

Course Evaluation: NORAM 1500, Fall 2009. Deborah Kitchen-Døderlein.

This semester we had a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, Julia Edwards, working with the class on writing. Students were told that they were to see her with their qualifying essay at least twice. A few ignored this. But many worked with her throughout the semester. Those who did learned a tremendous amount about writing a competent exam.

Unfortunately, those who ignored this opportunity ended up with very poor essays. Nine had to redo them at the end, delaying the turning in of the godkjenningslist. Several of those students plagiarized 80-100% of their essays (copying directly from the textbook). Four, in fact, had to be sent to the library to write in quotation marks throughout their revised essays, as a third revision. They were given 2 hours for this. These four students told me they now understood completely why it was wrong to copy and promised they had learned their lesson and would never do it again. Even with revisions, there were still 2-3 students who were not qualified for the exam. One never picked up his first draft despite an email from me and one from the studiekonsulent. I met with one of them while the others were taking the exam. We discussed how to study and what she needed to learn. She agreed that it was better that I told her directly that she had no chance of passing an exam, based on her essay, and that she needed to retake the course entirely. She also admitted that she had let the course slide and concentrated on other courses entirely.

There was little support from the HF exam office initially in this matter of plagiarism. One student was told that there would be no punishment for copying absolutely every sentence from the textbook, as it was not gross plagiarism. I met with the person from the exam office about this. Initially, that person claimed that I could not even use the words plagiarism or cheating, as it could only be "mistanke." She turned around on that during our discussion. I said that plagiarism is an academic term, and that if I am to teach them not to do it, I must be free to use the word. I also pointed out that I would never turn in a student for mere suspicion (and doubt that any colleague would either). I would prove it by finding the source. In that discussion, she said that prior cases in which I had been left out of the loop entirely, and the student was let off had been mishandled legally, as we are required to be informed and we have the right to be part of the meeting with the student. I showed her the written warnings I provided about plagiarism as proof that the students knew what it was. She liked the approach and reconsidered her position a bit. She agreed to call the student who thought she had been told it was entirely acceptable to copy all her sentences from the textbook and clarify that it was plagiarism and would deserve an F in the course, even though the fusk committee never prosecuted any but the grossest forms.

Twenty-five students took the exam. Grades in the course fall roughly into the normal curve pattern, with some variation in the middle. Variation from statistical expectations happens often when there are fewer than 100 observations.

A	3
B	7
C	6
D	7
E	2
F	0

When 1/3 of the class had to rewrite their qualifying essays despite having 10 weeks to complete them and having the TA available for help, I informally surveyed the class about

how many hours they spent on the course outside of class. Only 1 put in 9 hours and 1 put in 8 hours. Most put in 1-3 hours per week, and a significant number admitted they did nothing but attend class. This showed up, as it became impossible to hold a discussion with no more than 3 students prepared at any point. I told them they had not done their jobs, and defined a 10 point course as one third of full-time work hours, as defined by the government regarding employment. Several of the students told Julia (the TA) that they were glad I had been so direct with them. I believe, based on exam results, that quite a number of them put in a lot of hours catching up a bit before the exam. Part II of the exam (the term ID's) brought quite a number of grades up, compared to the large essay grades. This would be consistent with cramming at the end, as details are easier to cram for than analysis.

Two students in the class shone above the rest every week. They read not only the textbooks, but newspapers, internet sources, and other things. They raised excellent questions about things they had read that sometimes went well beyond the narrow readings and raised the level of the class as a whole. Both are history BA students, rather than NORAM. Both are insecure in writing English. I advised them to take our Applied Grammar course, as they have the possibility to go beyond the BA and improving their English will help them move forward in whatever field they enter. Both are now considering doing NORAM as a supporting field after our talks. I referred them to our studiekonsulent, Tor Erik.

I had to schedule 2 makeup sessions during the semester, as I had a concussion and later swine flu. It was possible to do them back to back with the regular classtime, and almost all

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Deborah L. Kitchen-Døderlein