Statutes of the Doctoral School of Life Sciences at the University of Geneva

STATUTES of the Doctoral School of Life Sciences

The Doctoral School of Life Sciences at the University of Geneva brings together doctoral programs that award PhD degrees from the Faculties of Medicine and Science. This study program is aimed at students with an excellent scientific training in any of the various research disciplines related to life sciences.

Each member of these doctoral programs is committed to developing doctoral projects of a high scientific level, to upholding the values of the doctoral charter and to respecting the rules of the PhD as described in the regulations of the Doctoral School of Life Sciences at the Faculties of Medicine and Science.

Each individual program enjoys a high level of independence with regards to its academic and scientific orientations.

1 AFFILIATIONS

1.1 Members of the Doctoral School

The members of the interfaculty Doctoral School of Life Sciences are academic members of either of the two faculties and fulfil two criteria. They must be:

- Able to fund the doctoral student and his/her project
- Scientifically active within the field of the program

Members of the Doctoral School are either full members of a given program, or associate members according to the rules delineated below (1.2, 1.3).

Full members:

- Holders of a PhD or MD-PhD, authorized to supervise scientific research at PhD level (MERs supported by their department, PAST, PAS, PT, PO), whose main activity is research, are entitled to autonomously supervising their PhD students’ research within a program of which they are a full member.

- Holders of a PhD or MD-PhD, whose main activity is research but who are not authorized to supervise scientific research at PhD level (CC, CE, CS, MA, ...) are entitled to supervising their PhD students’ research together with an academic supervisor who is a full member.

- Holders of an MD-PhD who do not hold a PhD and whose main activity is research, are entitled to supervising their PhD students’ research together with a
co-supervisor who holds a PhD.

Associate members:

- Holders of a PhD and/or MD are entitled to supervise their PhD students’ research on a specific doctoral project that fits within a given program of which they are not full members, together with a co-supervisor who is a full member of this program, and who holds a PhD or an MD-PhD.

- Members whose research activity is accessory to their main professional activities (clinical, industrial, or other), i.e. whose time spent on research activities covers less than 40% of their effective work time, cannot be full members and receive associate member status. The doctoral projects of their PhD students are co-directed by a full member who holds a PhD or MD-PhD.

In all cases, supervision of the doctoral project requires evaluation and approval by the Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) as delineated in the regulations.

1.2 Full member of a program

Members wishing to join a given program as full members must apply to the director of this program who will submit the application to the members of his/her program.

Any new full member must be elected by a two-third majority of the members by the acting full members of the program.

Full members must be active within their program, taking part in the recruitment process of doctoral candidates (recruitment committee, selection committee, ad hoc committee), in the equivalence committees, in the Thesis Advisory Committees (TACs), in the thesis evaluation committees, and in the teaching organised by the program. They cannot ask to be substituted for any of these duties, with the exception of the program director (see point 4.3).

Thesis supervisors can be full members of two programs at most, as long as they are elected independently by the members of each of these two programs.

If the commitment of any full member to the activities of the program is deemed insufficient or if his/her actions as thesis supervisor are detrimental to the PhD students, the program director may propose that the member lose his/her full rights. This proposal is validated by a restricted council of five members: the program director; two full members, one chosen by the thesis supervisor whose rights are being evaluated, the other one chosen by the full members; a representative of the Dean’s Office; and a representative of the PhD students.

1.3 Associate member of a program

Any student admitted into the Doctoral School within a given program may submit his/her thesis project to a different program with the approval of his/her thesis supervisor. The project will be evaluated by the director of the program in question, and in case of a favourable decision, the thesis supervisor will receive the status of
associate member of this program. However, acceptance into this different program depends on the favourable recommendation on the PhD student’s equivalence request, if relevant.

The PhD student must attend the courses that are minimally required by the program which accepted him/her and must fulfil the co-requisites defined upon admission.

His/her doctoral project will be co-supervised by a thesis co-supervisor who must be a full member of the PhD student’s program.

The status of associate member lasts only for the duration of the doctoral project.

The status of associate member of a program confers neither rights nor obligations, except for the obligation to abide by the working rules of the host program until the end of the PhD.

2 DIRECTION of a doctoral program

Directors for the following programs are chosen among the Faculty of Medicine:
- The Biomedical Sciences program, previously called Biology-Medicine program,
- The Genomics and Digital Health program.

Directors for the following programs are chosen among the Faculty of Science:
- The Molecular Biosciences program, previously called International PhD program in Life Sciences,
- The Pharmaceutical Sciences program, a program of the Geneva-Lausanne School of Pharmacy– EPGL,
- The Ecology and Evolution program,
- The Physics of Biology program.

2.1 Nomination of the director of a doctoral program

The director of a doctoral program is scientifically recognised in the field of the doctoral program and must be actively involved in research.

The director of a given doctoral program is chosen among the full members of the program and elected by a two-thirds majority vote of the members.

His/Her mandate lasts four years and is renewable once.

He/She may ask to be assisted by a co-director, who is a member of the academic community chosen by the program director.

The task of doctoral program director must be compensated by the institution in the same right as a teaching duty, proportionately to the size of the program.

2.2 Duties of the program directors

The program director manages the different academic aspects of his/her program with
the support of the coordinator.

The program director provides recommendations on requests for equivalencies.

The program director supervises the selection process of doctoral candidates organised by the coordinator: he/she assembles the committees involved in the selection process (see 4.2, 4.3).

The program director validates the composition of the Thesis Advisory Committees (TACs) and assesses the quality of the evaluation process based on the TAC report.

The program directors provide recommendations on thesis defence proposals based on the thesis report of the thesis supervisor and the endorsement of at least one external expert.

The program director supports the PhD students in organising the PhD retreat.

The program director contributes to the visibility of his/her program.

The program director manages the funds obtained by the program.

The program director makes him-/herself available to PhD students and members of the program.

The program directors manage conflicts in a spirit of neutrality, goodwill and confidentiality. As far as possible, the program director develops and proposes solutions to resolve conflicts, which must be compatible with the regulations, the statutes, and the charter of the Doctoral School.

The program directors are responsible for conveying a TAC outside the regular conditions if they deem this necessary.

The program directors must report any abuse to the relevant faculty or university authorities.

3 Council of the Doctoral School of Life Sciences

3.1 Composition and functioning of the Council of the Doctoral School

The Doctoral School is supervised by a Council which comprises a representative of each faculty and of each program.

The Council is composed of a vice-dean representing each faculty, the directors of each doctoral program, and a representative of the PhD students of each faculty.

The representatives of the PhD students have a consultative role in the Council.

The Council of the Doctoral School meets at least once per year to discuss structural and
functional aspects of the school.

Regarding structural aspects, such as modification of the statutes, or the creation, merging, separation, or dissolution of programs, decisions have to be approved by a unanimous vote of the council members.

Regarding functional aspects, decisions have to be approved by a vote supported by two-thirds of the council members.

The Council of the Doctoral School is tasked with providing recommendations on exceptional requests for waivers of researchers holding an MD but not a PhD, according to Article 6, paragraph 4c of the regulations. This recommendation is then passed on to the Dean’s Office of each faculty.

3.2 Duties of the Council of the Doctoral School
The Council ratifies the nomination of program directors.

The Council contributes to securing funding or sponsors willing to support the Doctoral School.

The Council establishes the ‘cahier des charges’ of the program coordinator(s) employed by the Doctoral School.

The Council ratifies the nomination of the program coordinator(s) proposed by the program directors.

The Council manages the funds obtained by the Doctoral School.

The Council establishes the list of Master’s Degrees that grant direct access to each of the programs.

The Council discusses and validates the attribution procedures for equivalencies in each program.

The Council is tasked with ensuring adherence to the doctoral regulations, the spirit of the doctoral charter and the statutes of the Doctoral School.

Any member or PhD student can report to the Council if a conflictual or abusive situation arises within the Doctoral School.

Members of the Council who are contacted in such a situation endeavour to lend a neutral, kind and confidential ear. As far as possible, members develop and propose solutions to resolve the conflict(s), solutions which must be compatible with the regulations and charter of the Doctoral School.

In case of proven misconduct of a member or a PhD student, the Council must contact the relevant faculty or university instances.
4 Selection process of PhD students

4.1 Admissibility and equivalencies

For students who need to submit an equivalence request, the coordinator sends the equivalence requests to the contact person(s) of the program in question. After having taken into account the recommendations of these experts, the program director communicates his/her recommendation to the Dean, or by delegation to the student advisor of the faculty, in order to have the equivalence attestation delivered. The latter may contain pre-requisites and/or co-requisites.

4.2 Recruitment of candidates

Recruitment is done through open calls with selection committee, or through interview and evaluation of a candidate by an ad hoc committee. These committees are composed exclusively of full members of the program. Associate members must be represented by a full member.

The Doctoral School commits to organising the selection process in such a way as to allow candidates to apply to several distinct programs of their choice.

Programs with over 20 laboratories are encouraged to organise or co-organise at least one selection process per year.

4.2.1 Selection committee

The selection committee is composed of two independent committees.

- The recommendation committee, consisting of program members who are not recruiting any student during this round of selection.
- The recruiting committee, consisting of professors offering one or more PhD positions.

Step 1: the recruiting committee selects, on the basis of application documents, those candidates that will be shortlisted for interview.

Step 2:
1. The recommendation committee attends the scientific presentations of the candidates and evaluates their scientific level based on questions. This committee provides recommendations which prevail on the recruiting committee’s proposal to select a candidate.
2. The recruiting committee attends the scientific presentations, evaluates the level of the candidates based on the exchange during question & answer time, and takes part in the one-to-one interviews with the candidates. The committee ensures that candidates receive all relevant administrative information regarding the doctoral program and have the possibility to visit the labs and discuss freely with PhD students who are members of the program.

The recruiting committee is in charge of finalising the list of retained candidates, based on the recommendations of the recommendation committee.
4.2.2 *Ad hoc* committee

The *ad hoc* committees manage the recruitment process of internal or external candidates proposed by a member of the program, outside open calls.

The decision to organise an *ad hoc* committee is evaluated and taken by the program director, upon request of the member.

*Ad hoc* committees are composed of the full or associate member proposing to accept a PhD student into his/her laboratory, and of at least two full members of the program, at least one of which must not belong to the same department as the recruiting member, and of the program director or a substitute designated by the director him-/herself.

The *ad hoc* recruitment process follows the rules of the selection process, i.e. a scientific presentation followed by a question & answer session and a one-to-one meeting with the future thesis supervisor. The committee members who are not recruiting play the role of the recommendation committee according to Article 5, paragraph 2 of the regulations.

*Geneva, December 7th 2017*

*Translated from French by Claudine Neyen & Yogeshvar Kalia, Jan 2019. The French version of these statutes is binding.*