

Course example in which students collect data and contribute analytical results to a research project

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Subject, course/other context, study level and number of students

Social network analysis. Methodology subject at Master's level. 10 ECTS points. 20 students.

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The motivation behind the activity

Partly, to elaborate on a course on a methodology which we were still getting to know ourselves and, partly, to produce research to illustrate the teaching.

Key learning outcomes for the activity (course)

To enable the student to design, carry out and communicate social network analyses. And to teach students to process data in the R analysis programme.

Description of the activity

After having spent the first month delivering a general, case-based introduction to the methodology, and two weeks on an introduction to the R analysis programme, the collective research project commenced.

The students were provided with a data set and we presented a study synopsis. The students could then in groups dive into the different research questions on the study. Concurrently with this, the whole class worked jointly with a collective analysis, driven primarily by the teacher. At the same time, the students dove into their own specific research questions.

Network analysis approaches and techniques were presented during a weekly lecture, and common open exercises, in which teachers and students worked together in the class room. This also provided for ongoing supervision and guidance. Before the exam revision period, a joint seminar was held at which students and teachers gave each other feedback.

The lectures explained e.g. the theory behind a network analytical goal, then we explained how this target could be calculated using data and how to interpret the result. Then, during the course of the week, the students worked on incorporating the target in their analyses.

After the students had handed in their exam papers, another seminar was held at which the students presented their results to each other and prepared a summary of their results for communication purposes.

The learning outcome of the activity for the students

The students were given access to new data they could use for their own publication purposes. Furthermore, the work on exam assignments was used constructively in a research process. Similarly, the students were given opportunity to study and apply thematic and theoretical literature on the research field examined.

This meant that the students were given opportunity to work independently with the methodology, while we as supervisors were very keen to assist the students with tools to help them arrive at a solid result.

The outcome for research

The students answered a number of research questions - and acted as critical readers of the analysis. Furthermore, there was need for a very strict research protocol and clear guidelines to ensure good scientific practice.

The data collected independently by the students subsequently served as a basis for further research. Furthermore, the work by the students made it possible to test a number of hypotheses that would otherwise not have been examined with the same degree of thoroughness and dedication.

Strengths and weaknesses of the activity

The activity was very inspirational for us as teachers and it provided us with both data and sub-analyses useful in our research. Similarly, the quality of many of the students' exam papers was extremely good.

The disadvantage was that both teachers and students had to work quite a lot more than in connection with normal courses. Enabling the students to carry out analyses at a level which can be applied to research takes more time in combination with a weekly lecture. Furthermore, the opportunity to prepare independent analyses required the students to set aside a considerable amount of time in order to be able to work in depth with their data.

Further information, link to Prezi

A presentation of the course: http://prezi.com/nm6flq4njvsz/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Key words

Research-based teaching, teaching of methodology, collective data collection projects