



Policy for Doctoral Studies

COVID-19

Please note: Due to the pandemic, this policy does not currently contain any information about the department's expectation with regards to working at home versus in Alnarp. For updated information please contact Annika Felton (annika.felton@slu.se)

Purpose

This policy serves as a guide for the Doctoral Studies at the Southern Swedish Forest Research Centre. It is developed in accordance with the general guidelines for Doctoral studies at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (DNR: SLU ua 2018.1.1.1-4677).

Goals

- To help PhD students develop into independent scientists, so that they can complete their studies with PhD theses of high scientific quality.
 - To ensure a good working environment for PhD students.
 - To ensure high quality supervision of PhD students by creating trust between them and their supervisors.
 - To stimulate professional development for current and future supervisors, and to stimulate their pedagogic development.
 - To develop a creative environment for postgraduate studies through scientific discussions.
 - To promote collaboration and networking at national as well as international level.
 - To resolve problems that may arise during the study period.
 - To ensure that PhD students are well prepared for the post-graduate work.
 - To ensure that both female and male PhD students have equal opportunities for an academic career as is a question of democracy, fairness, and very much a question of quality.
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Tools for achieving the goals

Director of Doctoral Studies (contact person)

The Head of department appoints a Director of Doctoral Studies whose overarching role is to support PhD students and supervisors to ensure that each PhD student obtains a high-quality, individualized education while enjoying a good and stimulating working environment at the department. Specifically, the Director of Doctoral Studies is responsible for:

- Organizing annual meetings with each PhD student and his or hers principal supervisor for revision of the individual study plan (ISP).
- Ensuring that each PhD student is offered at least one female supervisor, and that gender equality is considered when inviting potential members to PhD evaluation committee.
- Evaluating the PhD-Study policy annually. Any proposals for revisions shall be discussed with the Head of the Department.
- Mediating support services regarding psychological needs, statistical help, etc. available for PhD students on campus and elsewhere
- Making information about the graduate program available to everyone concerned; provide information about existing support on administrative requirements, forms, rules, recruitment issues, etc, to make it easier to recruit new PhD students.
- Updating the department's webpage about doctoral studies.
- Setting up and maintaining a functioning e-mail list for PhD students at the department.
- Consulting PhD students and their supervisors in the event of problems related to supervisory issues.
- Monitoring the number of PhD courses given at the department and initiating new courses if relevant.
- Organizing monthly science meetings for PhD students at the department.
- Convening an annual supervisor's seminar to discuss supervisory issues and pedagogic development of the department's PhD program.
- Organizing mentoring meeting for PhD students (voluntary) who are one year or more from graduation, so they obtain advice regarding e.g. post-doc possibilities, contacts and support for further action.
- Participating in leading team meetings at the department.

Recruitment of PhD students

All PhD positions are announced and interviews are carried out with the best candidates. Normally, besides the supervisor(s), a representative from the researchers and from the PhD students at the department (but outside the planned supervision group or involved research group) should participate

during these interviews. However, the main supervisor always has the final word and will make the decision. For detailed advice regarding the recruitment process, see “[FAQ regarding the admission of a new PhD student](#)”.

Introduction to the department

It is important that each new PhD student gets a warm welcome at our department when they arrive and is given a thorough introduction to the department. The principal supervisor is responsible for introducing him or her to the procedures and structures at the department, as well as presenting the student to other members of staff in the department. The supervisor makes sure the PhD student gets in contact with the head of department and the department’s administrator, economist, technician and IT-administrator. The Director of Doctoral studies is responsible for informing new PhD students about the PhD education at the University. The department administrator ensures the office is in order, introduces the PhD student to relevant digital systems etc, while the economist introduces them to economic issues (e.g. project numbers) and the insurance situation. The technician shows the new PhD student around the premises, explains the alarms, emergency procedures etc. Finally, the IT-administrator orders a computer for the PhD student and adds their address to relevant email lists.

There is a “[Handbook for PhD students at the Forest Faculty](#)”. In this book you will find practical advice and good information for new PhD students, collated by the PhD students’ union at the faculty.

Supervision

To give PhD students the possibility of receiving advice on their work from several persons, SLU requires each PhD student to have at least two supervisors, but normally not more than four. The Faculty Board can accept more than four supervisors if special needs for this are declared. It is the principal supervisor, together with the PhD student, who proposes this group. At least one of the co-supervisors must be employed by SLU. If the panel includes more than two supervisors, the department recommends that at least one of the co-supervisors should belong to another department at SLU or another university (and preferably from another country). This is to create some diversity in the supervisory panel, for the benefit of the PhD student with regards to advice and feedback given to them. The Faculty Board formally appoints all supervisors. The PhD student has the freedom to make changes to the supervisory group if they wish, but such changes must be approved by the Faculty Board.

Gender equality in supervisory and evaluation panels

Among PhD students, women constitute a somewhat larger fraction than men, but relatively few graduated female PhDs continue with an academic career. As a consequence PhD advisors are generally men. Therefore, care should be taken to arrange so that each PhD student is offered at least one female supervisor. Likewise, gender equality must be considered when appointing members of PhD evaluation committees.

Individual study plan (ISP) and PhD program

The department's PhD program can be done in either of the two subject areas Forest management (Sw: skogshushållning) and Biology. The general study plan for these subject areas are common to all PhD students at the faculty and can be found on the faculty's [website](#). This is a useful website as all relevant information, forms and documents regarding PhD studies at SLU are collated there.

Every PhD student at the department has the right to an individualized education. To ensure this, the Faculty has introduced an individual study plan (ISP). The design of each PhD student's program is defined in this document. The ISP includes such things as goals, commitments by both student and supervisor, important deadlines, participation in international conferences and courses and literature to be studied.

A preliminary ISP is to be drawn up by the principal supervisor in conjunction with admittance to the program. It should be updated by both the PhD student and the supervisor and submitted to the faculty within three months after admittance (Fig 1). The ISP is a living document and needs to be revised and updated at least once a year by the PhD student together with the supervisor(s), before the follow-up meetings with the Director of Doctoral Studies (see below).

From August 2021 we use a digital ISP portal at SLU. [Instructions of how to get started with the digital ISP can be found here](#). If the PhD student was employed after June 1 2021, it is compulsory to use the digital format of the ISP. Doctoral students that were admitted to doctoral education at SLU before June 1 2021 are strongly encouraged to transfer their ISP to the digital system in connection to the next planned annual follow up and revision of the ISP.

After 25% of the study period is completed, there will be a one-year follow-up with the Director of Doctoral Studies ("ISP meeting"). After 50% of the study period is completed (two years full time), there will be a mid-period follow-up of the ISP in conjunction with a departmental seminar ("half-time seminar") given by the PhD student with a competent evaluator present. The evaluator should be a docent or have scientific competence that is deemed equivalent by the Faculty board. The PhD student will be evaluated on their

ability to 1) verbally present their work, 2) discuss and analyze general and specific methods in their research area, and 3) independently discuss and analyze their results. The supervisor(s), acting Head of Department and Director of Doctoral Studies will take part in the mid-period follow-up. There will finally be a follow-up of the ISP after 75% of the program, and here the acting Head of the department will participate. The Director of Doctoral Studies is responsible for reminding supervisors and PhD students of ISP meetings and for organizing dates. The PhD student is responsible that each follow-up will subsequently be reported in LADOK, uploaded at the ISP portal, and copies of the revised study plan will be archived at the department.



Figure 1. Mandatory duties during the course of the PhD program over 48 months (In Swedish). Source: Riktlinjer för utbildningen på forskarnivå 2019 (DNR: SLU ua 2018.1.1.1-4677)

Other project presentations by the PhD student

To inform and get input on their research from colleagues, the PhD students shall present their projects at an open seminar. These seminars shall be included in the department seminar series. To prepare the PhD student for the defense of the thesis, the supervisor is recommended to organize a pre-defense of the thesis.

Courses

During the postgraduate program, the PhD students must attend courses equivalent to 30 credits (ECTS). Philosophy of science and ethics (3 ECTS) is the only mandatory course. Note that there are different requirements for students employed before and after 1 January 2013. Half the amount of credits must be taken for licentiates. There is a [search engine](#) for available PhD courses at the University. The credits can be distributed among generic courses, general courses and special courses. To obtain course credits the course must be designed specifically for doctoral students, be organized by a

university, and fulfill SLU's criteria: the course plan (or equivalent documentation) must define necessary qualifications, extent of course, learning goals, aim, content, pedagogic format, time plan and requirements for passing. Courses that deviate from the criteria may still contribute with credits but only after acceptance from the Faculty Board.

A guide to critically appraising and understanding thesis direction and foundation at the start of the PhD period

It is (by Feb 2019) no longer compulsory for PhD students to write an introductory essay. However, for the new PhD student to obtain knowledge necessary as efficiently as possible, the department recommends that the PhD student and supervisor(s) engage in an interactive exercise during the first 6-12 months of the PhD. This may be more or less relevant for different PhD students and projects, depending on prior knowledge, time constraints, field work etc., so it should be tailor-made to suit each case. This should help the PhD student to critically appraise their hypotheses and data collection early on, and obtain a good understanding of relevant literature in an efficient manner. It is the process that is important, not the product – a resulting text may be useful for future publications, but this depends on the project in question. After finding answers to directed questions given by the supervisor, the PhD student discussed them thoroughly with supervisor(s). Suggestions of questions:

- What is the theoretical background to your project?
- Are there important knowledge gaps in the literature?
- Which are your main hypotheses?
- Why is it important to obtain this new knowledge?
- What do you expect to find?
- What kind of data do you need to collect to test the different hypotheses?
- Can you, with your data, distinguish between different possible explanations?
- If your project gets criticised at the end, which criticisms do you think that would be? How would you overcome those problems?

International courses and conferences

It is important for both current and future research that PhD students broaden their international network. Therefore, every PhD student is expected to participate in at least one international scientific conference, where they present their own work. The department also encourages PhD students to participate in international postgraduate courses. Such courses can be included in the amount of course credits above after the faculty has approved it (see above). The department sponsors such participation in international courses with a maximum of 4 000 SEK for each course. However, each

student is only allowed to be sponsored for one such course, and any money will only be received after applications to other funding sources in foundations for the purpose have failed. In addition, PhD students are encouraged to visit research groups abroad. The department will not sponsor this, but assumes that the students find their own money.

Monthly science meeting and PhD students' activity money

To encourage critical thinking and scientific discourse across disciplines the Director of doctoral studies organizes monthly meetings that all PhD students attend as their schedules permit. Trans-disciplinary scientific issues, questions and research topics or papers are discussed.

To give the PhD students the possibility to discuss their work, other relevant matters and get to know each other better, the group could receive funding from the department. For example, they may want to arrange a trip or excursion. The amount is 2000 SEK per year for each student, and it cannot be used for other purposes. The Head of Department decides about this.

Teaching at the department

A doctoral degree entails four years of full-time study. Duties in addition to the student's graduate studies will result in a reduction in the speed at which the student can complete the degree and will entail an extension of the program by a corresponding number of days. All departmental duties are voluntary. However, all PhD students are expected to teach as part of their PhD position, although this is adjusted to the department's need for teachers with various skills. The department expects that PhD students teach for about 5% of full time (i.e. ca 2.5 weeks each year), without having their program dates extended. Teaching and participation in activities with the objective to inform stakeholders also are good opportunities for students to get contacts outside the University and improve their ability for popular scientific communication. In addition, it is our recommendation that each PhD student writes at least one popular scientific publication.

Working environment

To work as a PhD student can be stressful at times, due to tight deadlines and high expectations. The department is actively working to reduce stress for PhD students and prevent stress to become a long-term problem for any individual. For example, we try to prevent supervisory problems and conflicts, by ensuring that new supervisory panels are well balanced with regards to competence, gender and university origin, and by requiring clear "contracts" to be established during the first three months of the PhD to define

responsibilities and expectations. The Director of Doctoral Studies also mediates support services regarding psychological needs, statistical help, etc. available on campus and elsewhere.

For both the sake of the PhD student's wellbeing, and the economy of the department, the department urges every employee to take out their vacation every year. It is important that PhD students avoid having a large sum of vacation days left at the end of their research program.

Thesis and defense of theses

The department recommends that the doctoral thesis is produced as compilation theses, and includes four articles/manuscripts. According to the guidelines for PhD studies at SLU, minimum amounts of articles are 3 and 1 for doctoral and licentiate theses, respectively. The student should be first author or corresponding author of at least 2 and 1, respectively. For doctoral theses at least one of these articles should be accepted for publication by a peer-reviewed international journal at the time of defending the theses. The defense should be scheduled between the 15th August and 15th June. To apply for a dissertation date, a [form](#) must be filled out and sent to the faculty at least 3 months in advance of the defense day. This form will be assessed by the faculty (FUN), and once accepted, the date is finally agreed upon.. See guidelines from the faculty for preparing the theses defense including constellation of Evaluation Committee, important deadlines and more on [this website](#). Also, find advice regarding the final stage of the PhD tailor-made for our department in this [FAQ-sheet](#) about dissertations. In addition, at time of thesis defense, all course credits shall be registered, and other obligations fulfilled.

Development of future supervisors and teachers

PhD students at the department are encouraged to take part in pedagogic training. This includes the possibility to participate in the pedagogic courses available at the University, but also entails special courses or seminars, the purchase of books, or events where supervisors and/or future supervisors can share experiences. For such purposes, PhD students can use money for development of personal skills available for each group at the department.

PhD scholarships to cover the PhD program

Normally, PhD students at the department are employed as doctoral students with full salary according to the recommendations by the University including social insurance, overhead costs etc. The department does not accept scholarship students, as this results in unequal situations among PhD students

at the department. However, exceptions can be made with regard to individuals from countries that receive aid from Sweden according to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).