

Dear UCG Faculty Board,

Date: June 23, 2021

Topic: Improvements syllabus System View on Life

You have asked ESI to assign Jan Folkert Deinum to help me with the assessment aspects of the course Systems View on Life. This is my final report which has been endorsed by Deinum.

As instructed we have worked on:

1. Establishing and articulating learning outcomes for the course, which are concrete, assessable and appropriately connected to course material;
2. Connecting appropriate assessments to these learning outcomes;
3. Providing valid, reliable and transparent criteria for grading and feedback on assessment
4. Ensuring the assessment meets all other UCG requirements (such as multiple assessment moments)

In this process we have engaged the following activities.

- a) Andringa included a post- and pre-questionnaire with questions on the appropriateness of teaching and assessment for LAS. See Appendix 1. Appendix 2 offers assessment and learning relevant quotes.
- b) Jan Folkert Deinum has spoken to a delegation of students about the overall course, its stated and actual learning outcomes, and the assessment.
- c) Andringa, based on suggestions of Deinum, has adapted the Syllabus.
- d) We have met online four times with fruitful discussions, which led to suggestions of improvement and the mutual endorsement of the new syllabus text.

In summary, the overall conclusion is that the course quality itself is good, but that the syllabus and specifically the alignment of the course objectives, assignments and final rubric could be improved. Below I will explain this in more detail.

Course quality

During this process I have found no indications that there is anything wrong with the educational aspects of the course so far it pertains to how the students perceive the course. The students seem to consider Systems View on Life as good. In 2019-2020 the overall course grade was 9.29 (8 students out of 24) and this year 8.75 (4 students/24). Similarly the teacher evaluation was 3.88 and 3.63 out of 4 in both years (corresponding to 9.7 and 9.1 respectively).

During the discussion that Deinum had with students of the current year and the last year the students argued that they felt intellectually challenged in the System View on Life course, that they particularly like the amount and intensity of the feedback I give on their assignments and that they see the course as one of the reasons they choose for University

College. They mentioned that it took them some time to understand what was expected from them, but after receiving the feedback on their first assignment that became clear to them and motivated them to learn more.

Learning outcomes

I have improved the selection of TER learning outcomes in conjunction with a clearer formulation of the academic skills aspects of the course (See above). This led to the following table in the revised syllabus. [Text marked yellow has been added or improved in the course of this process]

Associated TER 2020-2021 learning outcomes as described in article 3.1.2	Learning objectives in this course	Teaching methods	Assessment methods
	Upon successful completion of the course unit, students have demonstrated to be able to ...		
1.4 ... is able to understand the origin and context of complex real-world situations 2.4 - ... is able to critically evaluate scientific knowledge and limitations	... identify (scientific) positions* and treat these respectfully	Homework assignments	Homework rubrics
3.1 - ... is able to apply existing knowledge with imagination and creativity 3.3- ... demonstrates ability to design their own learning path and learn in an active, deep and self-directed manner 6.2 - ... is able to integrate different disciplinary perspectives and knowledge	... develop an interesting profound idea from fragile to a well-supported position with a bit of coaching ... integrate different academic (and possibly non-academic) perspectives on the self-generated idea ... use key concepts from systems theory to synthesize insights across disciplines	Idea phase 1-3	Rubrics Idea
3.2 - ... reflects on personal performance	... reflect on the learning process and the course materials	Theory reflection	Rubrics theory reflection

The meeting with students showed that the learning outcomes were both appropriate to their expectations of LAS and realized without noticeable problems. The same can be concluded from Appendix 1.

Connecting appropriate assessments to learning outcomes

The students, based on the session with Deinum and the reflections in Appendix 2, report that the assessment methods and criteria in relation to the learning outcomes are clear, especially due to the high amount and intensity of the feedback they receive during the course. They emphasize they prefer the formative assessment in this course and the high level of personalized feedback which they consider appropriate for LAS education (Appendix 1)

We have analysed the rubrics of and found them – as the students indicated – appropriate for the task. Yet I have added one additional entry in the idea rubric:

Defendability (Phase 3)	The idea is grounded in existing knowledge and aware of existing criticism	The idea is in part grounded in existing knowledge and/or not fully aware of criticism	The idea is in hardly grounded in existing knowledge and/or unaware of criticism
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Transparent criteria for grading

The session Deinum had with students indicated that students did not experience any problems with the criteria for grading and feedback. In fact the frequent feedback prepared everyone well for the eventual grade. So we have not proposed any change here.

Meeting RUG assessment requirements

Given the character of the course we deem the fallback for the second assessment in the form of a delayed presentation of the portfolio appropriate. We have not found any issues where the course did not meet UG-assessment criteria, hence we have not formulated improvements on the current text.

Conclusions

SVL is a course that matches the epistemological development levels of (most of) the students and has no major weaknesses or flaws, which explains the high, and consistent, evaluations. However, the syllabus benefited from significant improvement in aligning the learning outcomes, assignments and criteria for grading, which have been applied..

Regarding the task set to me by the Board of the Faculty we conclude the following:

1. Establishing and articulating learning outcomes for the course, which are concrete, assessable and appropriately connected to course material;

I have changed the formulation of the learning outcomes in conjunction with the new description of the academic skill components of the course and adapted the Syllabus.

2. Connecting appropriate assessments to these learning outcomes;

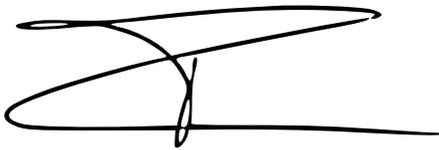
After updating the syllabus, the learning outcomes, assignment and the assessment are now appropriately aligned.

3. Providing valid, reliable and transparent criteria for grading and feedback on assessment

After updating the syllabus ,the criteria for grading and feedback on the assessment as described in the rubric are aligned with the learning outcomes and the assignment. Furthermore, students report they understand the criteria well due to the intense and numerous feedback they receive during the course.

4. Ensuring the assessment meets all other UCG requirements (such as multiple assessment moments)

The assessment meets UG criteria.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'T' followed by a horizontal line and a small loop at the end.

Best,

Tjeerd Andringa

Appendix 1 - Student expectations of LAS

What do students expect of a typical LAS course?

In previous installments students fairly often remarked that SVL was the most UCG-style or the most LAS course they had had until now. This year the students were asked in a pre- and post-test to indicate their expectations of a typical LAS class. The questions were roughly modeled on Baxter-Magolda's stages in self-authorship. This led to the following result.

Question	Development stage (Baxter-Magolda)	Pre	Post
Learning aimed at demonstrating (at assessment time) the accumulated knowledge of a (new) discipline	Aimed at acquiring fenced-off knowledge (memorization)	0	1
Learning aimed at acquiring interdisciplinary knowledge while focussing on the intricacies of interdisciplinarity and societal impact	Aimed at integrating and applying knowledge (application)	14	8.5
Guided learning that helps you to promote personal growth with academic content as a means	Focus on assisted personal growth	6	8
Self-guided learning in which you use the knowledge and experience of your teachers for personal growth	Facilitated self-guided personal growth	2	3.5

These questions reflect stages of epistemological development that develop, ideally, during college ages from a focus on knowledge acquisition (mainly memorization), to proving competence, to assisted personal growth, and eventually to self-guided personal growth (self-authorship).

The course spends some attention on the transition from uneducated thinking (based on the adoption of authoritative narratives) to educated thinking (based on the continual replacement of lower-quality beliefs by better supported and more self-empowering beliefs and skills). During the course the students seemed to change their expectations to the more advanced forms of learning.

This fits with some of the academic skill goals of the course that I (with Deinum's help) have formulated in the revised syllabus as follows:

One key aspect of Systems View of Life is to help you to reason like an academic. It deepens academic skills like steelmanning, giving and receiving feedback, academic listening, and respecting the (often hard earned) knowledge of experts. These skills help you to make more of your existing knowledge base and to detect where your knowledge and understanding are underdeveloped. Similarly, it helps you to detect expertise in others, make the most of their knowledge, and to discover where they might be weak (while being respectful). It also helps you to approach topics from a higher level of abstraction and from different perspectives. And it allows you to take a first step towards becoming an autonomous researcher by

allowing you to develop a self-generated idea from fragile and unformed to (fairly) robust and defensible.

Note that both the student responses and the new academic skill goals suggest a fairly high epistemological level compared to the general population (and possibly also in comparison to the staff).

Is the assessment-style appropriate for the course?

Similarly, we have asked the students what type of assessment they expect of a typical LAS course.

Question	Focus	Pre	Post
Uniform clear assessment based on specific and clear learning outcomes that make it clear what you should do to pass or excel	Demonstrating educational compliance	1	0
Assessment aimed at estimating how well you do in comparison with a specific, clear, and uniform standard	Discovering self in comparison to standards	4	1
Assessment more aimed at how much you have learned on a topic than at how well you comply with specific, clear, and uniform learning outcomes	Personal knowledge acquisition	8	7
Personalized assessment from a teacher who got to know your interests and way of working and who uses this more to give feedback than to grade	Self-development	9	13

These questions were similarly organized according to stages in epistemological development. The lowest two stages, described as “Uniform clear assessment based on specific and clear learning outcomes that make it clear what you should do to pass or excel”, and “Assessment aimed at estimating how well you do in comparison with a specific, clear, and uniform standard” indicate a fairly low awareness of the benefits of education. This changes gradually towards high personal significance at the higher epistemological development levels that were, in accordance with the student’s expectations of LAS-education.

The lower epistemological development levels fit best with the standard SMART interpretation of educational quality control. This is exemplified in our first task:

Establishing and articulating learning outcomes for the course, which are concrete, assessable and appropriately connected to course material;

Interestingly only a few students selected the less advanced options (and only one in the post-test). This entails that our students prefer a more advanced interpretation – aimed at personal knowledge acquisition and self-development – of the learning outcomes.

SVL students indicated that they expect, and hence appreciate, “Personalized assessment from a teacher who got to know your interests and way of working and who uses this more to

give feedback than to grade". SVL is centered around this type of feedback and the associated assessment. This personalized approach is, of course, at odds an industrial-grade standardization often associated with SMART outcomes.

Matching learning outcomes to student expectations

Good Excellent education requires a good near perfect match between the expectations of students and the provided learning opportunities. Given the high student evaluations, which are consistent over the years, we assume such a good match between the expectations of students and the provided learning opportunities may be assumed. And we consider that as something to be protected and showcased.

Appendix 2 - Student reflections on assessment

Student 1

I am very pleased with this course because what I have learned is applicable in many situations. I know this because I already see a difference in myself. That is very refreshing compared to other courses I have had so far, both in UCG as in Mathematics. Having real-life benefits from learning is the strongest motivation for me. I admit that I do not even care about my grade or assessment method for this course anymore because it cannot even express the knowledge I have gained so far.

I learned a lot by listening better to people in the documentaries for this course, but also from others outside this course, and it has only been a few weeks. This strongly motivates me to keep listening and ask questions.

Student 2

There was so much freedom in your course, as long as you were respectful and good and strong reasoning. There was also a lot to learn in this course, but the nice thing was that you could almost choose to learn as much as you wanted.

Student 3

This course is very different from other courses, but it has taught me more than I have learned so far from other courses. This course teaches not only all the things I mentioned before but also that progress is far more important than the end product. You asked how this type of learning should be assessed but I think it is pretty perfect how it is right now. I really liked doing the homework assignments and your feedback was a little confusing at the beginning but very helpful after. I also really liked the idea because you could do whatever you wanted to do, choose whatever you liked and that's the reason why I chose for Liberal Arts & Sciences, I wanted to choose my own path.

Student 4

This course is also full of hope because it shows us that we are able to educate ourselves of our own volition. We should know that we have the ability to develop our full autonomy and acting is always more effective than staying in the ambiguities.

Student 5

At first I was not sure what to expect, but I think I have never learned so much in this little amount of time in life. It goes beyond learning some information, it makes you think critically. Something I will be able to use the rest of my life.

Student 6

When I decided to take this class, I was excited to be able to write about my views and opinions about the subjects mentioned in the topics. I thought we would be given material that was obviously biased, and we would write what we thought and discuss. I didn't expect this class to change most of my views and my mindset. I walked into something completely unexpected, and it ended up opening my mind, making me more understanding towards others, decreased my own internal extremism, and affected both my daily and personal life.

This class is the reason I came to a liberal arts and sciences program. This class helped me open my mind so much and I am now in a place where I believe I am on my way, but I KNOW my mind needs more of this. This class by itself changed the way I see almost everything in my everyday life and I believe it's helped not only myself but people around me. If there was another class similar to this or an informal continuation I would be very very interested.

I haven't really experienced this type of learning before. I am grateful to finally have had a class that was focused on development in general but also our own personal development. The fact that we were graded and assessed on our personal development in response to the material given was not only a stress reliever, but also incredibly beneficial because I was able to focus on my own development and actually SEE it happening with each homework assignment. I also believe the discussions and ability to choose our own final project helped me understand the information more. I was interested every time and was excited to see the way other people thought. I was also very grateful to work on a topic of my choice for the final project, because I not only learned a lot about something I have a lot of interest in, I was also able to apply it to the class and to my own life. I honestly believe this class should be mandatory for everyone, not only because of the content but because of the way of learning, how it is personal and about how we GROW instead of what we remember.

Student 7

As for my individual development, this course has given me all the tools I need for what life has to offer to me. That is what I mainly liked about this course, it will give you tools for you to develop depending on your life path, it does not force you to live your life on a certain way or to use the tools on a certain way, it shows you all the options that you will need eventually and gives you the tools for it. It depends on us how we use it and how much we benefit from it.

The way of learning and teaching the course is an incredibly unique one. The learning objectives are much more abstract and are difficult to assess since they are more oriented to personal growth and mind expansion rather than facts and figures that can be tested. I think that every course should be like SVL in some way. This course prepares us for life and teaches us awareness towards different topics and the opinions we can find there. It teaches us how to improve our ways of thinking and understanding the world.

Student 8

In conclusion, I have gained much from this class but **most importantly it is an example that learning can happen in a different way; Although not all subjects can be taught like this, for me Systems View on Life proved that we don't need to standardise everything for education to work and that creativity can be rewardable in academics.**

Student 9

Only because of this course I started to educate my mind in a way I have done it before. I'm on my way to getting better and better but I think that I need more coaching and input, I would love to just continue the course in block 4

I would like to thank you Tjeerd for putting so much effort into the course! I really enjoyed the constant feedback and conversations we had. The course made me realize why I wanted to study Liberal Arts in the first place. Your course challenged me in the best possible way and I hope we can find a way to continue this course in some informal way!

I am supporting this type of learning a lot and I think it should be part of every single course to learn how to think for yourself and not only say what the teacher wants to hear. In order to assess the learning outcome in the end of the course the close contact to the teacher is the most important thing in my opinion because only when the teacher can see how the student improved over time he is able to assess the work. Furthermore a clear syllabus is really important (which was the case in SVL) because then the student is able to combine their individual learning and working style with the clear grading rubric.

Student 10

Wisdom allows to apply knowledge and a theoretical understanding to the real world, it is a valuable skill that I believe should be more developed in the educational system

SVL is more focused on you developing from your inner self than willing for you to develop defined skills. If I had to describe it in terms of dynamics I would say it is our inner self meeting the world and not about making the world meet us. By that I mean we are pushed to truly think for ourselves, to self-reflect on our boundaries and comfort zone. On the contrary, other courses have a tendency of 'imposing' competences and knowledge as an unquestionable truth. Most often, the syllabus' are rather rigid making it impossible to go in a relatively free direction. **Although it seems quite difficult for RUG to assess the exactitude of SVL, it is actually its lack of precision that should be valued - students and teachers get to choose together what they want to explore and discuss and there is no better way to have a positive and motivated working atmosphere.** It is the best way for people involved to enjoy themselves during the course, while making the skills assessed individually persuadable to everyone.

I also believe the way the course is assessed is very adapted to both the true flexibility of the course and the need for more rigidity coming from bureaucratic needs.

Student 11

I was definitely taken out of my comfort zone on multiple occasions but I believe that it was part of the journey and learning outcomes. I have definitely learned how to act in situations such as these and found it extremely rewarding

Extremely interesting course with unorthodox methods which was refreshing and exciting. Assessment was fun and weekly classes and homework were fun to participate in. Marleen was really great help and assisted me whenever I had questions. Tjeerd is an incredibly interesting and wise character and I enjoy listening to him and learning from him.

The focus on addressing alternative, and sometimes, frowned upon perspectives of world events was a great method of teaching refined thought which I will carry with me in the future.

Briefly touching on the method of teaching in the SVL classroom, it was, as I said above, unorthodox, refreshing and exciting. I learned that this is a common opinion shared by members of my year group and the SVL class of last year. In the discussion with Jan (I've forgotten his surname), many praises were given to the layout of the course including how we are taken out of comfort zones and how development is the focus of the course. **The simple facts are that we are in an educational setting and the overall goal of such a setting for the majority of students is exactly what is taught in this class; development and wisdom.** The focus on discussions and reflections each week help us all to gain a deeper understanding of themes and I would like to see such methods be taught in other lessons. Overall, I have thoroughly enjoyed the SVL course and I would strongly

recommend others to take it if I am given the opportunity to do so. It has taught me, through unorthodox teaching methods, discussions and interactive learning about my life, the future, and how true development works.

Student 12

Already the question “ what do you value more intelligence or wisdom” in the first questionnaire of the course sparked my interest. In the following weeks, I was happy to learn more of the concept wisdom. I really like the idea of wisdom but firstly I could not name what exactly it entails ; merely that it is a skill that is of high value and you gain it through experience. Soon I learned more, for instance, what the core-creation mode is and the three-dimensional concept of wisdom by Ardel. What fascinated me about wisdom is for instance that it is a skill/state of mind that is not linked to a specific time /epoch. Instead it is said to stay similar throughout the course of human existence.

This kind of questions of the questionnaire I appreciated a lot, similar to our discussions in class - all the topics were of high importance/value. Furthermore I appreciated your one by one feedback on our weekly reflections. Overall already with the first lesson you caught the interest of everyone and I, and many others similarly I assume, were very motivated towards the course and the learning process :) (for example by inventing us to your farm, being very engaged and motivated by yourself, sharing interesting content)

Student 13

I perceived “The Systems View on Life” to be a very unconventional course, both in terms of the content being taught and the method of teaching it. The lectures and homework worked together to promote a deeper understanding than a purely academic approach could provide.

Enjoyed it a lot, even though (or maybe because?) it was probably the most challenging course until now.

I perceived “The Systems View on Life” to be a very unconventional course, both in terms of the content being taught and the method of teaching it. **The lectures and homework worked together to promote a deeper understanding than a purely academic approach could provide.**

The type of learning in SVL differs a lot from other courses in the way that the course is much less about specific information, but more about a general outlook on how the world works and how one can make sense of it. One could say that it is much more “meta”. By building connections from the course content to my personal life, I feel like this course’s main function for me was providing me with tools for my personal and academic development. **For this purpose, the assessment methods used in the course were appropriate, as personal development is strongly dependent on where one’s starting point is. Therefore, it would not make sense for this course to have standardised learning outcomes, which would limit the nuance and decrease room for individuality.** In general, I still believe that “classic” standardised tests have their place in education; they can serve as a motivation to

learn important concepts, which might otherwise not be properly understood, and are more feasible when needing to evaluate the performance of a large number of students. It is of course not ideal, as different people have different styles of learning, but at the same time, many students do not have the luxury of small classes like the ones in UCG, and so individual assessment of all of the students might be very difficult to implement on a large scale.

To conclude, I believe that this course will be of much help in my further academic and personal development, and I would recommend it to anybody who is willing to broaden their horizon and be brought out of their comfort zone, as those were the main effects that it had on me.

Student 14

SVL course provided me with multiple insights about the topics that I was already acknowledged with. However, homework, materials, and lectures made me look at these topics from a different point of view. I realized that I approached many issues from the side of my closed bubble. Through provided materials and homework I went beyond my comfort zone, which was challenging, but at the same time very developing. It made me think outside the comfort box I was familiar with. The course had a significant impact on my self-development. The discussion about intelligence and wisdom changed my mind on both notions. I acknowledged the power of wisdom and I started to respect and value wisdom more than before

After the course I have more motivation in educating my mind and I'm really excited where this will lead me.

Student 15

This course fits into the reasons why I picked this study; multiple perspectives, thinking outside 'the box' and not everything is just black-and-white terms. In the beginning, we had to fill in a questionnaire. There was a question about what I thought about 'offending opinions. I filled-in that if I feel triggered by it, I'm interested in why it did so. The comments on the homework were very direct, clear, and triggering. This fits into critical thinking and getting me out of my comfort zone. It was really nice because I could actually apply the statement about being interested in why I feel so triggered about something. Each time I tried to understand it and eventually saw where the comment was coming from. Understanding people, statements and circumstances is something I always wanted to reach in life and this course got me on the right track.

Student 16

Reading the description of this course left me a bit confused, but interested at the same time. I really liked the idea of creating your own voice and position without following the crowd. A couple weeks into the course, both the confusion and interest stayed with me. I am used to other courses where I am used to being told exactly what to do, which I like and am very good at. Systems view on life pressures you to create your own opinions without much help. However, that is the reason I have learned so much and I am very appreciative of that.

I used to listen in order to answer and now I am trying to listen in order to understand.

Student 17

What I found really cool were Tjeerds answers on the homework while those words really showed me that I was making progress in my work and I thought that was really nice.

The difference between Systems view on Life and other courses was really nice. But I think for one block it might be enough. Tjeerd let us do our own thing a lot and in some cases that is really nice but I personally like structure too. That is also why I disagreed with replacing ECMS with SVL because I thought that SVL is a course that everyone should follow but one block is definitely enough. The grading in this course might be something that can be improved since it was really vague most of the time on how assignments were going to be graded. Honestly, it isn't entirely clear for me still. Are we graded on everything by itself or on the growth and development between each assignment. Especially for the homeworks. In the beginning no one really knew what to do and what Tjeerd wanted from us which was a bit weird. In the end I really enjoyed following this course and I think it will help immensely in the future. Especially for capturing information and really listening to what others are saying so you can form your own worldview and get an educated mind.

Student 18

I really loved this course! At the beginning to be honest I thought Tjeerd was a bit insensitive (even if he had asked what triggered people) as I heard some people got really offended by some of the selected words that he uses. I think at times its a cultural shock as well. But other times we see that most of what he says he can back up. I think the only problem at times is the word choice (at the beginning at least) was a bit shocking... What was also shocking is that this class is kind off made so that we question people and our own beliefs and sometimes I felt like we were getting lectured on not questioning the people in the videos because they are some big fancy professors or researchers that know what they are talking about and we (students) don't... This felt a bit insensitive because they might know more than us but it doesn't mean we can not question them. He was trying to talk to us about respecting them (which I try to follow of course) but it also seemed like a huge disrespect to us. After that I thought it created a little bit of a hostile environment (for me) to say anything going against the videos. However, even with that said most of the time I felt safe to express myself in the class (although I was always intimidated by the other students as well). And I feel like I have learnt a lot more than in other classes to be honest. I want to continue this way of thinking as it opened my eyes a lot of the times to things I was not seeing before.

The type of learning in this course is so different as it is tailored to the students. In the beginning, we got a form to fill out with our interests which was already so different to any other course. In our first class, we went through the syllabus, but then we went through the form, and as we went through it, we would discuss our preferred grading, feedback and

learning systems. Then Tjeerd took this new information and made adjustments to the syllabus with our chosen topics. Moreover, I truly appreciated the weekly homework. At first, the 300-word commentaries were daunting and challenging, but I started to improve so much with each week's personalised feedback and discussions. I had never felt improvements like this. Usually, it is like memorising or understanding new concepts, but this was more in-depth. However, I would have liked to see some grading for these homework assignments not initially because it might discourage this type of feedback learning and improvement. Still, maybe there can be a mid-block average grade of the assignments. This would give us some guidance on how we are doing. However, overall I appreciated this new way of learning/teaching as I feel like I have learnt more from this class than probably any other class so far.

Student 19

Then, the case of the type of learning during Systems View on Life. I personally really liked it. It brought me out of my comfort zone because of the topics presented, but more importantly (I think), in the way I had to learn. Especially the Idea forming was really fun for me. I loved that we could pick almost any topic and really make it our own. Combined with the theory we learned, this Idea has turned into something I have never produced before and I really value that. Also for me personally, I coupled this Idea to making changes in my own life through academic ways. This has greatly helped me already and I don't think I could have achieved that in this fulfilling way without the contents in this course and the way they were presented.

Although I most definitely wasn't someone who participated a lot during the classes, I did like the format of the classes. It wasn't just a long-lasting lecture, there was actual discussion and we went deeper into the learning material than in any lecture where the lecturer just babbles on for hours on end. Because the actual lectures were just pre-recorded, this was possible and I would honestly not mind if other courses started to adopt this way of teaching too.