not my domain – you need to send this comment to SSC as it's a departmental issue not a module issue]

Overall

The scores are fine except for the organisation. As noted, there were cock ups in the module guide and some of the articles were back to front in the coursepack. I didn't think this that serious, clearly many disagreed and felt that this was a serious impediment to their learning. For that I apologise, and obviously these issues will be solved for next year.

Other issues:

Library texts: As with last year people have complained about the library. There's still no evidence of any real problems. For instance, nothing has changed from last year except for people being slightly better informed about how to use the library – clearly, then, the problems isn't the books in the library but people's ability to use said library. I might be wrong – someone clearly felt it was a dire situation. But without any specifics, such as which texts were in short supply (which is difficult to imagine given the wide range of books moved to short loan, and the extensive reading list containing articles from the eLibrary) I don't really have the evidence to go the other way. Obviously if someone is reading this and thinking 'There were some texts I had a problem with' drop me a line and I'll ensure more copies are present for next year.

Difficulty/length of reading material: Given that very few people are adequately preparing for seminars, I've little sympathy. No change to this. My advice – ensure that you complete the required 14 hours of seminar preparation. That is the equivalent to one full 9 – 5 every week. I would imagine that spending less than that would indeed make it difficult to adequately digest the material, and from the stats it is clear that most people are spending less than this, and in some cases far less than this.

More seminars: It's difficult to argue for increasing the number of seminars when attendance is so piss poor that a seminar of 10 people is attended by just 2 students, and only a small handful of students make use of office hours. It's impossible to justify setting aside more time for me to meet with groups that are so small so as to be barely sustainable or, worse, sit twiddling my thumbs doing sweet FA in my office. One solution I'm considering is doubling the group size but doubling the number of seminars. Whilst this means that a fully attended group would be clearly over subscribed – containing 20 students – if attendance is anything like this year's it still means that only 4-10 people will turn up (average attendance was 5 students, with only two seminars reaching the heady heights of 70% of students attending – which given that we've had 15 seminars thus far, is pretty poor. If, by the way, you sense that when writing this I have a combination of shock and despair that around one half of students who are heavily subsidised to study their degree by the tax payer nonetheless couldn't be bothered to turn up, then you'd be right.) Presumably, with an eye to blending into the crowd, students who haven't prepared will then turn up, and I'll get complains about group size. Nonetheless, I'm considering piloting that change next time the course is run.