



Course evaluation 2022

Course code 5MT008	Course title Applied Communication (MTLS master program – KI, KTH, SU)	Credits 7
Semester Autumn 2022	Period 29 August 2022 – 9 December 2022	

Course coordinator Peter Swoboda (PS)	Examiner Peter Swoboda (PS)
Participating teachers Ulrik Kihlbom / Ann-Kristin Östlund-Farrants / Peter Lind and Charlotte Gottfries / Peter Swoboda	Other participating teachers N/A

Number of registered students 36	Number who have not completed the course 0	Number passed after regular session 36
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Conclusions from the previous course evaluation (2021)

The course stands well “as is”: it teaches so-called soft skills – read, write, talk and present, and reflect on ethical issues – with no immediate connection to biomedical research and science as such. We compensate for this “principal lack of connection” by using scientific literature for assignments, while the bioethics part relates to (cases in) research and biomedicine.

Last year’s course (2021) **suffered a bit** from practical shortcomings – **as per the student’s feedback** – which we tried to address for the 2022 course (responsible = PS): improve and streamline the use of practical communication channels teacher-student (Syllabus, Canvas, TimeEdit, E-mail); adjust group and teamwork setups in connection to the respective topic taught; improve the continuous use of different forms of feedback (e.g. teacher-student, student-student); improve the timing and scheduling of course events, so that the “scattered appearance” of the course can be diminished – this would require collaboration with other MTLS courses (in parts running parallel) in which 5MT008 is embedded.

Description of conducted changes since previous course occasion (2021)



We have streamlined communication channels between students, teachers and course management by focusing on providing and requesting timely, reciprocal information more strictly through the course web site on Canvas and strictly using TimeEdit for managerial tasks (time and place information). We have slightly adjusted teamwork setups: examples are that group sizes have been slightly diminished and that task distributions within groups have been made clearer. We have increased the use of different forms of feedback, including informal student-to-student formats (also in a team version) and student-in-class formats. This will continue by introducing self-reflection elements and by introducing an (external) PhD student-to-student format of feedback-discussion, when communicating about scientific papers. The “scattered appearance” of the course will be addressed in its new format (5MT011) starting in autumn 2023.

Method(s) for student influence (in addition to the final course evaluation/survey)

The course consists of four main sections (rhetorics, scientific writing and reviewing, poster production, philosophy of science and bioethics): during and at the end of each section individual, mostly oral feedback possibilities are available. The first term of the MTLS program concludes with a joint feedback and exchange meeting between all the students and all the course directors, including 5MT008, and in part with some of the teachers. This in-person meeting was prepared and carried out with written and oral feedback and input possibilities.

Summary of the students' responses in the course evaluation

Overall, the students consider the course contents of high value and a good introduction to the MTLS program, particularly regarding practical study and work tasks and team building activities. The four course sections (rhetorics, scientific writing and reviewing, poster production, philosophy of science and bioethics) are considered very important aspects and tools for the student's future activities. Whereby “*how much of it and which depth is needed in this course*” is a matter of how well an individual student has already been exposed to a given topic in his/her previous bachelor studies (the student's backgrounds are quite heterogeneous). This in turn can lead to mixed opinions about how much theory and how much practice is best for this course. The fact that the course consists of four distinct sections with – in parts – very little overlap or cross-connections, even though all four sections are clearly communications-related, makes the course appear a bit scattered. Most students find the course and its contents necessary, as it prepares them well for the upcoming communication tasks of the MTLS master program and for their future careers in the life sciences and in the biomedical research arena. This is also evidenced by individual, personal feedback one receives as a teacher one-to-two years down the line, when these first-year master students carry out their second-year master thesis work and/or start their PhD student tenures in laboratories.

Requested areas of improvement include: the course is spread out too much (will be addressed in autumn 2023); improve the structure and setup of group- and teamwork tasks (needs to and will be addressed continuously); introduce and improve possibilities for feedback at various levels (needs to and will be addressed continuously).



The course coordinator's reflections on the implementation and results of the course

The points and issues listed above are and will be addressed starting in autumn 2023. Due to overall MTLs program and curriculum changes the course **Applied Communication** (5MT008 / 5MT011) will undergo major changes (most important: 7 to 6 credits; new time setup = *en bloc* and not interspersed anymore with another MTLs course). This will allow for easily streamlining the four course sections and for introducing the most necessary changes mentioned above. Obviously, the new setup starting in autumn 2023 will then need to be fine-tuned over the first few years of the course, including how well the new course setup is embedded into the overall MTLs master program and curriculum.

Description of how the course works with quality, research-basis and collaboration with other professions

The course teaches so-called soft skills – read, write, talk and present, and reflect on ethical issues – with no immediate, direct or causative connection to biomedical research and science as such. We compensate for this “principal lack of connection” by using scientific literature for assignments, while the bioethics part relates to (cases in) research and biomedicine.

Teachers deployed in this course also come from outside the academic biomedical research arena. Thereby we ensure high quality for a given communication and ethical topic. The course employs a teacher with expertise in ethics, and two teachers with expertise in rhetorical topics, speech training, body language and using acting-based techniques in support of acquiring oral presentation skills.

Course coordinator's conclusions and suggestions for improvement

Strengths of the course

The course is organized so students get the opportunity to study and work practically in team settings and thereby get to know each other at an early stage of their master-level training and when they come to Stockholm for their studies. The students are exposed to cross-value topics that are highly relevant for the remainder of the master program and their future careers. These so-called “soft science” topics are sometimes under-valued and under-represented in other “hard science” (research and data driven) courses and training sessions.

Weaknesses of the course

The fact that the course is built up on four – in parts separate – communication topics makes the course appear a bit scattered and disjointed. This issue needs to be communicated better to the students, so that the direct and indirect value of the overarching topic of “communication” in a scientific setting is more appreciated.

The most important practical aspects to be worked on include (i) incorporate more and more diverse feedback opportunities for both the students and the teachers; (ii) improve the group- and



teamwork sections of the course and make sure these are adapted to the respective four major topics of the course.

Views on the course and improvement suggestions from others

Please see the other sections.

Description of how the course evaluation has provided feedback internally and to the students

The course evaluation is provided on the Canvas course web site and on the open web site of the course, at least for one, but mostly for two years back. The course evaluation is shared between course management, all the teachers and all the students. The course evaluation is discussed retroactively (What happened last year?) and prospectively (What should and will happen next year?) at the end of MTL term 1 (the term taking place at the KI) during a joint, in-person discussion, feedback and exchange meeting between all the students, teachers, course directors and administrators.
