

The PhD Coordinator function at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, University of Southern Denmark

Updated version – Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management

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The objective of the PhD School at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences at University of Southern Denmark is to train and educate researchers of a high international quality in a supportive, inclusive setting. The PhD program aims to fulfill current and future needs for highly qualified and skilled researchers for doing research, teaching and developments in relation to academia as well as private firms and public organizations.

The role and function of the PhD Coordinator appointed at every department at the Faculty is to support this objective. The primary role of the PhD Coordinator is to act as an “ombudsman”, who mediates issues related to the everyday life of PhD students. As such the PhD Coordinator initiates and supports activities for strengthening the terms and conditions of the PhD students. However, it is not the responsibility of the PhD coordinator to secure the progression of PhD projects or to intervene in the scientific and academic supervision. The function is independent and in general not affiliated with economics or HR responsibility, although variations exist among departments attached to the Faculty.

The obligations and tasks of the PhD Coordinator vary across departments depending on the number of students and the organizing of the department. However, some general obligations and tasks exist:

1) Information gathering and dissemination at the department

The PhD Coordinator communicates relevant information concerning the PhD program. The PhD Coordinator keeps her/himself informed on central and general initiatives and developments of the program (this does not include information on PhD courses).

2) Activities and meetings among PhD students

The objective of activities and meetings for PhD students is to strengthen knowledge sharing as well as inform and educate on selected topics (not to be compared to PhD courses). Activities and meetings are held regularly and in agreement with the Head of Department.

Departments are also encouraged to have regular meetings and activities for PhD supervisors for keeping and developing a high standard in supervision.

At some departments some activities can be facilitated by the PhD students – e.g. welcoming new students, mentor/buddy arrangements, social activities and the like.

3) Contact across the PhD School

The PhD Coordinator holds contact with the PhD School and supports the department in keeping and developing a high quality of the PhD program. This may include providing information to the PhD School on department activities for PhD students, PhD courses etc.

Furthermore, the PhD Coordinator is in charge of contact and exchange of information and experience with the other departments under the PhD School.

4) Counselling

The relationship between the individual PhD student and her/his supervisor(s) is a main building block in a fruitful PhD process. It is the responsibility of the PhD student and the supervisor(s) to

build a working relationship. In cases of potential disagreements, conflicts or other issues the PhD student has the opportunity to seek guidance and counselling by the PhD Coordinator. Some departments may choose to formalize this counselling in regular meetings. Furthermore, the PhD Coordinator may, where convenient, serve as a mediator in conflicts and expectations alignment between the PhD student and the department leadership (i.e., the department head, the leader of the research group etc.).

5. Gender equality and diversity

During the fulfillment of the PhD Coordinator's tasks and obligations, he/she may pay particular attention to whether gendered or other group patterns appear, for instance with respect to the following crucial points:

Personal motivation and development of the PhD project

- Trajectory of motivation throughout the PhD-project: how do the students themselves perceive the development, and how does the coordinator see it?
- Transitions during the project: From master student to PhD student, initiating the PhD project, preparing for the first-year evaluation, finishing the PhD project and preparing for thesis defense. Furthermore, other important transitions include studies abroad, returning from leave etc. The PhD Coordinator must pay attention to how PhD students handle these transitions and initiate conversations with PhD students or supervisor if necessary.

Embedding PhD students into a research community

- Sense of entitlement: How do students perceive their own fit in the community and/or discipline? Part of this is paying attention to how PhD students act when opportunities arise (grants, writing projects, conferences, courses etc.).
- Sense of belonging and community: How do students characterize their sense of belonging at the department and/or the community, and does it change during the course of the PhD project? Attention should be paid to whether students have active sponsors who open doors, pave the way, endorse, encourage and recommend them for opportunities and strategically smart moves. This sponsor may be the supervisor, but can also include other people from the research community.

Additional tasks and career focus

- During the PhD project, the PhD student may take on tasks that are not directly related to their research and teaching, and it is important to observe and discuss whether these tasks are career enhancing and strategically smart for the PhD student and the department.
- Balancing life and career decisions: Do students seem to struggle with difficult decisions concerning life questions in combination with career options? Attention should be paid to if the students involve their supervisors, peers or other colleagues, and if there are patterns in when and for whom the career becomes second priority.

If the PhD-coordinator observes group patterns with respect to any of the above points, it is important that he/she takes these up with the Head of department or eventually with the head of the PhD-school in order to devise initiatives that may counter any harmful and inappropriate single or patterns of occurrences.