

## QUALITY ASSESSMENT BY EU PARTNERS (PARTNER P4 Martin-Luther University Halle)

### New course: “(ECOL-827) Urban Ecology”

### Khovd University, School of Natural Sciences and Technology

### MSc Course

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><i>Evaluation</i> The course is split into four main thematic units: Introducing basic concepts of urban ecology, discussing urban ecosystems, discussing urban ecosystem services and adaptation to issues related to urban ecology. The number of credit units for lectures and self-learning are sensible and well documented. Learning will take place through e-learning as well as individual assessments, and there is also the opportunity of a discussion form where students can receive clarification on open questions. All in all, the course is split into 32 classroom hours (lectures, exercises) and 60 independent study hours (quizzes, tutorial, e-content and preparation of a mini-project).</li> <li><i>Strategies for improvement</i> Considering the high level (MSc) course of the course and the intent on having students develop their own strategies related to dealing with urban ecology, allocating just 30 hours for their individual assessment report might be perhaps a bit short.</li> </ul>
Quality criteria 2: Total number of credit units in the course is correct and appropriate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Evaluation</i> According to the syllabi, the course consists of 32 hours of lectures and 60 hours of independent study time, hence a total workload of approximately 90 hours. Considering that one ECTS is valued at 25-30 hours of study, the proposed 3 ECTS are correct, perhaps even somewhat low.</li> <li><i>Strategies for improvement</i> It would be possible to increase the course to 4 ECTS if so desired. Total workload should then be around 100 hours at least, which could be achieved by designating more time to the individual assignment. This could be doubly worth considering that, at present, the time allocated to the individual assignment is relatively low for a MSc course with only 30 hours.</li> </ul>
Quality criteria 3: Positioning of the courses in Curricula is appropriate based on the progressive level of difficulty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Evaluation</i> Considering that the target audience of the course are master student’s of Ecology, Chemistry and Biology, the intended topics present an adequate challenge and level of difficulty for the students. Two required courses (Ecological Research Methodology and Modern Trends in Natural Science) help in providing the necessary thematic background for students to be able to follow the course.</li> <li><i>Strategies for improvement</i> Given that the course focused on urban ecology, the role of ecosystem services is of crucial importance. It is unclear if students participating in the course will have prior knowledge of ecosystem services or not. If students are unfamiliar with the topics, this could pose a challenge. It would perhaps be good to</li> </ul>

recommend a prior course on basics of ecosystem services to students, so that they will have the necessary background information.

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

• *Evaluation*

Students will be graded based on active participation during e-learning lectures and in discussions (20%), for their homework assignments in the form of quizzes (20%) and project proposals for independent reports (20%). The last 30% of the course grade are attributed to a final exam (30%). As such, there certainly is a suitable amount of tests that will absolutely allow the teachers to gauge the progress that students are making during the course period.

• *Strategies for improvement*

The final exam is described as a “test consisting of exercises and tasks”. It is unclear how this will differ from the other graded assignments (quizzes and homeworks). It would be good to elaborate here if the final exam is one traditional exam, or a different method.

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

• *Evaluation*

The course requires the use of three separate reading materials, all three of which seem highly important and relevant to the course’s topic. Likewise, the recommended and required courses work well as a general background to the topic of urban ecology. The suggested assessments are well designed and the syllabus properly documents when they are taking place and which topics they are related to.

• *Strategies for improvement*

Some interesting references that could perhaps help to deepen the theoretical knowledge are listed below. These articles could serve well as additional reading material and could be distributed prior to the coming lectures to help prepare students.

- Wu, J. (2014). **Urban Ecology and Sustainability: The state of the science and future directions.** *Landscape and Urban Planning 125: 209-221*
- Luederitz et al. (2015). **A review of urban ecosystem services: six key challenges for future research.** *Ecosystem Services 14: 98-112*
- Bolund, P. and Hunhammar, S. (1999). **Ecosystem services in urban areas.** *Ecological Economics 29: 293-301*
- Childers, D.L., Pickett, S.T.A., Grove, J.M., Ogden, L. and Whitmer, A. (2014). **Advancing urban sustainability theory and action: challenges and opportunities.** *Landscape and Urban Planning 125: 320-328*

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

• *Evaluation*

The practical aspect of the course is well structured and documented. Hence, it seems very suitable to achieving the intended learning outcomes. On the other hand, there are only limited means of exchange with instructors due to the course being primarily conducted with the help of online resources. While this proves unique opportunities, it can also be challenging for students to receive feedback and to ask questions.

• *Strategies for improvement*



Great care should be placed upon allowing ample time for students to ask questions during the intended discussion forums. As most of the provided theoretical input is delivered through independent reading material or e-tutorials (which is laudable in its own), it can create a challenge if the students have questions or fail to understand some of the concepts. The instructors should properly clarify when questions can be asked and in what form, to allow students to receive the necessary guidance that they might require.

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