

Final Project Report

Overall Status: **Complete**

Project Name: Teacher Support Program for Teaching Staff at The School of Humanities

March 5, 2024 / Author: Beth Rogers

Status Code Legend

- On Track and Achieved
- Attempted but Ultimately Dropped from Project
- Achieved with Difficulty
- Goals Which Became Incompatible with the Project in its Original Form

<p>The project is Finished the week of MARCH 19, 2024, due to the following:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Worked with project supervisor to develop preliminary seminar program to address staff needs● Introduced preliminary version of support program to staff and outside third parties in academia to receive feedback for improvement. (Meetings in October 2023 with Ásrún Johannsdóttir, Guðrún Geirsdóttir, Rannveig Sverrisdóttir, Hólmfríður Árnadóttir)● Finalized program itinerary and disseminated advertisements to university staff● Held seminar before start of Spring Semester 2024, on January 4.● Compiled and analyzed feedback from seminar (see report below)
<p>Issues:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● A planned mentoring group was dropped/placed on hold from the program on the advice of Kennslumiðstöð, citing difficulties developing such groups in the past● Refreshments (coffee, etc.) were not able to be offered to seminar attendees because of lack of funding
<p>Milestones accomplished for the project over the course of Academic Year (AY) 2023-2024:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● WP1: Design & Development. Selection and creation of elements to be included in the first draft of the survey for staff began on receipt of this plan's funding acceptance in Spring 2023.● WP2: Analysis & Refinement of Program. The results of WP1 were evaluated with the help of various members of staff.● WP3: Working with Staff (Outreach and Dissemination). The larger staff will be introduced to the teacher support program in AY 2023-2024.● WP4: Ongoing Revision & Follow up. The results of this program will be published after feedback is gathered from participants at various stages throughout the academic year and may be used as a guide for any other staff or department wishing to build a similar support system for other faculties.
<p>Areas/questions for discussion:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● How could we encourage more participation in similar projects in the future?● What is the best way, going forward, to offer comprehensive training to all teaching staff, regardless of permanent or non-permanent status?● How do we address concerns about emerging technology (AI in Education) going forward?
<p>Is there any ongoing material for this project?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The project manager and supervisor will now begin analyzing results for publication.2. Some results from this work will be presented in conference presentation session led by Rannveig Sverrisdóttir, at Hugvísindaping 2024 on Saturday, March 9.

Contact Information

Project Supervisor

Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, PhD

Adjunkt lecturer, Applied Linguistics

Office: Veröld - Hús Vigdísar / VHV-206

Mobile: 525-4527

Email: asrunj@hi.is

Project Manager

Beth Rogers,

Doktorsnemi

Office: Gimli, 3. hæð

Mobile: 845-0155

Email: blr3@hi.is

Project Abstract

With the goals set out by the Strategy of the University of Iceland, HÍ26, huge efforts have been made to increase teacher training and mentorship amongst primarily the contracted teaching staff at the university. Less attention, however, has been paid to the needs and training of more than 2,500 non-contracted part-time staff. As such, this project seeks to devise and implement a plan to help staff at all levels, beginning with the School of Humanities. Drawing on a range of evidence gathered from a previous needs-assessment survey, the program will be arranged according to Fabrice Hénard and Deborah Roseveare's work on how to foster quality teaching. As a result, the program proposed here is more inclusive and targeted to the needs of all teaching staff in the School of Humanities, whether they are part- or full-time. This project was accepted for funding via Kennslumiðstöð in Spring 2023.

It is also important to note that this project implements training support ideas for Háskóli Íslands teaching staff that had been suggested by the 2022 needs-assessment survey, piloted by the School of Humanities. This work was funded by the 2022 Education Fund, and the survey was given to staff beginning on February 1, 2022. While the results ultimately did not represent the goal of a minimum of 20% of teaching staff of the four faculties housed within the School of Humanities (Faculty of Theology and Religion, Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies, Faculty of Languages and Cultures, and the Faculty of History and Philosophy), a look at the responses suggested some training needs for staff despite how relatively few they were in number. These survey results formed the heart of the Teacher Support Training Program project funded in 2023.

Introduction

Though many initiatives have been spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic at institutions of learning worldwide, many of them focused on technology to the detriment of other elements of education. It is for this reason that the University of Iceland may benefit from a reevaluation, deliberately designed to ask for feedback on training which involves pedagogy and technology. The 2022 needs-assessment survey allowed the researchers to garner feedback on a large scale and focus upon educators' needs from the sessional teaching staff up.

Quality teaching depends first upon the use of good pedagogy. Pedagogy is defined as the methods and practice of educating others, and at its best, it allows most students to achieve the learning outcomes set forth by instructors with the time and resources available. Examples of pedagogical concerns for teachers include creation of effective curriculum and course content, a variety of teaching methods (e.g., project-based learning, collaborative learning), effective collection, and compelling assessment. Quality education depends on an institution's ability to listen to and respond to the needs of its teachers, so that they may apply ideas to their courses with enthusiasm, creativity, and the energy needed to inspire their students all semester long. The main research questions of this proposed training program are:

1. How can we improve staff satisfaction with current teaching support practices at the University (since the pandemic, 2020-present)?
2. What is the current source(s) of stress and gaps in instructional knowledge for University of Iceland teaching staff?
3. How can we better integrate current piecemeal elements of teacher support into a more accessible and cohesive whole?
4. How can we recommend both technology-based and emotional-support education for tertiary learning and teaching so that educational spaces don't seem overly focused on IT?

Early results pointed to several possible issues for the staff of the Humanities department, who may lack support, even in comparison to other HÍ departments. Specifically, the teacher support seminar was created to support Goals 3 and 4 within the Strategy of the University of Iceland, HÍ26. Goal 3 is defined as Strength Based on Quality and Goal 4 is A Good Place to Work. The Project Objectives within HÍ26 which this project served were:

- **3.1 USER-CENTRED SERVICES** – User-centered services based on the needs of students, faculty and administrators will be prioritized at the University through digital transformation
- **3.2 QUALITY OF LEARNING PRIORITISED** – Teaching methods and program offerings will be continuously developed and form the foundation of the University's quality assurance work, with student satisfaction and quality serving as guiding principles. The development of digital teaching methods, distance learning and open online courses will be prioritized.
- **4.1 HUMAN RESOURCES AND JOB SATISFACTION** – The University will promote a motivating work environment, with a focus on student and staff well-being, that will attract ambitious individuals from diverse backgrounds. Support services and administration will be improved through stronger frameworks, education, and training

- **4.2 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING** – Research infrastructure, facilities and buildings support the advancement of research and teaching, as well as interdisciplinary cooperation and quality of operations

Methods

After several meetings collecting revision suggestions and feedback from teaching staff at various levels, and a consultation with a third-party specialist in academic funding, research, and staff training, the support program elements were finalized. All staff members in the School of Humanities were notified of the planned seminar for January 4, 2024, when advertisements were disseminated via university e-mails and social media (Hugskot mailing list, Facebook, etc.) throughout December 2023, along with reminder e-mails to the heads of department throughout the School of Humanities by both Beth Rogers and Ásrún Jóhannsdóttir, to inspire participation.

A Note About Methods:

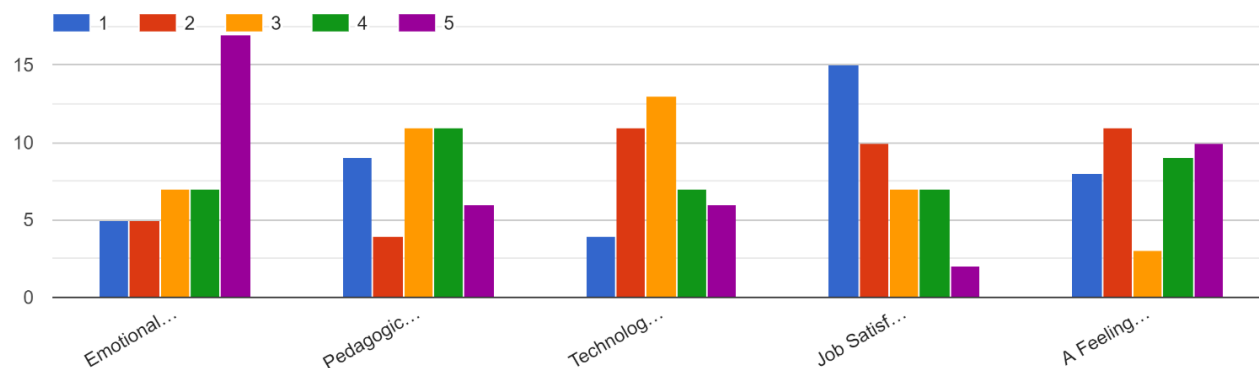
Elements of the seminar and support program were developed using the previous needs-assessment survey results which comprised teachers of all levels and content areas working within the School of Humanities at the University of Iceland. Although the survey was planned to reach a minimum of 20% of all instructors in the school, it did not ultimately garner this level of response; however, some results stood out regardless of the small sample size. These were discussed in detail in 2023's Needs Assessment Survey Final Report, submitted to Kennslumiðstöð, Spring 2023.

Results

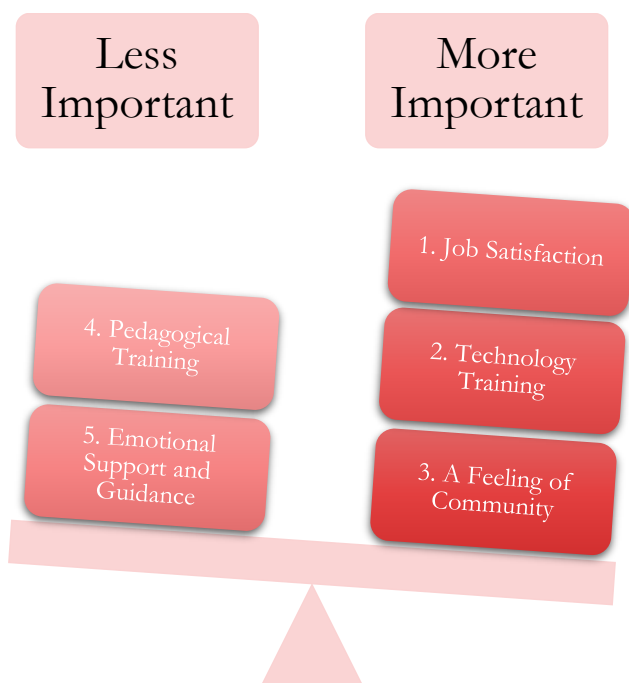
The four work packages and their corresponding project objectives were conducted in full. The understanding of professional support for current teachers was strengthened overall, especially in the case of new, inexperienced, part-time, and/or foreign teaching staff. Even considering issues with low participation from teaching and support staff, the needs-assessment survey results nonetheless illuminated common struggles of HÍ teachers, popular discussions in the field of education and feedback from staff at the School of Humanities.

As the final section of the survey delved more deeply into personal thoughts and opinions, it began with a ranking question, asking respondents to rank the following criteria from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important). Ranking questions calculate the average ranking for each answer choice so you can determine which answer choice was most preferred overall. The answer choice with the largest average ranking is the most preferred choice.

Rank the following in order of preference, 1 being the most important to you as an instructor and 5 being the least important to you as an instructor: / Raðaðu eftirfar...nanda og 5 er minnst mikilvægt fyrir þig sem leiðbeinanda:



The responses here show that most staff who took the survey count Job Satisfaction as most important, then Technology Training and A Feeling of Community tie for second place, with A Feeling of Community falling to third place, Pedagogical Training taking fourth and Emotional Support and Guidance for Teachers being rated least important by respondents.



In response to a question regarding additional resources and support, respondents had the following thoughts:

What format could more resources and support for teachers take? (Check all that you would be interested in) / Hvaða sniði gætu fleiri úrræði og st...ennara fylgt? (Merktu í allt sem þú hefur áhuga á)

31 responses



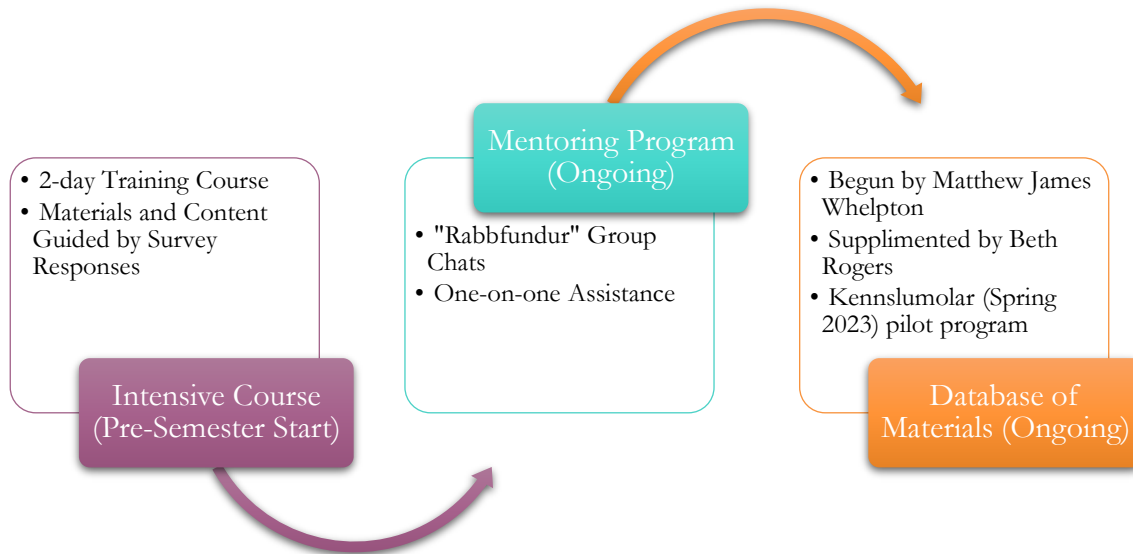
Once again, these responses show that more than half of survey takers are interested in any of these options, with the side benefit of confirming the necessity and popularity of various piecemeal attempts at teacher support available throughout the School of Humanities, such as the *rabbfundur um kennslu* (“Teacher Chats”) monthly meetings led by the Director of Academic Development for the School of Humanities and various pieces of teaching advice and examples on the University of Iceland website, the separate Kennslumiðstöð website, and a Canvas course created and maintained by the Director of Academic Development.

With these responses in mind, a preliminary support program was developed. The priority of the teacher support program was to create a program which will allow teaching staff to learn more about topics in accordance with the suggestions of the needs-assessment survey respondents. While adaptation of technology is a constant concern in education, it is not the whole, and the needs-assessment survey results reflect that.

Teaching staff were invited to sign up for the training and support program detailed below online. The program was presented in both English and Icelandic to ensure that both the concerns and ideas of all staff, at all levels, are heard whether they be Icelandic-speaking or have a different mother tongue. Use of Canvas Events, campus e-mail lists (e.g., Hugskot) and websites such as the Hugdok (Félag doktorsnema og nýrannsakenda á Hugvísindasviði) and FEDON (Félag Doktorsnema og Nýdókora við Háskóla Íslands) websites/email lists were invaluable in achieving the widest array of awareness of the seminar from all levels of staff.

3.3 Training Program

The original project proposed a three-part program for teacher training and support in the School of Humanities, to be scheduled in the 2-weeks before the start of the Spring semester 2024.



This program was designed to be open to all levels, unlike other offerings from the university, such as the Kennsluakademía (active since November 2022), which only serves those “employed on a permanent basis at the University of Iceland, the University of Akureyri, the Agricultural University of Iceland, or Hólar University in 50% employment or more.” Those who are not employed 50% or more comprise a large percentage of teaching staff at the university, and they, too, need support.

Part 1: Intensive Course

The needs-assessment survey responses of 2022 showed that teaching staff is highly interested in more teaching support at HI; more than half (57%) either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the School of Humanities is not currently doing enough to support teachers. Seventy-five percent Agreed or Strongly Agreed that pre-job training is necessary after courses and training duties have been chosen. More than half (61%) Agreed or Strongly Agreed that ongoing professional training is essential for staff at HÍ.

When asked when they may be able to attend such training in an open-ended question, most asked for options which would not compete with their work during the semester, especially at the beginning and end when teachers are at their busiest. Therefore, a time before the start of the fall semester, or just after the close of the spring semester, was most popular. The program then developed as an intensive 2-day course in Teacher Training and Support which offered staff members help with the skills they marked as most important.

As you can see from the criteria assembled above, those surveyed Agree or Strongly Agree with all of them, especially the following (in random order):

1. Communication skills
2. Supervision of student research
3. Professional attitude and ethics
4. Innovation in teaching strategy

5. Classroom management
6. Pedagogy

Likewise, the original survey respondents expressed a majority of Agree or Strongly Agree responses for more training in the following skills:

1. Preparation of instructional materials (e.g., PPT slides)
2. Preparation of Lesson Plans
3. Syllabus or Timetable Planning

To create separation between topics and allow those with limited time to prioritize which element(s) of the course are most important, I organize elements according to Teaching Theory (Beginners) and Teaching Practice (Advanced) for anyone who must choose only 1 day to attend.



Day 1: Teaching Theory

- Communication Skills
- Professional Attitude and Ethics
- Classroom Management
- Setting Up A Course (Syllabus, Lesson Plans, Slides)



Day 2: Teaching Practice

- More pedagogy
- Innovation in Teaching Strategies
- Supervising Student Work
- Good Feedback for Students

Part 2: Mentoring Program

Of all the early data collected as a part of the needs-assessment survey, the mentoring program was the most uncertain. While general support was expressed for the idea of mentoring (see below), survey respondents appeared hesitant to commit to an additional responsibility, citing busy schedules and a large volume of unpaid work.

In general, a mentoring program would take the following form:

1. Mentoring program administrators create the program and determine program criteria, e.g.,
 - a. **Who can participate:** Any current teaching staff member at HÍ, regardless of level of employment, can volunteer to be mentored as the mentee

- b. **Mentor training requirements:** Mentor teachers must have at least 1 year of teaching experience at any level (including a minimum of 1 course at HÍ), and/or an education diploma of any kind
 - c. Together, the mentor and mentee must set SMART goals (a minimum of 1 each) for themselves for the semester
2. Administrators invite participants to join the program.
 3. Mentors and mentees complete profiles to help administrators determine the best mentor-mentee matches. With software, this can be done automatically through surveys and matching algorithms that remove both implicit and explicit biases that are hard to avoid with manual matching.
 4. Mentors and mentees are matched into relationships and begin meeting.
 5. The mentoring relationship progresses over the course of the semester. Mentors and mentees track progress toward goals, and mentoring program administrators gather data on relationships.
 6. The semester ends and the program administrator evaluates the end-of-semester data while preparing for the next academic year. Mentors and mentees who choose to do so can continue their relationship throughout the academic year.

The openness of criteria to be a mentor especially is innovative in that it creates an opportunity for what is called reverse mentoring; while normally an older person automatically mentors a younger person, on the assumption that the older person naturally has more life experience to impart, allowing relatively beginner instructors to also mentor breaks down any automatic deference to age or perceived authority, and encourages collaboration at all levels.

A Note About the Mentoring Program:

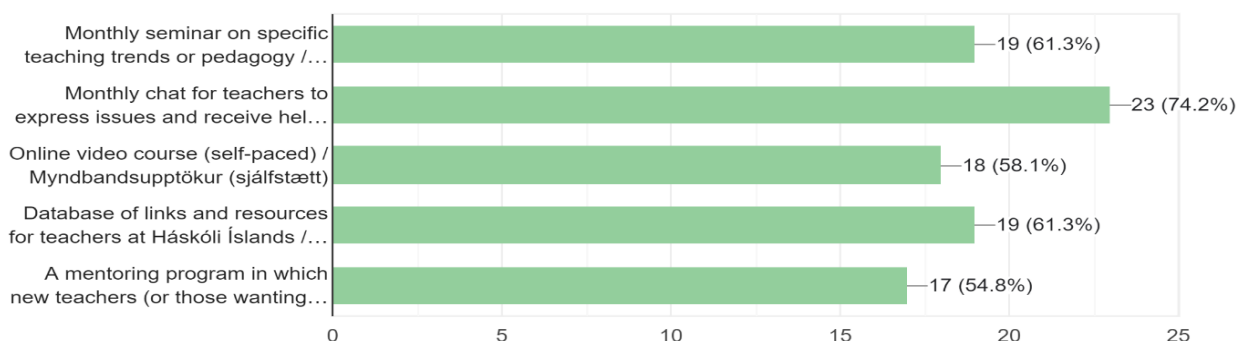
Concerns by both staff and survey respondents about the time and (unpaid) manpower required to start and maintain a functional mentorship among staff members was borne out in the Fall of 2023. Reception to this element of the program was lukewarm due to previous attempts to establish such help for staff by Kennslumiðstöð having difficulty getting off the ground. In consultation with education experts, it was decided to shelve this part of the support program and focus upon pre-semester dissemination of help in the form of the teaching seminar.

Part 3: Database of Teaching Resources

In response to a question regarding additional resources and support, needs-assessment survey respondents had the following thoughts:

What format could more resources and support for teachers take? (Check all that you would be interested in) / Hvaða sniði gætu fleiri úrræði og st...ennara fylgt? (Merktu í allt sem þú hefur áhuga á)

31 responses



As stated before, the Director of Academic Development does a fantastic job with the monthly *rabbfundur*/Teacher Chats organized on-campus, open to all members of teaching staff. But the results above suggest that we could incorporate what is already extant and working well into something more cohesive for better results. Similarly, there is already a database of links and resources in various locations including the Kennslumiðstöð website and a Canvas course created by Matthew James Whelpton and supplemented with further material by Beth Rogers, but do teaching staff know where to look or how to access these materials? Further, do they know how to use these resources, especially in the case of first-time *stundakennarar* (sessional instructors) who may have no background in education at all?

Fitting topics and materials more closely to the results of the initial needs-assessment survey, feedback from the mentoring program and teaching course and requests for more resources will help us streamline these deliverables to staff. It can also be aided by a series of videos or explanatory clips to explain the material tailored to teacher needs and student capabilities within HÍ's unique campus culture, similar to the material found on the [K. Patricia Cross Academy website](#), so that instructors may get more out of the changes to curriculum they make. This work is ongoing, and will continue to develop alongside current efforts to improve the university website, increase best practices use of Canvas, etc.

Discussion

Did you accomplish the purpose of the project?

In general, the purpose of the project, to disseminate information to staff based on the support and mentoring needs expressed in the results of the 2022 needs-assessment survey, was accomplished. Though it was originally envisaged as a 2-day intensive training seminar, the teaching seminar was collapsed into 1 day of discussion and working with ideas as a group. There were approximately 20 attendees, either partially or for the whole 4-hour session. Time constraints made a change in itinerary necessary. The topics covered were narrowed to these:



Morning: Beginner Basics

- Basic Communication Skills for Every Teacher
- Classroom Management
- Syllabus and Course Design

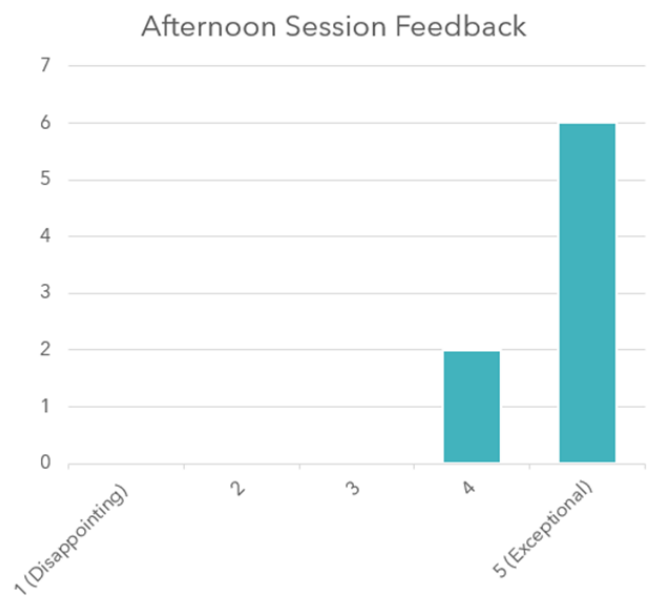
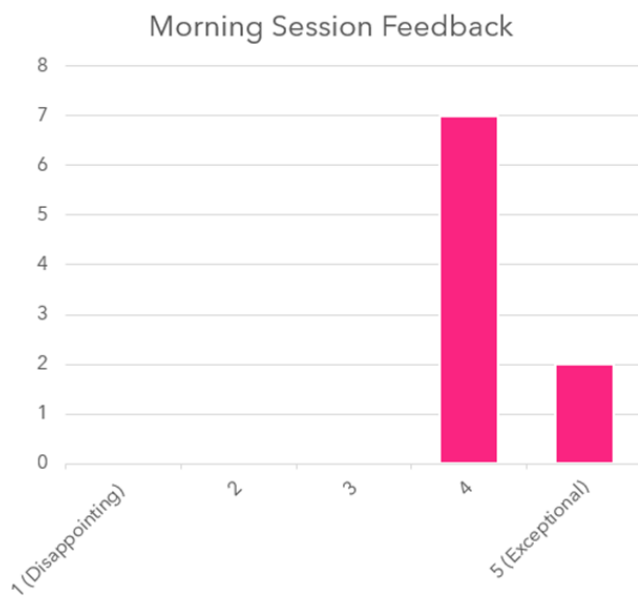


Afternoon: Practical Practice

- Innovative Teaching Strategies
- Assessment and Feedback
- Supervising Student Work

Most attendees had more than 5 years of experience teaching in some form (10/20 or 50%), while 3 of 20 (15%) had no experience at all. The rest were somewhere in the middle. As a result, it was difficult to serve the needs of all who attended. I could not speak in detail about pedagogy or teaching advice for teachers who had never taught, while the veteran teachers found the material rightly superficial in some instances. Of the 6 elements listed above, **Classroom Management was marked the lowest (3 of 5)** on simple feedback surveys given to attendees after the support seminar, expressing a desire for more in-depth examples and more specific advice for dealing with “difficult students.”

Overall, though, results for feedback showed that attendees were satisfied with the material and felt encouraged in their work as educators for the semester to come, rating both sessions a 4 or a 5 in terms of quality.



Did anything interesting come to light that was not related to the original project?

Due to the issue of low participation, it is difficult to show that patterns and trends among the responses offered by the teaching staff of the School of Humanities represent a large-scale need for change, as I had hoped to do. However, the consensus seen in these relatively few participants is still undeniable in certain questions and when thinking about certain issues (see **Results** for full analysis). There was interest in developing more communication for teachers and about teaching. There was interest in learning more and having more resources for Classroom Management in general. **Also, interestingly, ChatGPT and other examples of AI in education were brought up during open discussion by instructors. The question of how to use this new tool effectively while simultaneously discouraging cheating was a paramount concern for some attendees. I was told that Kannslumiðstöð was developing a response to help teachers navigate use of AI in the classroom in December 2023, but as of March 2024, I have heard nothing more on the subject.**

What conclusions can be drawn from the results?

Considering the above, continuing to build flexible access to training and information is encouraged. This allows staff to "dip into" events and access resources as they need them. The university continues to develop incentives, but, as always, teaching staff at any university always have ongoing research and administrative pressures in addition to other work/time commitments for both permanent and sessional staff which make it difficult to attend regularly scheduled training seminars or contribute to a more detailed support program like these.

In addition, discussions and reactions gleaned from this research revealed that teaching staff are interested in any kind of support, resources, or information they can get to aid their work. Enthusiasm and a desire to do their best is universally observed. There are resources in place meant to help encourage *some* teaching staff to innovate, but they are few and often closed to non-permanent staff and especially non-permanent and non-Icelandic staff whose Icelandic language proficiency is still developing. **If the University of Iceland wishes to place itself within a coalition of international European universities leading in high-quality education and research in the future – as HÍ26 suggests – this *must* change.**