



# Guidelines: PhD Thesis Committee

For ICBM Research training groups within the PhD program Environmental Sciences and Biodiversity

## 1) Purpose

PhD thesis committees are internationally a widespread structure to support young scientists and are becoming more and more common in the German higher education landscape.

PhD thesis committees accompany the PhD candidate's progress from the very beginning to the disputation. The committee members bring in different (and international) perspectives on the research project and on the doctoral education in general. They serve the PhD candidate by providing regular "out-of-the-box" feedback and the chance to knit a research network right from the start. They also support the primary supervisors and ICBM in constantly improving their doctoral education.

The committee meetings provide a confidential and comfortable setting to discuss the progress of the PhD project, including possible risks and adjustments if needed. Important aspects of the meetings are scientific discussions, time table and important milestones, the PhD candidate's familiarity with relevant literature and experimental skills, adequacy of advice provided by the supervisor and others, and overall progress in the PhD program Environmental Sciences and Biodiversity.

## 2) Members

- A thesis committee consists of the primary supervisor and usually two or up to three additional committee members.
- One of the additional members should work at another research institution, ideally outside UOL.
- The members of the committee are chosen by the candidate in consultation with the primary supervisor.
- All committee members must hold at least a doctoral degree (PhD or other designation) and have expertise in the area of the thesis' research.
- If desired by the PhD candidate, another PhD candidate is allowed to attend the committee meetings.
- The composition of the thesis committee can be changed by the candidate in consultation with the primary supervisor, e.g., if the thesis work proceeds in new directions or if the PhD candidate feels that the committee does not meet their needs.

## 3) Frequency of meetings

- Two meetings of the committee per year are obligatory.
- The initial meeting of the committee should be held within two months after the PhD candidate started.
- The committee and the doctoral candidate may decide to schedule additional meetings if needed.

## 4) Roles and Responsibilities

### ***PhD candidate***

The PhD candidate organizes the meetings, invites all members, prepares and chairs the meeting. For the first meeting, the PhD candidate compiles a written summary (ca. 3-5 pages) outlining the thesis project and objectives of the PhD thesis. This should include a realistic timetable for all ongoing and

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planned activities ("thesis concept paper"). For all subsequent meetings, the PhD candidate summarizes the progress on the work, highlights revisions to the thesis project, critical obstacles for completing the PhD thesis, and provides a recent transcript of courses taken in the PhD program Environmental Sciences and Biodiversity. All documents should be collected in forms of a portfolio allowing a quick revision of the progress.

The focus of the meetings will change over time. At the beginning, project outline, choice of methods and timetable will be in the focus, rehearsal of conference presentations or publication strategies will become more important at a later stage. The PhD candidate should take advantage of the advisory function of the committee in trying out different modes of presentation, setting own foci and highlighting open questions and potential obstacles.

Minutes are prepared by the PhD candidate for each meeting, using the template provided by coordinator of the PhD program, and shared with the committee members and the coordinator of the PhD program.

### ***Primary supervisor***

The central role of the primary supervisor is scientific, technical and academic support and advice to the PhD candidate at all stages of the PhD project. The primary supervisor overlooks the research project, provides a supportive research environment, and advises the candidate in the selection of courses of the PhD program. The primary advisor should encourage and enable the PhD candidate to attend international conferences, visit laboratories abroad and establish networks with other scientists from the same or related research areas.

### ***Additional members***

Since the members of the committee are experts in the research area of the PhD candidate, their contribution is of high value for improving the quality and for facilitating the progress of the work. The members of the committee make suggestions for changes and improvements to the project of the doctoral candidate. All members of the committee are available for further advice of and discussions with the PhD candidate outside the regular biannual meetings, including confidential discussions on any subject relevant for the candidate's progress and welfare.

## **5) Documents to be filed**

Minutes and Module Certificate (Olt432) of the thesis committee meeting should be filed (electronically as a PDF file) at the office of the PhD program, that provides templates for the documents. All documents are made available to the committee members until the graduation of the PhD candidate.