

## SECINTEL Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

<b>Student Matriculation No.</b>	Glasgow 2226892	Charles
<b>Dissertation Title</b>	The Mexican War on Drugs	

### INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

<b>Glasgow Marker</b> <i>Office Use</i>	<b>Charles Marker</b> <i>Office Use</i>	<b>Grade Conversion</b> UoG-CU    CU-UoG	<b>Charles Additional Info</b> <i>Please advise ranking</i>
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### JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

<b>Final Agreed Mark</b> B1 [17]    2 [Very Good]
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### DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
<b>A. Structure and Development of Answer</b>	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Excellent
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Very Good
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Very Good
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Very Good
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Good
<b>B. Use of Source Material</b>	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Excellent
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Very Good
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Very Good
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Excellent
<b>C. Academic Style</b>	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Excellent
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Excellent
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Excellent
• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	Not Required
• <i>Appropriate word count</i>	Yes

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### ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

#### ***Glasgow Marker***

This dissertation explores the consequences of the so-called ‘War on Drugs’ in the Mexican context, and is focussed on understanding the effects of this policy. It begins with a very well researched summary of the historical backdrop to the WoD, as well as a survey of existing analyses of the phenomenon; these opening sections, in keeping with the dissertation as a whole, show evidence of sustained and wide-ranging reading, and are concise and well-organised. The dissertation moves on to outline its theoretical approach, which breaks with a realist position in favour of a more constructivist perspective. There is also a careful and reflective discussion of methodology. The research itself brings together qualitative analysis of a range of documentary evidence alongside quantitative data. This work informs a clear and well-articulated account of the unintended and often deleterious effects of the policy, which include diversification of operations on the part of the cartels and the creation of a political context in which spectacular displays of violence gained a new symbolic significance. I thought that this discussion was persuasive and well marshalled, and there are some very nice visualisations of data and timelines.

In general, all of this seemed to me to give evidence of commendable effort and critical insight. I have, however, two lingering questions about the project. The first concerns the articulation between the theoretical approach which is outlined in section 4 and the research itself. That approach is defined as being ‘constructivist’, yet the subsequent research doesn’t seem to focus all that much on the kinds of analysis that one might expect of a constructivist approach: there’s no significant discursive analysis of political rhetoric around the war on drugs which might allow for a more detailed understanding of how the response to the cartels came to be ‘securitised’, for example. And although the student very tellingly identifies gaps in existing analyses of the situation (such as the ‘tendency to depict people as passive actors which suffer in silence’ (35)), the subsequent analysis doesn’t really do all that much to recover the voices of those actors, partly because it is wholly reliant on secondary data sources. In that respect, I did feel that the theoretical position that was outlined at the outset was not completely ‘followed through’ in the research itself. Secondly, I wasn’t completely clear how far the conclusions reached in section 6 emerged from a systematic and original analysis of the data. I found the account provided in that section compelling and informative, but often it seemed as if conclusions were emerging – at least partly – out of a synthesis of already existing analyses (indeed, key analytical conclusions are often buttressed with or justified by references to existing studies). In that respect, I think a bit more could have been done to demonstrate the specificity and originality of the analytical conclusions of this project, to show how these differ from those reached in existing analyses, and to make clear how and where those conclusions emerged from a new and systematic act of research. Overall, though, I thought that this was a very good piece of work, emerging from what was clearly concerted reading and reflection, and establishing a provocative and thoughtful account of the way in which the policy led to outcomes which were at odds with its (putative) aims.

#### ***Charles Marker***

The thesis demonstrates the author's considerable intellectual curiosity, determination and competence to treat in detail a complex subject relevant to the field of security studies yet so far not submitted to definite treatment. The argument is clearly situated in the existing body of research, focused, logically structured, and all its key aspects are well researched. The conclusion that the government strategy not only has been ineffective, but has actually been counterproductive in terms of pushing adversaries (violent drug cartels) toward structural and territorial fragmentation and has resulted in hypermilitarisation and the increase of risk to human security is both sensible and substantiated in the thesis. That said, the thesis suffers from imperfect linking of the theoretical and methodological framework and empirical analysis which results in a

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certain indeterminacy of the objectives and limits the scope of the conclusions reached. In literature review, the author introduces and discusses thoroughly concepts that are relevant to the chosen case (Mexico), but does not derive a theoretical framework from here (which could structure the case study covering the recent developments). Indeed, they are accompanied by immediate reflections on the case study, but the theoretical chapter that follows turn to securitisation theory (and constructivism broadly speaking) and "ungoverned spaces". While the former is a robust lens for discourse / process tracing analysis of how a certain issue has become elevated beyond the realm of politics and to what social effects (premised on internalisation of certain ontological assumptions associated with social constructivism which the author does not make entirely explicit); the latter, on the other hand, cannot really be considered a theory as such, while it functions ideologically to reify a certain ideal of nation state where these spaces, not governed in the "modern way" do not exist. Neither is properly used in the empirical analysis as, instead of engaging in interpretive research (e.g. exploring patterns of intertextuality, recurrent discursive themes etc.), it seeks to evaluate the effects of the Caldéron government strategy to counter violent drug cartels, and in particular whether the strategy empowered drug cartels instead of debilitating them. It is presented as content analysis in terms of method, but in effect it is more of a dense historical narrative benefiting from a wealth of secondary literature and compiled expert observations while it lacks a thoroughly employed methodology, bearing on the originality of the argument's conclusions even as the thesis is successful in treatment many aspects of an undoubtedly complex problematique in a coherent and reasonably exhaustive way.

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Please note that this grade is recorded as the provisional final grade for the University of Glasgow degree. All grades remain provisional until confirmed at the joint examination board.

The Czech State Exam/Oral Defense may make a difference to the final grade for the Charles University degree.

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**Notes for Markers:** When grading the SECINTEL Dissertation markers are asked to reflect upon the aims and learning outcomes for the dissertation. Each dissertation should also adopt a clear security focus reflecting the relevant programme pathway

**Aims:** The course aims to provide students with independent research opportunities. It will include engagement with research methods training leading up to a period of independent research and the production of a substantial dissertation that builds upon themes and issues covered within the MSc International Security, Intelligence and Strategic Studies. Students will be encouraged to develop their own ideas and demonstrate their capacity for original thought and independent research. The dissertation element aims to enable students to identify and research particular issues or problems, linked to security, intelligence and strategy, at a deeper level than is possible within assessed essays and to develop a critical analysis of the existing body of academic work relating to their topic of choice. Students taking this course will be prepared for further research, study or professional careers through the development of their skills in data collection and analysis, use of original and secondary sources and the conducting and writing up of a detailed research project.

**Intended Learning outcomes:** By the end of the dissertation, students will be able to:

- > Devise a realistic programme of research on a topic reflecting the main themes of the programme;
- > Collect, select and critically analyse relevant background literature and arguments of a range of scholars;
- > Understand and select the appropriate methodology for dealing with information sources and data;
- > Apply these methods to gather and interrogate data in an open-minded, rigorous and undogmatic manner;
- > Be able to critically evaluate competing theories and apply relevant theoretical frameworks to guide the study
- > Organise the data collected and analyse the findings in a competent manner that allows for a fluid and logical argument to be presented;
- > Be reflexive and self-critical about findings and the limitations of analysis;
- > Work independently, organising and maintaining own programme of study to meet academic deadlines so as to produce work containing a substantial element of originality.

**Word Count:**

Dissertations should be 20,000 words in length for students undertaking work-placement as part of the independent study portfolio and 22,000 words in length for standard dissertation students. Word counts exclude the title page, abstract, contents, bibliography and appendices). All dissertations must display an accurate word-count including the citations, footnotes/endnotes and chapter/section titles.

**Language:**

The dissertation **must** be written in British English. A Czech Language cover page / abstract may be included

**Late Submission Penalty:**

Dissertations that do not have an extension or are submitted after an extension deadline are subject to a penalty of 2 secondary bands per day (this includes weekends and holidays) on the Glasgow grading Scale.

**Plagiarism:**

Dissertations which suffer from excessive (e.g. serious and/or deliberate) plagiarism will be subject to a grade of 0/Fail and be referred to the appropriate authorities at both universities. Dissertations that contain some elements of plagiarism, but which are deemed not to be excessive (e.g. minor instances that are not considered deliberate) based on consultation of both internal markers, should be graded accordingly and will be subject to scrutiny from the external examiner and could still result in a mark of 0 as well as referral to appropriate authorities for disciplinary action.

**Consultation prior to final grading:**

First marking by both institutions should be completed blind with no prior consultation. Once both markers have graded the dissertation and provided written comments, they should consult on the grading and come to a joint final grade, taking into consideration any late submission or excessive word count penalty. It is the responsibility of the Glasgow marker to oversee this. Where markers cannot come to a joint agreement then the dissertation should be referred to the Programme Convenors at Glasgow and Charles (Dr. Eamonn Butler & Dr Vít Střítecký). The external examiner will be used to moderate any dissertation in this position and the comments referred back to the internal markers for confirmation.