

**EPIC 1st Workshop, 1st Cohort
Student Evaluation**

Q1 Do you think the EPIC Workshop successfully initiated an interdisciplinary research network?

Yes	No	DK
21	5	4

Most students felt that the workshop did initiate a research network (20/29).

It was felt that the principal element were the interdisciplinary international debates (45%).

For many students, relatively more personal reasons constituted the main elements:

- The exchange with students with a similar research focus (10%)
- Personal contacts (6%)
- Discussion of and receiving comments on individual research (19%)

Finally, other students mentioned the unique experience of such an informal workshop itself (6%) and of the people that participated in it (10%)

The workshop did not initiate a network because:

- It is too early to say (57%)

Only one person mentioned that the research topics were too diverse.

Answers were generally consistent across all three groups.

Q2 Did the Workshop increase your awareness of other disciplines' methodologies?

Group	Yes	No	DK / NA
1	4	2	4
2	4	3	2
3	7	3	1

Mixed answers, not possible to draw any precise conclusions. However, students generally felt that there should be more discussion on methodology in the workshop (see below).

It was felt that Salvatore's group had treated methodology more explicitly than the other two groups. Thus, their answers show a different pattern.

Comments:

Students gave very diverse comments as to how and why the workshop did / did not increase their awareness of other methodologies. However, related points that were addressed were:

- Methodology is important but very difficult to convey to students who are still at such an early stage of their research
- Quality of methodological debates was limited as too little time was given to students to allow discussion of their own methodology.
- Applied vs. theoretical discussion of methodology: theory considered less susceptible to lack of subject-specific knowledge; EPIC provides opportunity to discuss methodology in an applied context, which may be just as important.

Q2a Do you think there was enough / too little / too much methodological discussion?

Group	Too much	Too little	Enough	DK / NA
1	1	6	0	3
2	0	8	1	0
3	3	3	4	1

Strong indications that students would appreciate more methodological discussion. This was reflected in some of the comments:

- Methodology very important at the beginning of research.
- Could have been a great addition to the overall workshop

In addition, by improving the quality of the discussions, the number of debates would be sufficient.

Q2b Will it influence your research?

Yes	No	DK / NA
13	11	6

In what way:

- Include a wider methodology or a more global perspective (38%)
- Clarity of argument; making it more accessible to outsiders (23%)
- Construction of argument (15%)
- Other (23%)

Why not:

- Research topics were too diverse (35%)
- Discussions were too limited and / or unfocused (30%)
- Other (35%)

Plenary sessions

Q3 Did you find the plenary sessions a useful part of the workshop?

Yes	No	DK /NA
13	8	9

Despite the apparent uselessness of the plenary sessions, students still appreciated them:

- They were considered still an interesting part of the workshop.
- A meeting point
- Insight into other research areas

On the negative side:

- Too content specific
- They did not add any specific character to the Workshop

Q3a Do you feel they were relevant for the group sessions?

Group	Yes	No	DK / NA
1	6	4	0
2	4	5	0
3	1	9	1

Differences across groups may have reflected a certain bias in the topics of the plenary sessions. Consequently, respondents from Howard's group generally found them relevant, while those in Salvatore's group did not.

This was reflected in the positive and negative comments that were made:

- They gave impulses for discussions in the group sessions.
- They were too subject specific and unrelated to the students' work.

More general criticisms were that the debates of the plenary sessions were not continued in the group sessions and that students had no time to 'digest' them.

Q3c Should there be more or less plenary sessions?

More	Less	Right	DK /NA
4	10	12	4

The answers and comments to this question support the impression gained from the previous questions. Thus, only two points were raised in the comments:

- Quality rather than quantity
- The plenary sessions provided a good rhythm to the workshop

Q3b Were there any particular topics, you would have liked to be discussed in the plenary sessions?

Subject-specific suggestions (all quoted answers):

- Economic geography and industrial and technology policy
- Topics relating to the EU (e.g. EU vs. EMU, WTO, enlargement)
- Legal settings of the EU (“if they want to take care of problems, they first have to find out if they can”)
- New technologies, technological change
- De-industrialisation process, information society

Discipline-specific:

- Social (instead of economic) issues
- Topics relating more generally to more disciplines
- More interdisciplinary presentations

Format- and Methodology-specific:

- Methodological issues
- Speaker + discussant, paper circulated beforehand
- Less focus on some individual professor’s research but more on methodological stuff, tools, experience in research, etc.
- Introductory and closing sessions

General suggestions:

- More student involvement
- Personal experiences of writing a PhD - what consequences this had on the researchers’ careers and life
- Profiles of the three working groups

Senior Researchers

Q4 Were the senior researchers’ presentations in the group sessions helpful / relevant / irrelevant / other? Why?

Helpful	Relevant	Irrelevant	Other	DK /NA
11	7	3	8	1

Even though the groups were given very different presentations, all positive comments focused on methodological or research design elements in the presentations. None of the respondents mentioned content-specific issues.

Negative comments focused on the lack of any match between the presentation and the students’ research topic.

Respondents from Howard’s group also bemoaned the lack of speakers.

Q5 Were there any presentations that you found particularly good? Why?

Respondents tended to appreciate methodological issues (“Ana’s: interdisciplinary, clear organisation and included a discussion of her methodological approach”), comments on research structuring (“Damian’s focus on research structuring”), and clarity and thoroughness of the presentation (“Steve: well constructed and easy to understand”, “Steve: discussed starting point and the whole discussion surrounding his article”).

Q6 Were the senior researchers' comments on your research very useful / useful / neutral/ useless /other?

Group	V. useful	Useful	Neutral	Useless	Other	DK /NA
1	1	4	1	2	0	2
2	3	2	3	0	1	0
3	4	5	1	0	1	0

Despite the positive answers, comments were generally very critical. The main point that was raised that the comments were already familiar and that time was too short to have thorough discussions of one's research. In addition, related to previous questions, respondents of Howard's group mentioned that comments would have been even more useful if there had been more senior researchers.

Out of 14 comments in total, only three remarks were outright positive ("any comments from different backgrounds are useful", "empathy with one's own situation", "pointed out specific areas that needed attention").

Q6a Did these comments help you in your planning of your future research?

Help	No help	DK / NA
19	8	3

Responses indicated that the comments were helpful in different ways:

- Pointing out methodological shortcomings
- Clarification of ideas
- Access to new sources of information
- Pointing out the need to include more comparative work

The only reason that comments were not helpful was that the comments did not contain any new criticism.

Q6c Would you have liked there to be more / less discussion on research structuring?

More	Less	Right	DK / NA
21	2	5	2

Apart from being useful, respondents also indicated that:

- Debates on research structuring would make the overall discussions more structured.
- Debates would be less subject-specific.
- Students' research could serve as case-studies
- While it was discussed in group sessions, it should be included more in the plenary sessions

Q8 Do you have any further comments about the senior researchers and their roles?

Two main points were raised:

- There should be more senior researchers and more rotation across groups
- It was not clear what the senior researcher's role was; they had different roles across the groups

In addition, it was appreciated by a number of respondents in Salvatore's group that he took on a role as a chair of the group and made sure that all presentation should follow a certain structure and answer certain questions.

Group sessions

Q9 Did you find the students' comments on your research useful? Why /why not?

Yes	No	DK /NA
23	4	3

Students' comments were thought useful for three main reasons:

- Feedback from different standpoints (27%)
- Clarification of one's own thoughts, i.e. being forced to explain research to people unfamiliar with the subject matter and having to respond to 'common sense' questions (23%)
- Overcome the PhD isolation and to talk to students at similar stages of their research or researching in similar areas. (12%)

Other respondents gained new information on literature, new insights into methodological shortcomings of their research.

It was noted by a number of respondents, however, that the relative ignorance of the students of the different subjects were a limiting factor.

There were two types of negative comments:

- People were still at the beginning of their research
- There was too little time open for discussion

Q9a Were the discussions too long / too short / long enough? Why?

Too long	Too short	Right	NA
0	8	20	2

Very few comments. All comments, however, stressed that there was too little time so that discussions remained too short. Hence, there was "no time to discuss conceptual and methodological aspects" and one "only got a glimpse of other students' research".

Q10a Was there too much or too little structure? What effect did this have on the group sessions?

Group	Too much	Too little	Right	DK / NA
1	0	5	3	3
2	1	1	4	3
3	0	0	10	1

Salvatore's group appeared to have an ideal structure (no critical comments).

Howard's group:

- Lack of structure caused great confusion → students did not know what was going on and it was thought that there was a lot of dead time.

Bob's group:

- Too little time for students to present and discuss due to strong focus on senior researchers' presentations
- Senior researchers made the most useful comments

Q11 Group 1 & 3 only: What preparation did you make for this workshop?

Except for three respondents, all students only prepared their own presentation. The remaining three prepared by:

- Familiarising with other students' topics
- Read more about one's own topic
- Read paper handed out by senior researcher

Q11a Would you have time for a preparatory programme?

Yes	No	DK / NA
15	2	4

There were only few qualifications to these answers:

- Preparation should be related to one's own research
- It should not be too demanding
- It should not be about methodological issues.

Q12 Group 2 only: Was the recommended reading too much / sufficient / not enough ?

Too much	Sufficient	Not enough	Other / NA
3	2	0	3

Only three comments:

- There was no time to read all of it
- The reading list was not essential to follow the discussions
- One respondent did not have access to the literature

Q12a Did you find the reading list essential / useful / irrelevant? Why?

Essential	Useful	Irrelevant	DK / NA
2	5	0	2

- They allowed better understanding of presentations and enhanced the quality of discussions.
- It allowed more time to focus on methodological issues
- Good preparation for workshop and for one's own research
- In the end, too much emphasis was placed purely on the text

Q13 Suggestions and comments

Most answers suggested that students should be given some chance to choose their groups. In addition, a number of comments also called for more methodological discussions.

Q14 Was the overall workshop a useful experience to help you with your research work?

Yes	No	DK
27	2	1

Comments focused on two aspects that had already been mentioned in previous questions:

- The workshop was an opportunity to present one's own work
- It was an opportunity to overcome the PhD isolation and to get to know other people working in a similar field

Some more elaborate comments:

Plenary and group presentations:

“It is important to clarify what the objectives of these [plenary] sessions are. One possibility would be to introduce participants to very up-to-date ideas and research outcomes in the field of political economy. In this sense, it is not crucial for the particular topic to be relevant to the students’ work. However, if the objective is to contribute to the particular research agendas of the participants, then maybe a set of ‘themes’ can be extracted of all PhD outlines and the plenary sessions can be targeted to them”

The last point was also picked up by another student:

“Our group needs more senior research presentations. But first of all it’s necessary that we send out interest to Christoph. I think that it is better if the senior researchers talk about common topics.”

Also:

“I liked the general setup of the week: workshops meeting continuously discussing student’s and plenary sessions. But: never do a plenary session right after lunch again unless it is really necessary. It is possible to stay awake in the smaller group but not in such a large one even if the lectures are interesting.

In the future I would be interested in a different kind of plenary sessions. I would like to see the organizers of EPIC discuss the question underlying EPIC: how should questions which are both studied in law, economics and political science be studied? What kind of approaches are there? I discussed this with Bob Haacke and others on the last day and he gave us a lecture on institutional economics which was a) very funny (I did not know that the explanation of transactions costs can be so much fun) and b) very informative because I discovered that what we discuss in International Relations stems directly from institutional economics only that it is applied directly to the relations among states. A move which is highly problematic. But I would like to have a lecture on this to discuss problems of cooperation, confrontation, institution building, etc. I think the lecture of Anna at the last day was going in the direction I am thinking of, only that one could concentrate on interdisciplinarity more explicitly (NOTE: this is not a criticism of the lecture which I enjoyed very much!)

Why this suggestion? In my view the plenary sessions so far were interesting but I wondered what purpose they served precisely, and therefore, I suggest that they could look at how interdisciplinary research and discussions can be successfully carried out.

An example of how not to do it (same student):

During my studies at Konstanz university in a program called „administrative sciences (Verwaltungswissenschaft) I made very bad experiences with interdisciplinarity: we had to take courses from sociology, political science, economics, law. In the second part of the degree we were then supposed to focus on one policy field such as international relations, communal policies, domestic policies and investigate these with the help of economics, political science, sociology and so on. But we were constantly told by each discipline that we were inadequate to the task because we did not know the fundamentals of each of the discipline. So I really wonder whether interdisciplinary research is possible at all, and if so how? (After this experience interdisciplinarity to me means that economists tell everybody else what to do, think and research. They never seem to question their own approaches and adopt insights from other disciplines (if this is not true, well: make a plenary session on this). I would like these lectures to be presented by the organizers of EPIC because I find it quite disappointing not to get to know what the other institutions/senior scholars are doing. Will there be a presentation of the institutions at some point? I will of course try to locate some of the information on the net which I could not do before the workshop but still, it would be quite interesting to get some idea of what the directors of the other two workshops are doing in their work.

On the other hand, some people in our workshop were really disappointed not to have more people from "the real world" coming because they wanted to use the workshop as a starting point for interviews. So there is probably a need to balance the academic and "real world" part more.”

Senior researchers and their roles:

“I would welcome the opportunity for every group to talk to every senior researcher (or at least some of the researchers from the different institutions). In this way, all students could benefit from their different theoretical approaches and views about methodologies” [→ *this could be done by compiling a list of senior researchers and their research interests before the workshop and send it out to the students*]

EPIC online elements:

“a) Journal: It should be possible to get reports from the three workshops which summarize the research questions and the discussions of the dissertations, if this is of interest. One could think of short statements to prepare for the next workshops on interdisciplinarity in the social sciences as well.

It would be interesting furthermore, to have a general statement of purpose of EPIC and how to apply in the Journal or the web page.

b) Links to the participating institutions should be on the web page, and if available to hompages of participating scholars.

c) Hompages for every participating student describing his or her research project? Instead of Christoph or workshop directors having to send out every single paper we all could download it from the net. May be the web page should be divided in a public part available to everybody and an internal part which is accessible only to EPIC members. Here, one could set up e-mail connections to the senior researchers and to the groups themselves. Other, more sensitive and/or uninteresting to outsiders information (telephone numbers, travel info, directions etc.) could be made available here.”

Reading list:

“The reading list was too much in too little time but I think it will be much better to have subgroups with only 1 compulsory lecture each (so you cover the 3-4 articles for each sessions) and the rest optional, so that people come with the coverage as a group but not an indigestion of readings!”