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▶ **Infopool better teaching**

Assessment in pi LVs (courses with continuous assessment) (1)

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Characteristics of courses with continuous assessment

Overview

1. Examination process
2. Attendance
3. Competence- and outcomes-oriented assessment

The **examination process** and rules for **attendance** differ in pi LVs and npi LVs (e.g. lecture courses, repetition courses, comprehensive examinations). In pi LVs, teachers have a choice to require attendance, whereas in **npi LVs** an attendance requirement **is not permitted**. The University of Vienna statutes stipulate the study law provisions for these two course formats in detail. See: https://satzung.univie.ac.at/en/ (https://satzung.univie.ac.at/en/) for current regulations. The relevant regulations, structured along the chronological sequence of a course, are also available in the following checklist (https://studienpraeses.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_studienpraeses/ Studienpraeses_Neu/Che LV_01.10.17.pdf) (in German).

1. Examination process

In contrast to npi LVs, assessment in pi LVs is not a singular event. First, the **assessment process extends over the entire duration of the course**. Second, it includes **at least two** written or oral **partial achievements**, which teachers take into account for the final assessment in an appropriate, fair and

comprehensible manner. From a pedagogical point of view, we also strongly recommend creating learning opportunities that are not assessed at all or carry only a low weight toward the final grade.[1] Such **assessment-free spaces** are the prerequisite for a teaching/learning culture that welcomes mistakes as **learning opportunities** (see also Teacher Feedback (https://infopool.univie.ac.at/en/start-page/teaching-advising/feedback/teacher-feedback/#c372926)). Find suggestions for designing partial achievements here (/en/start-page/assessment-grading/assessment-in-pi-lvs-courses-with-continuous-assessment/3-designing-partial-achievements/).

2. Attendance

Another distinct feature of pi LVs is the possibility for teachers to require student attendance. In general, **attendance is mandatory** in the **first course unit**. Teachers will deregister students who are absent during this first unit without stating important reasons and give the vacant spots to the students of top of the waiting list (see Teaching Manual, Registration and deregistration for/from courses (https://wiki.univie.ac.at/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=196231641)). Teachers may **define a scope of attendance as a minimum requirement for passing** a course. In principle, teachers are free to set attendance policies for their classes, but there may be curricular requirements or agreements at the faculty, institute or centre level. However, attendance **may never be graded** in assessing student performance.

(Mandatory) Attendance in university courses is a **controversial topic** in higher education generally. Discussions often revolve around **student accountability** and autonomy in contrast to the **pedagogical responsibility of teachers** and a certain desire for control from both teachers and institutions. A 2015 study examined student attendance as a contributing factor to their academic success. The study found that more **attendance leads to better student performance**, which benefits weaker students in particular. In addition, the study reported that **regular course attendance reduces failure and dropout rates**.[2]

Discussions about (mandatory) attendance and, connected to it, about autonomy and control addresses an **antinomy**, a common tension in pedagogical matters: Divergent goals or perspectives tend to be valued equally, yet cannot be realised simultaneously, or realised to the same extent.[3] Since such contradictions are inherent in the system and cannot be resolved, **professional conduct** entails the ability to **be aware** of the **antinomies** and to **reflect** on how to **handle** them.[4]

When you design a course, consider **how much attendance students need to succeed in the course**. Communicate your attendance rules in the course directory (u:find (https://ufind.univie.ac.at/en/index.html)) and also inform your students during the first session.

You may choose from various **strategies** how to handle student attendance. See examples of teacher attendance statements below. Feel free to adapt any of the templates to your own setting.

- **Addressing attendance at the beginning of the course and explaining its importance for the learning process.**
  Example: "In this course, I will not document whether you attend the individual units. I assume that you, as mature students, make responsible decisions on your course participation. However, it is important to me to tell you that regular attendance has significant advantages. First, as we will discuss scientific arguments, your personal learning process will advance, both at the subject level and at the level of socialisation into the discipline. Second, these discussions will train your debating and critiquing skills. Third, regular attendance encourages greater engagement with the course content and often results in better student performance."

- **Documenting attendance without sanctions**
  Example: "In this course I will document your attendance. However, as I have not made attendance mandatory, there will be no sanctions. Instead, I use this documentation to evaluate my own teaching. Please let me know when you have to be absent so that I can plan the course units accordingly. However, it is important to me … (see above)."

- **Documenting attendance with sanctions** (where a minimum scope of attendance has been set and communicated).
  Example: "In this course I will document your attendance. Since three absences are allowed, I will contact you after you have missed class twice and arrange a talk with you. Please let me know when you have to be absent so that I can plan the course units accordingly."

Making students aware of the relevance of attendance for their learning process as well as documenting attendance without sanctions often leads to a **higher student attendance rate**.[5] Checking attendance regularly allows you to recognise if a student might **drop** the course and to offer support early if necessary. Measures that require regular attendance mainly benefit low achieving students, as they are more likely to **miss class** than high achievers.

3. Competence- and outcomes-oriented assessment

Assessment is a central component of the student learning process because it encourages and directs student learning.[6] As John Biggs, who developed the Constructive Alignment (https://infopool.univie.ac.at/en/start-page/teaching-learning-at-the-university/outcomes-oriented-teaching-and-learning-constructive-alignment/#c605736) concept,[7] stated, "To the teacher, assessment is at the end of the teaching-learning sequence of events, but to the student it is at the beginning."[8] Many students use assessment to guide their learning. If the teacher wants to ensure that students achieve the (intended) student learning outcomes, these outcomes and any assessment must be aligned. Coordinating student learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, and assessments serves as a tool for teachers to guide student learning. Students benefit from this coherence, as it supports them in staying orientated and focused and thus assists them in learning.

Clearly defined student learning outcomes (https://infopool.univie.ac.at/en/start-page/teaching-learning-at-the-university/outcomes-oriented-teaching-and-learning-constructive-alignment/#c605723) play a central role in course design and therefore in assessment design. With

learning outcomes, you communicate your concrete expectations to your students. For students, learning outcomes serve to integrate course content and to focus on relevant elements of a class. In order to create a coherent course, it helps to consider competence levels (see for instance, Bloom's Taxonomy (https://infopool.univie.ac.at/en/start-page/teaching-learning-at-the-university/outcomes-oriented-teaching-and-learning-constructive-alignment/#c605728)), which should be based on **learning outcomes** and be **consistent across teaching/learning methods** and **assessment activities**.

References:

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[5] Schulmeister, *Abwesenheit von Lehrveranstaltungen,* [2].

[6] Müller, Florian H. „Prüfen an Universitäten. Wie Prüfungen das Lernen steuern." In *Universität in Zeiten von Bologna*, edited by Brigitte Kossek and Charlotte Zwiauer, 121–132. Göttingen: V&R unipress. Vienna University Press, 2012.

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