

PhD buddy system

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The PhD buddy system is an informal peer support system for PhD candidates. The Graduate School of Social Sciences appoints a PhD buddy in each department. The buddy is a PhD candidate (post Go/No Go) whose main tasks include welcoming and orienting new PhD candidates, offering low-threshold support to peers, and helping to foster an active and inclusive PhD community within the department. The PhD buddy is appointed for a one-year term (reappointment is possible) and is compensated for their work through a Graduate Fund allocation.

Tasks and responsibilities

- Welcoming new PhD candidates and giving them a warm and informed start (showing them around, introducing them to the department and faculty, introducing them to other PhDs and colleagues in the department, explaining practical things such as the coffee machine and printing, informing them about departmental activities);
- Having a sense of what is going on at the department and signalling problems (to the GSSS and/or the department management team), and directing PhDs who are facing issues to the right people (see 'How to handle issues' page on the GSSS website);
- Keeping to the role of peer support: the buddy is not a counsellor, and refers peers to the appropriate contact when more than peer support is needed;
- Being present at the department regularly, and making some effort in reaching out to PhD candidates who are less often present, or abroad;
- Attending GSSS activities such as the induction program, lunch sessions, and social events, and motivating other PhD candidates to participate;
- Organizing additional activities that help create a PhD community in the department (this can be structured activities such as reading clubs or presentation sessions, or more informal activities such as coffee breaks or drinks).
- The time commitment is expected to amount to no more than a few hours per month.

Selection procedure

- At the end of every calendar year, the Graduate School announces a call for applications for the upcoming calendar year. The Graduate School reviews all applications and makes a selection (based on the selection criteria in the appendix);
- The buddy position is open to any active PhD candidate who has passed the Go/No Go assessment, whose end date (as registered in Hora Finita) is more than one year away, who knows the department well, and who is regularly physically present at the department;
- Current PhD buddies can reapply (we strive to balance demonstrated experience with ensuring equal opportunities for everyone).

Financial compensation

A compensation of €600 per year of being an active PhD buddy is allocated to the buddy within the framework of the Graduate Fund. This can be used for e.g. fieldwork, conference visits, and external courses. GF guidelines apply, and no compensation can be paid out after the end date of the trajectory (as registered in Hora Finita). The compensation is granted after review of a short report to be submitted by the PhD buddy to the Graduate School, summarizing their activities as a buddy.

Appendix: Buddy selection criteria

1. Motivation
 - Demonstrates enthusiasm for the buddy role
 - Shows understanding of the tasks and responsibilities of the position
 - Explains clearly why they want to become a buddy
2. Engagement and initiative
 - Willingness to take initiative and contribute to the community
 - Evidence of participation in the PhD community at department level, SSC level, or VU level
 - Experience with organizing activities, projects, or events
3. Ideas for the buddy role
 - Presents clear and realistic ideas for the buddy role during their tenure
 - Shows creativity and commitment to supporting incoming PhDs
4. Communication and interpersonal skills
 - Ability to connect with and support peers
 - Friendly, approachable, and reliable attitude
5. Availability and commitment
 - Ability to commit sufficient time to buddy activities throughout the academic year
 - Passed the Go/No Go assessment
 - End date of the PhD project is more than 1 year away