

Annual Report 2010

Activities 2010 (November 2009- November 2010)

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At last count, 66 PhD students were registered in the doctoral program. This year 9 PhD students obtained their doctoral degree. The mean duration of their doctoral theses was 3 years and 10 months.

Ten courses or workshops were offered (see Table), which were attended by a total of 171 doctoral students. Of the participants 51% were from the University of Neuchâtel, 22% from Bern and Fribourg, 11% from Geneva and Lausanne, and 16% from the other partner institutions (University of Zürich, ETH Zürich, Agroscope, etc.) and foreign institutions. Each course was evaluated by the students. The results from the evaluations were sent to the course instructors and the information will be used for the selection and improvement of future courses. The evaluation showed a global appreciation of “good (3)” to “excellent (4)”.

Activities	Dates (2010)	Duration [days]	Speakers	Participants [nr]	Credit points	Appreciation
Communication						
Peer review and writing manuscripts	31.03, 1,12,13.04	4	J. McNeil (Univ. Western Ontario, Canada)	16	2.5	3.1
Effective public speaking	26.04	1	M.L. Goldschmid (consultant)	13	1.0	3.9
Scientific writing clinic	22, 29.10, 12.11	3	M. Matter (Univ. Berne) J. Regan (Univ. Fribourg)	12	2.0	3.7

Planning a career strategy - Part 2 <i>Joint course with 3e cycle romand</i>	24-25.11	2	P. Kraus (aht' intermediation)	16	1.0	3.6
Research tools						
An introduction to microarray analysis	23-25.03	3	F. Schütz and N. Houhou (Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, Lausanne)	19	1.5	3.5
Scanning electronic microscopy (SEM)	3-5.05	3	M. Vlimant and C. Chappuis (Univ. Neuchâtel)	6	1.0	4.0
An introduction to the practice of statistics using R	16,23,30.09, 14,21.10, 4.11	6	Diego Kuonen (Statoo consulting)	21	3.0	3.3
Scanning electronic microscopy (SEM)	4-6.10	3	M. Vlimant and S. Kessler (Univ. Neuchâtel)	6	1.0	3.7
Scientifics topic						
Soil organisms as bioindicators: methods, applications, and current research priorities	17-18.06	2	S. Adl (Dalhousie Univ., Canada) B. Griffiths (Teagasc, Ireland) E. Havlicek (Federal Office Environment) G. Imfeld (Univ. Strasbourg/ENGEES, F) S. James (Univ. Kansas, USA) J. R. van der Meer (Univ. Lausanne) F. Widmer (Agroscope ART)	33	0.5 / 1.0 / 1.5	3.1
Avoiding tragedies of the commons: an evolutionary approach to human cooperation. <i>Joint course with 3e cycle romand</i>	9-10.09	2	M. Beckenkamp (Max Planck Inst, D) R. Bergmüller (Univ. Neuchâtel) S. Gächter (Univ. Nottingham, UK) P. Hammerstein (Humboldt Univ. z.Berlin, D) L. Lehmann (Univ. Neuchâtel) D. Penn (K. Lorenz Inst. Ethology, Austria) J. Stevens (Max Planck Inst. Human Dev., D) C. Wedekind, Univ. Lausanne)	29	1.0	3.5

Table: Activities of the doctoral program 2010

Seminars

A series of seminars in ecology, evolution, and behaviour was offered during the spring and autumn term. The Ph.D. students had the opportunity to obtain a credit point by attending and write a short report on the seminar topics. Although the seminars attracted many Ph.D. students, only one of them registered for the extra credit point.

External activities

The doctoral program co-sponsored the SPSW Summer school "The global food crisis - how can plant sciences contribute?" 23-26 June in Mürren. Thirteen PhD students of the doctoral program attended the workshop.

Annual PhD students meeting 2010

The annual meeting of the doctoral program is organised by the PhD students themselves (this year, Jérôme Frei and Tom van Noort of the University of Neuchâtel). It took place on 19 April. Dik Heg (Univ. Bern), Jean-Luc Perret (Novartis) and W. A. Foster (Ohio State Univ., USA) were invited to give a talk. The latter could not attend due to the eruption of the volcano in Iceland and was replaced at the last minute by Patrick Guerin (Univ. Neuchâtel). A total of 54 PhD students attended the meeting. They presented the results of their research to their peers (7 oral presentations and 28 posters).

Mobility grants

Eight congress travel grants (total CHF 6000) were awarded, which gave the awardees an opportunity to present their results (poster or oral presentation) to an international audience. In addition, 8 requests for mobility grants were received and were granted (total CHF 8000), allowing the students to visit other laboratories to conduct experiments, learn techniques and/or discuss research results with experts in the field.

Global evaluation of the year 2010

The graph in the annexe provides a summary of the global evaluation made by the participants. The global questionnaire was sent to all registered Ph.D. students and those who ended their Ph.D. this year. It was completed by 50% of the students.

Overall the evaluation by the students was good (first line).

The comments show that overall the program is evaluated very positively and the students are happy with the quality of the courses and the way they are organized. The emphasis on communication continues to be appreciated. There is less appreciation for the scholarly character of the program and the credit point system. One re-occurring problem is that the students would like to see more courses in their specific domain. This year there was a specific demand for more courses in R-statistics and in the field of molecular biology (other years students wished for more courses in ecology). The requests will be taken in consideration during the planning of the new program. Obviously, we have our budget limitations (more so now than in previous years). This is also one reason why we included a policy of paying a fee if students do not show up for course that they registered for. This policy is not at all appreciated, but for now we cannot think of an alternative solution to avoid wasting money and guarantee attendance.

Graph: Results of the global evaluation of the courses 2010

- First line shows the overall impression.
- The lines below detail the answers at the different questions.

