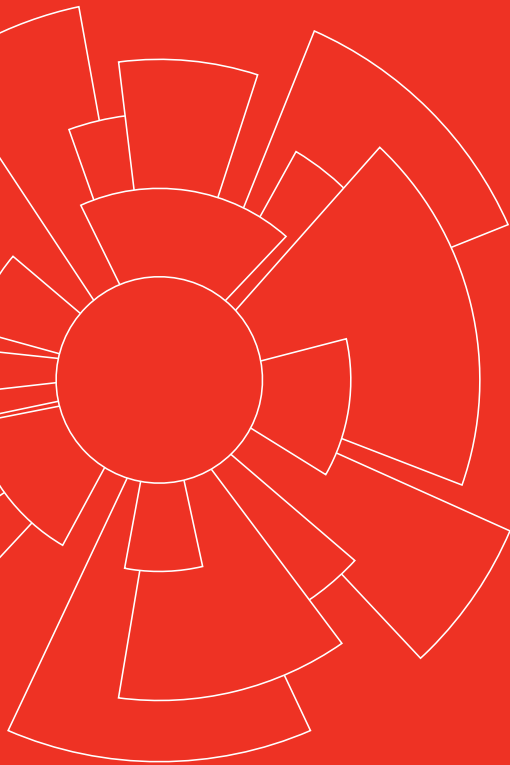


REYKJAVÍK UNIVERSITY
HÁSKÓLINN Í REYKJAVÍK

TEACHING QUALITY HANDBOOK



2009

**TEACHING QUALITY
HANDBOOK**

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Objective

The vision of Reykjavik University is to be the first choice for students who wish to pursue a university degree in Iceland. The most important prerequisite to achieving this vision is to ensure innovative and high quality teaching in all degree programs offered at the university.

We would like all teaching at Reykjavík University to reflect our ambition and innovative spirit, as well as our dedication to quality, professionalism and the building of a relationship with each student as a unique individual.

The objective of this handbook is to provide instructors at RU with step-by-step guidelines on various aspects of the teaching process, in order to ensure consistency and quality.

Scope

This handbook is applicable to all credit-bearing courses taught at RU, both undergraduate and graduate. The first four sections deal with various practical issues involved in the teaching process, from preparation through grading. The final section describes the Teaching Quality Assurance System at RU.

Responsibility

The Teaching Quality Assurance System at RU is overseen by the Executive Director of Human Resources and Quality, the Director of Academic Affairs, the Teaching Coach and the Curriculum Council.

I. PREPARING TO TEACH

Step one: Planning the course and creating the course description for the on-line course manual.

All teachers are required to provide a course description for the RU course manual. The most important part of the course description consists of the “learning outcomes”, which specify the knowledge and competencies acquired by students upon completion of the course. Course descriptions shall be provided in Icelandic and English, in order to accommodate both Icelandic and foreign students.

Course descriptions shall be in accordance with the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) standard. According to the ECTS standard, one ECTS credit involves approximately 25-30 hours of coursework, including class sessions. A six credit course (ECTS) will therefore require that each student completes approximately 150-180 hours of coursework.

A “template” for the course descriptions in ECTS format is available from the program administrators in the school.

Step two: Creating a more detailed course description in the on-line MySchool system.

A detailed description of each course shall be in accordance with the Bologna standard and be available on the course website in the on-line *MySchool* learning management system no later than **two weeks before teaching commences** (NEW! – effective fall 2009).

The course description shall include the following:

- Names of all teachers in the course, teaching hours for each teacher and e-mail addresses for each teacher.
- Description of course content.
- Course learning outcomes (i.e. course objectives).
- Course materials, book lists and any other relevant reading materials or information.
- Course syllabus including a preliminary weekly plan.
- Assessment methods, including the weight of each factor.
- What type of support material is going to be allowed in examinations (if any).
- Assignment descriptions and criteria for evaluation (if relevant).
- Due dates for assignments.
- Consequences for overdue assignments (lowered grade or zero grade etc.).

The above information shall be made available on the relevant web pages on the course website, e.g. “Description”, “Objectives”, and “Teaching methods”.

Important points:

- Each obligatory element required to complete the course shall be specified very clearly in the written course description on the course website (e.g. grades required to pass each component).
- All information that may potentially be sensitive if misunderstood (i.e., materials allowed in examinations) should be in writing on the course website.

The electronic learning management system (MySchool)

All teachers at RU must use the electronic learning management system (*MySchool*). The learning management system is very useful for submitting information and for direct use in teaching, discussions and assignments.

The learning management system provides many features that differ in how useful they are in each circumstance. To ensure quality and consistency at RU, and to ensure continuity whenever a course is passed to a new teacher, instructors are required to use at least the following areas of the course website:

- Learning outcomes (or learning objectives)
- Content
- Teaching methods
- Assessment methods
- Syllabus
- Grades (*)
- Assignments
- Lectures

* We specifically recommend using the “Grades” system provided on each course website. Grades for the various assignments contributing to the final grade can be recorded there and the system calculates the final grade.

Teaching Affairs offers regular courses in how to use *MySchool* in teaching. Teachers are encouraged to attend these courses.

Reading materials

The Library and Information Services of RU supports high-quality teaching at the University with a dedicated service to students and teachers.

The RU library is mainly in electronic form. A good supply of electronic data bases and magazines with theoretical material is available to support the academic study. The RU librarians are available to teach the library's users to search for and use reference material. The purpose of this teaching is to strengthen the information literacy training of students, i.e. the ability to find, use and evaluate information in a professional and responsible manner. This teaching is carried out in cooperation with the various RU schools and according to the wishes of teachers. Teachers are strongly advised to make use of this service.

The Library and Information Services run a Reserve Library which contains one copy of every textbook taught at undergraduate level in the current semester as well as chosen books at graduate level. These books can only be loaned out for use in the library. Teachers can ask the library's staff to acquire further reading in connection with the teaching of certain courses, or they can add their own material to the Reserve Library. It is important that the library is notified about material which is supposed to be in the Reserve Library with ample notice. Only thus can it be assured that the material is accessible in the library and not on loan at the start of the teaching period.

In those instances where further reading material is required for a course (other than the main book), the teacher shall provide a detailed list on the website, preferably in the form of a full bibliography. This list can be put under the heading “Other material”. This is important so that Deans, Program Directors and teaching staff are able to see what has been covered in the course. This also promotes the proper use of academic citations to our students.

Teachers are responsible for adhering to copyright rules when photocopying and scanning materials. Teachers should limit the use of photocopied and scanned materials as much as possible, and refer students to online materials whenever feasible. Based on a contract signed in 2008, Reykjavik University must now register all photocopied and scanned materials and compensate the association of copyright owners for its use (NEW! – effective fall 2009).

In order to facilitate this, a new module will be added to *MySchool* in the fall of 2009. This module will require instructors to register all scanned materials that they put on the course website. Further instructions about this will be available in *MySchool* as of fall 2009. The Reykjavik University library can give further information in this area.

Teaching quality seminars and teacher training

In order to assure the quality of all teaching at RU and to fulfill contracts made with the government, the University and/or individual schools regularly provide teaching quality seminars and/or teaching days for its staff.

All permanent and part-time teachers are **required to attend these seminars** unless special circumstances preclude it. Teachers shall attend seminars outside RU if they are unable to attend annual seminars provided internally.

Schools are responsible for monitoring attendance to these courses, and this is covered in annual faculty and teacher reviews.

A teaching coach is employed within the Teaching Affairs and Registry. The teaching coach is available to help teachers with all aspects of the teaching and the curriculum. The teaching coach holds regular seminars and courses to help teachers develop. New teachers are particularly encouraged to seek the help of the teaching coach as soon as they start planning their course, for example when building the syllabus.

II. The Teaching Itself and Interactions with Students

Our definition of an excellent teacher:

First and foremost an excellent teacher must command expertise in their field. An expert can focus on the essentials in a subject, explain the material at the appropriate level of abstraction, and has the self-confidence and motivation necessary to teach well.

An excellent teacher should also possess:

- a) Enthusiasm for the subject matter.
- b) Enthusiasm for the development of students as individuals.
- c) Enthusiasm for the teaching methods that he or she uses.

In order for students to mature, grow and reach their goals it is important that they are responsible and that they themselves work hard. The University can provide the environment that allows each student to reach their educational objectives and realize their potential.

**Encourage reading and independent learning
– inspire initiative – avoid “spoon feeding”**

Upon graduation, we want our students to have:

- Knowledge and skills relevant to their subject, based on program learning outcomes.
- The ability to apply critical thinking, and to present their knowledge in an articulate manner.
- An interdisciplinary way of thinking and substantial knowledge outside their specialized field of expertise.
- Independent initiative and the ability to complete large and long-term projects independently.
- Excellent analytical skills and problem solving skills.
- Outstanding social and communicative skills and the ability to express themselves clearly.
- Skills to pursue further studies, such as graduate studies.
- Language skills and the ability to communicate internationally.
- The ability to work effectively as a member of a team as well as the leader of a team.
- The ability to think creatively, take initiative and define new challenges.

Teaching methods

According to Reykjavik University Regulation teachers at RU shall employ varied methods in teaching, particularly methods that inspire active student participation to encourage individual growth.

**The teacher's role is to encourage individual growth
– In order to do this we must make demands upon students**

How can teachers encourage individual growth?

- Active participation by students in class.
 - Class discussions.
 - Student presentations.
 - Student teaching and peer instruction (e.g. teach-back).
 - Case analysis.
 - Role plays and cases.
 - Peer assessment and self assessment.
- Variety in projects and experiences.
 - Group work and group projects.
 - Individual projects.
 - Practical assignments.
 - Academic projects and participation in research.
 - Field trips.
 - Portfolios.
- Discussion boards on-line, blogs, web-chat and on-line office hours.
- Clear and timely feedback on students' work.

Other important aspects of teaching:

- An academic approach.
 - To connect the teaching to our own research.
 - To encourage students to the usage of RU's library.
 - To make use of acknowledged data bases and information sources in the relevant field of study.
 - To provide original references and encourage further reading.
 - To emphasize a critical usage of reference material.
 - To emphasize the use of correct bibliographies and references.
- Cooperation with the professional and business sector.
 - Guest speakers from business and industry, where appropriate.
 - Using examples from the outside environment in teaching.
 - Project work in collaboration with business and industry.

- International frame of reference.
 - Benchmark with similar courses in international institutions of higher education.
 - Introduce students to international developments in the subject.
 - International guest lecturers where applicable.
 - Use international exams where applicable.
- Encourage the use of technology in assignments and presentations.
 - Encourage the use of technology in research and presentations.
 - The teacher must be a role model in the use of information technology.

Teaching your classes

- Teachers shall arrive punctually for all lectures (preferably 5 minutes early), and be ready to start teaching at the given time.
- Teachers are encouraged to set rules early on in class regarding issues such as the attendance of students, the use of electronic devices in class, punctuality and other important factors in effective classroom teaching.
- Teachers shall address students by name as often as possible.
- Teachers shall, if possible, stay for a few minutes after each class to allow students the opportunity to approach them.
- Teachers shall utilise all teaching hours provided by the timetable and shall avoid cancelling lectures. Should lectures be unavoidably cancelled then the teacher should attempt to compensate with extra lectures as soon as possible.
- Teachers shall announce their absence in a timely manner both on the course website and to the school office.
- Teachers must show integrity at all times and ensure professionalism in their appearance and interactions.

Communication with students

Teachers must treat students with respect and integrity and should provide support as much as possible through their studies.

Teachers should strive to respond to e-mails sent by students **within two working days**. Teachers can ask students to use the course website (discussion forum) for questions and debate, so that the answers can benefit all students.

Teachers must advertise office hours outside teaching hours for students, or be willing to schedule them when the need arises.

The following areas of the RU University website provide teachers with important information and guidelines regarding problems that may be experienced in teaching or in teacher-student interactions:

- **University-wide** regulations. See the Study and Examination Rules available via the "Course catalogue" on our website.
- **School regulations**, available on each school's website.
- **Reykjavik University Code of Ethics**, available on the university's website.

Please note that teachers are not supposed to deal with breaches of the Code of Ethics or regulations themselves, but must refer these to the School Dean.

Language in the course

- Courses taught in English provide language training that is a valuable addition to the course material being taught.
- When a course is taught in English, lectures, materials, examinations and answers should be in English.
- The language of instruction should not be changed after the start of the semester.

Teaching in distance learning

- In distance learning it is particularly important that technology is used to the fullest to disseminate information to students, including interactive teaching technology, podcast, recorded lectures, streaming video, etc.
- Distance learning teachers are encouraged to use the on-line discussion boards in the MySchool system.
- Distance teachers need to be particularly active in answering students' questions and comments online.
- Weekly tasks (assignments/projects) for students are useful to encourage active learning and regular work.
- It is important to follow the course syllabus from the beginning of the course and changes of any form should be avoided.
- Distance teachers need to offer weekly appointments after five o'clock.
- Methods such as MSN, Skype, phone or other widely used media are recommended.
- Distance teachers must take an active part in on-site sessions with students when they are offered.
- Distance teachers are required to participate in all school meetings relevant to distance learning.

III. Evaluating Student Performance

Integrity and ethical work on assignments

RU emphasises academic integrity and ethical behavior by its staff and students. An important part of academic integrity is the respect for copyright and the full participation of all members in all work groups.

In order to clarify our expectations in this area, we have created the following project work code of conduct.

Project work code of conduct

Reykjavik University places great emphasis on academic integrity and the high quality of scholarly work. The following rules apply to all aspects of project work.

a. Your original work

Reykjavik University requires that your projects be your original work. This means that the work has been completed by you from beginning to end. Plagiarism is unacceptable at all times, and all sources of information must be acknowledged in a scholarly fashion. Instructors may give students more freedom to cooperate in special cases, and this will then be stated in the written project description. This also applies to group work. Projects undertaken by a group must be completed from beginning to end by that particular group. The whole group shall be answerable to this code of conduct.

b. Your contribution

Reykjavik University requires that you always put forth your best effort in group work and make sure that your contribution is equivalent to that of others. Instructors are allowed to give different grades to group members when there is reason to believe that contributions differ greatly.

c. Individual and group projects

In individual projects the student must work on all parts of the project alone. Group projects may allow for the division of tasks between the individuals, given that the contribution of each member is comparable. The whole group remains, however, responsible for the final product.

The penalty for violation of these rules ranges from the grade of 0 for the project, to 0 in the course and even to suspension from further studies.

Teachers are encouraged to introduce the above code of conduct and its meaning for the particular course assignments at the beginning of the course.

Teachers may also insist upon an "originality statement", or an equal statement of authenticity ensuring that the work has been completed from beginning to end by that particular student.

Evaluating student performance

- RU emphasises the importance of multiple methods in student performance evaluation. Evaluation methods can include attendance, contribution in discussion, essay work, presentations, assignments, projects, field work, work reports, examinations, etc.
- Teachers shall provide details on evaluation at the beginning of the course (well before the first day of teaching).
- **The evaluation methods and their weights shall not be altered after their announcement unless absolutely necessary.**
- Grades for each part of the course shall be itemised. The learning management system (MySchool) should be utilised for this purpose (use the areas "Grades" and "Assignments" on the course website). Once the teacher has entered all relevant grades the system will automatically calculate the grade average (alterations can be made by the teacher at the end).
- Teachers must return grades and feedback at the right time. If uncontrollable events cause a delay then both students and Teaching Affairs and Registry must be notified.
- Teachers shall double check all grades, particularly failing grades, to prevent that such grades are accidentally allocated to and/or published for the wrong student.

CREATING AND ADMINISTERING EXAMINATIONS AT RU

Written exams:

- As of 2009 it is required without exception that **a colleague be asked to read a test** before it is turned in for photocopying (NEW! – effective fall 2009). The name of the person reading the test should be turned in when the test is submitted to the Director of Exams. The teaching coach can also help to proof read a test.
- Final exams must be turned in electronically to the Director of Exams (in the Teaching Affairs and Registry) at least 48 hours before the start of the exam.
- RU insists that teachers never use old exams unchanged. This is particularly important if the examination is "open book".
- As a guideline for the length of an exam, the course teacher should be able to finish the exam in about one third of the time allocated to students.
- Teachers shall visit the examination room at least once during the examination.

Oral exams:

- Teachers should inform students at the beginning of the course about the format of oral exams, if they are used.
- Oral exams must always involve a second examiner who is present during the exam.
- Notes should always be taken during oral exams.
- Grades for oral examinations should be posted within two working days after the exam date.

Grades and Feedback

- Grades from written exams and assignments must be posted within **seven working days** from the due date of the assignment or examination (*NEW!* – effective fall 2009). The teacher can apply for an extension to the Teaching Affairs and Registry, if for example the student group is exceptionally large. See also in the RU Study and Examination Rules.
- Assignments and grades for assignments should be returned to students before the final examination, if at all possible.
- Should the final grade consist of the weighted average of two or more grades, then **only the final grade** shall be rounded out to the nearest half digit (e.g. 7.5 or 7.0).
- In instances where students must pass certain components of a course to pass the course (i.e. must pass the final exam), the passing grade should be the **unrounded** minimum grade defined by the teacher (i.e. a student passes with 5.0 on the exam, not 4.9). See also item 4.2 in the RU Study and Examination Rules.
- Teachers should strive to provide feedback in writing on all assignments, especially larger assignments (final essays, extensive projects or reports etc.), at the same time that the grades are posted.
- If students fail to meet due dates for assignments, the teacher can apply certain penalties, which must be specified in advance. This can involve a grade of 0.0 for the project, or a lowering of the grade, by perhaps 0.5-1.0 per day of delay.
- According to the RU Study and Examination Rules, the teacher is required to offer students an opportunity to see their test, in the presence of the teacher, if they so wish.

Mid-term exams

- Teachers are responsible for monitoring their own mid-term exams.
- The deadline for posting grades from mid-term exams is the same as for final exams, seven working days after the exam date (*NEW!* – effective fall 2009).

Student access to old exams:

- The Information Act in Iceland (nr. 50/1996) has been construed in such a manner that students may have access to older examinations. RU has decided to honour the general rule of access to information by producing an electronic library of examinations, and teachers are required to post their final exams there. Students can then gain access to them via the internal web. **Multiple choice questions need not be submitted to this system.**

IV. Teaching Evaluations by Students

- Teaching evaluations are completed by students at the conclusion of all courses, just before the start of the final examination period. The results are posted for the teacher to see as soon as he or she has posted the final grades in the course.
- Generally there is also a teaching evaluation at mid-term, and the results of that evaluation are posted for teachers immediately. Teachers should use the mid-term evaluation to develop their teaching.
- Evaluations are provided by students anonymously through the MySchool system.
- **To view your teaching evaluation: Enter the internal website of the University and click on “Taught courses” (left-hand side). Here you can see your teaching evaluation in each course.**
- The results of the evaluation is available to the teacher in question, the Dean of the School, the Program Director, the Executive Director of Human Resources and Quality and the Director of Teaching Affairs.
- As of the fall of 2009 the main results of the RU teaching evaluation system are posted on the RU website (*NEW!* – effective fall 2009).

V. Teaching Quality Assurance System at RU

To ensure quality in teaching, Reykjavík University has put in place a quality assurance system for teaching. This system is part of the overall university Quality Assurance System that deals with teaching, research, academic staff and support services.

The quality assurance system for teaching is based on the following factors and practices:

- Rules on the establishment of new study programs and major changes to existing programs at RU.
- Student evaluations of teaching.
- Teacher training and teacher participation in courses offered by Teaching Affairs and Registry and by the academic schools at RU.
- Regular analysis of the criteria used to accept students into RU study programs.
- Course analysis, where all courses are analyzed and compared in a systematic fashion, looking at factors such as number of lectures, practical sessions, assessment, number of students, credits given, workload, etc.

A description of the Teaching Quality Assurance System can be accessed at RU's webpage and at <https://esja.ru.is> (*NEW!* – effective fall 2009).

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