

Reporting on experiments with research integration in teaching

Name
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Course Name
HHIK02832U HIS 83. The League of Nations: international organization, international politics and internationalism, 1850s-1950s : https://kurser.ku.dk/course/hhik02832u/2021-2022
Study Board
<i>Humanities</i>
Level and class size
Area B: Full Degree Master, Master's minor subject. Bachelor choice - 25 students
Description of the experiment
<p>The students worked with a comprehensive set of prosopographical data, supplemented with uniquely rich personnel files, to locate, organize and map the trajectories of key officials. They learned how to visualize this in Gephi, which is an open-source software dedicated to network visualization. The network-based analysis constituted the base of (jointly) written exam papers on specific subsections of the Secretariat and policy fields of the League.</p> <p>With Obaida Hanteer (SC Datalab), I taught & supervised four elements that helped the students achieve their LOs: 1) A historiographical/ methodological introduction element; 2) Three intensive workshops applying Social Network Analysis (SNA) on the source material; 3) Writing-based seminars and follow-up lectures on specific aspects of the League's global governance, tailored to the focus of the students; 4) A concluding 2-day writers' workshop, with presentations, debates and 1-on-1 supervision. The research agenda & exam thus incorporated the LOs in an innovative manner.</p>
Outcome for the students
<p>This was a new experiment, for a MA-course focussed on academic writing and source analysis. In addition to the LOs, the students (a) learnt digital methodologies, network software (Gephi) & prosopography; (b) experienced how collective research projects work; (c) engaged in the editorial & conceptual work going into a jointly created research tool. These are key elements of a research process, but also exciting ways of tackling the LOs.</p> <p>In addition, based on the criterion of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interest 2. Grades 3. Ability/time: fall semester editorial process (online possible) 4. Thematic/methodological plurality <p>A group of students have been selected to develop their exams into articles for a special issue in <i>Culture and History an online journal, publishing articles written by students at the Saxo Institute, Uni. of Copenhagen</i>. More info here: https://saxo.ku.dk/uddannelser/culture-and-history-student-research-papers/</p>
Outcome for the research
<p>The outcome for the research has been that the datasets, tested and enhanced by the students, and some of the key questions asked and probed by the students, were brought into a remake of the datasets, which now will be part of (a) the student special issue; (b) the <i>Visualizing the League</i></p>

<p><i>Research Tool</i>; (c) a Research Guide on the Secretariat, which will be published on the UN Geneva webpages.</p>
<p>Interaction between teaching, research and exams</p>
<p><i>See below on Strengths and Weaknesses and Experienced Challenges</i></p>
<p>Adapting of the experiment</p>
<p>The experiment changed in one significant way: In addition to the described procedure above, we decided – as part of the three workshops on Social Network Analysis – to teach the students how to make their own “nodes” and “edges” (dots and lines in a network), based on prosopographical data that was specifically relevant for their own research. On the other hand, we made it much more open <i>whether</i> the students wanted to use network analysis in their final exam.</p>
<p>Strengths and weaknesses</p>
<p>Lesson 1: It is very time-consuming to integrate digital history methods in a "regular" class. I received additional funding to set this up (not a viable solution all round), preparing much material in advance and running it on a very tight schedule. This is a challenge, but...</p> <p>Lesson 2: ...the methodological knowledge; skills w/ software/tools; conceptual understanding is transferable → thus, even if they might not use it in /this/ exam, they might bring it to their BA/MA-thesis or some other class. - Coordination across classes seems key moving forward.</p> <p>Lesson 3: We wanted students to research the data w/us. The feedback/Qs/explorations of the students are incredibly useful in mapping qualities/drawbacks on choices in structuring the data & what the networks can ask/answer. Digital hist. = great for research-integrated teaching.</p> <p>Lesson 4: The exam formats - fixed as they are - may not necessarily be conducive to bringing digital history in. Not every course needs dig.hist. (by a long shot), but flexibility/reform in exam formats across the BA/MA could make it easier to bring it in where it makes sense.</p> <p>Lesson 5: (Int.) History being in the midst of a digital revolution - digital history should be an integral part of the basic methodology classes at BA-level. Not as the new shit to displace all; nor the weird uncle, we're not quite sure of; but as another tool in the toolbox.</p>
<p>Experienced challenges</p>
<p>Probably the most important challenge was that the students were unevenly interested in the digital tools and the collective work. I'd say 1/3 really engaged with Gephi and the datasets; 1/3 were happy to learn Social Network Analysis, but did not want to use too much time on it, focusing quite early on, on a specific research question for their exams which precluded the use of SNA; while 1/3 was relatively disinterested. This might be the case for any class/subject, but it is a structural weakness for a collective endeavor. Thus, strategies for engaging all/more scaffolding and perhaps also a clearer instruction in advance could be considered, next time around.</p>
<p>The most important experience</p>
<p>See: Lesson 3: We wanted students to research the data w/us. The feedback/Qs/explorations of the students are incredibly useful in mapping qualities/drawbacks on choices in structuring the data & what the networks can ask/answer. Digital hist. = great for research-integrated teaching.</p>
<p>Will the experiment be conducted again?</p>
<p>I am eager to conduct a similar experiment in a source-based course, and I think I will get the chance in a year (spring 2024). This time around I would (a) focus more squarely on the social history of the organization; (b) spend a bit more time on SNA; (c) fix the exams on sources/topics that are conducive for the use of SNA and prosopography, like institutional history and group biographies of the League Secretariat.</p>