

STS390, Media, war and peace Recommendations for 2006

Out of 74 students in the subject, 58 were present during week 13 to fill out individual feedback forms. This is a summary of responses. I also had a look at the forms filled out by groups.

I will be using these recommendations when planning the 2006 class. You'll be able to see what I come up by checking my website in February. Thanks for your feedback!

Brian, 30 November 2005

Theories

1. Which theories do you recommend most highly for the first 5 weeks of 2006's class?

- Conspiracy theories, 33
- Backfire, 42
- Deciphering violence, 18
- Communication technology for nonviolent struggle, 23
- Lying, 24

Many students ticked more than one theory. For those few students who numbered the theories 1 to 5, I counted only the number 1 choice.

2. What other theories do you recommend instead of one or more of these?

- * Genocide, 6
- * Just war, 6
- * Pacifism, 6
- * Militarism, 3
- * Aggression, 2
- * Nonviolence, 2
- * Propaganda, 2
- * Agenda setting, 1
- * Censorship, 1
- * Cyberactivism, 1
- * Language (semiotics), 1
- * Marxism, 1
- * Political jiu-jitsu, 1
- * Propaganda model, 1
- * Racism, 1
- * Sexual violence, 1

A number of other topics were mentioned, such as bias in the media, that I wouldn't consider to be theories. I will take note of your interest, though!

What happens in class

Which things do you recommend for 2006?

- Exercises in the first few weeks to learn other students' names, 46
- Weekly introductions, 43
- One-minute reports, 40
- Exercises working in small groups (for learning theories, weeks 1 to 5), 37
- Class activities (run by student teams), 44
- Shorts (by students), 41
- Snacks, 45
- Others:
 - * documentaries, multimedia, 3
 - * more on theory, 3
 - * games, 1
 - * opening space for discussion throughout class, 1
 - * direct instructional readings, 1
 - * lectures in early weeks, 1
 - * debates, 1
 - * model UN forum, 1

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 of weeks 6 and 10; option to work in groups.

• *What worked well about the shorts?*

- * Informative, 19
- * Variety of topics and theories, 17
- * Shortness; time limit, 16
- * Groups, 9
- * Due dates; choice of date, 6
- * Participation, involvement, 5
- * Case studies, media items, 4
- * Less stress than all essays, 3
- * Presentation skill development, 2
- * Choice of activity or presentation, 1

- *What do you suggest changing for 2006?*

- * Better scheduling to spread out presentation dates, 12
- * Make stronger link to theory, 6
- * Only one short, 6
- * No group shorts, 4
- * More activities, 3
- * Explain assessment criteria better, 3
- * More group shorts, 2
- * More topics/theories from which to choose, 2
- * Make them worth more, 2
- * One oral, one written, 2
- * No activities, 1
- * No shorts, 1
- * Shorter time limit, 1
- * Longer time limit, 1
- * Handouts no more than one page, 1
- * Presenters give copies of articles, 1
- * Separate exhibition of media items and interpretation of them, 1

Class activities

Aspects of class activities this year included: expectations of working in groups; choosing weeks to present; time allocations (15 minutes per person); assessment criteria.

- *What worked well about class activities?*

- * Group work, teamwork, 14
- * Fun while learning, 8
- * Participation, 7
- * Choice of week to present, 6
- * Time limits, 4
- * Class interaction, 4
- * Creative, interesting, 4
- * Choice of group members, 4
- * Choice of topic, 3
- * Assessment criteria, 2
- * Encouragement/compulsion to be in a group, 2
- * Confidence building, 1
- * Different form of assessment, 1
- * Group size, 1
- * Activities, not just talking, 1

- *What do you suggest changing for 2006?*

- * Shorter time limit, 6
- * Groups no larger than three, 4
- * Only one group per week, 3
- * Clearer expectations of what's required, 3
- * Reduce repetition of theories, 2
- * Lecturer assigns topics to groups, 2
- * Lecturer suggests topics for groups, 2
- * Reduce presentation portions of activities, 2
- * Group work voluntary, 1
- * Get outside classroom, 1
- * Start sooner in the session, 1
- * Greater differentiation from shorts, 1
- * Shorter handouts, 1
- * Make activity portion less, 1
- * No activities when shorts due, 1
- * Time in class to prepare, 1
- * Visual assessment criterion but no powerpoint, 1

Projects

Aspects of projects this year included: project plan due week 11; report made up of opinion piece, letters and dialogue; word length; assessment criteria; due date; use of a theory or a concept; expectation to use primary sources.

- *What worked well about the projects?*

- * Different, interesting, fun, creative, 26
- * Project plan, 17
- * Choice of topic, 6
- * Variety of tasks, 2
- * Sample report, 2
- * Scope for presenting ideas, 1
- * Improving writing skills, 1
- * Getting into research, 1
- * Assessment criteria, 1
- * Primary sources, 1

- *What do you suggest changing for 2006?*
- * Clearer instructions, 11
- * Replace the dialogue, 10
- * Optional primary sources, 4
- * Worth less, 2
- * Shorter; fewer sections, 2
- * Less bias towards journalism students, 2
- * Show examples of dialogue in class, 1
- * Less restrictive format, 1
- * Longer word length for letters, 1
- * Different text types, 1
- * Due week 8 or 9, 1
- * Break up over session, 1
- * Cite previous projects, 1
- * Have option of news article, 1
- * More explanation of theories, 1

Assessment

What is your recommended mix of assessment methods for 2006?

- Participation (based on one-minute reports), 50
- Written shorts, 18
- Oral shorts, 52
- Class activities (run by student teams), 52
- Project plan, 37
- Essays/reports, 42
- Exam, 1 (one person circled the entire list of options, including exam)
- Other
- * Debate, 1
- * Report on a set reading, 1
- * In-class test, 1
- * More formal report, 1
- * Participation based on all things done in class, 1

Quite a few people recommended essays/reports but not the project plan. More surprisingly, quite a few people ticked the project plan but not essays/reports. I suspect they were treating the project plan and report as a package. I should have written “150-word project plan” to make this clearer.

Class sizes

In the Arts Faculty, the workloads model for staff gives an average of one contact hour for every 8 students.

What is your recommendation for next year's class size?

- A. 24 students in a 3-hour class each week, 14
- B. 16 students in a 2-hour class each week, 40
- C. 12 students in a 1.5-hour class each week, 9
- D. 8 students in a 1-hour class each week, 3

(As this year, classes in some weeks might be shorter and some longer than the average.)

Miscellaneous

Would you recommend any of the following?

- Peer assessment (assessment by other students), 9
- More theories, 27
- Fewer theories, 1
- More training/preparation for interviews, observations and participation, 18
- An excursion, 32
- An in-class simulation (for example of a press conference), 28
- Other —
- * More theory guidance, 2
- * Role plays, 1
- * Multimedia, 1