Course/Professor Evaluation

Geography and Environment 3401

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Question 1: These particular courses (Research Methods in Human Geography and Environment or Research Methods in Environmental Science) were taught from a different perspective, using a “Problem-Based Approach” to teaching and learning. Basically, students were walked through a series of “case studies” and associated problems first hand in the field and were able to read, discuss and react to past research on the problems. Can you please comment on your reaction and experience to the Problem-Based approach in this course? Was it an effective way of approaching research methods compared to a traditional lecture-based course?

-I vastly prefer the problem-based approach. It allowed me to interact on a higher level with the material and it meant that I was experiencing the material and tangibly interacting with it, rather than reading about it or seeing pictures. I felt that it enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of research methods in physical geography because I was doing it, especially when compared to a traditional lecture-based course.

- The Problem-Based approach in this course was a fantastic way of learning how research methods are performed. Usually when research is being performed it is for a specific reason and giving students the opportunity to do our own projects based on what we saw was a great way to learn and to experience what it might be like in the real world. Learning through doing is a much more effective way to learn how to do research compared to sitting in a classroom and having someone tell you how to do something. I feel like there are many students who feel the same way, it is much easier to understand a concept when you are given the chance to do it yourself.

- I thoroughly enjoyed the more hands on experience had with the problem-based approach in this course. I feel that it is much closer to what scientific research is like in the ‘real world’ than what students typically experience in a lecture-based course. I found this approach particularly useful as a way of determining if research is something I would like to do more of (it is). It was a very good introduction to the world of scientific research.

- Much better. This involved real problems where students had to think analytically and on the spot, and learn as they do it. It was nice to finally have a more hands-on, do-it-yourself type class. Much more real than classes that can be purely lectures on how to solve problems. Encountering your own problems and research gives learning a whole different angle.

- As we continue to get closer to graduating, it becomes more apparent that we need to focus on special topics that we enjoy or are passionate about. This course gave us an excellent opportunity to explore what we thought we would be doing later in our lives, even a few months from the present. The problem based approach allowed each individual student to explore their passions, as it wasn’t just “presented problems” the professors asked us what we were interested in and built the problems around that. This
course was far more effective than a lecture based course, and we were able to explore our passions which is what university is all about, I can wholeheartedly say that GENS 3401 was the defining course in my student career at MTA. It allowed me to see what was possible and to choose my career path.

- I strongly believe that the problem-based approach is more effective than a traditional lecture based course. Using this style of teaching, we were encouraged to create and implement a research project based on our interests. For me, being interested and invested in the research topic heightened my interest in learning research methods. This experience allowed us to design the entire project and to learn to deal with planning issues while in the field. I learned more about field research than I could have possibly ever learned in a class room and had the valuable chance to learn from and reassess possible flaws in project design with the assistance of Dr. Laroque – flaws which are generally eliminated from structured labs. The case studies and papers we were asked to read were meant to, and succeeded, in showing us research possibilities and the exploration of the Jasper area inspired us in our project choices. The projects chosen would not have been possible in a lecture setting and without the support of Dr. Laroque and Dr. Fox. After taking this course and other courses at MTA, I do not think that a lecture based course is appropriate to teach research methods. The mistakes and project design revisions taught me more about field research than I would have learned (and retained) if only shown the “correct” way in a lecture setting.

Question 2: These particular courses were delivered over a different time schedule than the traditional fall session course period, in that it was an intensive, six-day delivery schedule (Tuesday to Sunday with travel days on either end) requiring your entire day to attend and live within the classes. Can you please comment on this course delivery style, in terms of the intensive, one-week period, with the remaining period to complete course assignments?

-I liked this layout. I like to have a week-long of intensive work and then the rest of the semester. It’s a similar layout to what, as a student, we can expect to do if we wish to continue researching in grad school—an intensive data-collection period, and a longer time period in which to analyze.

- The intensive one-week period of classwork, in the field, was a great way to deliver the course content and it definitely had a much larger impact compared to sitting in a classroom for four months. A professor can show as many pictures and as many videos of a process or a formation or anything, but seeing it and being able to be where these processes are happening makes the subject a lot easier to comprehend. It was also a great way to teach research methods, as we were very much on our own to do whatever we wanted to, research-wise. When we returned to Sackville we decided what we were going to do with the data that we received, we set our own schedules according to what worked for the group and I found that this method worked very well. We were able to produce a document that may be used for further research in the field and this was a great accomplishment.
- I found that the intensive nature of this course fit my schedule perfectly. It was right between when my summer job ended and school started again, and as a third year student with no shortage of challenging classes it allowed me to have fewer in-class hours during the semester. This extra time allowed me to do things that I normally wouldn’t have had the time for like being a tutor and TA. Also, having to spend a full day in the field is nothing but a positive thing in my mind.

- Much better. I was able to concentrate all of my efforts on this course, whereas normally I have four other courses to concentrate on. It also helped that the remaining time could be divided up into my free time, and I could choose when to work on material for the class. It effectively led me to learn more, as I spent that course of the week purely concentrating on the subject material just for this one class. Since it was held away from school, there were no distractions there to interrupt my learning.

- The course delivery style was excellent, and I would not change it. This course was purely about how to research, and what better way to do it that first hand. The way we lived and the layout of assignments with the travel days, etc. are exactly how researchers would do it. Having the remaining fall semester to complete the course assignments gave us ample opportunity for research as well as consultation with our professor on how to approach our research questions.

- The intensive course was completely immersive. I really enjoyed this method as it made learning about the Jasper area and about research opportunities and research methods our complete focus. During the regular school year we take several courses at once and have many projects to on which to focus; the 3401 style allowed us to get completely involved in our projects with no other distractions. I really enjoyed the topic I chose to research and was grateful that I had no other work to focus on. During the school year, the flexibility in choosing our meeting times allowed us to work most on our projects when we were least busy and least stressed out. Quite a bit of the work was done independently and not having to go on campus at set times helped get more work done on the project. It was a course in which I did a lot of work but was least stressed out. I liked the flexibility and focus this method provided.

Question 3: Some might argue that introducing the entire range of research methods in one week (36 hours) is too much to grasp for students. Can you comment on the timing and the subject matter presented in the course? Included in the course were a number of different methods of delivery: pre-reading lists, lectures, field experiences, meetings with individuals in Jasper, applied research methodologies and guests/practitioners in research methods who visited or worked with the class. Can you please comment on the range of methods used in the course? Did it meet the objectives of teaching you research methods?

-I felt that using many different mediums for the course allowed me to experience a lot of the different ways that researchers can conduct their research. Sending out pre-reading enabled me to familiarize myself with some of the areas that we went to, as well as gain some background on ways that, as mentioned above, researchers conduct their research.
This course did meet the objectives of teaching me research methods, and I think it did a wonderful job at that.

- The timing and the subject matter of the course were definitely NOT too much to grasp. The pre-reading lists prepared us for the material that we were going to be covering in the field and the material that we learned while in Jasper was complimentary to the reading material. Lectures in the field were much easier to keep focused and to learn from as the material seemed much more interesting, as we were learning about the things that we were actually experiencing. For example, while standing on a formation produced by a glacier we learned how it was formed and different theories that many people have on the formation. Hearing experiences and talking with the guest speakers in Jasper gave us a wider knowledge on the specific topics that we were learning about and personal experiences made the learning process much more interesting and was easily understood. I definitely learned the processes used in research methods and I learned many other things, above and beyond what I expected to get out of the course. Not only did we finish a paper at the end of the course but also we were able to present our research at a conference. The experience that this type of course delivers is phenomenal and I would recommend it to anyone.

- The course readings seemed very lengthy when I was sitting out on my deck in Sackville enjoying the sun, but once I was in Jasper and experiencing the things the papers had talked about, I was very glad I had taken the time to read them. It helped put everything into context, which I think is very important since not all students had experienced that environment before. Having people around that knew the environment and meeting casually at the end of the day helped to cement what we saw and learned and gave a good introduction for what we would see the next day. I feel that I learned many things about research methods and would feel comfortable now going about a research project on my own if the opportunity arose.

- What I liked about this class is that it was different in this aspect. I found that is was not just 36 hours committed to the class, but the whole week itself. The field experiences, meetings with individuals, applied research methodologies were able to be experienced in this week type of class format, whereas I have not experienced much of these aspects within my other classes. I felt much more well-rounded, and felt like I knew the subject very well after taking this class. I would say that the structure of this class was very effective. No complaints. I did however find that the pre-reading list did not really need to be part of the course, I did not take much from that part of the course. It was more about the class experience itself that lead to my learning.

- This course definitely met the objectives of teaching me research methods, no question about that. Not only were we exposed to our own type of research and how to do it but we were exposed to various other types of research, such as dendrochronology. It is also noted that each of the groups presented their own projects to the rest of the classes, demonstrating how they did their research, allowing the students of the class to see various research methods and applications for them.

- I agree that introducing the whole range of research methods in one week is a lot of information, but only when presented in lecture format. This course provided a hands-on approach that encourages learning through doing and this is the format
through which I personally learn best. The field experiences and the lectures in the field were great, partly because Jasper is a beautiful landscape, but also because learning is so effortless when the subject matter is at your fingertips. The pre-reading list was okay and I think it did help me to get into the mindset of research possibilities. The little booklets in the tea and toast boxes that described research methods were really important when designing our project and perhaps reviewing some basic methods before the course would be beneficial. Without travelling and visiting various locations in our first few days it would have been difficult to know what options were available and I am glad we did that. I would have liked to have spent more time with the park wardens on some sort of ride-along to learn more about the park and research and issues in the park. Overall, I definitely know that this course met its objectives of teaching me research methods. Coming up with an idea is stressful at first but once you have it, it’s fun to get excited about it.

Question 4: Can you please comment on the course materials presented? You were provided a range of readings before the class even started, and related course material during the field week. Did this approach work well, given the problem-based approach? Would there have been a more effective way of transmitting the knowledge contained within these materials?

- Given the problem-based approach, I think that giving a range of materials beforehand is very useful. It gives a general working knowledge for each student of some of the possible topics that can be encountered and worked with. This allowed me to develop a little bit of an understanding about what I was potentially interested in working with. I think that this was the most effective way to transmit all of the materials to students who were all working in very different places with different schedules.
- The course material presented included many readings on the processes surrounding glaciers and specific areas within Jasper National Park. Some of the readings were about the possible effects of tourists in the area, and readings on rock glaciers. When we were in Jasper we visited many of the sites that we had previously read about and we were able to talk and discuss many of the topics that were discussed in the papers that we had read. This approach did work well as we were able to tie all of the readings to an actual place and we could see what the authors were writing about and we were able to experience the reality of the situations. I do not think that there could be a more effective way of transmitting the knowledge contained within these materials.
- I found the readings beneficial once I had arrived. I wouldn’t change that, but would add a brief reading on the history of the area. Something I would have enjoyed as well is some kind of a map showing where we would be going while there, even if it changed once we arrived.
- It is an effective way. It saved an extensive lecture time and gave us more time in the field, where I found the real-learning took place. Spending the first couple days travelling around and reviewing the area was also an asset.
However, as stated above, I found the reading not as informative as the class itself.
- The reading material given prior to the start date of the class aided me in visualizing what could be done in Jasper within a week, and gave me ideas of how to go about doing
them. These papers also provided a number of different approaches to doing research. It was a great way to transmit the information within the texts.

- The reading list was useful in that it presented a wide variety of research possibilities. Without it I think that being asked to come up with a brand new idea would have been even more overwhelming. I can’t decide whether reading about research methods in advance would have been beneficial or not. I think it may have constrained our methods to strict guidelines rather than evolving around the project idea. Once we had our research topic, the material with methods specific to our project was very helpful.

Question 5: Can you please comment on the course instructor. Were classes and related materials well organized? Was the teaching style and various formats (discussion, field based instruction, powerpoint, individual attention and assistance, etc.) effective for your needs? Feel free to make any comments you would like on the style and delivery of the course materials and the teaching and learning environment created in the class. Make sure to think through the entire course, from April applications, to the end of December.

- Colin was wonderful to work with. He gave great support to us both in the field and back in the classroom. Everything was very well organized and flowed smoothly. He gave me an opportunity to learn in a different way, which I would not have had otherwise.

- The instructor of the course was fabulous, not only was he interested in the subject matter; he lived in the area that we were learning about and given the situation we were able to learn so much more about the subject matter because of his personal experiences. The material was well organized and every activity that we did was related to the course material. Every place that we went had some correlation to the subject matter at hand. The teaching style was great, the individual attention was very helpful as there was a stronger relationship built compared to most other professors. This relationship made it easier to talk to the professor and ask questions and to get help with a problem when needed. The application process was a good way to approve the people that belong in the course, however I think that finding out if I had been approved sooner would have been more ideal. Overall it was the best course that I have ever taken and as I said before I would recommend it to anyone. Even if a student does not want to go into research it is a great way to learn and I feel that I did much better in my other classes last semester simply because I had learned the material in those courses and I had already experienced many of the subjects personally.

- I found the teaching and learning environment to be ideal for this type of course. We learned about glaciers while walking on them and came up with our topics while visiting different locations. To me that is very important because it puts what you are learning into context and makes it the most relevant it could be. I enjoyed being able to see what was going on with my own eyes and having it explained to you right there rather than in a classroom a few thousand kilometers away. I felt we were also given more individual attention and assistance in this setting than we would in a classroom. Sometimes in a
class you don’t think to ask a question because you aren’t able to see the full picture, but in the field everything is right there and you can ask about it as you come to it.

- The teacher always felt approachable and was very helpful. I felt as though he went out of his way to give us a great experience. His knowledge and teachings in the field were great, couldn’t have asked for better.

Also the organized trip to Newfoundland was a great experience in which we owe all to him for organizing, even though it was not expected. He could have provided better guidelines for projects, as he admitted towards the end of the semester. Overall, a dedicated, approachable instructor. What was very helpful was the lectures that occurred in the field, and his knowledge of the area in which we worked.

- I was kept will informed of everything that was going on from April all the way through to December. Dr. Laroque provided great office hours and was always willing to help out when it was needed and offer much needed advice. The only regret I have is not being able to use all the different research tools that were brought along, possibly for the next 3401 class one lecture could be done by showing the class how each tool works, I realize that we were allowed to view them and play around with them for one night, but upon reflection I realize that I should have and maybe forcing the class to see how each instrument works would be great.

- In the beginning, it was overwhelming to be asked to create and conduct a research project in such a short time period. Exploring Jasper before deciding on a project was very important to this course as was the reading material in providing inspiration and guidance.

The ACAG conference gave our group a deadline of sorts to get our research organized and the experience of presenting to other researchers was awesome. The writing phase meant a lot of independent group work and I was very happy that there were no scheduled meeting times as we made our meetings work with our schedules. We probably should have asked for more assistance and guidance and this probably would have made our process easier and our final paper much better.

Question 6: Can you please reflect on the course evaluation structure (problem-based cases, user defined course outline, and final written assignment and presentation). In particular, did you find the in-depth study of an individual problem to be a useful, informative, and reasonable amount of work to achieve your learning goals? Did you find that the instructor was available to answer any questions or issues you encountered after the one-week field period had finished?

-I liked being able to create my own course outline and evaluation. I also found that working in-depth with one problem was far more effective than a smaller set of readings would have been. It gave the opportunity to be independent and work towards something tangible that mattered not only to me, but to a greater whole. I did find that Colin was more than able to answer and questions or issues that we encountered, and was open to anything that we needed from him.

- The in-depth study of an individual problem was extremely useful. Learning about the specific problem was very realistic where when performing research in a lab would be specific to one problem. Learning about the specific problem was informative as we learned how to perform research in a more professional manner.
The amount of work that was put into the project did not seem to require any more work than any other course that I have taken. The way that we scheduled it was so that we would work on our project when our schedules allowed and when we were busy we were able to set it aside for the time being. This method worked out great for my group and having a final deadline for the end product kept us on track. The instructor was available for issues and helped out whenever we needed. There was never a problem with communication or lack of help.

- I found the course evaluation structure very fair, which is all you can really ask for from an evaluation. It was nice to be able to come up with our own weighting of the different components, even though they probably ended up being pretty similar. To me the amount of work for this course was very reasonable, especially because we worked in a group. This allowed us to bounce ideas off each other and get different points of view if we were unsure of something. Our instructor was available to us throughout the duration of the course, but we did not take enough advantage of that. I think in the future it would be helpful if each group were required to set up a time at least once during the semester to meet with their instructor to discuss how things were going.

- Yes. The concentration on one problem was essential. Many courses broadly assess many problems, but diving into one specific problem and analyzing it helped me learn more about it.

- I found the in-depth study a very useful way of presenting the learning goals, the professor was always available for questions and issues that were encountered during the week, especially on the 2 hour hikes back from certain field sites.

- The user defined course evaluation was tricky because when creating it I did not know how much work I was going to put into each part or even if I wanted to spread the mark out over more assignments. I am happy with the outline I chose: 60% paper and 40% presentation.

The in-depth research project provided me with one of the best learning environments and experiences I have had. The amount of independent work taught me how to better design a project, find supporting papers, and write a final report than if I had been directly shown how to do it. It was a reasonable amount of work in that there was a choice in the amount of time and effort that could be put into the project.

The preparation session in the MAD Lab before ACAG was extremely helpful. The next students that take this class should be strongly encouraged to go to ACAG!

The instructor was available after the field period ended but for whatever reason our group chose not to reach out for help during the writing phase of the project.

Question 7: Finally, can you please think about this course, in terms of scheduling and style of instruction, and comment on your overall evaluation, in comparison to your other course experiences here at Mount Allison? In particular, we are interested in knowing if this is an effective method for instruction and learning, rather than the traditional 3 hour-per-week lecture-based courses, where students take five courses at a time. We are considering these alternative styles for the future, including such things as block schedules, where students take a full week course in September or January or the March break or the Spring. Other methods may include a series of 3 week-ends, 2-week field courses to other locations, etc. If you
have no further comments on this, please feel free to make any comments, suggestions or improvements that you care to add about the course in this section.

-In terms of other classes, please keep this style. I like the one week intensive in a different location. I think that it gives the chance to go someplace else, a chance that cannot be given over a weekend. Either one week or two is a great time span to be in the field in an alternate location.

- I really liked the way that this course was run, I think that the one-week period was a great amount of time to see the environment, choose a project and collect data. Depending on the weather and the transportation there may be some issues and a two-week period might be more beneficial in this way but I think that two weeks might be too long. I think that a two-week period might be more like a vacation and doing data collection for a longer period of time might make the time away less of a learning experience. I am not sure though, but I am sure that the costs would go up for a two-week period and this might be the bigger issue. I liked going in the summer because it was still warmer, going in the winter to a cool place already might not be such a great trip because it would be so cold that hiking in the freezing cold would not be as enjoyable. Doing the three weekend trips would be hard to do because many students have other commitments that may include weekend travel, work and other such things.

  I stated earlier that this method is a much better way of teaching and learning as it is hands on and seeing while learning is the best method, in my mind. I just want to say thank you very much to you both, it was a great experience and the best class I have ever taken, and may be the best that I will ever take. I definitely learned more and had a lot of fun while doing so, which is not common when learning in the classroom setting.

- I found this course to be the most effective of any I have taken at Mount Allison. Everything I learned I can associate with a place or experience rather than a line in a notebook. By having only one course to focus on at a time, the majority of our time and energy was focused on coming up with a good project while we were there and executing what had to be done. Personally I really like the idea of more intensive courses. In my experience it is very effective and would give me an alternative to taking five courses at a time each semester. I know I can handle five courses, but having only four in-class lectures last semester gave me so much more time and energy to devote to my work. It ended up benefiting me academically as well as personally to take the weeklong field course before classes started.

- This course was one of the best courses I have ever taken at Mount Allison. One thing I may change would be to schedule teacher appointments throughout the term after the week course when you are working on the assignments. However, I felt that concentrating on one subject matter for one week helped me put all of my efforts towards that class. It allowed me to know my peers and teacher through extensive involvement. This helped me become comfortable in interacting and learning with them. Where as the traditional classes are purely lecture-formatted, disallowing for this amount of comfort.

  I feel as though I developed some good group work skills.
- This course has definitely been much better than my other courses at MTA. It showcases the low student to teacher ratio that MTA is known for and the instruction style is excellent as we are lectured on the topics of our interest. Changing this course style would only be beneficial if it were to be longer, a 2-week field course would be excellent for data collection and easier on students who are not as physically fit as others, it regards to 3401’s hiking.

- This course rates highly in comparison with other courses I have taken at MTA. This was a very effective method for teaching field research methods. I think that taking this course all at once is very important and a 2-week session might take away some of the stress associated with the time limit for the project. Doing it over a series of sessions would not be as good as doing it all at once and being completely focused on the project/course.