

QUALITY ASSESSMENT BY EU PARTNERS (PARTNER P2: UNIVERSITY OF SALZBURG)

Course revised 1: “Integrated Watershed Management”

QUALITY ASSESSMENT
<p>Quality criteria 1: Number of credit units for lectures, practical sessions and self-learning are appropriate to the contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p><i>Evaluation</i></p> <p>The distribution of credits among lectures, practical sessions and self-learning is not appropriate. Most part of the credits correspond to theoretical in-class sessions, whereas only a very limited number of credits is assigned to practical sessions and self-learning. Due to the high importance to acquire practical knowledge complementing the theoretical knowledge gained in-class in the watershed management field, in order to create professionals able to deal with this important topic in practice, the distribution of credits proposed should be rethought. A higher number of credits for practical sessions and self-learning is required.</p> <p><i>Strategies for improvement</i></p> <p>Practical assignments should be added to the course. This does not necessarily mean that the number of theoretical sessions should be reduced, but it would be interesting if every theoretical session was accompanied by a practical assignment. It should not be in the form of a simple theoretical question, but should enable the application in a practical case of the concepts taught. Additionally, some theoretical sessions or at least a part of them might be changed to in-class discussions. Students can prepare the contents at home and the session should be devoted to the discussion of the concepts by means of a kind of a game. It is argued that this will enable the formation of better skilled professionals and a more smoothly integration of the theoretical frameworks, as well as make the course more attractive for students. The additional practical assignments might be interrelated and of help for the writing of the short interdisciplinary dissertation foreseen in the course. However, as no descriptions in the syllabus are offered on the topics, methods, etc. that are embraced in the assignments that you suggest (questions and short interdisciplinary dissertation), no further strategies for improvement can be provided. We would like to additionally ask thus for a better description in the syllabus of the assignments different than the final exam, including the evaluation questions, so that a more accurate assessment of the quality of the course can be carried out.</p>
<p>Quality criteria 2: Total number of credit units in the course is correct and appropriate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p><i>Evaluation</i></p> <p>The total number of credits awarded is too high if a workload of approximately 60 hours is estimated.</p> <p><i>Strategies for improvement</i></p> <p>As 1 ECTS is equal to circa 28 hours, the course should either be awarded with 2 ECTS or the workload increased to approximately 120 hours. We would especially recommend to increase the workload for students, if possible. As the ratio of hours devoted to lectures is too high, increases in the workload in the form of practice-oriented activities are actually really desirable. This will for sure also imply an increase in the number of marks awarded.</p>
<p>Quality criteria 3: Positioning of the courses in Curricula is appropriate based on the progressive level of difficulty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p><i>Evaluation</i></p> <p>The course is appropriately positioned in the curricula. Its positioning in the fourth semester of MSc and MA studies is deemed as appropriate, as this theme constitutes a specialised area that requires the previous provision of basic knowledge in environmental management, so that all concepts and practices can be more accurately integrated and put into practice. The specific focus on mountainous regions is justified by the location of Kumaun University in a mountain area and thus the need to train future professionals with knowledge and skills on the management of mountain environments in a wide range of topics, including the integrated management of watersheds. The degree/major of the MSc and MA students targeted should be, however, mentioned in the syllabus, in order to better be able to determine the appropriateness of the course developed.</p> <p><i>Strategies for improvement</i></p> <p>None. Everything is deemed correct.</p>

Quality criteria 4: Tests are suitable and appropriate to support transferable skills

- *Evaluation*

The designed tests and grading system is not appropriate to support transferable skills in practice. This is clearly shown by the fact that the grade that students get is almost entirely derived from the quality of the written final examination. The high relevance given to theoretical knowledge and poor evaluation made on the practical skills obtained, along with the very limited number of practice-oriented activities, makes it hard to support and evaluate the transferability of skills in practice.

- *Strategies for improvement*

Strategies for improvement are pointed out under “quality criteria 1”: they concern the provision of more practical sessions, which remain very limited in the course, and, thus, a more purposeful evaluation of the practical knowledge acquired by the students. Most part of the grade should be obtained through the evaluation of the quality of practical assignments.

Further, we would strongly recommend to mix lectures, seminars and practical sessions in the timeline. The development of seminars and practical sessions right after the lecture where theoretical knowledge on the concepts worked is provided will help students to better integrate this knowledge and clearly relate the theoretical concepts/ vision and its practical implementation. Students memory is limited and many concepts would be lost in the way before practical sessions take place, which would impact on the skills transferability. The provided structure of the course suggests that first theoretical lectures take place and afterwards the short interdisciplinary dissertation is written, whereas the questions posed on each of the units during the course seem to be theoretical. This should, however, be further clarified in the syllabus, so that strategies for improvements can be more objectively made.

The involvement of local stakeholders during the practical sessions would also be very valuable, as they have knowledge on the practicability of the theoretical concepts offered, and on the opportunities and challenges that appear in practice. The practical perspective of students might thus be widened.

Quality criteria 5: TLM and assessment strategy support students in undertaking the course i.e. prerequisites are helpful and relevant, assessments helps gauge students understanding etc.

- *Evaluation*

The prerequisites set up are relevant: the knowledge obtained during all the courses established as a prerequisite will substantially help students to better follow and easily understand the contents provided. Improvements are needed in the learning materials used, as they seem to be limited to Power Point slides and recommended literature, as well as in the assessment methods, for the reasons stressed under “quality criteria 4”.

- *Strategies for improvement*

As we don't have access to the e-learning materials, we don't know whether the suggestions that we will mention here can be useful or not, as this all might have already been carried out. We would suggest adding videos and interactive online practical exercises in the e-learning platform, in order to make the learning experience more attractive and allow all those students that are really interested on the topic to learn more on it. An online chat might be also developed. It is also relevant that all courses established as a prerequisites should have taken place during a semester preceding the semester when the course is held, but we assume that this is already the case.

Quality criteria 6: Theory/Practice-oriented components are sufficient to cater the learning outcomes and skills development

- *Evaluation*

Theory-oriented components are sufficient to cater the learning outcomes and skills development, but this is not the case with practice-oriented components. Practical sessions are missing in order to cover all relevant themes needed for the acquisition of the promised learning outcomes and skills. A more active interaction among teacher and students during the sessions should be fostered and standing lectures and presentations limited to a minimum.

- *Strategies for improvement*

The strategies suggested are pointed out under “quality criteria 4”.