

## Guidelines for Good Doctoral Supervision

### Introduction

Freie Universität Berlin recognizes its responsibility to create a nurturing environment for young scholars and scientists.

These guidelines, approved on November 10, 2014 by the executive committee, are an important step in ensuring such an environment and in maintaining the university's already high level of doctoral education.

The guidelines are designed for faculty members in the university's departments granting doctoral degrees. They are the product of exchange of experiences among graduate schools and institutions at various universities gathered over many years. They are also informed by the recommendations of the University of Saarland's Doctoral Studies Quality Circle (Qualitätszirkel Promotion) and by the conclusions of the task force on supervisory models of the German University Association of Advanced Graduate Training (UniWiND).

### 1. Taking on New Doctoral Candidates

Providing good supervision is a challenging endeavor. University faculty have many obligations and are responsible for numerous staff members. In addition, doctoral candidates often face difficult upheavals and financial uncertainties during this period of their lives.

#### Verifying capacity

It is therefore critical that university faculty make sure they have sufficient capacity before agreeing to supervise a new doctoral candidate. They must check whether they have the space, financial resources, and technical equipment for a new doctoral candidate to complete a dissertation in the standard length of time. As a rule, a faculty member should not take on more than twenty doctoral candidates at a time. Requirements will vary depending on the discipline and the objectives, but as a minimum faculty should make certain that they can meet the recommendations contained in these guidelines.

#### Assessing prospective doctoral candidates

Before formally accepting new doctoral candidates, faculty should carefully discuss with them their goals and objectives, the quality and scope of their project, the resources and skills needed to complete the dissertation (methods, language, etc.), and a realistic timetable. These discussions should be based on a candidate's dissertation prospectus and chapter outline. Any stays abroad should be factored into planning also at this time.

#### Funding for doctoral candidates

Secure finances play an important role in how quickly and successfully doctoral candidates complete their dissertations. At the same time information concerning funding is sensitive, therefore supervisors should handle it confidentially, as they would all other personal information. Furthermore, doctoral candidates should be informed that while they are not obliged to disclose their financial situation, doing so is recommended. Before accepting a new doctoral candidate, faculty members should discuss these issues with the candidate and, if necessary, recommend appropriate advice services. Supervisors gauge whether they can support doctoral candidates' scholarship applications through letters of recommendation. Generally, dissertation time and work schedule should take candidate's financial situation into consideration.

## Guidelines for Good Doctoral Supervision

### Admission and enrollment

After receiving a letter of acceptance for doctoral supervision (Betreuungszusage), candidates should apply for the admission to do a doctorate (Zulassung zur Promotion) at the respective department as soon as possible. The Professional Development Program of the Dahlem Research School is only open to admitted / enrolled doctoral candidates. The department assumes the responsibilities laid down in the doctoral degree regulations (Promotionssordnung) only for doctoral candidates who are officially admitted. Faculty members should make certain that the doctoral candidates they have agreed to supervise have submitted their admission applications (Antrag auf Zulassung).

### Supervision agreement

In addition to a letter of acceptance, it is generally recommended to sign supervision agreements. Supervision agreement is signed between the doctoral candidates and supervisors. The agreement lays down the rights and duties of doctoral candidates and members of the supervisory team. It is supplemented by project-specific timetables (such as work schedules and chapter submission dates).

## 2. Doctoral Supervision

Good doctoral supervision is determined by disciplinary characteristics and takes individual situation of doctoral candidates into account. The following general framework can nevertheless provide some helpful orientation.

### Supervisory meetings

Supervisory meetings should take place regularly. Doctoral candidates should meet with their supervisors at least once a semester to document their progress and discuss the overall timetable. This allows adjustments to be made early on in case the dissertation project has grown too large or shows methodological shortcomings. A record of the meeting should be made by the doctoral candidate and signed by all the project's supervisors. It is recommended that appointments be made well in advance. This applies especially to doctoral candidates not involved in a close working environment. The appointments should be kept to ensure continual and close supervision. Doctoral candidates should not as a rule make individual appointments that are scheduled for the supervisor's general consultation hour.

### Good academic practice & conflict resolution

It is crucial that good academic practice be discussed at the first supervisory meeting. The Dahlem Research School in cooperation with the Humboldt Graduate School offers training courses on this subject. It is also recommended that supervisors refer doctoral candidates to department or university ombudsman for handling conflicts pertaining to good scientific practice.

### Presenting and discussing dissertation progress

Doctoral candidates should have regular opportunities to present their work as it progresses. They should discuss their project at the peer group seminar sessions (doctoral colloquium, once a semester) and present at a national or international academic conference at least once during the doctoral process.

### Chapters and drafts

It is generally recommended that supervisors ask doctoral candidates for chapters and other preliminary drafts early on. Supervisors should carefully review the submitted materials and identify weaknesses in the argumentation. This allows doctoral candidates to address prob-

## Guidelines for Good Doctoral Supervision

lems as they arise rather than having to solve them in the final draft, which can considerably prolong the time required for completing the dissertation.

Professional development	Doctoral candidates should be given the opportunity to expand their professional development beyond their respective disciplines by attending courses offered, for example, by the Dahlem Research School, the fu:stat, or the Freie Universität's Continuing Education Center. This includes finding financial aid for the courses.
Workload	It is urgently recommended that doctoral candidates who work at a department-funded position or at an externally funded position be given sufficient space for completing their dissertation within the timeframe specified by the doctoral degree regulations. Article 110, paragraph 4 of the Berlin Higher Education Law stipulates that at least one third of the contractual working hours for doctoral candidates be made available for degree-related work.
Teaching experience	Doctoral candidates who are not contractually obliged to give tutorials or seminars alongside their graduate training should be given the chance to gather teaching experience. To keep the time investment manageable and to operate within the framework of the capacity law, it is advisable that doctoral candidates teach a selected thematic section of a course offered by their supervisor. The share of the total workload for the course should not exceed twenty per cent. Supervisors should subsequently discuss with doctoral candidates their teaching performance from a university didactics perspective (mentored teaching / mentorierte Lehre). Doctoral candidates should teach no more than two such courses during the doctoral phase.

### 3. Submission, Evaluation, Defense

Planning	<p>In due time before planned dissertation submission date, supervisors should thoroughly discuss the final steps of the doctoral process with their doctoral candidates. The most important are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting the date for the final review of the dissertation</li> <li>• discussing the composition of the dissertation committee and making sure that it adheres to the department's regulations (especially when external university teachers or retired faculty were involved in supervising the dissertation)</li> <li>• schedule for the completion phase of the doctorate (scheduling final editing, the prospective evaluation period, the Auslagefrist [the period during which the dissertation and the reviewer evaluations may be consulted before the defense], a tentative date for the defense, and an appointment to discuss the "Disputation" [an oral defense of a dissertation thesis]).</li> </ul>
Evaluation	In the interest of the doctoral candidates, supervisors should evaluate dissertations in a timely fashion. For no reason should the time limits specified in the doctoral degree regulations be exceeded.
Defense training	Dahlem Research School Doctoral offers defense training workshops. It is recommended that candidates should be informed of and encouraged to participate in such workshops.