

Grading guidelines

STV2250 – International Resource and Environmental Politics

Department of Political Science, University of Oslo

Spring 2023

On the examination

The exam has two parts: a three-hour written school exam and a term paper.¹ One overall grade is given, and both parts of the exam must be completed the same semester. Graders shall give the school exam more weight than the term paper and section 1 of the school exam greater weight than section 2.

Unanswered parts of the school exam should be considered a (partial) F; but the final grade should reflect graders' comprehensive assessment of all answers.

The term paper must have a maximum word limit of 3500 words, not counting front page, list of references, table of content, table, figures and appendices.

School exam – three hours (60%)

Section 1 (60%): Respond to one (1) of the assignments below:

Either: Give a brief account of ecosystem services and name at least one example of each type of service. Discuss the extent to which and how the valuation of ecosystem services can help to overcome the time-inconsistency problem that marks long-term environmental challenges. Examples or illustrations from one or more issue areas are encouraged. Use the heading 'Ecosystem services and the time-inconsistency problem'.

Grading guidelines: The main syllabus sources are Hovi et al. on the time inconsistency problem and Schröter et al., IPBES, and Morin et al. on ecosystem services; both concepts have been addressed in the lectures but in separate ones. A good performance will typically get the types of ecosystem services right and point out that the concept, and ongoing efforts to price-tag the less obvious among them (regulation and support services), can promote political mobilization for environmental protection by exposing more of the real costs of environmental degradation. Such mobilization may counter the time-inconsistency problem, which arises whenever policy makers fear that other states, or

¹ General information about the course and the examination is available at <<https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/statsvitenskap/STV2250/>>; <<https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/statsvitenskap/STV2250/#exam>>; and <<https://www.sv.uio.no/english/studies/resources/submission-written-assignments/isv.html>>.

subsequent governments, may renege on their abatement commitments and thereby undermine the effects of costly environmental action (Hovi et al. p. 22). This problem is especially pressing for problems requiring consistent policies over time, such as climate change and biodiversity loss. As always, it is the degree of precision, conceptually and empirically, and the levels of demonstrated understanding and independent thinking that distinguish very good or excellent performances from those that are merely good; see the recommended norms at the end of this document. Here are some points likely to be included but a top grade does not require attendance to all of them:

- The concept of ecosystem services was popularized by the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* published in 2005, coordinated by UNEP and involving more than 1300 experts from many states and international organisations – a precursor to the *IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*.
- Four categories: Provisioning services (natural resources); Regulating services (eg. carbon cycle, vegetational flood control); Support services (eg. nutrient cycling, photosynthesis); and Cultural services (eg. recreation, multiyear ice enabling inuit traditional subsistence economy).
- Often criticized for anthropocentrism (disregard for values unrelated to human welfare) as well as economism (disregard for benefits that evade price setting). Both criticisms are debatable but going deeply into such debates would require an explanation of how it may be relevant to this assignment.
- Hovi et al. highlight that the time inconsistency problem is reinforced by two other predicaments for the development and implementation of international environmental policies. First, domestic opposition to ambitious policies typically gain in strength when lofty goals are to be implemented – generating ‘vertical disintegration’ (p. 25). A political-economy derived driver of such disintegration has been referred to in the lectures as ‘the uphill battle of environmental politics’: the costs of abatement are often concentrated (industries, well-organized politically) whereas benefits are typically dispersed among many (p. 27). Second, the international anarchy yields well-known collective-action problems associated with free rider incentives.
- Very good or excellent performances might link their discussion of ecosystem-service derived political mobilization to some of the problem-coping measures discussed by Hovi et al. (not always optimistically) or other syllabus contributions on how states and others might overcome problems of collective action (e.g. Ostrom et al., Underdal, Young, Jagers et al.).

Or: Give a brief account of what securitization is and the conditions that, according to the Copenhagen School, improve the likelihood that a securitizing actor will succeed. Discuss the extent to which and how securitization of one or more environmental issues is likely to improve the effectiveness of international institutions operating in the issue area(s) in question. Use the heading 'Securitization and effective international institutions'.

Grading guidelines: The main syllabus sources are Åtland and Bruusgaard, Trombetta, and Morin et al. and the subject matter was addressed also in the lectures. A good performance will typically get the definitions of securitization, institutions, and effectiveness roughly right and link them together in a plausible way: most obviously by their common interest in processes associated with agenda-setting, political mobilization, and prioritization among policy objectives. Here are some central points, with the same caveat as above:

- Securitization denotes a speech act aiming to convince an audience of actors in charge of extraordinary measures, such as military capabilities, that an existential threat exists and justifies employment of such measures.
- Conditions for success highlighted by the Buzan, Wæver, Hansen and others in the Copenhagen school include the use of a 'grammar of security' (a plot with existential threat, point of no return and a possible way out), the social capital (status) of the securitizing actor, and certain contextual conditions such as the existence of confidence-building institutions or a history of cooperation or conflict.
- Institutions can be defined well in several ways; the textbook (Morin et al.) version is a 'set of rules that mediate social interactions by prescribing behavioural roles, constraining activity, and shaping expectations. Institutions include organizations, regimes and social norms' (p. 361).
- Institutional effectiveness can also be defined plausibly in several ways – but the lecture on this topic highlighted the causal (making a difference, contributing) and the evaluative dimension (helping to solve or considerably mitigate a problem). Some students might explain the Oslo-Potsdam solution to combining assessment on those dimensions to provide a singular score.
- Some might point to the connections between the concept of securitization and that of the Anthropocene, addressed in particular by Malhi in the syllabus.
- Very good or excellent students might link up to those parts of syllabus that deal with science-politics relations (eg., Cash et al. but also others), for instance how scientific credibility might suffer if environmental-security grammar enters scientific advice without adequate and reasonably consensual scientific substantiation.

Section 2 (40%): Respond to two (2) of the assignments below:

(a) Non-state actors: *Give a brief account of what non-state actors are and the functions they have been delegated under international environmental treaties. What conditions affect the ability of non-state actors to influence decision making within the United Nations?*

Grading guidelines: The main syllabus sources are Morin et al., Green, and Tallberg et al. and the subject matter was addressed also in the lectures. Here are some central points, with the usual caveat:

- ‘Non-state actors’ is a broad term that denotes all actors, public or private, that do not represent state governments – including provincial or city authorities, industry organizations, civil-society organizations, and philanthropic associations. An early example in global environmental politics is the Sierra Club, established in the USA in 1892 and using expertise as currency for influencing governance policies.
- Green examines five ‘policy functions’ that treaties sometimes delegate to non-state actors (but less frequently than to states or international organizations): Rule making; Adjudication (eg. providing or handling complaints); Implementation (eg. local action); Monitoring (eg. of the environment or of adherence); and Enforcement.
- Despite the instruction to be brief, some students might demonstrate their understanding of global environmental politics by pointing to the empirical pattern that states are much more reluctant to delegate regulatory functions, such as rule making and enforcement, than support functions such as monitoring and local implementation.
- Conditions for influence in international organization highlighted in the syllabus (especially Tallberg and Morin) include possession of expertise on the substantive matter or on stakeholder positions, material resources such as number of employees or other capacities for media use or campaigns, and access to transnational policy networks. Morin et al. distinguish among discursive, material, and network resources. Tallberg et al. report from a survey-based study of UN institutions that the weightiest among these resources is possession of expertise or information that is useful to those operating the institution.

(b) Science and politics: *Give a brief account of what is meant by ‘boundary work’ in scientific advising on resource and environmental management. What conditions have been found to affect the influence of scientific information on international decision making.*

Grading guidelines: The main syllabus sources are Cash et al., Haas, Lidskog and Sundquist, Litfin, and Morin et al. and the subject matter was addressed also in the lectures. Here are some central points, with the with the same caveat as above:

- Boundary work occurs at the interface between communities of experts and communities of decision makers. Members of those communities have different role expectations, including with respect to commitment to impartiality – high among scientists and lower among decision makers, especially at the international level.
- Decision makers want credible scientific information but typically also some level of control over what scientists are allowed to advise on –in part because of the political cost of going against such advice, especially if consensual and given with a high degree of certainty. Lectures have provided examples from fisheries/ICES and climate/IPCC.
- Although instructed to be brief, some student might point out the distinction Cash et al. make among three types of boundary work: *Communication* is about ensuring two-way flows that allows mutual adaptation whenever needed for policy advice to be relevant/salient to decision makers. *Translation* aims to overcome barriers to communication posed by jargon, complex modelling and the like. *Mediation and negotiation* occur because those affected by the international decisions advised on frequently have different interests and seek to influence the advisory process.
- Conditions empirically found to affect the influence of scientific information on international decision making can be summarized in the three keywords used by Cash et al. but deriving also from the work of those mentioned above: Credibility (high if consensual and certain, as presented by the scientific community); Legitimacy (high if the information has been developed inclusively in terms of participants and disciplines); and Saliency (high if provided in policy-relevant terms).
- Some students are likely to develop conditions for influence by means of Peter Haas' well-known concept of epistemic communities: a network of experts tied together by shared norms/values, causal beliefs, scientific validation criteria as well as policy enterprise (p. 3). According to Haas, such closely-knit and often transnational expert communities can become highly influential, especially in issue areas marked by technical complexity and unclarity regarding how states will be affected by the proposed policies.

(c) Institutional strength and effectiveness: Give a brief account of what is meant by the 'strength' of an international environmental institution. What are the relationships between an institution's strength and its effectiveness?

Grading guidelines: The main syllabus source is Underdal (2004) but the link to effectiveness means that many other contributors can be relevant as well; the subject matter was addressed also in the lectures. Here are a few central points:

- An institution's strength, according to Underdal, is the extent to which it constrains the freedom of legitimate choice open to the individual member (p. 28). He distinguishes between a substantive and a procedural dimension.
- Substantive strength concerns constraints on the range of behaviour that qualifies as appropriate or legal – and is enhanced by factors such as stringency, determinacy, legal bindingness and depth (ambitiousness beyond business as usual).
- Procedural strength concerns the institution's scope – how much of the activity system it constrains – as well as the decision rule (consensus marking procedurally weak institutions and majority rules procedurally strong ones).
- On the concept of effectiveness, see above. Whereas strength refers to qualities of an institution, effectiveness refers to its consequences. Institutional strength is therefore no guarantee for effectiveness.
- Moreover, as Young and others have argued, even weak institutions can contribute considerably to problem solving, for instance by helping to build knowledge or by framing environmental problems in ways that trigger political mobilization or problem-solving action in some or many countries, thereby obtaining some level of effectiveness.
- Nevertheless, most of the mechanisms identified in research on institutional effectiveness are more likely to be triggered by strong institutions than by weak ones.

Term paper – up to 3500 words (40%)

Students were given access to supervision in five two-hour seminars, with around 20 participants in each group. Based on the generic term-paper assignment given below and a list of themes and examples, the students have formulated their own research questions. They have presented drafts of their term papers at the seminars once, receiving oral and written feedback from fellow students and the seminar leader. At least once, each student has served as main discussant of a paper draft, supported by a discussant guide – an extended version of the generic term-paper Grading guidelines below.

Generic term-paper assignment: *Formulate a relevant and manageable research question within the topic you have chosen or been assigned. Develop an analytical framework and explain why it is suitable for your question. Discuss the research question in light of the analytical framework. Conclude by answering the question based on your research.*

Explanation: An analytical framework consists of a conceptual framework (the concepts and possibly theories you want to apply) and a research design (the way you go about substantiating your answer); the latter typically includes compilation and evaluation of relevant data and selection of method(s) for analysing the data. The most common research designs for short tasks like this are a case study (in-depth and broad study of one or a few

cases of a phenomenon, e.g., a state, an organisation or a cooperative regime) and comparative study (systematic comparison of two or a modest number of cases) – but a quantitative study (many cases of a phenomenon but focusing on a small number of characteristics/ variables) would be equally welcome.

Generic term-paper Grading guidelines: The items below refer to substantive components of the paper; students are free to structure their papers differently.

- *Introduction*
 - Is the research question clear and precise? Does it specify clearly the object to be described, explained or assessed?
 - Is the question relevant to a specific scholarly debate and/or societal issue – and is such relevance explicitly stated?
- *Conceptual framework*
 - Are key terms explained precisely – and used consistently?
 - Are any hypotheses well substantiated – either by reference to the literature or by showing how explanatory variables can affect the outcome?
 - Is attention paid to alternative explanations?
 - Is it clear how key variables are to be measured? Is there a good match between the theoretical and operational definitions?
- *Research design*
 - Is it clear how the answer to the question is to be substantiated?
- Is the quality of the data material assessed?
- *Analysis and discussion*
 - Is the analysis systematic and transparent, with clear connections among research question, conceptual framework, and data material?
 - Are the central findings well substantiated?
 - Is the discussion of the material and any hypotheses well balanced, including also any counter argument to the conclusion?
- *Conclusion*
 - Does it provide a clear answer to the research question and the reasons for that answer?
 - Does it point to any implications for the academic debate or the societal issue that made the question relevant?
- *Structure and presentation*
 - Is there a good balance and a clear connection between introduction, analytical framework, discussion and conclusion?
 - Is the language clear and in accordance with other norms for academic argument?
 - Does the paper meet the formal requirements (including use of sources)?

Your answers to the questions above form your basis for grading, leaning on the following recommended norms:²

| A | B | C | D | E | F |
|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| Excellent performance, clearly outstanding. The candidate demonstrates an excellent mastery of the course curriculum. When discussing subject-related issues, the candidate applies concepts, theories and empirical knowledge with a very high degree of certainty and in a manner that shows independent thinking and reflection. Correct use of sources and references. | Very good performance. The candidate demonstrates very good mastery of the course curriculum. When discussing subject-related issues, the candidate applies concepts, theories and empirical knowledge with a high degree of certainty and in a manner that shows independent thinking and reflection. Correct use of sources and references. | Good performance in most areas. The candidate demonstrates good mastery of the course curriculum. When discussing subject-related issues, the candidate applies concepts, theories and empirical knowledge with certainty and in a manner that shows independent thinking. Correct use of sources and references in general. | Satisfactory performance, but with significant shortcomings. The candidate demonstrates incomplete knowledge of the course curriculum. Concepts, theories and empirical knowledge are applied inconsistently, and there are some deficiencies in the use of sources and references. | Performance that meets the minimum criteria, but no more. The candidate clearly demonstrates incomplete knowledge of the course curriculum, and shows substantial weaknesses in the application of concepts, theories and empirical knowledge, as well as a poor understanding when discussing subject-related issues. | Performance that does not meet the minimum academic criteria. The candidate shows no mastery of even elementary parts of the course curriculum, and demonstrates wide gaps in knowledge or an erroneous representation and application of key concepts and theories. |

² See <https://www.uio.no/english/studies/examinations/grades/grade-descriptions/sv-isv.html>