

INST 5000 6.0
Interdisciplinary Seminar

Criteria for Evaluation

An IS student has asked me to try and clarify the grade for the IS seminar, 5000 6.0. The seminar is "a discussion conducted by the Candidate's Supervisory Committee, focussing on the Candidate's research topic and designed to integrate the knowledge gained in courses in which the student is enrolled". The grade for this seminar can be determined in a number of ways, depending on the wishes of the supervisors. The grade is meant to evaluate the progress the student has made in meeting the challenge of the thesis topic, and can be based on the interim and end of year reports which you wrote and submitted to the programme at the appropriate times. The seminar is a required course, in addition to two courses, a colloquium presentation and a thesis. The grade measures the "whole" student in a programme where academic work is organized around a student's special interests, and not around an offered course.

Here are some of my own thoughts about the seminar. Faculty have measured student progress in the seminar in different ways. I personally evaluate intellectual progress based on the way the student incorporates course work into the thesis research and the colloquium; I also like to give credit for preparation for supervisory meetings, and for the quality of the discussion the student conducts with the committee: does she bring salient questions?; how do her readings inform her point of view?; does she make a coherent, interdisciplinary and persuasive argument for the topic? etc. I use the reports and the colloquium to help me support a fair assessment. I also give credit for promptness and commitment--but that is just me.

There remains a certain flexibility in how this grade is determined, and we see this as an advantage to the committee and to the student's project. The individual supervisors usually have to negotiate the criteria by which the evaluation is made, especially where there is debate about the grade.

There are no hard and fast rules about how to grade the student's progress in the seminar, because it is not a "course" in the conventional sense, and it varies according to the student's project and the supervisors' disciplines and teaching habits. But it is still a course, for which the student must prepare.

Marlene Kadar
Director for the Graduate Studies
in Interdisciplinary Studies Programme

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