APPLICANT
Name (incl. academic degree/s): Dr. Stefan Mayr, LL.M.
Department: Socioeconomics
Academic unit: Institute for Law and Governance
Telephone: 5544   **Email:** stefan.mayr@wu.ac.at
Members of the working group, if applicable[2]: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Verena Madner
GENERAL INFORMATION
Course level master's **Course number:** 0779 **Semester**: Winter semester 2020-21 **ECTS credits:** 8 **Course title:** International and European Law, Institutions and Governance
Further information on the course: (e.g. prior knowledge of students, position in the curriculum/program, number of students) The course is taught in the first semester of the master's program "Socio-Ecological Economics and Policy. The class is designed for approximately 60 students, who have diverse backgrounds, geographically, academically and in other dimensions. Most students have no (or only limited) prior knowledge of European and/or international law.

[1] Courses held during the 2020 calendar year (summer semester 2020, winter semester 2020/21) are eligible for the 2021 Innovative Teaching Award. Courses held over two semesters (WS 2019/20–SS 2020) can also be nominated.

[2] Please name all the people involved in the development of the course design. The people named in this field will also receive the award in case of a successful application.

Application Form

Innovative Teaching Award 2021[1]

1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE DESIGN (max. 180 words)

If your course is selected for an award, this text will be published on the WU website along with the submitted application form.

The course "International and European Law, Institutions and Governance" is taught in the first semester of the master's program Socio-Ecological Economics and Policy (SEEP). It is part of the core curriculum and introduces students to key issues of European and international law, institutions and governance, drawing on a wide range of current difficult and complex "real world" problems, which are relevant in the context of socio-ecological policies and transformations. Among others, these include efforts to mitigate climate change, global trade governance and challenges of European integration (e.g., Brexit). While each week is dedicated to a concrete topic, the issues dealt with are related and build on one another in multiple ways. The course design aims to provide a tailored and seamless learning environment. To this end, it focuses on a balanced and mutually supportive integration of both the use of various digital platforms (Vimeo, Zoom, MS Teams, Learn@WU) and adequate human interaction (formal and informal, with lecturers and/or peers). By working on topics that are widely debated in public discourse and media, students are further encouraged to bring in knowledge they have acquired in various contexts outside the course.

2. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE DESIGN

   2a.)   Overview

   - What are the learning outcomes to be achieved by the students?
   - What are the content elements of the course and how is the course structured?
   - What are the elements on which the final grade is based?
   - How is the learning environment of your course designed?

Learning outcomes

The **learning outcomes** to be achieved by the students cover both content-related competences as well as transversal competences.

Content-related competences:

- Students gain sound **knowledge of foundations of European and international law, institutions and governance**.
- Students **understand the relevance of law in the context of socio-ecological policies and for transformations** as well as the function and constraints of law as a regulatory tool.
- Students acquire **insights into the working of international and EU institutions as well as current attempts at institutional reform**, both at the European and international level. They **understand key features of EU multi-level governance** and the complex interplay of domestic and European actors in EU law- and decision-making.
- Students can **apply insights to new institutional settings**.
- Students can **analyze and evaluate existing institutional arrangements** and governance structures and **develop creative ideas** for alternative approaches.

Transversal competences:

- Students **improve their academic writing skills** and are able to **develop and present well-founded arguments** in academic discussions.
- Students are able to **reflect critically on academic and policy papers** and present complex topics in a **concise** manner.
- Students are able to **reflect on their own performance and to give constructive peer-feedback**.

Content elements

The course applies a **problem-based learning approach**. It introduces students to key issues of European and international law, institutions and governance drawing on a wide range of current **difficult and complex "real world" problems**, which are relevant in the context of socio-ecological policies and transformations. Among others, these include efforts to mitigate climate change, global trade governance and European integration. While each week is dedicated to a concrete topic, the issues dealt with are related and build on one another in multiple ways (e.g., distinct yet comparable problems of international law-making and institutional reform; different facets of EU multi-level governance in light of theories of integration etc.).

For example, students are first introduced to international treaty making (from pre-negotiation phase to conclusion and ratification) in the context of the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change** and other International Environmental Agreements.

Based on both literature and case studies, students gain insights into the **process of treaty making and questions of treaty design**. Students learn how different design features (hard vs soft obligations; enforcement mechanisms etc.) affect the resulting treaty regime and why certain design features are more/less suited in a particular context. Moreover, they understand the **importance of and rationale behind forum choice in international negotiations**. Subsequently students get to **apply their knowledge** in the context of the **WTO governance crisis**, which additionally allows them to gain important insights into **reforming existing international institutions**. They understand and analyze institutional features, which are crucial for the effective enforcement of international obligations as well as the failure and demise of such mechanisms and can apply their knowledge in a different context (e.g., the reform of investor-state arbitration). In the context of the **Brexit negotiations**, students learn to understand the **working of key EU institutions and the complex interplay of domestic and European actors in EU law- and decision-making**. Again, students subsequently get to apply their knowledge in other areas of EU law and governance, for example, in the context of EU climate and energy policy or the EU "rule of law crisis". In guided group discussions as well as written study reports students **analyze and critically reflect on current institutional challenges, evaluate different solutions and creatively think about alternative approaches**.

Structure, design of the learning environment and grading

The course format is a **"lecture with interactive elements"** and is based on a **blended learning approach**. It consists of weekly pre-recorded lectures and live interactive sessions, which build on these lectures. Each week the course deals with a current "real world problem" in a specific field (e.g., climate change, human rights, global trade, EU rule of law etc.). Given the diverse backgrounds of students, geographically, academically and in other dimensions, **lectures introduce students to fundamental aspects of a particular field/issue**. Each lecture is **accompanied by key reading material** that helps students gain a sound understanding of the fundamental aspects of the topic. The lectures are pre-recorded and are released two days prior to the corresponding interactive session. **Students can stream the lectures for 72 hours, but cannot download the video files**. In this way, students' **flexibility** to learn independently of time and space **is increased**, yet the **lectures maintain the character of a reference point in the overall learning process.** Thus, students are **encouraged to acquire knowledge continuously**, instead of learning mainly prior to the exam.

For the weekly **interactive sessions,** students are divided into two groups of approximately 30 students each. Initially interactive sessions were provided both on-site and online on a rotation basis, permitting to accommodate students' preferences/physical presence in Vienna. The interactive sessions are dedicated to **in-depth discussions** of current (legal, institutional and governance) challenges. In order to encourage students' flexibility in learning, we provide them with the **advanced as well as background reading material, including academic literature, policy papers and media articles** for each week **at the beginning of the semester**. In order to allow for a more structured preparation and discussion and guide students in their work on advanced texts, we also provide students with the broad **questions** to be discussed **before the start of each session**. Moreover, by choosing topics that are widely **debated in public discourse and media**, we aim to enable students to bring in **knowledge** they have **acquired in various contexts** outside the course.

Over the semester, students have to submit **two study reports**. The topics for the study reports are related to (but not identical with) the issues discussed in the interactive

sessions. The **pool of topics for study reports and all the relevant literature** is published at the beginning of the semester. This gives students the opportunity to make an informed choice among different topics in line with their thematic preferences, prior knowledge and/or anticipated workload. Study reports are due prior to the interactive session in which a particular topic is discussed in class.

The final grade is based on the following criteria: **two study reports** (each accounting for 20% of the final grade each), a written **mid-term exam** (20%), **active in-class participation** (20%), a **self-assessment** of one study report (10%) and giving **blind peer-feedback** on one study report (10%).

2b.) Teaching methods

- Which teaching methods do you use to help your students achieve the intended learning outcomes?
- What role does the learning environment, or more specifically the context in which students learn, play in your course design?
- Why did you choose this/these particular method(s)? What specific advantages does it/do they offer in your teaching? What do your students learn through the use of this/these method(s)?
- In which way do the students benefit from the teaching methods used in the course?

The course format is a "lecture with interactive elements", which consists of weekly lectures and interactive sessions.

A key factor in our choice of methods is the **highly diverse background of SEEP students**, be it geographically, academically or in other dimensions. We aim to **address challenges** but also **realize the potential** that results from the significant differences in prior knowledge. These considerations also guide our design of the learning environment that we want to offer students in this course.

Overall, the course design combines elements of an **inverted classroom approach and blended learning**.

The **lecture-parts** aim to **ensure that students have sound knowledge** of the fundamentals of the specific fields and issues of international and European law, institutions and governance that are discussed in-depth in the interactive sessions. Based on the **inverted classroom** approach, students are required to acquire basic knowledge prior to the lecture. To this end, we provide students with a **wide variety of accessible learning material** (including **academic literature, podcasts and media articles**). The lectures go one step further. While building on the material provided, we introduce students to new and more complex issues. In this way, we try to avoid that students are either overwhelmed or underwhelmed and lose interest in the lectures.

Importantly, students are not required to stream the entire lecture "in one go"; moreover, they can stream the lecture multiple times during the 72-hour streaming-period. This allows students to **learn at their own pace and independently from time or space**. At the same time, by limiting the streaming period and preventing students from downloading the video files, the **lectures maintain the character of a reference point in the overall learning process**. Thus, students are thus **encouraged to acquire knowledge continuously**, instead of learning mainly prior to the exam, e.g., by "bingeing" on previously downloaded lecturecasts. Importantly, as the content of the lectures goes beyond the reading material, students are also provided with the **lecture slides**. These slides can be downloaded via Learn@WU and **complement the other learning material**. Students can for example print the slides and use them to take notes while streaming the lectures, allowing for an **individualized combination** of digital and physical learning material.

The interactive sessions take place "live" via Zoom and allow for direct interaction between students and lecturers as well as among students. In terms of content, the interactive sessions build on the weekly lectures and, again, follow an **inverted classroom** approach. Compared to the lectures, the material students have to deal with is significantly more advanced. Thus, in order to support students, we provide the broad questions that will be discussed in the interactive sessions before the start of the discussion. In addition, at the beginning of each interactive session we provide **"flashlight" rounds**, inviting students to **ask questions** or **share insights and/or prior knowledge**, which may inform the subsequent **structured group discussion**, which is **moderated by the lecturers.**

During these discussions, students are moreover encouraged to share input (such as relevant articles etc.) via the chat function. In this context, it should be noted that our tutor was invaluable in surveying the chat during the sessions and harvesting that content.

We generally aim to include different methods to encourage **peer-to-peer learning**, thus allowing us to "tap" students' prior knowledge but also encourage their active participation.

To this end, we divide students into **two smaller groups** for the interactive sessions. Importantly, the groups are not fixed but their **composition changes every week**. Creating new student constellations every week helps to avoid certain behavioral patterns (i.e., a distribution of roles) among the members of a group. In this way, the changing constellations help to activate students and to increase broader in-class participation. Moreover, by **fostering the exchange between all students** (and not two separate groups), the rotation helps to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and ideas between students both during class as well as outside the digital classroom, for example, in the digital **informal study areas**. The informal study areas are a means to provide students with a digital space for exchange outside the classroom. Especially at the beginning of the semester, when students are not yet as well-connected through other means, these informal study areas aim to complement the learning environment for this course and to facilitate informal exchange and peer-to-peer learning by offering students **a space for social interaction and collaboration**.

Another method we employ to encourage peer-to-peer learning is that we require students to give written **peer-feedback on a study report**. Study reports are **anonymized** and the distribution among students is **randomized**. However, in order to realize the full learning potential, each student is assigned a study report on a **"new" topic** (i.e., a topic they have not written a study report on). In order to give meaningful feedback, students have to revisit a topic they have not dealt with in-depth so far.

Even more importantly, the peer-feedback gives students the possibility to improve their ability to **reflect on their peers' as well as their own work** and to **give constructive feedback**. In order to structure the feedback-process we have **devised a detailed rubric** that covers the three dimensions along which the lecturers grade students' study reports. However, the rubric does not include any points or grades. Students can choose one or more of the provided options (e.g., by checking a specific box or more granular, by underlining the descriptions they consider most accurate). Moreover, there is a text box where students can explain their choices and are invited to comment on the strengths of the report as well as potential for improvement. The peer feedback is once again anonymized and made available to the author of the respective study report. In this way, students get valuable feedback supplementing the feedback by the lecturers.

Building on their experience with the peer-feedback, at the end of the course students are asked to carry out a **final self-assessment** of one of their own study reports based on the same rubric.

2c.) Innovative character of the course

- In which dimension (see call section 2) do you place your submission?
- Which didactic elements of your course design do you consider particularly innovative with regard to the focus of this year's award "Seamless Learning: Designing Learning Environments"?
- Transferability: In which ways can your course design be adapted for other courses? Which didactic elements of your course can also be used in other courses?
- Which elements could be improved/reconsidered in a second edition of the course?

Our course design combines different digital platforms and didactical choices in order to **facilitate learning independently of time and space** and aims to **encourage the integration of knowledge gained in various contexts**.

Innovative character

In designing this course, our goal was to take an innovative approach towards blended learning for a course taught in a highly international master's program and in light of the specific challenges posed by COVID-19. We aimed to create a seamless learning environment and facilitate students' learning independently of time and space and to encourage the integration of students' knowledge gained in various contexts. In our view, the innovative strength of our didactic approach and our course design is rooted in the insight that achieving these goals requires (1) an adequate **balance between structure and flexibility** and (2) the **balanced use of digital platforms and human interaction**. The innovative character of our course thus is illustrated by: (1) the structured provision of course materials and assignments that allowed for a flexible learning environment (2) the balanced and mutually supportive integration of the use of various digital platforms (Vimeo, Zoom, MS Teams, Learn@WU) and human interaction (formal and informal, with lecturers and/or peers).

Concrete elements of the course design

For our course, we identified three **different "locations"**, which would constitute key elements of the learning environment and which would have to be **"translated" into a (semi-)digital environment**: the **lecture hall**, the **seminar room** and **informal study areas** where students can interact among themselves – as they would on campus before and after classes – despite (factual and regulatory) restrictions to meet in person.

Drawing on our previous experience with the digital infrastructure available, we found that no single tool or platform provided all the functionalities required for this course. Only a **new and creative combination of a variety of digital platforms and didactical choices** allowed us to tailor a unique learning environment, which facilitates learning independently of time and space while meeting key didactic objectives.

The "lecture hall": Streaming pre-recorded lectures via Vimeo

Instead of requiring students to attend online lectures at a fixed time, we wanted to give students the flexibility to stream pre-recorded lectures within a defined 72-hour time slot. For didactic purposes, however, we consider it **crucial that students cannot** (easily) **download the video files:** By providing the lectures only for a limited time, they maintain the **character of a reference point in the overall learning process** and students have an **incentive to watch** lectures prior to the interactive sessions, which build on the lectures. Consequently, students are encouraged to acquire the relevant knowledge

continuously and not just before the exam. Importantly, this enables them to participate more actively in the structured group discussions.

Finding a **technical solution** for our "lecture hall" that would satisfy both key didactic requirements (allowing asynchronous streaming/preventing download) proved more difficult than initially expected, especially as any solution would also have to fulfil a number of other criteria. One highly important consideration was, for example, that students should be able to access the video file through a link without having to download any apps etc. Other factors included user-friendliness, upload speed and volume, price). Vetting a number of options, we finally chose to stream the lectures via the video streaming platform Vimeo, which satisfies both didactic requirements as well as other key criteria.

The "seminar room": Interactive sessions in smaller groups via Zoom

The **weekly** interactive sessions, which allow for **in-depth discussions** and help students test and apply their knowledge, take place via Zoom. The lecturers communicate the broad questions that will be discussed in advance and moderate the discussions. In order to increase student participation, the students are divided into **two groups**. In this regard, we introduced another innovation: The groups are not fixed but their **composition changes** every week. Creating new student constellations every week, helps to avoid certain behavioral patterns (i.e., a distribution of roles) among the members of a group and thus helps to increase students' active in-class participation. Moreover, by fostering the exchange between all students (and not two separate groups), this rotation can help to **facilitate an exchange of knowledge and ideas between students** both during class as well as outside the digital classroom. In order to realize the **peer-to-peer learning potential** of a course bringing together a diverse group of master's students, we include further innovative methods to encourage students to share their knowledge both during the course and outside the digital classroom. These include **peer-feedback**, virtual **informal study areas** (described below) and **"flashlight rounds"** at the beginning of each interactive session. The "flashlight rounds" provide an opportunity for students to share prior knowledge, personal experiences and/or insights related to the reading material, beyond the questions to be discussed in the main part of the interactive session. By choosing topics that are widely **debated in public discourse and media**, we aim to enable students to bring in **knowledge** they have **acquired in various contexts** outside the course. Moreover, during the subsequent group discussions, students are encouraged to **share input**, which cannot be discussed in detail due to time constraints (e.g., relevant articles, podcasts etc.) **via the chat function**. This information was harvested by the tutor and later **made available to all students** via Learn@WU.

The "informal study areas": Dedicated channels on MS Teams

Another "location" we added to the learning environment are informal study areas in the form of channels on MS Teams. These study areas innovatively complement the learning environment, **facilitating peer-to-peer exchange** independent from time or space. Beyond the specific situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, students may not yet be as well-connected through other means at the beginning of the semester. Against this background, the informal study areas offer an opportunity for students to interact and collaborate, to continue discussions that have unfolded during the interactive sessions or to meet and prepare for the course. To this end, a Team is created for the course and students are invited to join. While the General Channel can be used for communication between students and teachers/tutors, a number of additional channels have been designated as "Study areas" and are **available for students to meet at any time, share documents, talk via chat or video**, etc. In order to encourage students' interaction, it

is clearly communicated that the lecturers will not visit or monitor these informal study areas.

Further facilitating learning independently of time and space

Supplementing the technical solutions, we take additional steps to facilitate learning independently of time and space.

Accessibility: **Learn@WU** has proven essential as the **"key node"** where all information is collected and made accessible to students at all time. This includes links to lecture streams as well as online meetings, the entire course literature, assignments, student submissions (exam, study reports and other assignments), grades and feedback. As such, Learn@WU plays a crucial role in our seamless learning environment.

Transparency: Importantly, all learning material, as well as topics and dates for submissions for study reports are published on Learn@WU one week **before the course starts**. This permits students to browse, plan their semester and choose between different study reports (students must choose two out of six topics) in line with their thematic preferences, prior knowledge and/or anticipated workload.

Responsiveness: Realizing the potential offered by the various digital platforms requires more than finding and combining the required functionalities. In addition to clear and **transparent up-front communication**, it requires a **high degree of responsiveness** along the way. Throughout the semester, we actively used the interactive sessions to get students feedback on their experiences with the virtual learning environment. This helped us to adapt certain features and **improve the learning experience** for students. For example, in light of students' feedback, we early on decided to extend the streaming period from 48 to 72 hours. In this context, we want to emphasize that having had our tutor as the first point of contact helped avoid any hesitancy and greatly facilitated communication with students.

Transferability

In light of our experience, we believe that our **balanced approach, combining the functionalities of a variety of digital platforms and didactical choices** facilitating learning independently of time and space, is transferable to other courses.

On the conceptual level, the most important take-away is the realization that **more flexibility** – perhaps counterintuitively – **needs more structure** and that students' learning experience in a virtual learning environment strongly depends on **adequate human interaction**.

On a more concrete level, it should be emphasized that the digital platforms are (mostly) freely available and very user-friendly. While the functionalities they offer may have to be combined in slightly different ways to **tailor a seamless learning environment** for a specific course, the combination of these platforms opens up many possibilities to facilitate learning independently of time and space without having to compromise on key didactical objectives.

As mentioned above, one of the **key challenges** was to find a technical solution to **allow students to stream recorded lectures during a defined period of time, but prevent them from downloading the video files**. We have spent **considerable time and effort on finding and evaluating technical solutions** that allow for high quality streaming via secure links (requiring no registration or download of software by students) but prevent

downloading and storing the video files. If other lecturers at WU are confronted with a similar challenge, they may find this solution particularly useful. Ideally, the required functionality could be integrated in Learn@WU and thus be easily available to all WU lecturers. Alternatively, WU may negotiate for better access conditions to existing platforms, such as Vimeo.

Based on our experience and students' feedback, we are now **looking into possibilities to further improve** the learning environment for our course. One concrete idea is to give students a possibility create a wiki on the course contents. On the one hand, this would enable lecturers to get a better idea of students learning progress. On the other hand, it could increase discussions and collaboration among students and thus further peer-to-peer learning.

Summary

The innovative character of our course design is firmly rooted in the understanding that seamless learning requires an adequate **balance between structure and flexibility** and the **balanced use of digital platforms and human interaction**. More specifically, this innovative character is reflected in the **new and creative combination** of a variety of digital platforms and didactical choices **in order to create a seamless learning environment**. Importantly, the various technical components of this learning environment do not serve their isolated purposes. Rather, their **use and the specific combination of functionalities is motivated by and embedded in the overall didactical concept**. In doing so, we aim to **facilitate and stimulate** learning independently of time and space, without having to compromise on key didactical objectives.

Note: By sending the application form and documents, the applicant confirms that the course design has not received any other awards or grants.

Attachment: Please attach evaluation results, if available.