

EPIC 2nd Cohort
1st Advanced Research Workshop
Corfu, 23 – 30.05.01

Student Evaluations

Methodology questions (Questions 1 – 14)

Q 2: was the substance of the *specialist* methodology course: very useful, useful, neutral, not very useful? Please explain

Group	Very useful	Useful	Neutral	Not v. useful
Rat. Choice	-	3	-	3
Quantitative	3	6	2	1
Qualitative	6	18	5	-

Rational choice

All respondents pointed out that the sessions were too basic. It was positively noted, however, that the material was applied to students' proposals.

Quantitative

It was noted positively that the seminars focused significantly on students' proposals. This gave very suitable examples for the presented material and helped students to clarify their topic and hypotheses. On the other hand, some respondents felt that too much time was spent on the proposals so that little was learnt about specific quantitative methodology.

Qualitative

Students found the substance of the course very useful because:

- It clarified the various methods and their terminologies.
- It made methods accessible to students from different backgrounds.

In addition to the above two points, other respondents found the course useful for the following reasons:

- It was an opportunity to apply the material or theories to students' research.
- Students had received no training in these methods at their home institutions.
- The general discussions with fellow participants provided many new insights.

On the other hand, it was perceived as neutral that:

- The material had already been familiar to the students.
- The course lacked depth as it was thought to be too general (“[...] therefore, our subjects could not be discussed in detail.”) and / or too narrow in focus (“[...] we need to put ontology prior to epistemology. [...]”)

To enhance the quality of the course, it was suggested to provide seminar notes or good examples of papers in which the material had been applied.

Q 3: Will it help in your future research? Very much – some – very little – not at all. Please explain

Group	Very much	Some	Very little	Not at all
Rat. Choice	1	4	1	-
Quantitative	5	6	1	-
Qualitative	8	18	3	-

Rational Choice

The main benefit appears to have been to clarify students' ideas or to provide them with new ideas. On the other hand, one respondent stated that the seminars were too basic to be helpful for future research.

Quantitative

The discussions will help to varying degrees for future research because students could see how different methods were applied to different problems. They also confirmed previous reservations and gave some new general ideas for students' research.

Qualitative

Student found the material very useful for the following reasons:

- It raised awareness of methods while they were still at the very early stages of their research.
- It clarified ideas and issues related to students' own research, methods and general ones.
- It provided useful ideas and tools, which will be useful for future research, not necessarily related to their current work.

While the above points were also mentioned by other respondents who considered the material to be useful, overall the course would only be of some help:

- It was too early to tell where / when it would become useful.
- The course was a useful review but did not necessarily contain any new insights.
- It was rather a good challenge to one's own thoughts and ideas.

In contrast, few students found the course of very little use for two main reasons:

- It was not possible to tell yet.
- Students' own underlying approach to research differed to that of the methods course. Hence it was considered problematic to incorporate the material into one's own research design.

Besides these comments, two main criticisms were made by several students that limited the usefulness of the methods course:

- Respondents were too advanced in their own research and had already chosen their methods.
- The course would have been more useful if students had been given more time to discuss their own research.

Q 4: Given your prior knowledge of the subject, was the course targeted at the right level ? Too high – right – too low

Group	Too high	Right	Too low
Rat. Choice	-	2	4
Quantitative	-	5	6
Qualitative	1	15	13

Rational Choice

While the level was too low, one student felt that it would not have been problematic, had this been pointed out originally. In addition, seminars made little use of the readings. All this would have given more information on which to base their choice of methods groups.

One respondent also noted that the seminars were too narrowly focused on economics with too little attention to other disciplines, such as political science.

Quantitative

The sessions felt the level was too low as discussions focused on research rather than on methodology.

Qualitative

Reasserting comments in earlier questions, a number of respondents stressed that the course could be made more comprehensive and the level improved if it made better use of the reading lists. That is, students could be better prepared if priority readings were indicated. This would permit the organisers to target the course at a higher level. Readings should also include examples of actual papers, which apply some of the various methods. Similarly, the course should refer to the reading more explicitly.

Q 5: Was the substance of the *basic* methodology sessions (i.e. Friday): very useful, useful, neutral, not very useful? Please explain.

Group	Very useful	Useful	Neutral	Not v. useful
Rat. Choice	1	5	-	-
Quantitative	1	5	4	2
Qualitative	4	11	10	4

Rational Choice

Respondents particularly appreciated the opportunity to discuss the material with regard to their own research. One student pointed out that this was possible because of the small size of the group.

Quantitative

It was useful or very useful because it gave a general view on other methods.

It was perceived as neutral or not very useful because it did not provide any new insights or was too basic.

Qualitative

‘Very useful’ and ‘useful’ answers mainly appreciated that, to varying degrees, the course generally complemented the range of analytic tools. In contrast, criticism focused mainly on the detail of the presented material. This was perceived as too narrow or familiar to be of real use. Hence, respondents rated the course in the following way:

Very useful:

- The course widened the range of possible tools to analyse a problem.

Useful:

- It raised awareness of methodologies other than that used in one’s own research.
- It added new material, which can be useful for students’ current research.
- The course was useful for discussions during the subsequent theme group seminars.

Neutral / Not very useful:

- The course was only a (shallow) review of familiar material – time was too short to go more in depth and make it more useful.
- It was too narrow in focus.
- The discussions following the presentations were too unfocused “[...] and any further analysis of more advanced research problems was hindered.”)

Suggestions again focused on making more use of reading lists and providing more examples or reading that bridges the gap between the different methods strands more explicitly.

Q 6: With respect to questions 2 and 5, please comment briefly on the senior scientists in your methodology group.

Rational Choice

Students were altogether very positive about the senior researchers heading the rational choice group. In particular, the underlined their helpfulness and their efforts to provide constructive feedback and to bridge the gap between disciplines.

Quantitative

All respondents commented positively on the senior scientists. In particular, they liked the constructive comments and seniors’ efforts to point towards ideas and literature.

Qualitative

Overall, the reviews of the senior academics heading the qualitative group were similarly positive as in the other groups. They liked their enthusiasm and their willingness to discuss research problems of individual students. However, a few respondents felt that professors may have been too rigid in their use of methods and hence “they probably have to take into future consideration some of the limitations and shortcomings mentioned above.”

Q 7: Would you have preferred more or less background reading? More – right – less.

Group	More	Right	Less
Rat. Choice	1	4	1
Quantitative	-	7	5
Qualitative	3	21	5

Rational Choice

It was stressed that priority reading should have been indicated. Moreover, lists for further reading would have been useful.

Quantitative

Some respondents stated that there should have been greater reference to the readings in the discussion. It was also felt that priority reading should be indicated. Finally, it was pointed out that several papers were not available at students' libraries.

Qualitative

Similar to the other groups, students commented on the need to prioritise reading and to provide examples.

Q 8: Were the methodology lectures and discussions in your group prepared adequately by the professors? Adequately – inadequately – other? Please explain.

Group	Adequately	Inadequately	Other
Rat. Choice	5	1	-
Quantitative	11	-	1
Qualitative	28	-	1

Rational Choice

The criticism reiterated the previous point that the purpose of the methodology session should have been explained more clearly.

Qualitative

As raised in previous questions, a number of students pointed out that more complementary material should have been provided, such as examples of papers, agenda for discussions (to make discussions more structured), lecture notes, more information about the expertise of the various professors themselves.

Q 9: How satisfied were you with the division into three methodology streams? Very satisfied – satisfied – neutral – not very satisfied? Please explain.

Group	V. satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Not v. satisfied
Rat. Choice	2	1	3	-
Quantitative	1	7	3	1
Qualitative	6	16	5	2

Rational Choice

Respondents found particularly positive the small size of the group. In contrast, the widely differing backgrounds and levels of the students were perceived as problematic.

Quantitative

There were three main comments:

- It was noted positively that the division provided a good overview over the other methods.
- Clearer instructions should have been given beforehand about the purpose of the methods seminars and of the division into basic and specialist groups.
- Some respondents felt that the division was artificial (“[...] the quantitative and rational choice groups were more based on the use of certain types of techniques, whereas the qualitative group was more about the comparative method than the use of qualitative techniques.”)

Qualitative

While there was general satisfaction with the division, the usefulness of the division was diminished because of the size of the group and the limited time available for discussions. Therefore, students provided the following comments:

Very satisfied / satisfied:

- Apart from the division, it was very useful to split specialist and non-specialist methods. However, it was suggested that the basic sessions would need more rigid preparation.
- It categorised different methods, which made it easier for students to understand them.
- The division was the most suitable division for methods currently used in political economy.
- The division could have been further clarified if it had included a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of “comparative eclecticism and choosing the most optimal methodology for answering one’s research questions. As it was set for this workshop, no one questioned one’s choice of methodology which is often picked because one has insufficient knowledge about alternatives or because we abide by idiosyncratic standards of sub-disciplines or our home departments. This, of course, doesn’t always result in selecting the most optimal methodology for answering one’s research question.”

Neutral / Not very satisfied:

- The size of the group was too large / seminar time too short. Consequently, discussions were too shallow to make the division relevant.
- It would have been preferable to have fewer groups and discuss some methods in more detail.

Q 10: Did you find it useful to attend seminars on all three workshop strands? Please explain.

Group	Yes	No	N/a
Rat. Choice	5	-	1
Quantitative	11	1	-
Qualitative	24	5	-

Quantitative

Students thought it useful as they were able to draw some insights from the various strands for their own research. Moreover, one respondent noted positively that this made it obvious that all methods strands are equally legitimate.

Qualitative

Similar to respondents in other groups, students believed that they could benefit from the insights in their future research. In addition, one respondent mentioned that they did not receive any training in their home institution.

However, several students pointed out that time was too short to discuss other strands in depth.

Consequently, students who did not find it useful to attend seminars on all three workshop strands, would have preferred to focus on their specialist methodology for another day instead.

Q 11: Would you prefer more general training on research design (like the plenary talk on Saturday morning)? More – Same amount – Less.

Group	More	Same amount	Less
Rat. Choice	2	3	1
Quantitative	2	7	3
Qualitative	6	16	7

Rational Choice

Students expressed some concern over too much repetition if there was more research design training.

Qualitative

Those arguing for less or the same amount of research design training said that the training would need more structure, or would need to focus on specific needs, rather than general issues. Finally, some students felt that it overlapped to some extent with the previous methodology course.

In contrast, students who would like more training pointed out that research design was a weak spot for many students. Correspondingly, other students would like to see more examples as part of the training.

Q 12: If you prefer more training, are there any particular aspects that you would like to see covered?

- more about samples, surveys, etc.
- elite interviewing techniques.
- comparative case studies.
- Technical treatment of quantitative data.
- More examples.
- Operationalisation of variables.

Q 13: Are there any other methodological approaches you would have liked to have included within the course?

- Greater attention to other disciplines (e.g. law, psychology (for rational choice), political science).
- Current dynamics in research methodology.
- Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (great demand)
- Modelling.
- Econometrics.
- Simulations.
- More positivist methodology (e.g. process tracing)
- Social network analysis.
- Theories of institutional change / emergence; although this is “more a theoretical paradigm than a methodology [...]”

Q 14: Do you have any other comments or suggestions to improve the quality of the methodology seminars?

Rational Choice

It was stressed that more prior information about the methodology sessions is necessary. Respondents also commented on the advantage of the small group size.

Quantitative

It was suggested to include a discussion of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of different methods / strands.

Qualitative

Similar to evaluations from the other group, students suggested to improve the structure and amount of preparatory material, e.g. sending out descriptions of lists of projects for the group exercises, agendas for the various seminars, etc.

In addition, respondents stressed again the importance of using more examples. A number of respondents also recommended to devote more time for specialist topics.

Substantive questions (Questions 15 – 20)

Questions 15, 15 a/b/c were teaching quality assessment questions. All senior scientists have been given a summary of the answers provided.

Q 16: Were the *group members'* comments and discussions of your research: very useful – useful – neutral – other? Please explain.

Group	Very useful	Useful	Neutral	Not v. useful	Other
Innovation	2	4	3	-	1
EMU	2	7	-	-	1
Welfare	4	6	1	-	-
Transition	9	4	-	-	2

Innovation

The distinguishing aspect of the group sessions was the very different backgrounds of the group members. However, while roughly half of the group thought they benefited from this (“[...] in an interdisciplinary group we have questions that we have never thought about.”), others saw that as a constraint (“[...] the divide between lawyers and economists was too big in the group and discussions were scarce.”).

EMU

Respondents found comments’ useful or very useful because they pointed out further sources of literature and clarified or provided new ideas. Similar to students from other theme groups, students also found it useful to receive comments from people from different academic backgrounds. In addition, some students found it very useful that discussions frequently continued after the seminars.

Welfare

Respondents particularly appreciated that all group members had read the proposals and the constructive and creative atmosphere that this created. As in other groups, there were different opinions about the different academic backgrounds of the group members. On the one hand, the provided new perspectives on their colleagues’ research. On the other hand, for this reason comments appeared to remain rather general.

Transition

Students benefited most from the interdisciplinary and international composition of the group. Comments from students working on similar topics were mostly considered very useful “because they provide you with nuances that you do not find in articles or books”. However, there were different views about the usefulness of discussions with group member working on different topics. One the one hand, one respondent appreciated “the possibility to learn not only about methodology, but also about different research contexts and issues”. In contrast, another respondent expressed concern that “ ‘Transition and Enlargement’ as a thematic group is so broad that inevitably there were big gaps”. Respondents also commented positively that discussions frequently continued outside the seminars.

Q 17: Was the size of your group: Too small – right – too big? Please explain.

Group	Too small	Right	Too big
Innovation	-	10	-
EMU	-	10	-
Welfare	-	7	4
Transition	-	2	13

Innovation / EMU

The consent was that the size allowed enough time for presentations and discussions.

Welfare

While the majority felt that the size allowed enough time for each group member to contribute to the discussions, a number of students felt that the group was too big which led to too short discussions.

Transition

There was strong agreement that the group was too big. The main effect of this was that there was not enough time for the discussion of students’ research. One student also pointed out that a smaller group would have enhanced the cohesion of the group.

Q 18: Were the discussions: too long – too short – long enough? Please explain.

Group	Too long	Too short	Long enough
Innovation	2	1	7
EMU	1	1	8
Welfare	-	8	3
Transition	-	12	3

Innovation

The majority of respondents thought that the discussions were long enough. The remaining answers related to the widely interdisciplinary composition of the group and its stifling effect on discussions; it was felt that either discussions were too short because group members found it difficult to communicate with one another, or that they were too long when respondents did not understand the presentation.

Welfare

Most respondents pointed out that the large size of the group imposed too restrictive time constraints on the discussions. Not only was it felt that there was generally more to say, there were also suggestions that considerable time was required sufficiently to explain the core of each proposal to the rest of the group.

Transition

As indicated in the previous question, because of the large number of students in this group, students strongly felt that there was too little time for discussion of their papers (“[...] in some cases the discussions did not get deep enough to understand the full extent and implications of each project.”). One respondent thought the discussions among students long enough but would have preferred more time for comments and analyses by the senior scholars.

Q 19: Do you have any other comments about the group sessions?

- There was a suggestion to split participants according to their methodology rather than research topics.
- There should be senior scholars from all disciplines presented in the theme groups.
- The optimal group size appeared to be 10 students.
- The conference infrastructure needs to be improved (flipcharts, OHP, etc.).

Q 20: For the next two workshops, please give us the names of scholars who you would like to meet?

See file.

General questions (Questions 21 – 29)

Q 21: (The Forum Talk has been an attempt to illustrate possible linkages between the academic and policy-making communities.) With respect to the aim of the Forum talk, did you find the Forum presentation: useful – neutral – not very useful? Please explain.

Useful	Neutral	Not very useful	Other
5	14	26	1

Overall, students tended to appreciate the aim of the talk and some thought that the talk gave an indication of the issues in which policy-makers may be interested. Therefore, the element of a dialogue with policy-makers appears worth keeping. However, students were forceful in their suggestions that there are a number of points that should be improved. As a consequence, students found it difficult to draw many useful insights from the presentation. In particular, comments focused on the following issues:

- The content of the talk was not related to the respondent’s research focus.
- It should have focused more explicitly on the link between academia and policy-making.
- Students would have liked more information about how networks of policy-making institutions function.
- The Forum Talk should have included broader representation of policy-makers and their views.

Finally, students felt that the potential of the talk was further reduced by its inconvenient schedule (“[...] especially given the conditions, i.e. extreme heat, after lunch, end of the workshop [...]).

Q 22: In general, do you find the Forum Talk a useful element in the EPIC workshops? Please explain.

Yes	No	N/a
39	6	1

As indicated in the previous question, students very much appreciated the Forum element of the workshop. In particular:

- Students do not necessarily have the opportunity to meet policy-makers at their home institutions.
- It helps for a better understanding of policy-makers views.
- Comments from policy-makers may be very helpful towards students’ research.
- It provides an indication of how academic research can be useful to policy makers (“[...] as it can possibly develop a link with the practical implementation of the policy implications derived from academic research.”).

Respondents who did not find it useful generally did not derive any particular benefit from it. One suggestion therefore was to replace the talk with presentations by senior scholars of their career paths and their experiences with their doctoral research.

Q 23: In your opinion, what could be done to improve this element?

Many suggestions were made focusing on all aspects of the Forum talk. Suggestions regarding the content of the talk broadly were:

- To ask for suggestions from students on the topic of the talk before the workshop.
- To discuss more explicitly the use (who uses it; who is it used) of academic research in policy-making.
- Provide actual examples of instances where policy-makers have drawn heavily from academic research.

Suggestions regarding the format were:

- To invite more speakers, including academics, for a round table discussion on topics that “are discussed by policy makers and researchers alike” and to “explore more systematically the linkages between research and policy making”.
- Speakers should have actual experience in applying academic research. Moreover, rather than inviting people from very specific policy-making institutions, it might appeal to more students’ interest and be more easily accessible to students to have “someone closer to the Commission or any important decision centre at European level”.

Finally, it was suggested to change the timing of the talk and to move it to a more favourable slot.

Q 24: Is your supervisor aware of your participation in EPIC?

Yes	No	N/a
45	1	-

Q 25: How does she / he respond to your participation?

Generally positively	Neutral	Rather negatively	Don’t know / has not commented
36	4	-	6

Out of the positive responses, in six cases it was the supervisor who encouraged the student to apply.

Q 26: With respect to any training you receive in your home university, do you think the EPIC workshop has been: complementary – not very complementary – other? Please explain.

Complementary	Not very complementary	Other
42	1	3

Six respondents stated that they receive no or only weak methodology training at their home university. For other respondents it was complementary / positive for three main reasons:

- It was useful to receive comments and to discuss with researchers from different countries and academic backgrounds.
- The training overlapped or covered additional methods to that of their home institutions.
- It was complementary for broader reasons, e.g. providing references, establishing contacts, etc.

Q 27: Was the overall workshop a useful experience to help you with your research work? Yes – No – Other? Please explain.

Yes	No	Other
46	-	-

There were five main reasons for the positive experience:

- They overcame relative isolation at their home institution and gained access to a new network of contacts.
- The discussions clarified several issues and raised participants' awareness of weaknesses in their proposal.
- Participants received comments from researchers from very different academic backgrounds, which reinforced the previous points.
- The workshop provided new general insights into methodological and thematic issues.
- Some students do not receive sufficient training or have little opportunity to participate in discussions.

Q 28: Do you have any comments about any organisational aspects of the workshop?

Overall the answers very good. Criticisms focused primarily on the conference infrastructure (lack of OHP, etc.).

Q 29: Overall, which aspect did you particularly like / dislike about the workshop?

A very broad range of positive aspects, workshop-specific as well as general ones, were mentioned and no particular issue stood out. Comments included the quality of the sessions, the opportunity to meet researchers from different academic backgrounds, the positive and constructive atmosphere, the setting of the workshop, the workshop framework, etc. A number of respondents also pointed out as particularly positive that discussions would frequently continue outside the seminars.

Similarly, many different issues were mentioned that should be improved but no aspect received particular criticisms. Criticisms focused on various workshop elements, the quality of food, the timing of seminars / breaks, quality of accommodation and workshop infrastructure, etc.