



# **Guidelines for the Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) of the International Max Planck Research School for Organismal Biology**

## ***Preface***

The International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS) for Organismal Biology is a close cooperation between the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology (MPIO), the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior (MPI-AB) and the Department of Biology at the University of Konstanz (U KN). Its aim is to provide first-class training and education for outstanding doctoral students from all over the world in a stimulating research environment. This competitive doctoral program will provide its fellows with an excellent starting platform for a successful career in the fields of animal behavior, ecology, evolution, physiology, and neurobiology. In addition to their primary supervisors, students can gain academic supervision, guidance and support from other senior scientists through a Thesis Advisory Committee (from here on referred to as TAC).

## **§1**

### ***TAC Committee Composition***

- (1) Besides the direct supervisor, each doctoral student needs to have a TAC who will guide the doctoral student in all aspects of their doctoral work.
- (2) The TAC shall consist of the direct supervisor for the doctoral thesis and at least two other senior\* scientists without affiliation/dependence to the doctoral student's lab, of whom at least one member is from an institute other than the direct supervisor's institute.  
\*minimum level a Post-Doc. The TAC is not necessarily part of the examination committee.
- (3) The members of the TAC are jointly elected by the doctoral student and their direct supervisor.
- (4) The composition of the TAC may change during the course of the project for professional or non-professional reasons, upon the mutual consent of those involved. In the case of conflicts, the coordinator and board shall mediate.

## **§2**

### ***TAC responsibilities***

- (1) The TAC exists to assist the doctoral student by monitoring the pace and progress of the student's work and advising the student regarding the development of the research project, hereby complementing the role of the student's direct supervisor.

- (2) The TAC can (and is encouraged to) recommend changes to a student's proposal, evaluate the progress with regard to the potential for publication, and may also recommend a timeline for accomplishing defined goals necessary for completing the thesis research in time.
- (3) TAC members are asked to actively collaborate with the student, e.g., to read and comment on drafts of manuscripts.
- (4) In addition, TAC members are also intended to assist the student in all aspects of career planning, professional development and networking.
- (5) Members of the TAC may eventually mediate discussions and resolve conflicts if the doctoral candidate and the primary advisor disagree on essential aspects of the project or its supervision.
- (6) TAC members should be willing to remain in the TAC for the duration of the student's doctoral project, when possible, and be also available to the doctoral student for one-on-one consultations.

### **§3**

#### ***TAC procedures***

- (1) The TAC should be formed within the first 3 months and be notified to the coordinator of the IMPRS for Organismal Biology once determined.
- (2) The TAC should meet for the first time after 6 months. The second TAC meeting has to be called by the student latest after 12 months of doctoral work. Thereafter, TAC meetings should be called by the student at least once a year. Independent of the expected schedule, TAC members can be approached at any time, both by the student and the supervisor, if their advice and input is requested.
- (3) During the TAC meetings, the doctoral student should also have the opportunity for an interchange with the other TAC members without the main supervisor.
- (4) First TAC meeting:  
Within 6 months of admission, the student should have completed a written thesis proposal using the IMPRS thesis proposal form. This proposal should clearly develop the research questions based on a detailed overview of the recent research in this specific area. Furthermore, a methods section on how to address the research questions, possible results and their implications for recent research in this area, and a timeline with defined milestones are mandatory. A preliminary program for the additional curriculum, tailored to fit this research program, should also be presented in the proposal. This proposal will be sent to all TAC members, and two weeks later a major TAC meeting will be held. At this meeting, all committee members will have read

the proposal in detail and will discuss the proposed thesis work in great detail, the main aim being to provide critical and constructive feedback to the student before the main practical work is done.

(5) Further TAC meetings:

The second TAC meeting has to be called for by the student (and/or the advisor) after 12 months of doctoral work. The student will present their research progress. A positive evaluation by the TAC members at this meeting is essential for the student to continue in the program. Thereafter, TAC meetings should be held at least once a year.

(6) Prior to each meeting the student will send a brief progress report to each committee member, and give a short (10 min) presentation of the activities and achieved and missed goals during the reporting phase at the meeting itself. The research and additional curriculum schedule for the next period should also be planned / adjusted during these meetings. The student and the TAC members are obliged to document their meetings briefly to the program coordinator using the IMPRS TAC meeting minutes form.

(7) It is the student's responsibility to invite the TAC members, arrange TAC meetings and provide the IMPRS coordinator's office with copies of the signed TAC meeting minutes in a timely fashion.

(8) The meetings do not serve as an examination of the student, but as an evaluation and assessment of the student's work and a scientific support to the student.

(9) If you are unable to perform a TAC meeting under normal circumstances, or you need to change your TAC members, please contact the coordinator, for support.

## **§4**

### ***TAC meeting minutes***

(1) After each TAC meeting the minutes must be completed within a few days following the TAC meeting, and sent to all TAC members for review. Once approved by the TAC members the same should be signed and a copy sent to all participants and the IMPRS coordinator's office.

(2) The length should be concise yet informative and contain the following sections:

- Achieved goals in reporting phase
- Missed goals, weaknesses
- What was proposed to solve these problems?
- Adjusted project and financial time line
- Other comments, suggestions

- Milestones until next meeting
  - Date of next meeting
- (3) The TAC meeting minutes should serve as a reference for the student and the TAC in the following TAC meetings, in order to better track the progress of the student and to adjust the project outline to the financed period.
- (4) In addition, regular and complete TAC meeting minutes are an essential requirement before applying to any financial support by the IMPRS.

## **§5**

### ***Exceptions***

- (1) Exceptions to any of the aforementioned regulations can be discussed with the IMPRS coordinator. When necessary, issues may be discussed with the IMPRS board members.

## **§6**

### ***Resolution of disputes***

- (1) Scientific conflicts of opinion may be discussed and resolved within the TAC. Members from different groups within and outside the IMPRS shall guarantee a balanced composition of experts in the respective area.
- (2) In case of any other disputes or conflicts, the doctoral candidates are encouraged to approach the IMPRS board members or the coordinator. Also, the Academic Staff Development of the U KN offers free counseling and coaching in English and German for doctoral candidates.
- (3) The ombudsperson of U KN and/or MPIO/MPI-AB may be contacted in cases of scientific misconduct.

With their signature, the doctoral fellow and their TAC members agree to the Guidelines for the Thesis Advisory Committee of the IMPRS for Organismal Biology.

Date & readable names of each member is required, next to signatures.

Names + Signature doctoral Student

Name + Signature Direct Supervisor

Name + Signature TAC members