

STS390, Media, war and peace

Science, Technology and Society, University of Wollongong

Recommendations for 2008

In the spring 2007 STS390 class, students filled out the recommendations sheet during the last week of classes, 22-25 October. Of 123 students enrolled, 101 gave responses.

Theories

1. Which theories do you recommend most highly for the first 6 weeks of 2008's class?

- Conspiracy theories, 63
- Backfire, 53
- Deciphering violence, 33
- Nonviolent action, 66
- Lying, 38
- Just war theory, 37

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

- Genocide, 32
- Pacifism, 9
- Peacekeeping; terrorism, 8 each
- Torture, 5
- Protest art; extremism; reconciliation; conflict transformation, 4 each
- Civil war; racism; media; peace; positive peace; human rights; civil disobedience; social justice; assassination, 2 each
- Violence as entertainment; indigenous violence; capital punishment; hate crime; power; secret police; negotiation; remedies for injustice; structural violence; fundamentalism; militarism; Clausewitz's centre of gravity; revolution; protest; funding; war victims; peace journalism; aggression; bigotry, 1 each

What happens in class

Which things do you recommend for 2008?

- Exercises in the first few weeks to learn other students' names, 62
- Weekly sharing (e.g. an embarrassing moment; when I helped someone), 66
- 1-minute reports, 69
- Exercises working in small groups (for learning theories, weeks 1 to 5), 48
- Class activities (run by student teams), 57
- Shorts (by students), 68
- Snacks, 71
- Application of theories; theory handout; open discussion; group report, 1 each

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, 32
- Variety of topics, 31
- Skills and confidence in speaking, 16
- Interesting, 13
- Participation, interaction, 13
- Shortness, 1-minute cut-off, 12
- Class choice of weekly topics, 5
- Better researching, 5
- General discussion, 4
- Getting to know classmates, 3
- Speaking without reading, 2
- Coming to class prepared, 2
- Choosing topics in weeks 1 and 6; low stress; use of personal knowledge; good use of time, 1 each

What do you suggest changing for 2008?

- More general discussion, 7
- Less repetition in reports, 4
- Keep to 1 minute, 3
- No 1-minute cut-off, 3
- Longer time limit; no penalty for not doing a report due to forgetting; give framework for how to deliver report; more variety in topics; option to give opinion without reading an article; help in choosing topics; reports in only some weeks, 2 each
- Marked on content; same topics for all tute groups; decide all topics in week 1; free topic in one week; better to read reports; make easier to catch up on missed reports; have follow-up questions for class discussion; do more similar material; students should research topics better; two topics each week; use different types of sources (e.g. newspaper) in different weeks; bring in an object or picture; explain source of material, 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 assigned, with some choice; mark received at end of class; student feedback slips.

What worked well about the shorts?

- Range of topics and viewpoints, 27
- Interesting, 25
- Choice of topic/theory, 23
- Learning, 22
- 10-minute time limit, 11
- Feedback, 11
- Speaking skills, confidence, 6
- Marks received promptly, 6
- Focus on media items, 5
- Picking own week, 3
- Use of visual aids, 3
- Preparation for project; Brian's sample short; easy format, 1 each

What do you suggest changing for 2008?

- Clearer description, especially re media items, 16
- One short only, 15
- Schedule more evenly; not so many shorts in one class, 12
- Higher assessment weight, 6
- Wider range of theories/topics, 5
- Shorter, 4
- Follow assessment criteria, 2
- Schedule variety in topics/theories, 2
- No third shorts; less text, less boring; one short focuses on media item and the other on theory; improve computer/wireless; remove restriction to one media item; work in pairs; looser format; fewer topics; organised more in advance; discussion time after each short; more weight on multimedia in mark; link to one-minute reports, 1 each

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

- Provide a template; have multiple choice questions; have criteria to tick, 20
- Encourage constructive criticism, 11
- Use them for every speaker, 8
- Use rating scales (e.g., 1-10), 5
- No slips — they're not effective, 4
- Ensure that everyone fills out slips, 2
- Discuss performance in class, 2
- Better instructions; emphasise they are serious; print slips in colour; write more feedback; web-downloadable slips; give everyone pen and paper; make part of assessment criteria; larger print; more time, 1 each

Class activities

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

What worked well about class activities?

- Interaction, involvement, group work, 38
- Fun, 25
- Interesting, engaging, 24
- Informative, learning, 16
- Creativity, 11
- Variety of topics and presentation styles, 8
- Choosing topic, 7
- Choosing weeks, 7
- Group size; format; role plays and games; marks given quickly; learn time management; choosing own group; peer learning, 1 each

What do you suggest changing for 2008?

- Clearer criteria, more guidance, 17
- Different topics for different groups, 5
- Shorter, 5
- Higher marks, 5
- No marking on delivery or teaching methods, 3
- More time, 3
- Time in class to prepare; worth more; less emphasis on props and costumes; put activities in different weeks; encourage different formats for activities, 2 each
- Less complicated guidelines; some presentation component; worth less; use of case study optional; student feedback to other groups; more support from teachers; individual marks; make clearer that activities are not presentations/speeches; make all groups the same size; groups smaller than 4; groups smaller than 5; ensure all team members do their share; run earlier in the session; have a class on learning styles; ensure sufficient time; two activities; same time limit regardless of group size, 1 each

Projects

Aspects of projects this year included: project plan due week 10; possibility of partially joint reports; report made up of brief and dialogue; word length; assessment criteria; due date; use of a theory/concept and a case study.

What worked well about the projects?

- Innovative, different, creative, interesting, 26
- Choose own topic, 21
- Project plan, 14
- Option of working in a team, 11
- Engaging with theory, 4
- Due date, 3
- Research, developing ideas, 3
- Practical, relevant, 3
- Brief; dialogue; flexibility, 2 each
- Length; joint reports; challenging; engaging with type of organisation, 1 each

What do you suggest changing for 2008?

- Better explanation, more guidance, 54
- No dialogue, 6
- More specification, less flexibility, 5
- Shorter dialogue, 4
- Worth less, 4
- No working in teams, 3
- Fewer hypothetical things, 3
- Longer word limit, 3
- Replace dialogue by a report, 2
- More traditional format, 2
- Make less similar to shorts assessment; more consistency between tutors; replace dialogue by a diary; replace report by an essay; more time in class to prepare; more encouragement to work in groups; project plan; give examples of previous good work; shorter; dialogue only; due later, 1 each

Brian's comment

More than half of respondents asked for a clearer explanation of the project. That's a very strong message for 2008. Three students had especially useful comments.

- "This was an unorthodox project style and so needed more instruction/framework to grasp the focus/concept."

- “This class can be unique in its educational methods. Sadly we have been conditioned to react and learn in certain ways. Changing this can both be a challenge and upsetting. Keep this in mind!”

- “Have more specific guidelines. Tell people ‘You have to make up a brief to a company and, in that, make clear reference to past instances, i.e. your case study.’”

Assessment

What is your recommended mix of assessment methods for 2008?

- participation (based on 1-minute reports), 82
- shorts, 85
- class activities (run by student teams), 70
- project plan, 56
- essays/reports, 76
- no exam (write-in comments, e.g. “No!” or “No way”), 17
- exam, 12
- essay, 8
- small quiz, 2
- other fun written assignment; creation of media item; more skits; theory-based journal; online webct; debate, 1 each

Miscellaneous

Would you recommend any of the following?

- Peer assessment (assessment by other students), 12
- More theories, 32
- Fewer theories, 17
- Lectures, 34
- Exercise on searching the web, 14
- An in-class simulation (for example of a press conference), 46
- Optional excursion, 49
- Optional film screenings, 63

Write-in comments

- No peer assessment, 4
- No lectures, 4
- No exercise on searching the web, 4
- Book with readings, 2
- More teaching by teacher, 2
- Journal writing, 1

Brian’s comments

Each year I make modifications based on feedback, my own impressions of what will work well, my own capabilities and predilections and consultation with other tutors. Here are my preliminary thoughts for the 2008 spring-session class.

Theories: The number of theories seems about right. Recommendations for 2007 were overwhelmingly (43 to 4) for more theories but for 2008 the recommendations are more balanced, with 32 for more theories and 17 for fewer. I’ll probably replace just war theory with a theory about genocide.

What happens in class: The mix in 2007 seemed to work well. In 2008 I’ll again offer an optional excursion and an optional film screening. When these were offered in 2006, only a very few students attended but they got a lot out of them.

I’ll consider making the two shorts different in content or style. I’ll put more information in the subject outline about expectations and possibilities for the class activity. 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 a few were very opposed to them. I’ll see if a guest lecturer is available. In the past I’ve been burnt when students requested lectures but were unenthusiastic about the lectures offered. I’ll add to the 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. Every year I try to explain the requirements as clearly as I can and every year there turn out to be things that require clarification.

Assessment: The mix worked well, in my view.

Thanks to one and all for your participation and feedback.

Brian Martin, 4 January 2008