

## Doctoral Code

### FOREWORD: THE PHD MINDSET

This Doctoral Code provides a set of general principles concerning the philosophy, framework and requirements needed for a PhD project. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of those involved in doctoral training at the University of Geneva. The terms and conditions governing specific PhD programs are set out in the study regulations drawn up by the faculty or research unit concerned.

This Doctoral Code is based on the values of respect, integrity and responsibility set forth in the code of ethics for Geneva universities and other higher education institutions, which strives to support and promote academic freedom, scientific integrity and equal opportunities.

A PhD provides in-depth experience in conducting academic research. To successfully complete their doctoral studies, students need to find a topic that they are interested in and have a talent for research. They also need to be intellectually curious, be willing to gradually develop their research skills and have the right people supervising their work.

A PhD is an opportunity to be creative within an academic environment. It requires students to build on and develop their existing knowledge, come up with original and well-thought-through ideas, and produce some innovative results – that may even go against what has been previously established in their field. These principles apply to all fields of study.

### THE PURPOSES OF A PHD

In January 2014, the Conference of Swiss University Rectors (now swissuniversities) issued a position paper on doctoral training, in which they placed PhDs at the crossroads of training and research. As such, the aim of doctoral training is to:

- develop the student's academic skills, i.e., the ability to carry out independent academic work, and enable the student to acquire subject-specific (disciplinary and interdisciplinary), methodological and cross-cutting knowledge and skills;
- foster academic interaction and networking with other doctoral candidates as well as with researchers at all levels in Switzerland and abroad.

A PhD gives the student the know-how needed to take on intellectually demanding professional tasks and functions. It enables them to develop skills – such as independent and critical thinking, analytical rigor and complex problem-solving – in preparation for a variety of academic and non-academic careers.

## PRACTICAL ASPECTS

### The research topic

The research topic must lead to an original and instructive PhD project that can feasibly be completed within the deadline set out in the applicable study regulations. The research topic, thesis context and host department are determined when signing up for a PhD. The thesis supervisor must be a recognized expert in the chosen topic and methodology.

### Determining the thesis goals

The PhD candidate and thesis supervisor(s) set the thesis goals together. These may change over the course of the doctoral studies.

### Length

The applicable study regulations set the length of the doctoral training and the terms and conditions under which it can be extended. As a general rule, doctoral studies should not exceed ten semesters.

### Enrollment

Under Article 54.3 of the University Statutes, PhD students must be enrolled at the University of Geneva throughout their doctoral studies.

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the student's and supervisor's respective roles of producing academic research and correcting that work, doctoral studies require there to be a dialogue and relationship between the PhD student and their thesis supervisor. The quality of the doctoral training will depend on the quality of that dialogue and whether each side fulfills their responsibilities.

The PhD student agrees to:

- comply with the decisions taken upon enrollment concerning the research topic, the length of their studies and the deadline;
- keep their thesis supervisor regularly updated on the progress made, any difficulties encountered, etc.;
- ensure, to the extent possible, that they have sufficient financial resources to enable them to complete their doctoral studies within the required time frame;
- comply with ethical standards, particularly concerning thesis authenticity, and the principle of confidentiality in research, where appropriate.

The thesis supervisor agrees to:

- help the PhD student to come up with a research topic that constitutes original research;
- work with the PhD student to plan out the key stages of the project, from getting the research off the ground to promoting the research findings;
- set up frequent and regular meetings to support the PhD student in their research project;
- provide clear and accurate information about the financial resources and funding opportunities available to the PhD student (funding must be planned before the research project begins);
- help the student to expand their academic network;
- ensure that the PhD work complies with the rules concerning ethical standards, academic integrity and research ethics;
- discuss career prospects and, where appropriate, help the PhD student to pursue an academic or non-academic career;
- ensure that the student has sufficient time to spend on their thesis and that the breakdown

between their assistant-related tasks, research and thesis work is fair.

### **Thesis co-supervision**

The thesis may be co-supervised, in keeping with the terms set out in the applicable study regulations.

### **Thesis advisory committee**

Once the research topic has been established, the preparatory work that the PhD student was required to complete prior to writing their thesis – e.g., a pre-doctoral thesis, PhD application, report and/or doctoral training program – must be assessed to determine whether the student can continue with their doctoral studies. This assessment should, as a general rule, take place at the end of the first year at a meeting of the thesis advisory committee.

The requirements for the preparatory work (including the type of work and deadline for completing it) are set out in the relevant study regulations and may be based on the faculty's standard practice (e.g., a pre-doctoral thesis or preliminary dissertation).

The thesis advisory committee may be an ad hoc committee (i.e., a committee established under the study regulations for all relevant doctoral projects), or the role of thesis advisory committee may be taken on by another entity within the faculty (e.g., the academic committee or thesis committee), as provided for in the applicable study regulations. Regardless of which form it takes, the thesis advisory committee must be designated and defined in the applicable study regulations.

All committee members must hold at least a PhD and be part of the teaching staff.

The thesis advisory committee must comprise at least the thesis supervisor and two other members selected by the thesis supervisor and the PhD student. If the role of thesis advisory committee is taken on by another entity within the faculty, an additional member must be chosen by the thesis supervisor and the PhD student.

The aim of the assessment carried out by the thesis advisory committee is to:

- ensure that the PhD student develops the necessary research skills;
- issue a recommendation as to whether the PhD student can continue their doctoral studies (e.g., an early warning);
- prevent any disputes from arising;
- allow the PhD student to openly discuss their point of view in the absence of the thesis supervisor;
- allow the thesis supervisor to openly discuss their point of view in the absence of the PhD student;
- ensure that the necessary conditions are in place for the doctoral studies to be completed smoothly.

The terms and requirements of the assessment are set out in the applicable study regulations. As a general rule, the assessment takes the form of a presentation followed by a discussion. After the meeting, a report is drafted by the thesis advisory committee. The report must be signed by all meeting participants, including the PhD student, who is encouraged to add comments. The report is then submitted to the entity indicated in the applicable study regulations. It is also included in the PhD student's academic record.

If the committee deems the student's preparatory work to be satisfactory, the report may be brief and

simply provide a summary of the main ideas discussed at the meeting.

If the thesis is progressing as planned within the set deadlines, the committee is only required to meet once, at the end of the first year. After that, the committee will meet at the request of one of the individuals involved or of a member of the management of the section/department/unit or doctoral school concerned.

If the preparatory work is deemed unsatisfactory, the thesis advisory committee will issue a recommendation and submit it to the faculty entities indicated in the applicable study regulations. As stipulated in the study regulations, the PhD student may submit their preparatory work for assessment a second time. If it is once again deemed unsatisfactory, the consequences and requirements set out in the relevant study regulations will apply.

### **LEAVING OR BEING EXPELLED FROM THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM**

The committee serving as the thesis advisory committee must be informed if a PhD student is ending their studies early, regardless of whether the decision was taken by the PhD student or the thesis supervisor. The committee will review the situation and make sure that the studies are ended for valid reasons that are not linked to a supervision-related failing. In the event of a dispute, the thesis advisory committee will propose a solution, which may involve mediation, a change in thesis supervisor, adjustments to the conditions for carrying out the thesis, etc.

The decision to expel a PhD student is taken by the dean of the faculty or the director of the entity concerned, taking into account any exceptional circumstances.

### **IN THE EVENT OF A DISPUTE**

As a general rule, the thesis advisory committee should seek to resolve the dispute at the request of the PhD student or the thesis advisor. If the dispute cannot be resolved, the matter will be referred to a third person or entity, such as the head of the doctoral school, the head of the unit/department/entity concerned, the dean's office or the unit's management team. Depending on the situation, the matter can also be referred to the University's Graduate Campus or Human Resources Division.

For more information on the University's resources and services available in the event of a dispute between staff members or if a student is having problems: <https://www.unige.ch/maletre/en>.