

Course analysis, fall term 2019

Course: Language and geography, LIN316

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1. *Course development, fall term 2019:*

There was a clear division between the theoretical/descriptive part where issues pertaining to spatial aspects of human languages were discussed and the second part of the class devoted entirely to cartography, that is map-making. When I have given the class previous times, theoretical lectures alternated with cartography exercises. This has its advantages but since any serious mapping software has a steep learning curve, I found that it worked out much better to have a part of the class entirely devoted to the software and the art of map creation.

2. *Strengths (based on answers to the student course evaluation):*

There were 5 students who started the class and 4 who completed it. The students liked the discussions and the exercises where they could create maps on their own. They particularly appreciate the introduction to Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology and to the essential elements of maps and cartography in linguistics.

3. *Weaknesses (based on answers to the student course evaluation):*

The students find the class very rewarding. They found ArcGIS to be a rather challenging software to learn. At the same time, this came as no surprise since this as well as any other GIS software of some weight do require time and effort of beginner users.

4. *Instructor analysis:*

The class was a pleasure to teach. The steady group of students who remained in and finished the class was on the small side. However, this created an atmosphere of camaraderie, discussions flowed rather freely and all students could engage because they felt comfortable in a small group. The organization of the mapping exercises worked out well. It is the very first



time students were not intimidated by ArcGIS but rather wanted to learn more of it. I think the trick that did it was to give them ready made datasets in the beginning and just let them produce maps. Previous times, I have also explained how to collect and format pertinent data in the very beginning. This is per say hard and combined with the complex software, people feel really overwhelmed. This time, I let them produce a map with ready made data and left the data collection and assembling to the final phase when they felt comfortable with creating maps.

5. Conclusions and suggestions for course development:

Next time I would make sure I have more meeting and labs for the map creation part of the class. They are necessary and do help students a lot. The literature used this fall worked out well but it would be nice to find course literature with a more recent publication date.