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How to Get a Good Start – Developing the First Substantive Course of Legal Studies

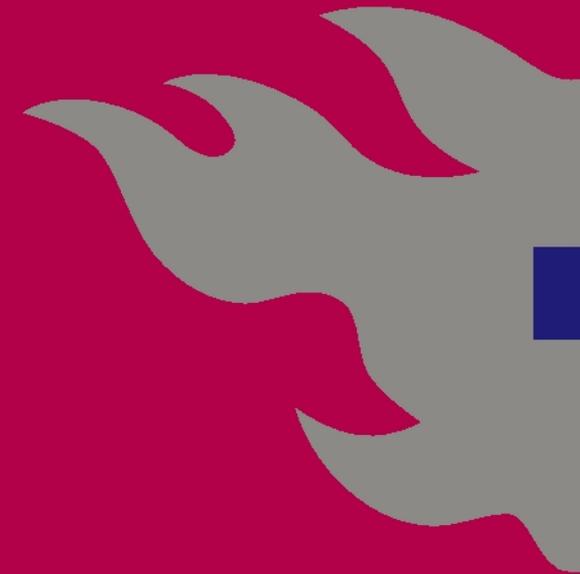
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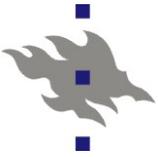
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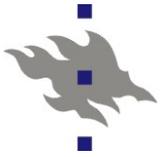
The University of Helsinki





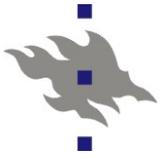
Aim of the study

- To explore the progression and social interaction of first year students at the Faculty of Law
- How does the first course (The Foundations of Legal Thinking, 11 ECTS) in the Faculty of Law support these aims
 - Development of “legal mindset” as an objective of the legal studies – professional ethics etc.



Why this particular course and its curriculum was in focus?

- The course was revised in 2010 – and has also been continuously revised after that
- The first year experience of the law students was considered to be especially important in the Faculty
- The course and its curriculum should form the basis of educating good lawyers
- The commitment of the students of the Faculty to the studies is not the best one (Final Evaluation Report of the Faculty, 2003)
- Teaching Learning Enquiry shows that the students experience lack of support from the Faculty's teachers (Haarala-Muhonen et al. 2013)



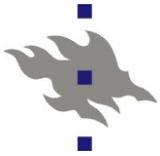
Research Material

■ Interviews

- First, second, and third year law students who begun their studies in 2010, 2011 and 2012

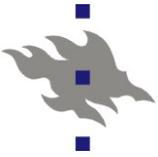
■ The data collected:

- Interviews, spring 2013 (N = 30)
- Student feedback collected from the course (\approx 260 per year)
- Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (ETLQ) (2010 n=155, 2011 n=225, 2012 n=205)



Main structure of the course in 2009

- Mass lectures
- Written exam
- **Exams failed (1st exam): 141 (60%)**
- Student feedback: general mean score of the course 2.65 (1–5)

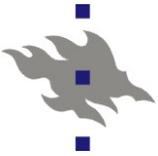


Main structure of the course since 2010

- Module 1 (Dimensions of Law) – mass lectures (containing also group work and discussions)
- Module 2 (Legal Argumentation) – group work, learning by doing, smaller groups
- Module 3 (Lawyer in Resolving Conflicts) – group work, learning by doing, smaller groups

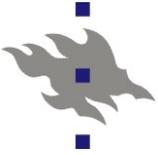
- Learning diary

- **3 students were asked to improve their learning diaries after submission in 2010**

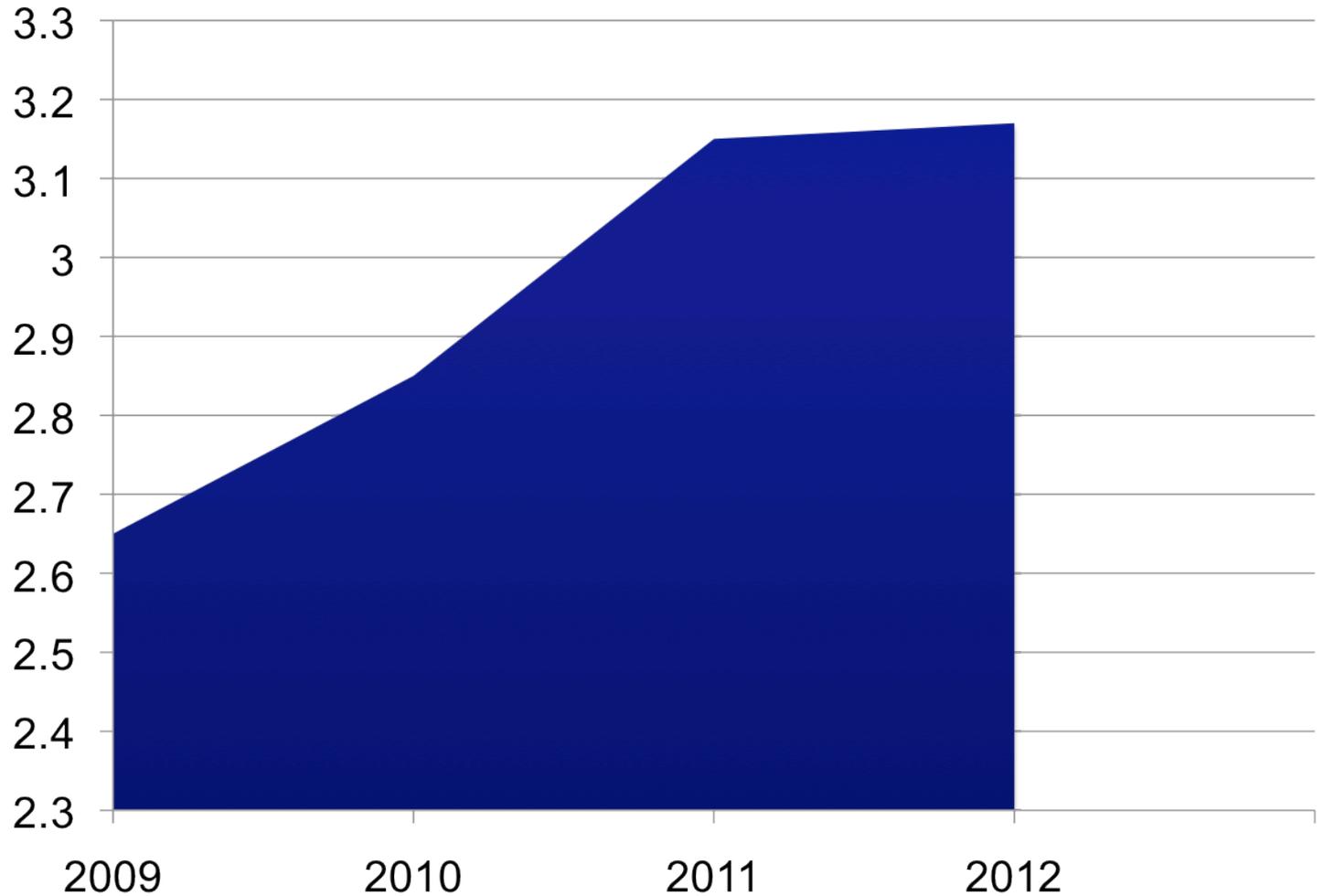


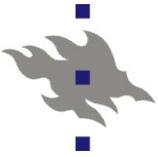
Student feedback

- **General mean score (1–5) for the course (student feedback collected)**
 - 2009: 2,65 (35.3%)
 - 2010: 2.85 (34.6%)
 - 2011: 3.15 (49.3%)
 - 2012: 3.17 (87.8%)
- **Feedback from modules 2 and 3 has been substantially better than from module 1**
 - 2012
 - Module 1: 3.06
 - Module 2: 3.77
 - Module 3: 3.45

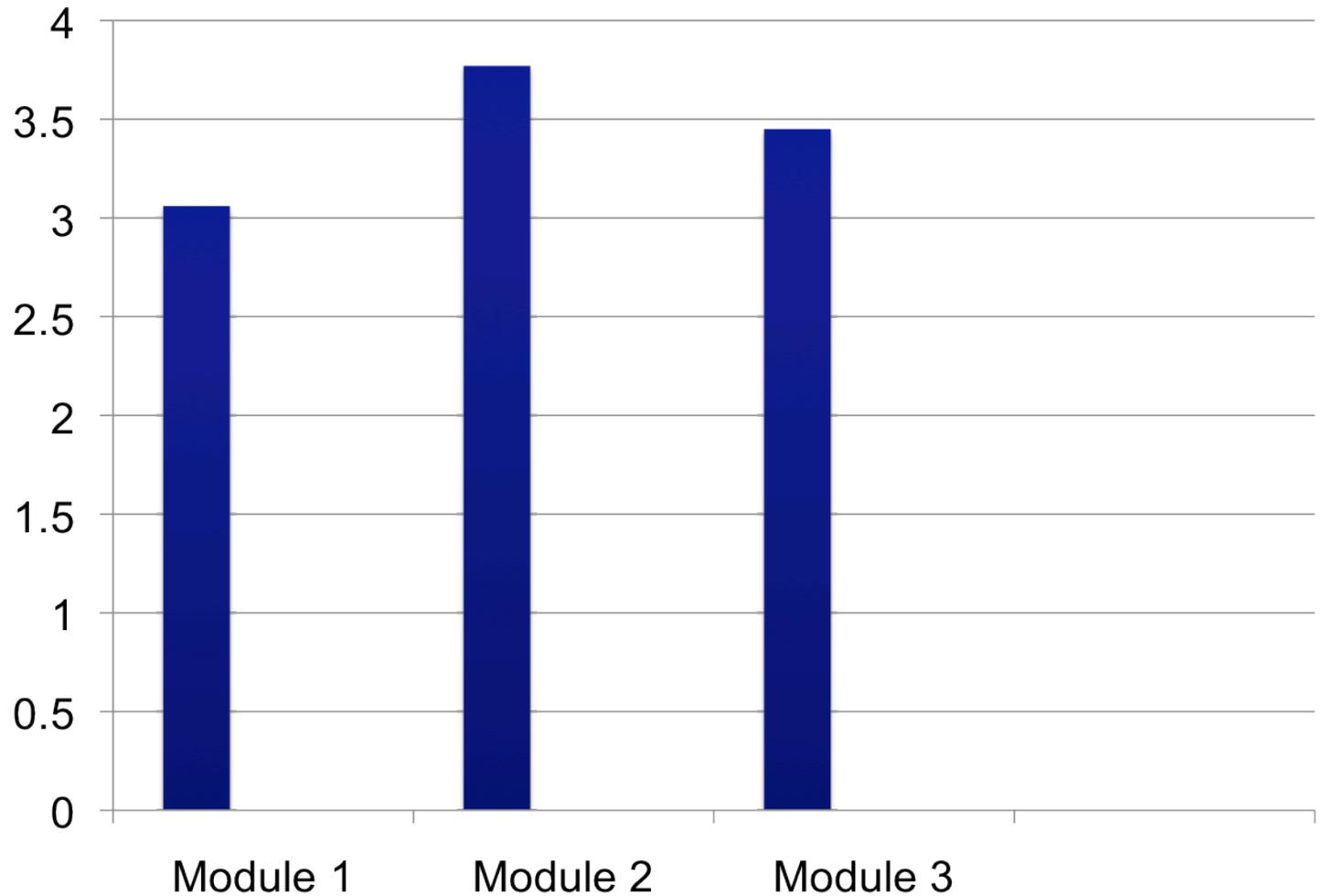


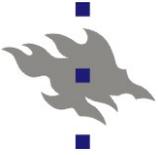
Mean Score (for the whole course) Given by the Students (scale from 1 to 5)





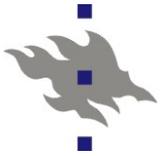
Mean Score for Different Modules (scale from 1 to 5) in 2012





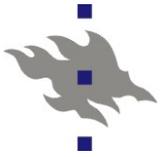
Preliminary remarks on interviews

- Working in small groups was experienced positively
- Interaction between students was appreciated
- Experience on teacher mentoring was positive
- Low interaction between teachers and students, but the need for interaction was also on a low level

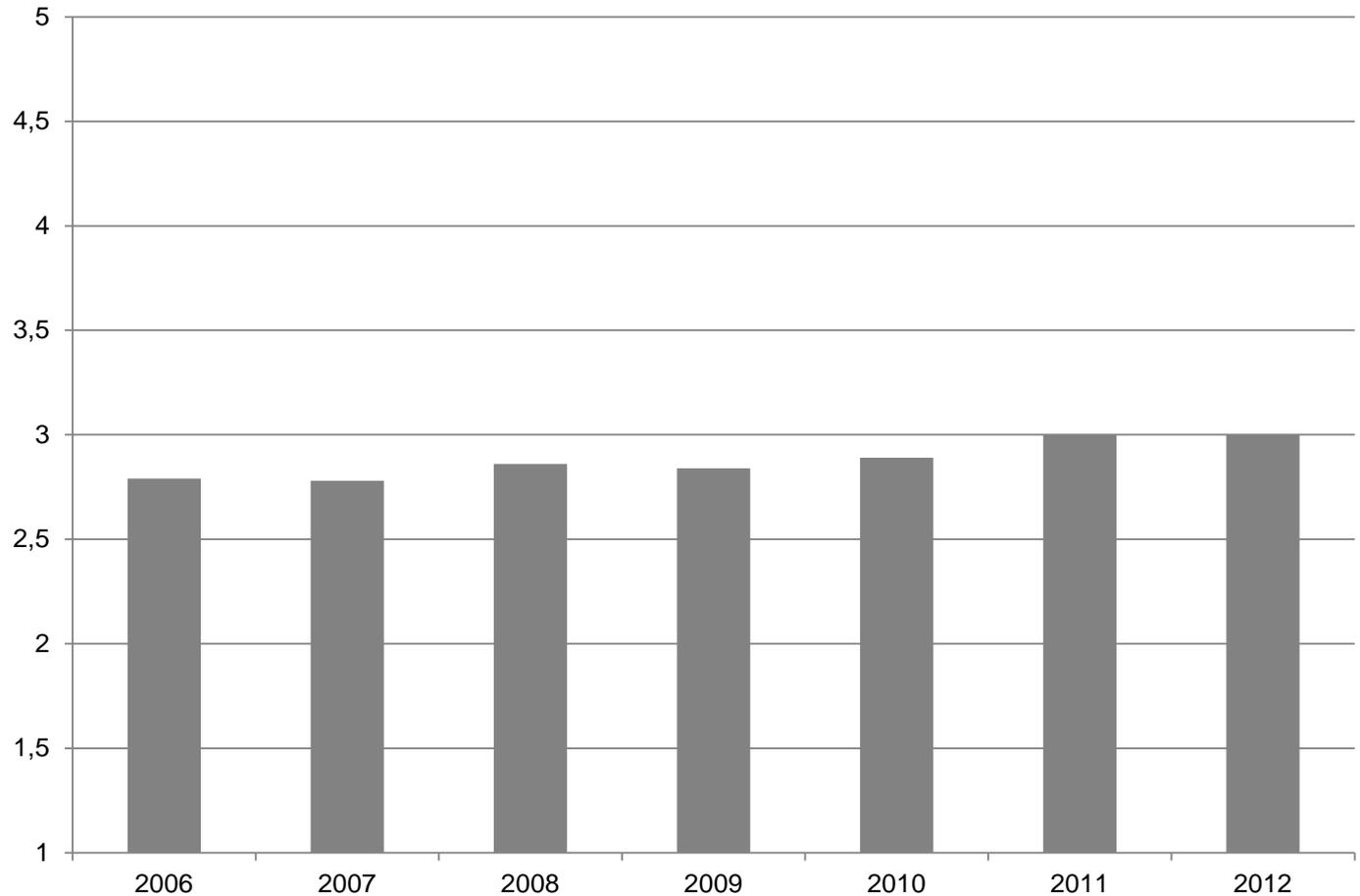


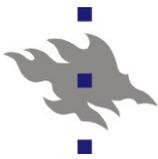
Preliminary remarks on interviews

- Lawyers in future will need more than knowledge on substantive law
- The role of (written and oral) legal argumentation will increase significantly
- The need for expertise in communication and interaction skills will also increase
- Traditional teaching methods in legal education (mass lectures, exams etc.) no longer correspond the reality



Students' perception about Staff enthusiasm and support in first year





Conclusions

- The curriculum of the Law Faculty needs to broaden its objectives to encompass also the development of the “legal mindset” (containing legal, ethical, practical and methodological aspects)
 - Faculty needs to pay more attention to interaction between teachers and students
- **PBL**
- **Organise events where students, teachers and alumni gather together such as seminars, panel discussions**