



CHARTER FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN LIFE SCIENCES



UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE

The Faculties of Medicine and Science of the University of Geneva propose a joint PhD School in Life Sciences that offers six specializations. Doctoral students are hosted in the laboratories from one of the two faculties and spend their thesis developing a research project. Throughout this period, they are part of a network of researchers from other academic laboratories, industry, and non-governmental organizations.

This charter defines a practical framework for understanding the concepts underlying the thesis process.

The principles stated here are in agreement with the values defended by the University of Geneva's Charter of Ethics and Professional Conduct. The present charter is for information purposes only and is not a substitute for the official regulations that apply to the PhD School in Life Sciences.

In the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Science, doctoral students receive financial support for the duration of their thesis either as a fellowship or as an assistant salary from their PhD director. However, the status of doctoral student is distinct from that of research and teaching assistant. The former concerns the doctoral training of the student and is formalized by a thesis direction certificate, a prerequisite for admission to the doctorate, while the latter is subject to an employment contract.

The role of the thesis director is to provide the necessary framework and supervision for the thesis project itself, so as to allow the doctoral student to develop his or her scientific and intellectual autonomy.

A lecturer may refuse to supervise a student. Co-supervision may be set up in agreement with the general regulations for Doctoral Studies in Life Sciences.

The doctorate is a professional experience that only becomes meaningful if the candidate has a strong interest in the subject and research ability.

Before agreeing to supervise a thesis, the thesis director must ensure that the motivation of the candidate is based on scientific curiosity, particularly for the proposed subject, and that the doctoral candidate has the necessary experimental and intellectual abilities.

The doctorate is an expression of creativity within an academic environment. The doctorate is a degree unlike any other, in that it demands more than meeting the requirements of a study plan, such as passing an exam or performing even substantial laboratory work. Instead, the candidate must demonstrate the ability to innovate and to prove or disprove a hypothesis. A successful doctorate is therefore not a question of creating a new text *ex nihilo*, but rather of experimentally testing the limits of a pre-existing scientific model and making it evolve. It is about developing new knowledge within the framework of a scientific approach. This creative process is only possible once

the methodology has been acquired, during basic training, and is built little by little to expand knowledge.

However, it will be at the cost of errors, unsuccessful attempts, questioning, and comparing the obtained results with the knowledge acquired from peers, in particular through readings and scientific discussions, that the doctoral student can hope to achieve excellence and add his or her stone to the edifice of human understanding.

The doctoral student works within the research group of his or her director, and his or her thesis project is integrated within the projects of the laboratory. As such, the financing of the thesis depends on funds allocated either to the student or to the thesis director, and the means of financing must be announced at the beginning of the thesis. The thesis director decides on a benchmark for the thesis work and on the complementary training courses that will help the student acquire the skills necessary for the research project. He or she guides the doctoral student in his or her professional development through research-related activities.

The thesis director and his or her doctoral student commit to interacting regularly. Continuous and fruitful exchanges are essential to developing a scientific project; thus, the doctoral student has to provide regular, detailed progress reports. The supervision of a thesis must imperatively lead to the intellectual autonomy of future PhDs in science; it is also expected that the doctoral student will demonstrate a sense of initiative. Deontological and ethical aspects are an equally important part of the training, and it is the responsibility of the thesis director to share these values.

The doctoral training aims at helping the student to become a researcher and to integrate the scientific community of his or her field of research thanks to the support of his or her thesis director.