

Guidelines

PhD Thesis Committee / Thesis Advisory Committee

Recommendations for OLTECH members

1) Purpose

PhD thesis committees/ Thesis Advisory Committees are an internationally widespread structure for the promotion of early career researchers, which is also becoming increasingly established in the German university landscape. PhD thesis committees accompany the doctoral candidate's progress from the very beginning to the disputation. The committee members bring in different (and international) perspectives to the research project and doctoral education in general. They provide doctoral candidates with regular "out-of-the-box" feedback and the opportunity to establish a research network right from the start. They also support the primary supervisors by 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 doctoral candidate's familiarity with relevant literature and experimental skills, adequacy of advice provided by the supervisor and others.

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 doctoral 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 research field of the dissertation.
- If desired by the doctoral candidate, another doctoral candidate is allowed to attend the committee meetings.
- The composition of the dissertation committee may be changed by the candidate in consultation with the primary supervisor, e.g. if the dissertation work moves in new directions or if the doctoral candidate feels that the committee does not meet his/her needs.

3) Frequency of meetings

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

4) Roles and Responsibilities

Doctoral candidate

The doctoral candidate organizes the meetings, invites all members, prepares and chairs the meeting. For the first meeting, it is recommended that the doctoral 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 planned activities ("thesis concept paper"). For all subsequent meetings, the doctoral candidate summarizes the progress on the work, highlights revisions to the thesis project, critical obstacles for completing the PhD thesis, and provides an overview of courses attended as part of the graduate school curriculum. 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, the focus is on the project outline, choice of methods and timetable; rehearsing conference presentations or publication strategies will become more important in a later phase. The doctoral candidate should use the advisory function of the committee to try out different forms of presentation, set their own priorities and point out open questions and possible obstacles. Minutes are prepared by the doctoral candidate for each meeting, using e.g. the template provided by OLTECH, and shared with the committee members.

Primary supervisor

The main task of the primary supervisor is to provide scientific, technical and academic support and advice to the doctoral candidate in all phases of the doctoral project. The primary supervisor oversees the research project, provides a supportive research environment and advises the candidate on the choice of courses to complement the PhD project. The primary supervisor should encourage and enable the doctoral 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 doctoral candidate's field of research, their contribution is of great value in improving the quality and facilitating the progress of the thesis. The members of the committee make suggestions for changes and improvements to the doctoral candidate's project. All members of the committee are also available to the doctoral candidate for further advice and discussion outside the regular bi-annual meetings, including confidential discussions on any topics relevant to the progress and welfare of the doctoral candidate.

5) Documents to be filed

Minutes and module certificates of the thesis committee meetings should be filed (electronically as a PDF file) and are made available to the committee members until the doctoral candidate graduates.