

# Handout for guest lecturers at the Department for Political Science

## 1. Explanatory notes on the Political Science curriculum at the University of Lucerne

### *Certification of ECTS credits for each part of the curriculum*

As is now common in most European higher education institutions, each part of the curriculum amounts to a certain number of ECTS credits and in order to acquire these credits, the student needs to prove the completion of the respective part of the curriculum in some way. At the Department for Political Science, this proof can take several forms, e.g. a written or an oral exam, an oral class presentation and/or a written essay and/or group work, etc. The way in which the student proves completion of a certain course should fit the learning outcomes of this course. That is, each lecturer should think of an adequate way in which his/her students prove to have acquired the learning outcomes foreseen; whilst for lectures this is usually done via an exam, for seminars it usually makes more sense to employ a less standardized and more creative form of proof, for example having students present in class, write an essay, draft a research design, etc.

### *Writing intensity*

At our university, both the BA and MA Political Science programs are focused on acquiring research and writing skills. Lectures (such as introductions to international relations, global governance and regional integration, political theory, comparative politics and Swiss politics) make up the learning basis, especially in the BA degree. The main part of the curriculum however consists of the participation in seminars and the writing of seminar papers, preparing the students to create their individual BA-/MA-thesis. A student's writing, i.e. her/his grade in the BA-/MA-thesis and the marks of her/his seminar papers, make up the largest amount of the student's final BA-/MA-grade. Behind this curriculum structure lays the conviction that research and writing skills are essential competences to be acquired by every social scientist.

### *Freedom of choice*

Whereas the courses focusing exclusively on methodology are predefined and mandatory, students have a rather large freedom of choice amongst several seminars according to their individual interests, with the goal that they can build a coherent and individualized curriculum and thereby learn how to organize themselves.

### *Separation of proof of seminar course completion and written paper*

In order for students to gain a broad knowledge basis next to their methodological writing skills, they are expected to participate in a range of seminars according to their interests. Students thus both chose the seminars they want to participate in as well as decide in which of these seminars they want to write a seminar paper; thus, writing a seminar paper is not a mandatory part of seminar participation, but an additional item of the BA or MA curriculum. For the seminar participation, students get 4 ECTS credits and for a written seminar paper they get 4 or 6 ECTS credits in addition. (Clarification: Master students get 6 ECTS credits for a master seminar paper; bachelor students get 4 or 6 credits for a main seminar paper, depending on when they started their studies.) Congruently, in a seminar paper a student must not only show to have acquired the learning outcomes of the corresponding seminar, but rather be able to inde-

pendently write a small research paper (approximately 15 pages for pro seminar papers, 20-25 pages for main and master seminar papers) under the supervision of the respective lecturer.

*Compulsory attendance and registration period*

Especially within seminars, students are required to attend 80% of the course sessions in order to attain ECTS credits for the respective course. This means you are expected to control students' attendance on a participants list in each session.

The first two calendar weeks of each semester are the period in which students can register for the courses they want to participate in the course of this term. Thus, it is possible that students visit more courses in these two weeks than they will attend during the entire term. After these two weeks, they have to register for courses definitively.

*Quality Assurance*

We highly value the assurance and continuous enhancement of teaching quality at our department. Each lecturer is therefore expected to engage with his or her students to get feedback on their perception of the quality of the course and to draw a conclusion as to how to improve the course on the basis of this feedback. Such feedback can be obtained in various forms. It is advisable to check mid-term how the meeting of the learning outcomes described in the syllabus are underway. To do so, one can ask students to reflect upon positive and negative aspects of the course so far and either ask them for an oral feedback or ask them to write both positive and negative aspects on a sheet of paper and hand it in anonymously. Furthermore, all courses of our department undergo an online evaluation through students at the end of the term. Each lecturer is expected to communicate to and remind students that they should fill out the questionnaire (which they get via email) in order to get their feedback and use it to enhance the quality of teaching.

## 2. Expectations towards guest lecturers

*Common standards of good teaching at the University*

There are common standards of good teaching applying to all teaching within the University of Lucerne. They are available in German [here](#).

*Accompanying electronic learning resources for each course on OLAT*

Each course is accompanied with an electronic learning resource folder on the OLAT (Online Learning And Training) platform (<https://lms.uzh.ch/dmz/>). Within two weeks before the start of the semester, lecturers should provide (at least) the electronic syllabus of their course and ideally the entire course literature, organized in folders for each session of the course. For our students to be able to make their choice of courses it is most important that they can access the detailed course syllabus within two weeks before the start of the semester. Ideally also the course literature should be provided by then, but if not all readings are available by then this can also be filled up later. Please get in contact with our secretariat ([polsem@unilu.ch](mailto:polsem@unilu.ch)) for further questions regarding OLAT.

*Methodological component in each seminar*

At the Political Science Department, each main seminar (Haupt-Seminar: HS) or Master seminar (Master-Seminar: MAS) should contain a methodological component in order to assure a high and comparable standard of teaching quality throughout our course offer, out of which students can choose freely. This does not mean that you need to include a specific lesson on methodology, but rather that students should be encouraged to apply their methodological skills to the topics they learn about in your course. With the term 'methodological skills' we here do not only refer to the ability to apply specific empirical research methods, but also more broadly the capacity to develop a research design with all its elements. There is a

variety of options this can be achieved; the department only prescribes *that* there should be a methodological component, not *how* to effectuate this. We hereunder list a number of options, providing some ideas and good practices, which can be implemented individually or be combined. The list is inconclusive; you are invited to develop other ideas and share them with us.

- Reflect the literature read within the seminar with an explicit focus on the methodological quality of the articles or book chapters, and encourage students to integrate such a methodological perspective into their active course participation.
- Discuss potential research designs in the research field treated in the seminar and have students draft their own research design which is then given feedback by the lecturer and potentially by other students within a peer review process.
- Include into the syllabus an explicit part on methods common to the research field treated in the seminar, with both taught and active learning elements.

### *Student presentations within seminars*

Often, seminars are structured around an input by each student or by teams of students and these inputs usually take the form of a presentation. This is not, however, necessary – whilst students need to participate actively within a seminar course, the form of this participation is not prescribed or standardized, that is, it can take the form of student presentations but it doesn't have to. *If you however use students' presentations as a main element of the students' participation to the course*, it is essential that you demand these presentations to fulfil certain standards. That is, a student presentation must go beyond simply summarizing the (mandatory) readings and it should have a "golden thread": It should be structured around (a) clear research question(s) or/and a (working) hypothesis which the student(s) has/have developed themselves: the student(s) present(s) along the line of his/her/their question(s) and hypothesis. Please see our respective guideline on the presentation within the booklet of all guidelines on academic writing and research available (in English) [here](#). The grade for the class participation will have to reflect the quality of the presentation. On the grading of the class participation in general, see below.

### *Grading of class participation*

At our department, students are graded in each seminar for their class participation. These grades do however not count for their final degree mark but they are shown within the transcript of records accompanying the diploma. Possible grades are as follows:

6	excellent	3	insufficient
5.5	very good	2	weak
5	good	1	unusable or unfair conduct
4.5	satisfying		
4	sufficient		

As long as a student's participation is sufficient or better than that, the mark you give is mainly qualitative information accompanying the ECTS credits necessary for curriculum completion. If however a student's participation in a seminar class is below sufficient, the student will not fail the seminar formally, but must

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<sup>1</sup> You may find the German version of these guidelines [here](#).

not get any ECTS credits for this class, that is, you should indicate this in your list at the end of the semester.

For lectures, grading follows the same logic as above, but if a student's exam is insufficient, he or she fails the lecture and can repeat the exam once. Failing a certain amount of ECTS credits definitively will lead to the student's exmatriculation.

Whilst the criteria for grading must be made as transparent as possible, it is up to each lecturer how to justify the grade, and this obviously depends upon how the course is designed. We hereunder list a number of options, providing some ideas and good practices which can be implemented individually or combined. The list is inconclusive; you are invited to develop other ideas and share them with us.

- Student presentation (see the note on such presentations above);
- Oral contributions in class;
- Completion of tasks regarding the literature read for class sessions: short summary, answering questions asked by the lecturer, short review essay;
- Essay (see our respective guideline on the essay within the booklet of all guidelines on academic writing and research available (in English) [here](#));
- Research design (see our respective guideline on the research design within the booklet of all guidelines on academic writing and research available (in English) [here](#));

The grades should be communicated to the secretariat of the Department upon the end of the semester (ca. two weeks after the end of the semester).

#### *Written, graded seminar paper (optional)*

As explained above, students can either only participate in a seminar or write an additional seminar paper on a topic relating to the seminar content which is credited with additional ECTS credits. That is, each lecturer has to foresee the option for student participants to write a seminar paper within her or his seminar. The content and structure of such a paper should be agreed between the respective student and you. If you are approached by students who do/did not participate in your seminar but want to write a seminar paper with you, please contact a member of the department team.

Timing: Usually, students write those papers in the time between the regular semesters and can hand them in until a certain deadline communicated by the lecturer, usually some weeks after the end of the seminar.

Grading: An optional written seminar paper must be graded (grading table is identical to the one for class participation above) by the lecturer. This grade counts as a part of the students' final BA- or MA-grades (students need to write a certain amount of seminar papers until they can register for their BA or MA thesis and exams). It is thus important that seminar papers are measured against relatively comparable standards by all lecturers. For this purpose, we developed a guideline for students on how to write such a paper, clarifying both formal issues as well as issues relating to the content. You may find it within the booklet of all guidelines on academic writing and research available (in English) [here](#).

Insufficient deliverables: If a student hands in an insufficient written paper, you are allowed to offer her/him the possibility to revise and improve her/his paper up to a sufficient level once and within six months. If the student does not make use of this option, the paper should be graded as insufficient (according to the respective grade levels under 4 as above). The consequence for the student is that she/he does not get the 4 or 6 ECTS credits for the paper in addition to the credits for class participation. The

mark you will give such a student does not negatively influence her or his final BA or MA grade but is mainly expressing of the student failing to write a sufficient seminar paper in your seminar, she/he then needs to write another paper in another seminar. If you have further questions pertaining to standards to be used for grading papers, please contact a member of the team at our department.

Prohibiting Academic Malpractice: Plagiarism is treated very seriously. Upon submission of their seminar paper, students need to hand in a declaration about having written this paper without any other sources or help than as they indicated within the paper. The template for this can be found [here](#). Please be aware, however, that if students write seminar papers in your class it is you who is responsible to check for academic malpractice. Therefore, please insist that seminar papers are handed in electronically. If you have doubts about plagiarism, please check the paper through with a respective software program (our Dean's office offers such software access if you do not already dispose of it) and contact a member of the Department team.

### *Supervision of bachelor and master theses*

Every lecturer at our department with a doctoral degree can (co-)supervise the final theses of students. Normally, this is done by the members of the department team. But there can be cases where it makes sense if guest lecturers supervise bachelor or master theses, and in such cases you are expected to be available for such supervision. In case you will take over the (co-)supervision of a thesis you should get in touch with a member of the department team for further information on this.