

Virtual Production: Visioning Course Evaluation



EMERGING MEDIA EXPLORATION



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Virtual Production: Visioning Course

Evaluation

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Introduction

In the 5-week online course, international Teams – shuffled together from Universities of Finland, the UK and Germany and into groups of 5-7 members with different academic backgrounds – were supposed to develop 2-5 innovative ideas for content and applications in the area of virtual film production and virtual reality. The 7 groups in total were guided through the ideation process by a likewise interdisciplinary and international set of 2 tutors. The developed ideas were discussed with professionals at the end of the course. All groups had the opportunity to interview two experts in the field during the course.

To evaluate the course the tutors were asked to write summaries of their Tutor-Sessions and at the end of the course structured feedback was collected. The participants of the course were asked to fill out a survey.

Tutor Feedback

- **Course Goals:** The course goal was confusing to the students. It needs to be communicated very clear early on with examples, including all interim steps.
But, once students understood the task, they grabbed it quite well. For some groups the goal was too narrow, some others were satisfied with its results.
- **Expert Interviews:** The interviews were very valuable for the groups. They drew a lot of information from them. This applies to the interviews they prepared and conducted themselves, as well as to the interviews they attended.
- **Open ideation:** The participants were not familiar with design and ideation processes. They appreciated the ideation tools presented to them and have found a taste for creative work.
- **Time frame:** To achieve the course objectives the course could have been a little longer.
- **Support:** Suggestions for tools and methods are needed in general and especially for group work. But the scope of the required or desired support varies from group to group. Self-exploration needs to be guided, but some groups (or some members of the group) prefer to be left alone at least at the end of the process.
- **Information / Lectures:** Some more lectures / learning materials would be appreciated.

- **Visual Collaboration Tools:** Visual Collaboration Tools (Mural, Padlet, etc) are helpful applications for teamwork, open ideation and creative work, but it needs some acclimatization time to get used to handling the “new” tool.
- **Feedback:** Feedback is needed in between, so that it is possible to react to it during the course and improve the course outcomes. Feedback from industry-experts is favourable, but peer feedback could also help.
- **Sociability:** It is valuable that students get to know each other on a personal level. Fun activities, within the field of the course matter, could help. E.g., meetings or games in virtual spaces.
- **Group collaboration:** From a teacher perspective, student teamwork went quite well, but some groups struggled with a lack of presence from some members and also in establishing team roles.
- **Remote collaboration:** Remote collaboration is also a matter of practice. Working with an unknown team implies a high amount of uncertainty. So, it seems they stick to subjects and tools they are familiar with. E.g., they prefer to chat instead of using the microphones during meetings and they don't necessarily formulate their wishes.
- **Solution finding:** Students tend to work on problems with which they are familiar with.
- **First tasks in ideation:** students have responded positively to research as a first task. They follow the request to search for inspirational examples very well.
- **Organisation / technical issues:** Technical matters in the communication or working platform can have a huge impact, so it is advisable to test everything accordingly and to have a back-up solution. Everyone should be advised to use their real name, so that everyone knows who is present.
- **Miscellaneous:** Participants need to be motivated; Digma (a Moodle platform) was perceived as too chaotic and not well organized.

Student Survey

The student survey consisted of 21 questions, including 3 multiple choice questions, 12 scale questions and 6 open questions, allowing free text. The Scale questions, with a range from 1 to 5 evaluate the course goal, the course organization and the learning success from the students' perspective. Further 6 open questions were formulated to get details about good practices and challenges during the course. 21 of the 47 participants filled out the survey.

Question Abbr.	Question	Distribution in %
MC-1	Where is your university?	Finland 25% Germany 60% UK 15%
MC-2	What is your study subject?	Creative Technologies 5% Emerging Media 5% Erasmus participant 5%

		Film- und Tv Production 40% Fine Arts 5% HCI 5% Media Production 15% Media Studies 20%
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Question Abbr.	Labels	Question	Median	σ
SC-1	strongly agree = 5	I was comfortable with the pace and timing of the course.	4	4
SC-2	strongly agree = 5	The course goals and objectives were clear to me.	2,5	2,6
SC-3	strongly agree = 5	I always knew what was expected from me and what to do next.	3	2,8
SC-4	too wide = 5	I found the thematic scope of the course:	3	3,5
SC-5	strongly agree = 5	I have learned about the production perspective (e.g., workflows, technologies).	4	3,8
SC-6	strongly agree = 5	I have learned about the user experience perspective (e.g., perception, usage, design).	3	3,3
SC-7	strongly agree = 5	I have learned about the innovation potential of virtual production and related technologies.	4	4,3
SC-8	strongly agree = 5	I have learned about virtual production might have an impact on individuals and society in general.	4	4,1
SC-9	strongly agree = 5	I have learned about intercultural collaboration.	4	3,8
SC-10	strongly agree = 5	I have learned about online-based ideation and creation.	4	4,1
SC-11	strongly agree = 5	I have learned about user interviews.	4	3,7
SC-12	very likely = 5	I think I might have made some friends in my team.	3	2,9

Question Abbr.	Question	Distribution in %	n	%
FT_1	Which course materials, activities or events helped you most?	Expert Interviews Tutor session Feedback Session Group meetings Introduction talk Methods Open Ideation Virtual Production Field Guide Mural none	11 4 2 2 2 1 1 1 1	44 % 16 % 8 % 8 % 8 % 4 % 4 % 4 % 4 %
		n=25		
FT_2	Which of the provided materials did you not use?	used all did not used most idea "paper" The Epic Virtual Production Manual used most	6 1 1 1 1	60 % 10 % 10 % 10 % 10 %
		n=10		
FT_3a	How did you communicate in your team, both technically and practically?	WhatsApp Zoom Slack E-Mails Hangouts Mural	10 8 8 5 3 1	29% 23% 23% 14% 9% 3%
		n=35		
FT_3b	How did you communicate in your team, both technically and practically ?	Regular good communication efficiently irregular hard communication	3 2 1 1 1	38% 25% 13% 13% 13%
		n=8		
FT_4	What were the best experiences and learnings during the course?	Expert Interviews Group work VP in general Learning about technologies Learning about UX Interviews Tutor support Open ideation none all	8 4 2 1 1 1 1 1 1	40 % 20 % 10 % 5 % 5 % 5 % 5 % 5 % 5 %
		n=18		
FT_5	What challenges and problems did you encounter	unclear Course Goal Remote work Scheduling meetings not enough technical introductions	8 4 3 1	38% 19% 14% 14%

	during the course?	everything 1 Group communication 1 unreliable Teammates 1 Teambuilding 1 Open ideation 1	1 1 1 1 1	5% 5% 5% 5% 5%
		n=21		
MC_6	How would you like to follow up on this course?	A) I'd like to further pursue the project idea(s) we had B) I'd like to continue working with my team C) I'd like to continue in a different team constellation D) I'd like to see further lectures E) No thanks, I am fine	5 5 2 6 3	23,8 % 23,8 % 9,5 % 28,6% 14,3 %
		n=21		
FT_7	Anything else you want to tell us?	mainly positive Feedback critical Feedback or Suggestions for improvement	7 4	64% 36%
		n=11		

All the survey-results are shown in the table above. The extremes and most notable results are further described in the following:

- If you look at the median of the scale questions, all results except one equal the average or are above average (SC1-12).
- For 7 of the 12 questions the calculated median is 4, which means that most of the students were comfortable with the pace of the course and they agree that they have learned about the production perspective, about the innovation potential of virtual production and related technologies, how virtual production might have an impact on individuals and society in general, about intercultural collaboration, online-based ideation and creation and about user interviews.
- The main issue according to the scale question was the comprehension of the course goals and the deliverables (SC-2, SC-3).
- To the open question: 'which course materials, activities or events helped you most', 44% of the given answers (n=25) refer to the Expert Interviews and another 16% to the Tutor Sessions (FT-1).
- The Expert-Interviews were also the best learning experience the participants had, followed by the Tutor Sessions (FT-4).
- A majority of the respondents did not answer the question about which of the provided materials they did not use, but most of the participants that did, declared that they have used all materials (FT-2).
- The 3 biggest challenges, sorted by importance were: the unclear course goal, the online group work and the scheduling of meetings (FT-5).

The question: "Anything else you want to tell us?" has produced mostly "Thank you" notes and positive feedback. One student mentioned that they especially liked 'the international aspect of the course'. Another one that they felt "really motivated to immerse themselves into VP". However, some feedback said that they had difficulty learning in courses without "real human contact" and that they would have liked to get to know their group better and in a more playful way. It was also mentioned that the heavy amount of group work was not appreciated, but instead some more lessons about virtual production, especially at the beginning of the course would have helped to develop ideas. Another critical voice lacked material on sound design (FT-7).

Insights and Conclusions

- The tutoring approach has proven to work very well. Due to the small groups, which are supervised by a team of two, the tutors are particularly close to the groups and thus get to know their needs and difficulties better. This is also reflected in the fact that the tutors' perception of the course corresponds to that of the students.
- Even though the tutorial concept is successful and will be used in future courses, it brings with it the difficulty that the groups have slightly different learning experiences and, above all, that the groups reach intermediate goals at different times and in different ways. Meaningful joint events or courses for all groups are thus made more difficult.
- Arranging expert interviews is a suitable means of conveying content. They helped the students to gather valuable information and achieve the course goal. The students saw it as a real opportunity to gain valuable insights into the industry and therefore appreciated preparing and conducting the interviews.
- It is very important that tutors and students have a common understanding of the course objectives. To do so, it is helpful to provide examples. However, sufficient time must also be allowed within the tutor group in the conceptual phase to clarify the course objective unequivocally.
- It is in the nature of brainstorming and open ideation processes that the outcomes are uncertain. Examples in this case can be counterproductive, because they could in the worst case limit the imagination. It is very important to explain that examples only show the rough scope. The process takes some time, and the uncertainty must be endured.
- Although the "unclear course objective" was a problem for many of the students, it was not raised by them. It is therefore necessary to check the understanding of the individual group members and to clarify misunderstandings and answer questions that arise.
- Remote group work is a challenge for most participants. To facilitate this tools and methods should be provided.
- Some or even most of the difficulties are rooted in the fact that you don't know your fellow participants at first. Therefore, activities should take place to make this possible. Similarities and differences should be identified, and both valued equally to create a safe communication space for all.

For most of the participating students, the course was very challenging. Group work with international participants that had never met before, with English as the project language, although it is not their mother tongue, and a course subject that is unfamiliar to them.

Considering all those uncertainties, the feedback given in the survey is surprisingly good. This leads one to suspect that students only need to be put in the challenging situation in order to develop their potential accordingly.

But as we also can understand from the student survey this does not apply to all of the students. Some need a little bit of more preparation subject-wise and a little help to get to know their peers.