

Master's thesis course 32LMU1 17: evaluation report

Master's thesis course consists of individual research work carried out under the supervision of academic staff. The students are sending in the first plan on thesis work in November when suitable supervisors (usually PhD holders) are located among the staff. This is the preliminary planning phase, as the students do not yet have pre-requisites to attend the Master's thesis course, they have not yet passed the *Research methods for digital libraries* course.

The common Master's thesis course PingPong site was created for two different student groups (MADI and DLIS). It presented coordinated learning materials and the events, such as seminars, submissions, allocation of examiner's, organization of final seminars and such. This functioned well from the point of view of the course leader for the DLIS course. The International Master's students had their own project group in addition to the common material and their own discussion forums. Their seminars were conducted online in smaller groups as opposed to the on-campus seminar for Swedish MADI students. The course leader had some problems in allocating suitable time slots for the seminars as students also work at different times. This resulted in some uncertainty among the students when to attend which seminar. This problem will be resolved by posting exact time of the seminars early in the process, so that students have time to plan time for participation. The seminars are not obligatory but are regarded as helpful milestones on the way to finalising the course. During the seminars, students help each other by reading the texts of the course mates and providing feedback as well as receiving constructive suggestions from others. The teacher leading the seminar steers the discussion and sometimes comes up with suggestions based on the discussion. Thus, the main supervision input comes from the allocated supervisor.

The course was started by 9 students and there were 8 students from the previous years who were continuing their work on the Master's thesis. There were three possibilities to submit the texts for the final seminar and by now eight students have submitted the texts and five have passed the examination.

There were some difficulties in conducting this course: the assessment of students and passing the examination in the prerequisite course in *Research methods for digital libraries* has been delayed due to the work overload of teachers assessing the submissions, so some of the students were admitted to the course quite late. Another issue is the short time of conducting the actual research and writing the text. Twenty weeks are allocated to this work, but in reality, to be able to finish the text by the first submission, the students have 17 weeks or even less if they start the course later. This is addressed by planning three submission possibilities and conducting three rounds of final seminars (May-June, August-September, November-December). However, many distance students continue working on the thesis longer than a year.

There is no separate evaluation of the course, but its evaluation is included in the final programme evaluation questionnaire for the graduating students. Nevertheless, the course leader monitors the comments of the students on the discussion forums and seminars,

conducts conversations in relation to the final seminar, opposition, schedules and other important matters. The relations with the supervisors are usually evaluated as good and helpful, though sometimes problems occur due to the mistaken communication or differences in understanding. There may be more problems with examination issues, especially, as many texts submitted for the first time are not ready for defence. This may be regarded as a continuous source of conflicts as the quality of the final work is usually more important than the quantity of graduating students.

Course leader
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