

Mentor's Guide

Dear Mentor

Thank you for being a member of one of the five GCB Expert Committees and for accepting the important role of a mentor in thesis advisory committees of GCB students. Your commitment greatly contributes to achieving the high quality standards set by the GCB both for PhD research projects and for the training of the PhD students.

This brief guide provides information on the role and responsibilities of a mentor, aiming at establishing some basic common standards and rules.

More detailed information about organisational and administrative matters can be found on the GCB website (www.gcb.unibe.ch).

General duties and responsibilities of the mentor

- The mentor is the link between the GCB and each student's thesis advisory committee and must therefore always be a member of a GCB Expert Committee. The mentor ensures that the GCB rules are observed. Thus, he/she must be acquainted with the most important rules of the GCB regulations, in particular the points which relate to course requirements (minimal ECTS credit points) and examination regulations.
- Each Expert Committee member should be prepared to serve as mentor for several PhD students.
- Interview meetings of the GCB Expert Committees are conducted three times a year in order to evaluate prospective PhD candidates. The mentor attends the meetings whenever possible.
- A mentor is assigned to each PhD student immediately after the interview.
- The mentor does not require specific expertise in the research project, but monitors the progress of the work in relation to the submitted research plan and intervenes if problems arise.
- The mentor is the primary contact for the PhD student and the supervisor if any conflicts arise between them.
- Five main tasks are assigned to the mentor throughout a PhD project; i.e., the mentor
 - leads the **mentor meeting**
 - evaluates the annual **progress reports**
 - chairs the **mid-term evaluation**
 - chairs the **thesis defence**
 - acts as **mediator** if required

MENTOR MEETING

- The purpose of the mentor meeting is to meet the student and his/her supervisor on a personal level and to plan and decide on the training units for the PhD student.
- The selection of suitable training units (courses/lectures) is carried out in agreement with supervisor and PhD student.
- Criteria for the selection of suitable courses/lectures are: 1) to fill knowledge gaps of the student in a broader area of his/her research project, and 2) to provide specific training in methods required for the research project. The mentor is responsible that such "useful" courses/lectures are selected, rather than courses with the lowest possible effort/ECTS ratio (sometimes preferred by supervisors and/or PhD students).
- At least 3.0 ECTS. (i.e., half), of the required ECTS credit points must be earned with courses which include a final examination.

- The GCB offers a list with recommended lectures and courses (see http://www.gcb.unibe.ch/unibe/graduateschools/gcb/content/e3529/e4026/LehreWeb_eng.pdf), but it is also possible to select other courses/lectures or summer schools as part of the mandatory training. The mentor verifies that all the selected courses meet the quality standards set by the GCB.
- At the mentor meeting, the *Doctoral Agreement* must be completed and signed. The courses specified in the corresponding section of the *Doctoral Agreement* are mandatory and can only be changed if explicit reasons are given (e.g. a selected course does not take place, or the student realizes after the start that the course is not suitable for him/her). In such cases, the student must immediately inform mentor and supervisor, and together, suitable new courses must be determined. The mentor reports the change to the Coordinator of the GCB.
- It is also very important that the mentor points out to the student that he/she is the contact person and mediator, should problems arise between him/her and the supervisor.

PROGRESS REPORTS

- The mentor evaluates the annual progress reports both in terms of meeting the training requirements of the GCB (coursework and examinations, meetings with co-advisor, conferences, etc.) and the progress in the research project.
- The mentor intervenes in case he/she recognizes major problems, be it on a scientific or a human level.
- An informative feedback to the student is expected.

MID-TERM EVALUATION

- The mid-term evaluation is initiated and organised by the student about two years after start of the PhD project.
- The mentor chairs the examination, fills in the examination form and submits it to the (Coordinator of the) GCB.
- A feedback to the student is important at this point (where does he/she stand in the project, what needs to be done for the successful completion of the PhD study?). Please also emphasize the importance of having a first author publication as a significant advantage for the student's prospective career as a researcher/postdoctoral fellow.
- During the discussion after the mid-term evaluation, possible external co-referees should be identified and then contacted by the supervisor.

THESIS DEFENCE

- Date and place of the thesis defence are arranged by the PhD student.
- The mentor chairs the thesis defence. The presence of the external co-referee is not required, but allowed.
- The presentation should last 40 to 45 minutes and be followed by a discussion of 20 to max. 60 minutes. Questions can be asked by both the examiners and the audience. The mentor ensures that the questions are answered by the candidate, and not by the supervisor.
- The examiners give individual marks and enter them on the thesis defence form. The mentor submits the signed form to the GCB.

MEDIATION

- The mentor plays an important role in case problems arise between student and supervisor. He/she is the contact person both for the student and for the supervisor, and should be prepared to act as mediator in such conflicts.
- It is important to tackle problems early and before they escalate.
- If mediation is not successful or impossible (i.e. in serious cases), the mentor alerts the Coordinator of the GCB.