

Agreements on the teaching role of PhD candidates

Approved by the Faculty Board¹ on August 24, 2020

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Scope of the agreements

1. These agreements apply to the following individuals at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam:
 - PhD candidates with an employment contract as ‘promovendus’ (PhD candidate);
 - PhD candidates with an employment contract as ‘researcher’;
 - PhD candidates who do not have an employment contract with VU Amsterdam.

Size of the teaching task

2. The policy of the School of Social Sciences is that each candidate on every type of PhD track should have sufficient time to carry out research and to participate in PhD training. The Graduate School² operates on the following assumptions based on a full-time 4-year employment contract as ‘promovendus’ (PhD candidate): out of a total of 6720 hours (4 x 1680 hours a year), 5% (336 hours) should be devoted to teaching and 30 ECTS credits (840 hours) to training, which leaves 5544 hours for research and other related tasks. Any teaching duties that exceed a total of 336 hours must be set out in a separate contract or an extension to the existing employment contract.
3. A PhD candidate on a full track extended over a longer period has the same number of hours allocated to research, training, and teaching. A shorter PhD track (e.g., an approved three-year contract) involves proportionally less time for research and includes exemptions for part of the PhD training.
4. A PhD candidate without an employment contract has no obligation to teach. Any teaching duties carried out by such a candidate will be reimbursed by means of a separate specific employment contract.

Definition of teaching

5. Supervising a Bachelor’s or Master’s thesis (governed by Examination Board regulations) is regarded as teaching, even when the research carried out for the Bachelor’s or Master’s thesis is directly relevant to the PhD candidate’s own research or specific area of expertise.
6. Collaboration with a Bachelor’s or Master’s student who contributes to the PhD candidate’s own research (e.g. as research assistant) does not count as teaching. This means that the PhD candidate has no responsibilities as regards preparation, grading, testing and other teaching-related tasks in cases where the Bachelor or Master student’s research activities form part of a course or an internship.
7. A single guest lecture related to the candidate’s PhD research does not count as teaching.

¹ Faculty Board of previous Faculty of Social Sciences, since 2025 School of Social Sciences within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities.

² VU-GSSS monitors the application and admission procedure, a review procedure at the end of the first year, annual progress reports and the final stages of the PhD, leading to the actual defense. At the same time, VU-GSSS stimulates all supervisors to achieve a high quality of supervision through training and annual evaluations by our PhD candidates.

Substance of the teaching; supervision and training in teaching

8. The teaching duties of a PhD candidate take place at the level of 'junior lecturer' as described in VU Amsterdam's Education Framework (Onderwijsraamwerk)³. The assistant professor or associate professor is responsible for the course and the teaching (and is appointed to this role by the Examination Board). The PhD candidate does not develop a course but completes it within a given framework, such as the course content determined by an assistant professor or associate professor. Guidance is provided by the relevant assistant professor or associate professor, who may also be responsible for organizing and chairing a group of peers to provide candidates with guidance and support. If called on to carry out more demanding teaching duties by way of exception (e.g. giving a lecture, teaching students in the third year of a Bachelor's program or a Master's program, developing a new course) PhD candidates require extra guidance and supervision.
9. A PhD candidate with a teaching role will receive teacher training within the University Teaching Program (UTP), in preparation for the University Teaching Qualification (Basiskwalificatie onderwijs, BKO).⁴ The department is committed to making this possible. Successful completion of this training course earns the candidate 6 ECTS credits on the PhD training program, the content of which is agreed between the PhD candidate, the supervisor, and the Graduate School in the first month of employment.

Organization of the teaching task

10. The staffing of the teaching program for the coming academic year is discussed well in advance, for example in May of the previous academic year. The teaching duties to be carried out by the PhD candidate are agreed at least four to six months before the teaching is scheduled to start. The coordinator of the educational program will discuss these duties with the PhD candidate (and with the supervisors where appropriate) to ensure that these duties suit the candidate and are compatible with her/his research. This means taking into account the candidate's preferences, capacities and skills, and the timing of research activities such as fieldwork abroad and attending workshops and conferences. Once the staffing of the teaching program has been established, adjustments may be made during the academic year, subject to a new round of consultations by the program coordinator.
11. The standard distribution of teaching hours for a full-time 4-year PhD employment contract is 0%, 10%, 10%, 0% in the consecutive four years. In many cases, however, years of employment do not coincide with academic years and an alternative distribution may therefore be preferable in light of intensive periods of work in the PhD research. The need to carry out fieldwork abroad, for example, is one consideration that may necessitate an alternative distribution. Any such arrangement will be agreed by the department and the PhD candidate.
12. A PhD candidate's teaching load (the number of hours required for preparation, teaching, grading, and testing) is determined on the basis of a calculation model. A PhD candidate is allocated more hours than an assistant professor or an associate professor for each course they teach for the first time. Up to 10% more hours may be allocated, with the exact amount to be determined by the faculty teaching load model.

Evaluation and monitoring

13. The director or coordinator of the educational program provides full details of the teaching duties and the teaching load in a letter to the PhD candidate, with a copy sent to the dissertation supervisor and the Graduate School.

³ <https://vu.nl/nl/medewerker/onderwijskwaliteit/docentprofessionalisering>

⁴ <https://vu.nl/en/education/professionals/courses-programmes/university-teaching-programme-utq/introduction>

14. The teaching duties carried out by the PhD candidate are evaluated in the annual assessment conducted by the supervisor. The PhD candidate provides his or her own evaluation of the teaching duties to the Graduate School as part of the annual questionnaire for PhD candidates.