

Examinations within ELLS institutions

Introduction

In light of the Bologna Process and the aims that ELLS set itself, it is important to consider all the remaining steps our home institutions still have to take and the steps ELLS can already take within their joint activities. After the input for the quality assurance group on the evaluation of courses and its follow-up procedure, ELSA decided to evaluate the system of examination at all ELLS universities. During the discussions it became clear that there are quite some differences between the ELLS universities.

The analysis lead us towards the following recommendations. Firstly, the main differences are signalled and secondly, possible solutions are formulated. ELSA would like to put the results forth as input for the Quality Assurance group as well as the IRO group. We look forward to your responses and are prepared to give more explanation and input if necessary.

The main differences

Study and exam periods: semesters versus 3,5 or 8 week periods

Grading system

(Un)limited exam re-sits

Exam evaluation: one or more examiners

Anonymous examination

Regulations and student rights: strict national laws and clear regulations and rights versus broad frameworks to be filled in by universities or professors

How to deal with the differences

1) To improve and enlarge our co-operation it is essential to make our period systems as similar as possible. It should at least be possible for students to do an exchange programme or summer course without delaying. We recognise that this is already in progress, but do urge the proceedings.

2) Each university must have a list on how to translate the other institutions' grading systems into their own system. To keep the Bologna process in mind, it is essential to also start considering similar grading systems such as the Bologna-proposed ECTS grading system.

3) The analysis demonstrates a great deal of variation on regulations for exam re-sitting between the ELLS institutions. In ELSA's opinion this is an important topic to consider, both for the home institution as well as for ELLS activities. As it is a complicated topic with many different student opinions, ELSA cannot give a binding recommendation. It should, however, be discussed within ELLS in light of joint activities and home institutions' practices.

4) We think that it is very important to have a second opinion on exam evaluations. At least for the joint activities a second internal or external examiner should be appointed. Yet also for the home institutions we want to strongly recommend considering the appointment of a second examiner. For institutions currently not using such a system, thesis evaluation can be a start-off. Teachers can make use of the ELLS network for this purpose.

5) The regulations on anonymity are different at the ELLS universities. However, at least within the ELLS universities that assure students' anonymity, it is considered very important. For this reason, and in light of student rights, it is important to assure anonymity in written examinations at least in ELLS joint activities.

6) Student rights are very important. Currently, these rights are very dissimilar at the different ELLS institutions. In case of summer schools, semester packages and especially joint MSc programmes, we need clear and strict regulations on student rights. Special attention should be paid to the power of professors in the teaching and marking process and the establishment of a safety net in case of violation of student rights. This recommendation is connected to the joint MSc framework the IRO's are working on. Owing to this, ELSA wants to invite the IRO's to start working on this issue. ELSA is willingly prepared to give more input if desired.

Analysis

1. Exam types

SLU:

At SLU written, oral and practical exams as well as combinations among those are held. The type of a written exam is variable: 2-6 hours written exams (with or without study materials), multiple-choice exams and take-home exams are used. Essay writing is also rather common, especially in case of a thesis. Oral exams can be held in groups of students or one by one and vary between a presentation and questions raised by the examiner. Duration of exams is decided upon by the course-responsible; the way of examination is written in the course-plan. At SLU there are no fixed exam periods. The examination language is in general Swedish; in case of an English course the exam will be in English. Students have the legal right to request an exam in Swedish.

WUR:

Three-hour written exams can consist of either multiple-choice or open questions. Projects/group-work is usually examined with an essay/report and a presentation. The teaching and examining structure consists of six weeks of lectures, one week for self-study and one week of exams. Bachelor exams are generally held in Dutch; Master exams are held in English, unless the student requests a Dutch examination.

BOKU:

At BOKU written exams, oral exams and a combination of the two are held. Oral exams start with a general question, which is followed by some more specific questions; duration is approximately 20-30 minutes. Duration of written exams is decided upon by the teacher, but in general 2-3 hours. Exams should at least be held 3 times a semester but the teacher decides upon the date. The exams are mainly in German.

KVL:

In case of KVL written, oral and practical exams are held as well as a combination of those. The written exams take usually four hours; oral exams take between 30-60 minutes. Project exams are commonly used as an evaluation of a group report. Courses taught in English are also examined in English; however, students have the legal right to answer in Danish. The exams for many courses will change at the 1st of September 2005 because of the new study structure that will be implemented.

UHOH:

At the University of Hohenheim mainly written and oral exams are held. Oral exams start with a general question followed by more specific questions. Duration is approximately 20-30 minutes. The teacher decides upon the duration of written exams; in general they take 2-3 hours. The courses that are taught in English are also examined in English; in case of a written exam the student has the right to answer in German. At BSc and MSc level, there are fixed exam periods.

SGGW:

At SGGW written, oral, practical exams and combinations of them are held. Written exams can consist of single or multiple choice questions, open questions, essay and combination of them. Time of exams depends on the examiner. They rarely exceed 90 minutes. Students pass oral

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exams as individuals. The presence of other students at the exam is depending on the examiner. Questions are raised by the examiner. Exam periods are fixed at the whole university at the same time – exams period is two weeks just after the end of each semesters. There is possible the pre-exam on the rights of normal exam, for good students (the only benefit is that when student failed it, he can take part in exam in exam period without any ballast of failed exam). Exams are held in Polish. Exams of courses in English are held in English and with student request also in Polish. There is limitation of 4 exams in one exam period at SGGW.

CUA:

At CUA written, oral exams and combination of them are held. Written exams can consist of single or multiple choice questions, open questions and combinations of them. The time of exams depends on the examiner. They rarely excess 60 minutes. Students pass oral exams as individuals. Questions are raised by the examiner. Exam periods are fixed at whole university at the same time – exams period is five weeks just before the end of each semester. Exams are held in Czech except for the English MSc courses. There are 3 trials for each student to pass one exam. So called seminars (practical part of most of the courses) are concluded by practical exam or test and make students possible to apply for the “final” exam. These practical exams and tests are not evaluated by marks.

2. Grading system

The way the students are credited within an exam situation differs from country to country and is in most cases regulated on national level. The Bologna declaration proposes the ECTS grading system as a possible way to standardise the different systems; this system is implemented at the Bachelor and Master level at UHOH and SGGW.

SLU:

At SLU the exams are passed with at least 60 % correct answers. The exams are marked failed or passed.

WUR:

The Netherlands has a national grading system each university has to use. It consists of marks from 1-10 of which ten is the best and to pass a six is needed. All decimals are possible, but the number will be rounded up or off. There is no strict line on the percentage of correct answers.

BOKU:

At BOKU the marks range from 1 to 5, where 1 is the best and 5 implies failure. The professor decides upon the percentage required to pass.

KVL:

At KVL the Danish national grading system is used, scaling from 00-13, where the exam is passed with the mark 6. Some exams are marked with passed or failed, but at least two thirds of exams should be evaluated with 00-13 grading.

UHOH:

The grading system consists of both letters and numbers:

A (= 4); A- (=3,7); B+ (=3,3); B (=3,0); B- (=2,7); C+ (=2,3); C (=2,0); C- (=1,7); D+ (=1,3); D (=1,0); F (=failure).

The 5 % best of students get an A, the marks the other students get are based on performance of these best 5 %.

SGGW:

Students have to have at least 50% of correct answers. Sometimes, person responsible for certain course can increase this level to 60% of correct answers. Grades are – 5,0 what accounts A in ECTS; 4,5 – B; 4,0 – C; 3,5 – D; 3,0 – E; and failed 2,0 – F.

CUA:

At CUA the marks range from 1 to 4, where 1 is the best and 4 implies failure. The professor decides upon the percentage required to pass. There are 3 trials for each student to pass one exam. Practical exams and tests concluding seminars are not evaluated by marks.

3. Re-examination**SLU:**

When the student answers 60% or more of the questions correctly, the exam is passed. Between 50-60% correct answers, the student can choose to re-sit only the failed part of the exam. Exam re-sitting is possible as many times as the student wants; however, after four years the course the exam is related to becomes invalid.

There is one exam and three re-sit possibilities per course per year. The dates for the re-sits are fixed, although students in the smaller programs can set a date with the teacher. Students attending a student representation body have the right to take an extra exam one week after the ordinary exam. After failing the same exam two times, a student can choose to have another teacher. According to the law, the exam questions have to be given to the student after the exam. The students' answers should even be given to whoever asks for it. The teachers have to review the exam with the students.

WUR:

At WUR it is possible to re-sit an exam as many times as the student wants to. Once the student has passed an exam, it is not possible to re-sit for a better mark. If a student doesn't show up at the exam, the teacher can ban the student from the next re-sit. A student can withdraw his/her exam application until 24 hours before the exam. Registration and withdrawal are done via Internet.

BOKU:

Students can re-sit a passed exam until six months after, to improve their mark. A student can re-sit three times; the third time must be in presence of a committee. On request of the student the second re-sit can also be done with a committee present. If the third re-sit is failed, the student has to quit the program at BOKU. Re-sits can be taken whenever the student wants. If the student registers for an exam and doesn't show up without a reason, the teacher is allowed to ban the student from the next re-sit. The student can withdraw his exam registration until one workday in advance. By law, students can review and copy their exams, in practice this doesn't always happen.

KVL:

Students at KVL have two re-sit possibilities, but can apply for a third or fourth. In that case the curriculum committee decides upon the permission. After passing an exam, the student cannot re-sit to improve the mark. Registering but not showing up counts as a trial. If the student wants to withdraw his/her exam registration, this must take place 1-2 months in advance. There is one fixed re-sit period in August. The student has the possibility to see and discuss his/her answers with the teacher after the exam and evaluation.

UHOH:

Registration for an exam takes place at least one month in advance. Not attending a exam that was registered for is considered as failed. The student has two re-sit possibilities; the date will be arranged in cooperation with the teacher. Once an exam is passed, re-sitting is impossible. Only if the professor agrees the student can see his/her exam documents. Students cannot re-sit exams for the purpose of improving their grades.

SGSW:

Students can re-sit each exam generally only once. Sometimes, exams can be re-sit more than once and also for better grade, but decision depends on teacher responsible for the course. Students can see the exams' documents. Time for re-sit is fixed: it is two weeks after exam

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period in the winter semester, and one or two weeks to the beginning of new semester at spring semester. When students failed re-sit, he can demand for exam with commission.

CUA:

There are 3 trials for each student to pass one exam. Time for re-sit is fixed: it is within the exam period (five weeks at the end of the semester). When students failed re-sit, they can demand for exam with commission.

4. Exam Evaluation**SLU:**

The responsible teacher and an examiner evaluate the exams; the latter one marks it. If there are more teachers involved, they can either co-operate or do their own specific part of the examination. For thesis work there is a supervisor and an examiner (can be the same person), where the latter decides upon the mark.

WUR:

In general the responsible teacher evaluates and marks the exams; theses are reviewed by the examiner and supervisor. If the student disagrees with the evaluation of the exam, s/he can make his/her complaints at the examination appeals board.

BOKU:

The responsible professor marks the exam, as well as thesis work. In case of a failed exam the student can complain, but only if s/he can prove something was terribly wrong with the evaluation.

KVL:

All exams are reviewed by a second examiner (censor), one third of the exams by external censoring, two thirds by internal censoring. The exam regulation allows only the examiner to evaluate the exam, but in general this does not happen.

Thesis work has to be examined by external examiners. The course plan explains the kind of censoring the exam of the course will have. If the student doesn't agree with the mark given, s/he can complain to the curriculum committee.

UHOH:

All marks are given by the professor. For thesis-work the student can choose the second examiner. Interesting fact: thesis failure hardly ever occurs.

SGGW:

The teacher who is responsible for the course also is responsible for the exam. He is preparing questions, evaluating and marking the exams. Teachers taking part in the course are taking part in the process of examination.

CUA:

The responsible teacher and an examiner are usually the same person and evaluate the exams. If there are more teachers involved, they can either co-operate or do their own specific part of the examination. For thesis work there is a supervisor and an opponent and the vindication of the thesis runs in face of the commission. The vindication of thesis is followed by the state examination (exam in five main subjects).

5. Anonymity

Only SLU and KVL have anonymous written exams. This is not the case at UHOH, BOKU, WUR, SGGW and CUA.