

PhD education guidelines

About this document

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Background

The objective of the PhD Education program of the Faculty of Science is to deepen the knowledge and skills of PhD candidates, enabling them to become fully qualified academics with an excellent perspective for a career within or outside academia. The PhD program is tailored to the individual needs of PhD candidates. The program provides a variety of activities enhancing the academic, professional and general skills of PhD candidates.

The guidelines in this document present a framework for a PhD education program that is compliant with the [VU Doctorate Regulations](#). The PhD education program comprises a number of activities shared by all scientific departments/Graduate Schools of the Faculty of Science organised in the Doctoral School of Science. In view of the highly diverse disciplines in the faculty, each Graduate School has the freedom to provide a tailored program to their PhD candidates. In all cases, courses and other activities are taught or monitored by renowned scholars of the VU faculties or colleagues from other universities, research institutes or companies that are fully qualified for providing education at the highest standards.

The PhD education program is based on a number of key principles:

- PhD candidates are viewed as full members of the academic community; their education program represents a professionalization of their skills.
- The PhD education program is highly decentralized; PhD candidates and their supervisors have a primary responsibility to select adequate program elements, organize the participation of PhD candidates, register in Hora Finita and monitor the achievements.
- The faculty encourages the participation of departments in national research schools. Education programs of national research schools are fully recognized as valid program elements. In addition, cooperation with other VU-faculties and Amsterdam UMC on education programs is encouraged. In all cases, it is mandatory that the educational program consists of at least 30 EC and includes the 2EC course on Scientific Integrity.
- The faculty encourages a balanced educational programme with activities and courses that support the timely completion of the promotion trajectory within the given contract time, e.g. scientific writing.

Organization of PhD education

The dean of the faculty is formally responsible for the PhD program, including the PhD training program. The dean has mandated this responsibility to the department heads. The department head can mandate the responsibility for the PhD education program to the PhD coordinator who organizes the support, education and training of the PhD candidates in more detail.

Role PhD coordinators

The tasks of the PhD coordinator are described in document [Functieomschrijving PhD coordinator \(in Dutch\)](#).

In short, the PhD coordinator is responsible for:

- Taking note of policy on PhD education of central VU and the Faculty of Science
- Representing the graduate school/department towards the Faculty Board
- Informing supervisors on policy and procedures concerning PhD education
- Informing PhD candidates on policy, procedures, training programme, and financial arrangements

The PhD coordinator is authorised to:

- Review the Training and Supervision Plan (TSP)
- Approve that the PhD candidate devoted at least 30 EC (840 hours) to training
- Grant an exemption from the demand to devote at least 30 EC to training

A list of the departments with their PhD coordinators is [here](#).

The faculty-wide Doctoral School of Science for PhD graduation serves as an umbrella for the separate departmental graduate schools.

Most departments are associated with national research schools (nationale onderzoeksscholen) for collaboration and training of PhD candidates. National research schools combine research with the education of researchers of different research organizations in a given scientific area. National research schools associated with departments of the faculty are included in appendix 2. PhD candidates are obliged to follow the regulations of the national research schools associated with their departmental graduate school. Conform the agreed mandate, the PhD coordinator will take a formal decision whether a national research school fulfils all criteria of the VU Doctorate Regulations with respect to the PhD education program. After the formal decision, all PhD candidates that

successfully have followed the education program of the national research school will automatically receive the faculty certificate.

Composition of the PhD Education program

An overview of PhD courses offered by VU Amsterdam can be found [here](#). The following four categories of courses and/or activities can be part of the PhD education program of a PhD candidate:

- A. **Scientific Integrity.** Mandatory course for each PhD candidate. Preferably, the course is taken in the first year and no later than the second year. More information is found under '[PhD courses](#)'. It is possible to follow an alternative course on scientific integrity at another faculty or university, provided that it is of equal level. This is to be assessed by the PhD coordinator. Before starting the alternative course, this should be notified to Maaïke Croes, bureausecretariaat, m.a.croes@vu.nl.
- B. **General skills courses and activities.** Courses may include scientific writing, scientific presentation, project management, management skills or similar courses. Other activities are (formal) Training for Education, participation in representative councils, participation in BSc/MSc Information days, teaching, impact-related courses/activities, organization of community events, such as conferences.
- C. **Scientific specialization courses.** Courses include methodological skills, training programs for complex instruments, capita selecta courses, writing of grant proposal and participation in scientific colloquia. Capita selecta courses may be given on an individual basis.
- D. **Research-related activities.** Activities include visit to conferences, presentation of lectures and posters, participation in workshops.

The PhD education program must meet the following composition rules:

- Category A (Scientific Integrity): 2 EC
- Category B (General skills courses and activities) + C (Scientific specialization courses): 8-20 EC
- Category D (Research-related activities): 8-20 EC
- A+B+C+D: 30 EC

Appendix 1 provides a list of course elements and the maximum number of EC awarded to each course/activity type.

Exemptions

VU Doctorate Regulations state that the faculty may grant an exemption for (parts of) the PhD education program. Exemption requests are approved/rejected by the PhD coordinator of the department. Exemption for the research integrity course are approved/rejected by the dean. The faculty recognizes the following reasons for granting a partial or full exemption from the demands to devote at least 30 EC to training and education:

- due to seniority of PhD candidate (long-term experience in R&D);
- due to double-degree PhD, education takes mainly place at partner university;
- due to personal circumstances (e.g., illness, difficult private circumstances);
- due to professional circumstances (for example, field work or extensive teaching load).

For PhD candidates who have a three-year contract, have a part-time contract or are "external" PhD candidates (with no employment contract), an individual assessment will be made in each case, depending on the prior degree(s), research training and research experience of the candidate. For

each “external” PhD candidate the PhD coordinator will decide which components of the PhD Educational programme should be completed to receive a certificate.

PhD candidates who have completed a 2-year Research Master in a relevant scientific field can apply for exemption for further core methods training (type B & C) and can receive dispensation for these core courses as part of the required 30 ECTS, when requested by the PhD candidate.

Training and Supervision Plan

The [TSP](#) contains the agreements between the PhD candidate and supervisors on several issues, including:

- Supervision. This defines who will act as supervisors (under whose daily supervision the PhD candidate will work (co-promotor(s)), and the promotor(s)). It also includes agreements on the structure and frequency of supervision by the promotor(s) and daily supervisor(s). If the supervisor is not also the promotor, it is also registered that at the start of the doctoral research, as well as those moments that are decisive for the progress of the research, the PhD candidate has a conversation about the doctoral research with the promotor(s). The promotor(s) and PhD candidate shall meet at least once a year.
- PhD candidate advisor.
- Research Plan. This concerns the topic and overall approach to the research.
- Teaching.
- Training plan. This refers to the PhD education program.

The first version of the TSP, together with Form I, is submitted to the department (PhD coordinator) within the first month after admission of the PhD candidate. The TSP is reviewed during each PhD candidate’s annual interview with the supervisor(s).

Certificate

After a PhD candidate has fulfilled all requirements of the Educational Program for PhD candidates of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the faculty will grant a formal certificate to the PhD candidate, stating this accomplishment. In addition, the certificate will contain a list of all courses and activities that have been followed and done by the PhD candidate. The issuance of the certificate is organized by the PhD coordinator.

Appendix 1: Elements of an education program

For some courses/activities the maximum EC is not yet determined (pro memorie, PM). One EC is equal to 28 hours of study load, and this can be used for granting the number of EC for a specific course/activity.

Category	Course/activity/examples	Max EC	Remarks/detailed examples
A. Mandatory	Scientific Integrity course	2	Faculty-wide and obligatory course, should be preferably done in Year 1 of PhD trajectory. No later than the second year.
B. General skills	Scientific writing, presentation, project management, management skills	PM	Certificate required
	Training for teaching	3	Certificate required
	Teaching	6	A reflection report on the teaching activity, written by the PhD candidate, needs to be approved by the PhD coordinator.
	Impact-related courses/activities	3	Example 1: outreach activity, e.g. communication on research, public debate, intellectual property. A reflection report on the impact-related activity, written by the PhD candidate, needs to be approved by the supervisors and PhD coordinator. Example 2: learning path valorisation and impact (IXA)
	Participation in representative bodies	2	Example: e.g. ODC, PhD council, programme committees
	Participation in BSc/MSc Information days	2	Statement from faculty head C&M and/or Programme director required
	Organization of community events	2	Example: workshop organization
C.	Training on complex instruments	PM	Specification by supervisor

Scientific specialization			required
	Research methodology, statistics	PM	EC according to course specification
	Capita Selecta courses	6	Specification by course supervisor in case of individual course
	Participation in colloquia, seminars	6	
	Preparation of Rubicon or comparable grant application	2	
D. Research - related activities	Conference visit	1	
	Poster or presentation at conference	1	
	Participation in workshop	2	

Appendix 2: National research schools

National Research Schools associated with Graduate Schools of Science Faculty VU

Graduate School of Science Faculty VU		National Research School		
Abbreviation	Full name	Abbreviation	Full name	Webpage
A-Life	Amsterdam Institute for Life and Environment	PE&RC		https://pe-rc.nl/
Athena	Athena Institute	WTMC	Netherlands Graduate Research School of Science, Technology and Modern Culture	https://www.wtmc.eu/
INF	Computer Science	1: SIKS 2: IPA 3: ASCI	1: Netherlands Research School for Information and Knowledge Systems 2: Institute for Programming research and Algorithmics 3: Advanced School for Computing and Imaging	1: https://siks.nl/ 2: https://ipa.win.tue.nl/ 3: https://asci.school/
AAW	Earth Sciences	SENSE	Research School for Socio-Economic and Natural Sciences of the Environment	https://sense.nl
IVM	Institute for Environmental Studies	SENSE	Research School for Socio-Economic and Natural Sciences of the Environment	https://sense.nl
N&S	Physics & Astronomy	1: DRSTP 2: OSAF	1: Dutch Research School of Theoretical Physics 2: Onderzoekschool Subatomaire Fysica	1: https://www.drstp.nl/ 2: https://www.nikhef.nl/activiteiten/onderzoekschool/