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Political science, University of Basel

Factsheet for the organisation of "Arbeitsgemeinschaften" (working groups)¹

As per the University of Basel Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences master's program student regulations (to be found via <https://philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/dokumente-merkblaetter/> as "Ordnung der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät der Universität Basel für das Masterstudium"), working groups constitute a part of the curriculum, and are worth between two and three credit points. The political science MA guidelines stipulate that a working group, worth three credit points, be carried out as part of a seminar course in the "regional focus" module. Please note that it is possible for students to carry out working groups in the same seminar course that they have selected for their seminar paper.

In the course directory, the working groups are not listed as their own independent course. Instead, in the seminar courses in the "regional focus" module, it is indicated that it is possible to do a working group. The topic of the working group is to be agreed upon with the instructor and to be confirmed in the form of a learning contract.

In accordance with paragraph 12 of the document "Ordnung der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät der Universität Basel für das Masterstudium", "unless evaluations take the form of module examinations, the assessment of [...] working groups [...] is carried out through active participation, particularly in the form of presentations, essays, or other designated tasks".²

The following provides a brief list of suggestions for structuring group work projects.

1. Organising a seminar session

A working group can be tasked with preparing and leading a seminar session, for example by giving a presentation on a specific seminar topic and by leading the ensuing seminar discussion. In terms of scope and detail, the presentation should surpass the efforts involved in a normal presentation. The students preparing a working group should therefore not only read and analyse the texts on the reading list, but should also go beyond this by carrying out independent research to gain in-depth knowledge on the topic. The assessed students should then be able to present the topic in a comprehensive and detailed manner in the course. In order to prepare, the group is recommended to meet also in attendance of the instructor. As a follow-up, a short written summary of the subject is recommended, and the instructor provides a short oral or written feedback to the working group.

2. Scientific data collection

Generally speaking, within the context of a seminar course, it is not possible – or is only possible to a limited extent – for students to collect their own data. As part of a working group, students can, with guidance from their instructor, work together to develop their own coding schemes to use on a chosen corpus of source documents. The data thereby obtained can then be used for seminar papers. It is important, however, that this process generates enough data for each student in the project. A presentation on the coding scheme can form part of the assessment. Alternatively, students can carry out a survey (whereby a suitable original questionnaire is designed) to generate data.

¹ The translation of this document is unauthorized and can therefore not be referred on.

² This translation builds no legal basis; it is unauthorized and only for understanding purposes.

3. Policy Proposal

During the course of the semester, working groups should work closely on a policy area dealt with during the seminar course and use this to create scientifically-based policy proposals. The result is a practical application of political science which demonstrates the relevance of university research and teaching for everyday political and social life. Towards the end of the semester, the working group is to present their policy proposal, explaining how they came to their findings and recommendations.

4. Country case study

Students working on a working group can prepare a case study on a specific country and present this in one or several seminar sessions. They can, for example, research factors influencing foreign policy (such as public opinion, parliament, leadership personalities etc.) in a chosen country and present these in short sessions during the seminar course. The group should make sure that the project encompasses multiple topics. It is therefore recommended that when preparing this work, the working group meets repeatedly.