



Notes

on the provisions of April 14, 2020 regarding different performance assessment methods in distance learning and replacement services

General information

The continuance of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates measures to minimize student inconvenience (notes on the COVID-19 University Act, BGBl I 23/2020). Responsible lecturers and committed students (BOKU Ethics Charter, March 2015) are helping to enable the completion of the semester and avoid delays in studying.

Even if the 2020 summer semester has been declared a “neutral” semester (e.g. by extending deadlines), it should not become a “lost” semester. Students whose graduation will be delayed may have to cancel further studies that have already been planned (especially at other institutions), and career opportunities that had already been accepted could also be impeded. Weighing up the outcomes of a “lost” semester with the outcomes of an extensive distance learning program suggests a profound change in teaching and examination operations.

There are no uniform examination regulations at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna. Regulations on performance assessment can be found in the statutes, in the curricula and in senate guidelines. In the current situation, uniform, sometimes different regulations are required in order to guarantee course completion and ensure a smooth-running examination period.

Within these regulations, the course directors are free to arrange exams in terms of content and didactics. Having as wide a variety of exam methods as possible also makes sense in distance learning.

BOKU Teaching Development, e-Learning and Didactics (didaktik@boku.ac.at) offers support in the technical-didactic implementation of electronic examination methods. The recommended options are coordinated with the Dean of Studies.

Ad 1. Non-continuous assessment courses

It is to be made clear that three examination dates are also to be scheduled in the 2020 summer semester.

The course directors should have a lot more leeway in designing exams using electronic communication methods. They can therefore determine whether courses that are not continuous assessment are evaluated on the basis of a single exam (written or oral “examination of the lectures”), on the basis of several partial performances or on the basis of a piece of written work.

As long as face-to-face teaching is suspended, all of these examination methods will be conducted electronically e.g. held via BOKU learn and / or in the form of video conferences.

If several partial performances or a written thesis is designated, at least one exam date must be entered on BOKUonline, through which all students wishing to take this exam method may register. The number of exam places should be based on the average number of exam places in previous semesters.

While no special registration is usually required for continuous assessment courses, special registration is intended to ensure that of those students who are registered for the non-continuous assessment course, only those register for the exam who intend to complete the partial or written work actually. Since the courses are not continuous assessment, students who have not registered for the course in the current semester should also be able to register (first come, first served).

As with continuous assessment courses, the course leader may allow the completion of a partial performance until February 15, 2021.

It is also permissible with non-continuous assessment courses to offer an examination date with partial performance or a written piece in addition to examination dates for single exams. The examination method must be specified in BOKUonline for each examination date. If course leaders offer two examination methods, students have the option of choosing one or the other examination method to pass the course.

Ad 2. Continuous assessment courses

The Vice Rector for Teaching and Continuing Education is responsible for the implementation of courses. She decides which continuous assessment courses cannot be completed without being physically present, in cases where students either have to practically learn how to deal with potential hazards or where learning practical skills is a prerequisite for acquiring competencies.

The Dean of Studies is responsible for implementing study regulations (especially exams). All continuous assessment courses for which the Vice-Rector for Teaching and Continuing Education does not mandate physical attendance must be assessed according to the provisions of this regulation without practical performance aspects. The type of performance assessment is thus derived from the previously stipulated implementation method, either with or without physical attendance.

If courses that cannot be completed without physical attendance have to be postponed, completion should be made possible in individual cases where postponement would delay graduation. There must be good reason given for the impending delay (e.g. presenting a transcript of records). It is a target provision, which especially depends on the available resources and options (e.g. practical activity with protective mask).

Ad 3. Field trips

It would not be practical to postpone all excursions in summer or fall of 2020 since it is not certain, for example, whether (longer) bus journeys will be feasible and which excursion destinations will be accessible by this time. Difficulties in semester scheduling due to postponed dates should also be avoided. Replacement services must therefore be provided in all cases.

Ad 4. Mandatory internships

In the case of mandatory internships, an alternative must be made possible if a student can demonstrate that postponement would delay graduation. Evidence can be provided by presenting a transcript of records. There is a particular risk of graduation being delayed if students are expected to complete their studies in the 2020/2021 academic year and therefore no longer have the option of using the summer of 2021 to do a mandatory internship.

Ad 5. Examination resits

Written examination resits should ideally be carried out in a seminar room with a glass wall, in order to enable examination supervision from the outside. An FFP2 / FFP3 protective mask will be made available to the candidate and the examiner present. It is important to make sure that the candidate can contact the supervising examiner if anything is unclear.

Oral resit examinations should take place outdoors if possible (e.g. in the BOKU garden or on the roof terrace in the Schwackhöfer house). Candidates and members of the examination board will also receive protective masks.

Ad 6. Introduction and orientation phase

Since examination dates have had to be temporarily canceled and postponed as a result of the cessation of on-site operations, students who were unable to complete STEOP as planned should benefit from an extended preponing provision. This regulation applies to all students; regardless of why STEOP has not yet been completed.

Ad 7. Submission of master's theses and dissertations

Please access the current information on the Study Services website.

Ad 8. Notification of changed examination methods

In the current situation, ongoing communication between teachers and students is especially important. Lecturers are advised to use the email function in BOKUonline to keep in contact with their students. Should contradicting information be unintentionally given, the latest information communicated applies in case of doubt.

Ad 9. International study program

Some international study programs do not allow completion of a course without a semester abroad because the BOKU courses provided in the curriculum are either of insufficient scope or would lead to an imbalance in course content. In these cases, students (similarly to individual studies) can apply with the Study Services that courses not specified in the curriculum can be taken instead. The Dean of Studies must obtain a statement from the course supervisor. The course content of the designated alternative courses is to be chosen in such a way that the qualification objective specified in the curriculum is achieved.

Ad 10. Keeping the changed examination methods

A change in examination method can be disadvantageous if students have already completed part of a course or if it is reasonable to suppose that students have already started preparing for an exam.

Ad 11. Coming into effect

The provisions are to be applied to all performance assessments that have not yet been completed when the provisions come into effect. These provisions do not apply to examinations or assessed courses that have already taken place.

Ad 12. Abrogation

As the provisions interfere with the curricula and guidelines of the senate, the period in which they remain in effect is limited to September 30, 2020 (sunset clause). Should a (partial) extension be necessary, this would only be possible by means of a new Senate resolution.