Mentor’s Guide

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, and 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 [https://www.gcb.unibe.ch/training/course_catalog/index_eng.html](https://www.gcb.unibe.ch/training/course_catalog/index_eng.html)), 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 DEFENSE**

• Date and place of the thesis defense are arranged by the PhD student.

• The mentor chairs the thesis defense. The presence of the external co-referee is required to be present in person or video conference. If not possible then an additional external co-referee can be chosen for the defense.

• The examiners give individual marks and enter them on the thesis defense form. The mentor submits the signed form to the GCB.

**Formal setting**

• The doctoral examination takes place in the form of a thesis defense, which consists of a public part with a 40 to 45-minute lecture, followed by questions by the audience and a 60-minute closed discussion/exam. It is up to the thesis committee to decide which part the public or the closed exam comes first.

• Examiners are the thesis supervisor, the co-advisor, at least one external examiner and the mentor. The mentor chairs the thesis defense including the closed exam.
Public Talk

- 40-45-min public talk in the setting of an Institute or Department Seminar Series
- Presence of thesis committee (supervisor, co-advisor, mentor and external co-referee)
- Brief public discussion

Closed discussion/exam

- Presence of thesis committee (supervisor, co-advisor, mentor and external co-referee)
- The candidate and the thesis committee thoroughly discuss the research project, the results and its strengths and weaknesses in a scientific context and evaluate the background knowledge of the candidate
- During this closed discussion/exam, the candidate also presents his/her outlook on the project, so that his conceptual understanding of the project can be assessed
- The mentor (or alternatively any thesis committee member) takes notes during the closed discussion/exam and all sign the protocol at the end of the thesis

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.