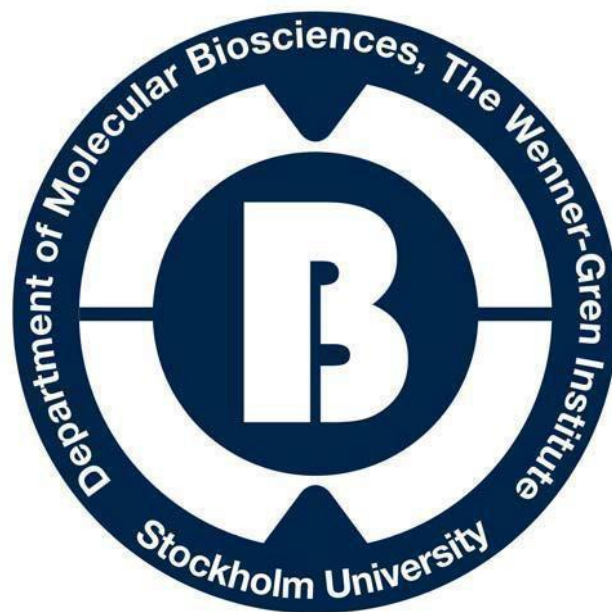




PhD Guide

To new graduate students

Updated 2024-08-15



Department of Molecular Biosciences,
The Wenner-Gren Institute



PhD guide – To new graduate students

Congratulations, you are now a PhD student at MBW (you should know by now the meaning of the acronym)! You should already have been introduced to the general rules and procedures at MBW. You can also find them [here](#).

In the next few pages you will find more information regarding specific aspects of the PhD program that you have just started. [You can find further general information about doctoral studies in Sweden here.](#)

This PhD guide reflects a combined MBW/PhD Council effort and was developed as a resource to help you (the graduate student) navigate through the various milestones that will lead to your PhD degree.

The PhD Program in Molecular Biosciences at MBW *The basics*

To obtain the degree of Doctor of Philosophy generally means that you have to undertake an extensive portion of original research, which has to be obtained and reported under proper academic supervision and in a research environment for a defined period.

More specifically, to receive a PhD in Molecular Biosciences at Stockholm University you need to collect 50hp by attending seminars, conferences and courses, produce a thesis that meets the quality standards required for publication in international journals and defend your work in a public dissertation.

MBW is a heavy research oriented and highly interactive department, which provides a solid foundation for your PhD studies, giving you great opportunities for both personal and scientific development.



The specifics

These are some of the points we consider important for you to realize from the beginning:

1. **Terms of employment and salary ladder for PhD students**
2. **The Supervisor**
3. **Individual Study Plan (ISP)**
4. **PhD evaluations and ISP revision**
5. **Credits**
6. **Courses**
7. **Teaching**
8. **Half time control and Licentiate degree**
9. **MOSS**
10. **Prolongation**
11. **Doctoral thesis**
12. **MBW PhD Council and the Science Faculty (NFR)**
13. **Useful links for PhD students**

1. Terms of employment and salary ladder for PhD students

In the Swedish PhD system, PhD students are assigned to 4 years of full-time employment. At MBW, this period is extended by 20% (1 additional year) by participating in extra departmental activities, including mandatory teaching at basic and master levels. The remaining 80% of the time must be dedicated to PhD education.

The salary you get depends on how far you have come in your PhD program and it is set according to the Stockholm University salary scale for PhD students. For all doctoral students, with a doctoral studentship at Stockholm University, the scale is divided into three stages. The first step of the salary ladder starts with the beginning of the PhD studies. The second step begins when you reach half time of the PhD program. The top step of the salary ladder is reached in the last year of your program when 80 percent of the requirements for a doctoral degree is completed. If you want to have more information, you can talk to the MBW administration.

Wellness and Sickness benefits:

As an employee at Stockholm University, you are entitled to a wellness benefit of up to 3,000 SEK per year. Wellness activities that are approved by the Swedish Tax Agency can be claimed under this benefit by providing original receipts. To claim the wellness benefit, read the information here and then log into Primula/My page/Wellness benefit: [Wellness and wellness benefit - Staff \(su.se\)](#).

When you have come to Sweden, it is important that you apply to be registered with [Försäkringskassan](#). Through Försäkringskassan you can register for the EU health insurance card (EUHIC), which will cover your travel insurance in EU, and get other health allowance, such as, you can get dental allowance (600 SEK per year until you are 29, and 300 SEK from when you are 30).



In case of sickness you must always register your absence in the HR system [Primula](#).

2. The Supervisor

According to the Higher Education Ordinance, on admission at least two supervisors shall be assigned to you as PhD student to provide you support, of which one is the principal supervisor. It is the supervisor's primary task to guide the PhD student throughout the PhD program, and reach the final public defense. It is also the supervisors' responsibility to ensure that the research project is feasible. It is good to clarify the demands and expectations that the PhD student and supervisor have of each other at an early stage and should be revised annually. An agreement on obligations and guidelines for cooperation should be achieved and formalized in an individual study plan.

3. Individual Study Plan (ISP)

Before the official start of your PhD program an **individual study plan (ISP)** has to be agreed between the PhD student and their supervisor.

In accordance with the Higher Education ordinance, everyone admitted to a doctoral program must draw up an ISP with their supervisor. This plan must include:

- The institution's and doctoral student's commitments
- A time schedule for the doctoral student's program

The ISP must be **regularly followed-up** and, if necessary, revised by the ISP follow-up committee. Members of the committee are the doctoral student, the main supervisor, the co-supervisor, and one more teacher from MBW (recommended to choose someone from a different corridor). You also have the option to have a PhD student from a different research group to sit with you during the discussion.

The length of the program can be extended only if there are special circumstances requiring an extension. Examples of these special circumstances are leave of absence because of illness, leave of absence for service in the defense forces, an elected position in a trade union or student organization, or parental leave.

4. PhD evaluations and ISP revision

The evaluation of the PhD education must occur at least once a year and may occur more often if necessary. The first ISP update is approximately six months after start. The ISP is then updated annually in conjunction with a seminar given by the student. The members of the ISP follow-up committee should attend the seminar. The ISP form and the protocol are handed in to the administration after the follow-up. The goal is to follow up the progress of the PhD students and, if necessary, to update the ISP.

You should consider these evaluations as a **critical quality control** step that will help to keep you in the right direction towards your PhD degree. Regardless of small executional differences, all PhD students at MBW should be evaluated under the same standards. You can find the PhD student's evaluation form [here](#).



5. Credits

To obtain a PhD degree you need to get 50 credits (50 HP).

You get credits by attending **courses, seminars**, giving a **talk**, presenting a **poster**, going to a **conference**, etc. To achieve 1.5 credits (1.5 HP) the activity that you attended should represent the equivalent to one week's full-time study. If you have an oral presentation or present a poster you will have an extra credit point. [Read more here](#).

Your supervisor needs to approve these activities and you need to report them to the **Head of Research Subject** (Kristina Jonas) in order to be registered in [LADOK](#). You should use the following template to submit your credits: [Registration of credits for phd-studies](#).

For more information about credits contact the Head of Research Subject.

6. Courses

Attending courses is part of your training as a PhD student and as such you should choose wisely, together with your supervisor, and attend the courses that will benefit you the most. At Stockholm University the web-based learning and collaboration platform Athena is used.

There are three mandatory courses in the MBW PhD program in Molecular Biosciences:

- 1) "Introduction to research studies in biology", 3 credits, is given twice per year by the Stockholm University BioResearch School. The BioResearch School organizes PhD courses for students in all biology departments. As a PhD student at MBW you will belong to the research school in molecular life sciences. Find more details about this course in the following link: [Introduction to Research Studies in Biology](#). The course should be taken in the first year of your PhD studies and consists of two full weeks of work.
- 2) "Writing a research proposal", 3 credits, is obligatory for PhD students registered at MBW. The writing of the research proposal (self-study) shall normally take place within the initial three months of PhD studies but has to be completed within the first year. Find more details about this course in the following link: [Writing a research proposal](#).
- 3) "Topics in molecular biosciences", 10 credits (15 seminars in total, once every three weeks), is obligatory for PhD students registered at MBW after 1st July 2017. MBW recommends doctoral students to start this course during the second year of PhD studies. The course should be completed before the end of the third year. Find more details about this course in the following link: [Topics in molecular biosciences](#).

It is worth mentioning that if a student or group of students considers the need for a course on a subject not yet covered by the available courses, it is possible (and appreciated) to contact the coordinators of the BioResearch School and evaluate the possibilities for organizing such a course.

You can find more information about the BioResearch School, and about courses for graduate students (including courses that you can take outside SU), at: <http://www.bioresschool.su.se>.



Coordinators for BioResearch School:

Susanne Keipert, susanne.keipert@su.se and Sara Rydberg, sara.rydberg@su.se

7. Teaching

As part of your duties at MBW you are expected to undertake teaching assignments, usually in the form of a lab assistant. Below, you can find the answer to some of the questions that might cross your mind:

How much do you have to teach during your PhD?

The goal is that PhD students at MBW teach on average 5% of their total PhD time. The teaching load may vary over time depending on the amount of PhD students, and during some periods teaching may exceed 5%. Whenever possible, the last year should be free of teaching, although in some cases the exempted period can be as short as six months. The learning platform Athena is used for communication with students, setting deadlines, report submission and announcements about the course.

What are your duties?

When you are assigned as a lab assistant, you are expected to work on the preparation and conduction of practical classes. For each practical there is a teacher in charge who coordinates and distributes the necessary tasks. Preparation can include: inventory, material ordering, elaboration/update of lab compendium and further confirmation of experiments to be performed by the students, laboratory equipment, laboratory safety, etc. The lab assistant is also responsible for the correction and classification of student report(s). In case you are assigned to give a lecture, first discuss the content of your talk with the course responsible in order to prepare a suitable lecture for the course in question. You might be asked to formulate exam questions related to your experimental/lecture class and further correct them. Be aware that “invigilator” (exam watcher) is part of your duties as a lab assistant/lecture

How is teaching counted?

Teaching duty is recorded as the number of hours that you are scheduled to teach. As a rule, additional 10 hours are recorded for the preparation of the classes. In case you get engaged in more demanding tasks, for example participating in setting up a new laboratory exercise, the number of hours is determined individually. Upon request, the head of the department can provide you with a certificate for the teaching you have carried out over the PhD years.

Who do I address if I have questions regarding my teaching?

Contact the course responsible/organizer for course-related questions, or the director of studies Stefan Åström for more general questions.

Director of studies:

Professor Stefan Åström, stefan.astrom@su.se Room: E329, Tel: 08-16 1566



8. Half time control and Licentiate degree

When half of your PhD program is achieved (2.5 years, +/- 3 months), the yearly evaluation includes a major checkpoint in your progress towards graduation, the **half time control**. In this checkpoint you should write a report including an extensive literature background and the results obtained so far during the PhD program. Additionally, you should give a seminar. This checkpoint can further assume the format of a **Licentiate degree**. At MBW, to get the Licentiate degree you should have obtained half of the credits needed to graduate (25 out of 50) and write a thesis. This thesis should include a comprehensive introduction to the research subject and the results should be presented in the form of one or several manuscripts or published papers.

You can find *MBW's instructions for half time control and licentiate examination* [here](#).

A Licentiate is a degree in its own right, but in the context of the PhD, the Licentiate is also a stage in the program leading to award of a PhD. For students who do not complete their doctoral studies for some reason, the Licentiate degree is a valuable proof of what they have achieved. The Licentiate degree is also well known and recognized in the Swedish private sector.

9. MOSS

MOSS (MOnthly Seminar Series) is a monthly series of research seminars at MBW. The purpose of this series is to give fourth year doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows the opportunity to present and discuss their research projects. MOSS is usually held on the last Thursday of every month from 15:00 to 16:00.

The presenter gives a 20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute discussion. Usually, the MOSS seminar is also used as a yearly update of the ISP form (s. 3. Individual Study Plan) and should prepare PhD students for their defense.

10. Prolongation

Every non-profit assignment gives you the right to a prolongation of the student grant and paid service employment. If you choose to represent your fellow students you should not lose any study time. You can read how many extra days per year different assignments give you, [here](#).

Remember that it is calculated on the working week, so in reality five days of prolonging actually means one week of extra time. The prolongation is compiled and is added to your contract time in the end of the period/PhD.

In addition, you should consider getting unemployment insurance at least one year before defending your thesis. E.g. [STs a-kassa](#) or [Akademikernas a-kassa](#).



11. Doctoral thesis

As mentioned before one of the requirements to obtain a PhD degree is to produce a thesis. In the thesis the PhD student should exhibit the contribution made to knowledge and research development. This should be done based on the original approach and/or interpretation of the findings produced during the PhD. Furthermore it should demonstrate the student's ability to communicate research findings effectively.

There are two kinds of doctoral thesis: monographs and compilation theses. Compilation theses are the most common at MBW and consist of a number of articles, usually around 3, although the number can be quite variable. Both should, however, contain a general introduction and a summary that should be formulated in a way that can be accessible to non-specialists in the field of the thesis.

The doctoral thesis must be defended orally and publicly. For each thesis defense, the Faculty of Science appoints an opponent and an examination committee. Usually, at MBW, the public defense consists of an introduction to the research field offered by the opponent, followed by a ca. 35-minute presentation by the PhD candidate explaining their contribution to the field. Then there is a thorough discussion with the opponent and committee. In the end, the discussion is opened to the audience.

Don't forget that the public notification process, the nailing, must occur at least 3 weeks before the public defense and that the thesis has to be printed and delivered no later than 12:00 in the noon of the day prior to the nailing (check with the printer). [Read more about the preparation for your defense here.](#)

For more information on a timeline that is mostly mandatory to fulfill, look [here](#).

12. MBW PhD Council and the Science Faculty (NFR)

The PhD Council at MBW consists of all PhD students that attend the PhD Council meetings. The PhD Council Board organizes the PhD Council. This Board consists of one chairman, one vice chairman, one secretary/treasurer (these 3 positions need to be filled for the board to be approved by the SU union), and usually up to three board members. The main aim of the PhD Council is to be responsive and put forward the issues raised by the PhD students, to bear influence on all decisions concerning PhD studies and to contribute to a stronger PhD student community at MBW. The PhD Council is responsible for electing PhD positions at the department.

These are 3 representatives (plus substitutes) to the Departmental Board, one MBW representative in the Science Faculty (NFR), one representative in the steering committee for the BioResearch School. The PhD Council also elects PhD student security and equality officers. The PhD Council is also responsible for organizing the MOSS, given by PhD students and PostDocs. The PhD board needs to organize a minimum of 2 council meetings per term.

Elected PhD positions should be reported to the student union (studiebevakare.natfak@sus.su.se).

Contact the PhD council board: phdboard.mbw@su.se



13. Useful links for PhD students

- [Scholarships Stockholm University](#)
- [Stockholm University student union](#)
- [Study at Stockholm University – Handbook for international and exchange students](#)
- [SSSB - student housing](#)
- [Housing for international students](#)
- [Faculty of Science - PhD studies](#)