



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

New course 4: “Himalayan Ecology”

QUALITY ASSESSMENT
Quality criteria 1: Number of credit units for lectures, practical sessions and self-learning are appropriate to the contents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <p><i>Evaluation</i></p> <p>Credit units are mostly allocated to lectures, while units for practical sessions and self-learning remain residual. Although this might be indicative of an inappropriate assignment of credit units to practical sessions and self-learning, it might be justified by the introductory character of the course to the Himalayan environment and ecology. We assume that the contents of the course are further addressed in other more practice-oriented courses during the remaining semesters of the master’s programme. This should, however, be indicated in the syllabus. If this was not the case (i.e. if the topic was not addressed from a practical perspective in other courses), further endeavour would be needed for the provision of practical skills during the course (see the suggestions below). This is of high relevance in order to train students not only knowledgeable of the concepts and approaches available, but, most importantly, able to deal with real situations in practice and adopt the concepts/approaches learned. The focus of the course on the Himalayas (close to the place of instruction) further supports the need for the provision of practice-oriented sessions. Regardless of whether practical courses on the topic exist or not, theory and practice should, however, be further integrated and interrelated in the course process. This also encompasses the integration of self-learning activities, which mostly remain absent (see suggestions below).</p> </li> <li> <p><i>Strategies for improvement</i></p> <p>The suggested strategies for improvement are twofold. They involve increases in: 1) on the one side, practice-oriented elements; and 2) on the other side, the dynamism and self-learning components of the course. First of all, it would be desirable to convert at least some parts of some lectures into practical sessions. Through practical sessions, students might need to deal with the socio-ecological reality, issues, etc. occurring in the Himalayas while working on small case studies. This might be the case of e.g. conservation and development issues arising around the topic of tourism in a certain locality. Rather than receiving this information straight from the professor, giving the students the chance to explore and work each of the subjects from a practical perspective, after a short theoretical introduction of each of them, would make the course a much more enriching experience and ensure the training of professionals better prepared for addressing this very relevant subject during their professional life. Especially enriching would be the engagement of local stakeholders (professionals, residents, etc.) in some of the practical sessions. The sound knowledge of these stakeholders about the characteristics of the Himalayas and the issues that the area faces, can give rise to very enriching discussions and increase the practical experience of students, especially if stakeholders are involved in some of the practical tasks.</p> <p>Second, the usage of in-class discussions, games, quizzes, etc. during the theoretical sessions should be considered. They would bring dynamism and make the contents more attractive to students. Additionally, in-class discussions would give students a chance to express themselves and better integrate their already existent knowledge on the topic with the new contents taught. Some short readings and quizzes might also be provided so that students can continuously self-evaluate their level of understanding of the contents worked. Although the syllabus appears to indicate that some of these methods are already used (e.g. “the course will make most of interactive and self-reflective methods of teaching and learning”), it becomes unclear the extent to which they are employed, as well as the purpose for which and the way they are utilised. Further clarifications should be rendered in the syllabus in this regard, so as to being able to offer more precise suggestions for improvement.</p> <p>All these amendments should involve the formulation of practical assignments. According to the syllabus, almost no assignment is planned for this course (or at least is not used for evaluation). We propose the creation of small practical assignments (one for each of the subject areas covered in the course) and a “final practical project” that builds on all previous practical assignments. Individual and group assignments should be offered to the students.</p> </li> </ul>

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<p><b>Quality criteria 2: Total number of credit units in the course is correct and appropriate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Evaluation</i> The total number of credits awarded is too high if a workload of 30 hours is estimated.</li> <li><i>Strategies for improvement</i> Given the fact that 1 ECTS is equal to circa 28 hours, it becomes paramount to either reduce the number of ECTS awarded to 1 or increase the workload for students to approximately 60 hours. Especially advisable is to increase the workload for students, if possible. This is due to the need for workload increases in the form of practice-oriented activities that complement and enable to reduce the excessively high ratio of hours devoted to lectures.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality criteria 3: Positioning of the courses in Curricula is appropriate based on the progressive level of difficulty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Evaluation</i> The positioning of the course in the second semester of M.Phil. studies in Environmental Sciences is deemed appropriate. The course is thought as an introduction to the Himalayan environment and ecology. It is assumed that it builds on courses delivering basic knowledge about ecology in the first semester of the master's degree (e.g. course "Ecosystem Processes" revised under the frame of the project SUNRAISE). Its positioning in the second semester makes it possible that it constitutes the basis for more specialised courses on the topic during the third and fourth semesters.</li> <li><i>Strategies for improvement</i> None. Everything is deemed correct.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quality criteria 4: Tests are suitable and appropriate to support transferable skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Evaluation</i> Only or mostly only exams are used to obtain the grade of students. Eighty percent of the grade is derived through the successful completion of a mid-term and a final written examination. This is a reasonable way to proceed when it comes to the evaluation of the understanding of theoretical concepts and approaches gained by students when attending an introductory theoretical course. However, it becomes inappropriate to support transferable skills. The capability of students of putting the concepts they have learned into practice can be hardly evaluated through the mostly exclusive usage of exams. This becomes especially critical if the course is not complemented by other practice-oriented courses during the master's programme (see suggestions below).</li> <li><i>Strategies for improvement</i> Strategies for improvement are pointed out under "quality criteria 1". They basically concern the definition of practical assignments, which remain almost absent in the course programme and are not used for evaluation purposes. Practical assignments should be in the form of group work and individuals work, and involve short written assignments, oral presentations, interviews, etc. They might include the assignments listed in the syllabus, whose objectives, positioning, etc. remain unclear through the provided descriptions and, thus, should be further cleared up. Most part of the grade should be derived through the assessment of the quality of practical assignments. A part of the grade should also come from the degree of participation in in-class discussions, quizzes, etc. The successful completion of a final written examination might also be taken into account. The latter (successful completion of a final written examination) should, however, not represent a very significant part of the grade. Of high relevance is also the location of practical assignments in the timeline. Theoretical sessions and practical assignments should be mixed in the timeline. In no case should all practical assignments be located at the end of the course. Rather, each practical assignment should be positioned right after the theoretical session that is relevant to it. Some of the reasons for that are the limited students' memory and the possibility that this approach opens to students to better interrelate the theoretical knowledge gained with its practical implementation. This might potentially improve the skills transferability.</li> </ul>
<p><b>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.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Evaluation</i> On the one hand, prerequisites should be defined for attending this course, which has not been done. Basic knowledge in the field of ecology (including the interaction of humans with the remaining nature) appears to be needed so as to following the contents of the course smoothly. This should be reflected in the list of prerequisite</li> </ul>



**COURSES REVISED AND NEWLY CREATED BY  
PARTNER P12 (JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY)**

**Work Package 2**



courses for attendance. On the other hand, since we do not have access to the lecture materials, it is not possible for us to provide an accurate assessment on them.

- *Strategies for improvement*

Prerequisite courses should include any course held during the first semester of the M.Phil. studies in Environmental Sciences furnishing basic knowledge in the field of ecology. This might encompass the two courses revised under the frame of the project SUNRAISE, i.e. the course “Ecosystem Processes” and the course “Man & Tropical Forest Ecosystem Function”.

Regarding the learning materials, our suggestions are similar to those made while evaluating the other courses produced by partner P12 (Jawaharlal Nehru University). Although we do not have access to the e-learning materials, we hope that these comments can be useful in order to further improve the materials created. First of all, we would strongly recommend uploading the slides and videos of the theoretical sessions on the e-learning platform. This way, students would be able to access these materials anytime and revise any concepts and/or parts of the sessions that might not have been clearly understood. Additionally, self-working at home would be fostered. Second, the creation of an online chat would be advisable, in order to promote the discussion among students and between the students and the professor. Students with high interest on the topic might also be willing to interactively learn more on it, the reason why the provision of additional interactive exercises on the online platform might be an attractive idea. A list of literature for further reading should also be offered.

**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 knowledge development, but this is not the case with practice-oriented components. The practice-oriented components should be further developed in the course planning and evaluation process to value the student work. This is especially required if the course contents are not further worked in other more practice-oriented courses during the master’s programme.

- *Strategies for improvement*

The strategies suggested are pointed out under “quality criteria 1 and 4”.