



Programrapport

Programmets namn: Master in Library and Information Science: Digital Library and Information Services	Ladokkod: BMDD121h & BMDD121h1
Antal högskolepoäng:	Årskull: 2021
Programansvarig: Wout Dillen	

Comment on response frequency in the student assessment

In this report, the existing course evaluations from all courses attended by students in BMDD121h have been consulted. In general, as commented on across course evaluations by course managers, very few students fill out the course evaluation surveys, which means that they form an unreliable basis for making assessments about the students' views of each course and the overall programme – although they can be an indication and a source to identify potential issues with the course.

It should also be noted that the case of the DLIS programme in general, course evaluation are especially unreliable. This is because DLIS students take classes together with students in the MADI programme. As a result, the results of these surveys are not just an underrepresentation (due to low student survey completion rates), but also an overrepresentation (because they include opinions from MADI students). Because of the strict anonymity of student evaluation surveys, it is impossible to filter out responses from DLIS students. Some of the specific student opinions referenced below may therefore belong to MADI students. However, since these students experienced exactly the same course as DLIS students (the only exception being some grading formalities), they may still be relevant for this evaluation.

In this particular case (BMDD121h), the material to draw on is especially scarce. Out of 10 courses in the programme, only 5 evaluations exist. This has to do with the fact that the coordinators of some of the courses have retired or changed their employment before uploading their evaluations to the Kursrapporter area in Canvas. For other courses, course managers have stated that evaluations were never made. Since the search for a new coordinator for this programme was only concluded after the courses for this group of students were already quite progressed, very little could be done about this situation in time for this programme report. I have now contacted the current course managers, and hope to improve this situation for the next programme report (group of HT2022), which is the last iteration of the DLIS programme (which is currently phasing out). More about this in the final section of this report.

Similarly, miscommunication and human error in the cumbersome process of appointing a suitable coordinator for the DLIS program has prevented the timely construction and distribution of a program survey. At this point, it is unrealistic to still hold such an evaluation, because of time constraints with regard to the submission of this report, but also because many of the students in the programme have finished and will no longer have access to their student email accounts. This is also a situation I aim to improve for the next programme report, by sending out a programme evaluation survey to students during their final semester (VT2024).

Analysis of:

Students' opportunity for responsibility and participation

Apart from participating in questionnaires students also communicate with programme and course coordinators both online and during the residential weeks. Online communication with programme and course coordinators

happens both on an ad-hoc, student initiated level via email and canvas messages, and on a scheduled, programme coordinator initiated level by means of open office hour zoom meetings.

Content, teaching methods, examination and progression

In total, the BMDD121h group of DLIS programme counted 53 students. Of those, 25 (47%) were completely inactive, having earned 0 credits in the course from HT2021 to VT2023. At the time of writing, a total of 8 students (15%) have completed the course (having earned 120 credits), and another 11 students (+/- 21%) are relatively close to completion (having earned +60% of the total course credits). Not counting inactive students, the completion rate for this group at the standard end of the programme is 27.5% (with an additional 38% close to completion).

The teaching formats were largely online discussions and workshops on campus for the residential weeks positioned at the beginning of each semester, followed by Canvas activities and discussions, as well as zoom discussions and seminars. The course hosts a myriad of different examination methods, including specific skill-related assignments (like the HTML assignment in Technologies of digital libraries 1 and digitization skills in Digitization of Cultural Heritage Material), analytic papers (Digital Library Management; Users; the thesis course), seminar discussions (Research Methods), methodological experiments (Research Methods), concrete digital development projects (Digitization of Cultural Heritage Material; Interaction design), and home exams (Information Retrieval).

The analysis of the available student evaluations suggest that students were generally positive about the range and execution of the teaching methods, largely agreeing (or strongly agreeing) with questions on whether the teaching in the courses supported their learning. To illustrate, the evaluation of the Information Retrieval 1 course quotes a student commenting that the teaching was important for their understanding of the course contents, and the evaluation of the Technologies for Digital Libraries 2 course boasts that all survey participants reported that they found the lectures and exercises offered in the course helpful. The same holds true for the examinations, which were also for the most part positively evaluated.

A criticism with the courses in this area that seems to surface across several course evaluations has to do with pacing. For example, in the Information Retrieval 1 course, a student remarked that the written assignments and home exam were scheduled too closely together. If they had been scheduled further apart, students would have been able to use the feedback they received on their written assignments in preparation for the home exam – which the current scheduling prevented. In the Technologies for Digital Libraries 1 course, on the other hand, this question of pacing was more related to the level of (technical) difficulty of individual parts of the course. Here, students experienced a big leap in the difficulty of the teaching, materials, and examination of the parts concerning HTML/CSS/XML on the one hand, and JavaScript on the other – where the latter was perceived as too difficult by some students.

The programme progression was also mostly positively evaluated, as most respondents to the student evaluations agreed or strongly agreed that individual courses worked well in relation to other courses in the programme.

Research connection

Connections to research are varied in the available course evaluations. The evaluation for the Information Retrieval courses, for example, suggest that they provide a very good link to research conducted in the area. On the other hand, like in previous evaluations of this programme, students still identify the Technologies of Digital Libraries 1 and 2 courses as lacking a connection to research. The teachers of this course are aware of this, but do not consider this a problem for the course, because of its more practice-oriented nature. As it stands, the course is mainly offered to prepare students to understand and undertake their own research using skills learned in this course. In this sense, the course supports a more practical understanding of research.

Resources

Teachers involved in each of the courses had relevant research backgrounds for teaching these courses. However, the resources for teaching were just barely sufficient for the program, as teachers report overtime issues, and the search for examiners (especially for the Research Methods and Thesis courses) continues to pose

difficulties. To some extent, some structural changes in the Research Methods course (which has since been split into two individual, smaller courses) and the Thesis course (where students are now strongly encouraged to work in pairs, and the deadlines and relevance of seminars and deadlines are currently being re-evaluated) aim to resolve some of these issues (if not for the DLIS programme, which is currently phasing out, then at least for its sister MADI programme), but it is unlikely that those changes will eradicate this problem completely.

If we understand ‘resources’ as the availability of teaching materials for the students, it should be mentioned that these have also been mostly evaluated positively. For the most part, survey respondents report high degrees of satisfaction with video lectures, literature, and other training materials.

Most of the issues in this respect were reported in the evaluation of the Technologies for Digital Libraries 1 course. There, one student commented that the course relied too much on external (W3C-schools) materials, and one (possibly the same) student remarked that the track towards A-B level grades included additional research of materials that had not been explicitly touched upon in the classes. It was also remarked that the live teaching in this course lacked leadership, and was too dependent on input from the students. This situation is mainly caused by the general teaching structure for this course, where students are asked to view recorded video lectures and study other training materials individually, and then invited (but not required) to participate in scheduled live teaching sessions, that are structured more like open office hours. In those sessions, students are expected to take the initiative, by indicating which areas of the course they are struggling with. Without such input, it is taken for granted that the teaching materials were sufficiently clear to the students. Of course, this only works when students 1) study the materials and try to make the relevant exercises before this session, and 2) feel comfortable enough to ask questions, and indicate to the teachers and the rest of the class which aspects they fail to understand. From experience, we know that 1) is not always the case, to a considerable extent because many students perform part-time or even fulltime jobs alongside following the programme. Since the DLIS programme is designed as a fulltime programme, this situation is something teachers in the programme can not account for. Still, 2) may be enough of a reason to reconsider the structure of the course, and/or prepare some more guided activities in the live sessions when student activity starts to slow down.

Usability and preparation for working life

Although this was not specifically polled in the evaluation surveys, some students commented that they find the link between courses in the programme with the profession (librarianship) more difficult to find – especially with courses focusing on digital skills. Such comments should, however, be taken with a grain of salt. On the one hand, it should be noted that the digital turn has also affected the library, which means that librarians also more and more frequently require (the kind of) digital skills (offered in this programme) for their professional work. If anything, the students’ perception that these skills are irrelevant to library work points to a failure on our part to make the extent of this evolution clear to the students – rather than pointing to a mismatch between the programme and the profession. This is certainly something to take with us as we continue teaching in this and other programmes. On the other hand, it should also be taken into account that the DLIS programme is a research education programme, not a professional education programme. Its aim is more to teach students to become familiar with the area of library and information science, rather than to prepare them for a professional assignment at a library.

Other

As noted above, there are significant lacunae in the evaluation of student participation in the programme for this specific group of students, which is lamentable. There are many reasons for this, including general staff turnover rates, difficulties finding a suitable coordinator for the programme, staff workload and overtime issues, administrative hurdles (such as teachers not always having access to relevant areas in Canvas), and the difficulty of finding information (including instructions, deadlines, and templates) for performing these duties in the first place – on top of a general history of low participation rates in student evaluation surveys (which is not exactly motivating for course coordinators). But these issues (many of which relate to what was mentioned under ‘Resources’ above) are the Department’s, and should of course never stand in the way of allowing students to

offer us feedback on individual courses and the programme as a whole. While we expect that some of these issues will persist, we aim to make some significant improvements in this area in view of the next (and final) evaluation for DLIS students.

Any suggestions for changes

First and foremost, we aim to perform a more thorough evaluation of the program for the next group of DLIS students (BMDD122h) by:

- Reminding and encouraging course coordinators to perform their student evaluations;
- Continuing to host frequent open office hour sessions in 2024 (where workload and parental leave issues have caused this practice to slow down somewhat in HT2023); and
- Conducting a student evaluation survey in VT2024.

It should be noted that since the following batch of students (BMDD122h) is the last group to ever participate in the DLIS programme, and that they are about to embark on their final semester (with only the MA thesis course left), there are very few (or even: practically no more) opportunities to use this evaluation (or indeed the next one) to make substantial changes to the DLIS courses and programme. Still, we may use what we learned from these evaluations when we go on to teach different programmes (notably the DLIS Swedish sister programme MADI, and the new international MAIDI programme). It should also be noted that some of the DLIS courses that were evaluated here will continue to be taught in different programmes. Changes proposed to those courses on the basis of the BMDD1121h student evaluations include:

- The improvement of the scheduling for residential days
- Updating teaching materials
- Reassessing the accessibility of the literature and examinations of certain aspects of the courses (e.g. the mathematical component in Information Retrieval, and the computer programming component in Technologies for Digital Libraries 1)
- Reassessing the pedagogical structure of the Technologies for Digital Libraries course (to include more guidance in the live sessions)
- In general, we should keep a closer eye on the pacing of the courses
- In programmes with a high focus on technical and digital skills, we could improve the way and extent to which we explain to students how the process of digitization affected the profession of librarianship