

STS390, Media, war and peace

Science, Technology and Society, University of Wollongong

Recommendations for 2007

In the autumn 2006 STS390 class, students filled out the recommendations sheet during the last week of classes, 22-26 May. Of 97 enrolled students, 82 completed the sheet.

Theories

1. Which theories do you recommend most highly for the first 5 weeks of 2007's class?

- Conspiracy theories, 49
- Backfire, 46
- Deciphering violence, 23
- Communication technology for nonviolent struggle, 33
- Lying, 50

*2. What other theories do you recommend **instead** of one or more of these? Some possibilities are genocide, just war and pacifism.*

- Genocide, 37
- Just war, 15
- Nonviolent protest, 6
- Pacifism; realism, 5 each
- Aggression; terrorism; torture, 4 each
- Civil war; protest music; peacekeeping, 3 each
- Dictatorship, 2
- Scandals; democratic peace; critical theory; kidnapping; communism; political stuff; international law; religion; centre of gravity; structural violence, 1 each

What happens in class

Which things do you recommend for 2007?

- Exercises in the first few weeks to learn other students' names, 52

- Weekly go-arounds (e.g. an embarrassing moment; when I helped someone), 49
- 1-minute reports, 61
- Exercises working in small groups (for learning theories, weeks 1 to 5), 45
- Class activities (run by student teams), 58
- Shorts (by students), 59
- Snacks, 67
- Optional excursion, 21 (plus 2 for a compulsory excursion)
- Optional film screenings, 30 (plus 3 for films in class)
- Others: lectures, 3; debate, 2; discussion of theories, 2; mock UN, 1

1-minute reports

Aspects of 1-minute reports this year included: class choice of weekly topics; mix of peace and war topics; cut-off after 1 minute or so; encouragement to speak without reading; opportunity for general discussion

What worked well about the 1-minute reports?

- Learning; hearing others' findings, 21
- Building confidence; encouragement to speak in front of people, 17
- Interesting topics, 13
- Speaking without reading, 11
- Learn a new concept each week, 11
- Class choice of weekly topics; individual choice of reading, 10
- Everyone participates, 9
- Relaxed, comfortable, trust, 7
- Opportunity for general discussion, 5
- Mix of peace and war topics, 3
- Good start to class, 3
- Consistency; easy to prepare, learning to be precise, 1 each

What do you suggest changing for 2007?

- More debate and discussion, 9
- Set topics, linked to week's work, 7
- Greater variety and interest, 5
- Shorter time or fewer weeks, 3
- Longer time, 3
- Set readings, 2
- Option of photos/images, 2
- Students take it more seriously; portions of class look at contrasting aspects of topic; more specific topics; set a question to answer about the topic; less assessment; warning before 1-minute cut-off; in week 1, set topics for all session; broader choice of topics; no practising of techniques, 1 each

Shorts

Aspects of shorts this year included: option to choose a theory or a concept; expectation to present media items; 10-minute time limit; assessment criteria; due dates in weeks adding up to 16 or less; option to work in groups; mark received at end of class; student feedback slips.

What worked well about the shorts?

- Choice of interesting, diverse topics, 30
- Length, time limit, 20
- Learning, 19
- Feedback slips, 10
- Group work, 8
- Speaking skills, confidence, 8
- Mark at end of class, 7
- Media items, 4
- Relaxed, fun, 4
- Class involvement, 2
- Helped with report; visual aids used; assessment criteria, 1 each

What do you suggest changing for 2007?

Note: For 2007, I plan to change the due dates for shorts so that everyone has to do their first short by week 6 and their second by week 10.

- Assign weeks for giving shorts, 14
- Less repetition of topics, 5

- Class discussion and debate, 5
- More guidance and definition of topic, 5
- Set theories, 3
- Shorter, 3
- One theory only, 2
- One short only, 2
- Have PC always in class; no groups; monitor timing; more activities; require one presentation and one activity; identify ways to keep audience attentive, 1 each

How can the student feedback slip process be made more effective?

- Have questions/points to rate speaker, 10
- Encourage positive criticism, 7
- Require everyone to fill out slips, 4
- Ensure anonymity, 3
- No slips — they're not effective, 3
- Provide examples of useful feedback, 2
- Endorse encouragement; more time to fill in; analyse the short, 1 each

Class activities

Aspects of class activities this year included: expectations of working in groups; choosing weeks to present; time allocations (14 minutes per person); assessment criteria; mark received at end of class.

What worked well about class activities?

- Informative, interesting, 22
- Group work, 20
- Involvement, interaction, 19
- Fun, 14
- Choosing topic, 9
- Choosing weeks, 7
- Everything, 6
- Mark at end of class, 5
- Student-run class, 4
- Creativity, 3
- Choosing groups, 2
- Good length, 1
- Relevant to today's world, 1

What do you suggest changing for 2007?

- More time, 9
- More diversity of topics (less duplication), 8
- Shorter, 7
- Clearer marking criteria, 4
- No presentations, 5
- Group participation non-compulsory, 3
- Assigned groups/topics, 3
- Reconsider marking weight on audience involvement, 3
- Finish by week 10 or 12, 2
- Suggestions on topics and methods, 2
- Larger groups; more emphasis on individual roles; make group topics overlap; hand something in; relate activities to concepts; more consistent marking; time in class to prepare; equal group sizes; encourage more class interaction; maximum 4 people per group; no need to check plans beforehand; option to do essay instead; narrower scope; game shows unacademic; no need to dress up; no deductions for rude students, 1 each

Projects

Aspects of projects this year included: project plan due week 11; possibility of working in a group; report made up of leaflet and dialogue; word length; assessment criteria; due date; use of a theory or a concept.

Note: a number of students said they hadn't started the project.

What worked well about the projects?

- Project plan, 15
- Choice of topic, 12
- Fun, creative, 12
- Group work, 10
- Interesting, 7
- Leaflet, 4
- Due date, 4
- Choice of group or not, 4
- Unusual concept, 4
- Using what had been learned, 3
- Everything, 3
- Length, 1

What do you suggest changing for 2007?

- Better explanation, 17
- No dialogue, 10
- Greater word length, 4
- More structure, 3
- Due date, 2
- Essay instead; essay as option; leaflet format; change the criteria; scholarly format; separate mark for plan; more flexibility in format; more project plan feedback; in-class preparation time, 1 each

Assessment

What is your recommended mix of assessment methods for 2007?

- participation (based on 1-minute reports), 69
- shorts, 71
- class activities (run by student teams), 72
- project plan, 60
- essays/reports, 58
- exam, 4
- other: design your own organisation and why; participation (turning up); film/music project, 1 each

Note: due to an ambiguity in my wording, some students apparently did not realise that "essays/reports" included the project report.

Miscellaneous

Would you recommend any of the following?

- Peer assessment (assessment by other students), 15
- More theories, 43
- Fewer theories, 4
- Lectures, 26
- Exercise on searching the web, 10
- An in-class simulation (for example of a press conference), 42
- *Other*: class debate, 3; more readings, 3; more acting, interaction, 1; discussion of theories, 1; stronger outline of expectations, 1; UN idea, 1; more in-depth treatment of some topics, 1; more group-based exercises, 1

Brian's comments

Each year I make modifications based on feedback and my own impressions of what will work well — and my own capabilities and predilections. Here are my preliminary thoughts for the 2007 spring-session class.

Theories: I'll either replace "deciphering violence" or design an exercise to explain it better. I'll probably replace "technology for nonviolent struggle" with just "nonviolent action." And I'll add at least one theory.

What happens in class: The mix in 2006 seemed to work well. I'll continue with an optional excursion and optional films. Only a very few students attended either in 2006, but they got a lot out of them.

1-minute reports: I'll continue with these, with stronger encouragement to speak without reading.

Shorts: These seemed to work well. I'll have a better system to spread them out over earlier weeks, and think about a way to promote better feedback through the slips.

Class activities: These seemed to work well. I'll think about how to encourage a greater diversity of topics and theories.

I'll experiment with an in-class simulation.

Quite a few students recommended lectures, although others were quite opposed to them. I'll see if a guest lecturer is available. In the past I've been burnt when students requested lectures and then were unenthusiastic about the lectures offered. I'll develop a list of readings for those students who want more content.

Projects: Every year I make the project somewhat different. Whatever I decide on, I'll do my best to explain it in the subject outline. This can be a challenge when the format is quite different from what students are used to doing.

Assessment: The mix worked well, in my view.

Thanks to one and all for your participation and feedback.

Brian Martin, 3 January 2007