

## Public presentation at the Faculty (FÖP): Guidelines for doctoral advisory board members and supervisors

Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies (Directorate of Studies 40)  
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The Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies (DSPL) is dedicated to ensuring awareness among all members of the doctoral advisory boards and supervisors regarding their roles before, during and after public presentations at the Faculty. Therefore, this document outlines all necessary aspects of the public presentation. Please consider this document both when preparing for a public presentation and during your supervision process with each doctoral candidate.

Generally, each doctoral candidate is required to prepare a doctoral research proposal for their public presentation. Each proposal should contain the following components:

- **Research topic:** definition of the research subject and its broader academic and public relevance
- **State of the art and theoretical approach:** description of existing research in the field, place the project has in it, and explanation of theories and concepts that will be used
- **Research objectives, questions and/or hypotheses:** summary of the aims of the research project and the questions or hypotheses used to structure it
- **Methodology:** description of how the research will be carried out and justification of the chosen approach and choice of methods, including data sources and analytical approach
- **Ethical considerations:** In addition to completing the [Research Ethics Pre-Screening for PhD Projects](#), the proposal should discuss ethical considerations in the design and process of the planned research endeavour, including reflections on the doctoral candidate's role as a researcher.
- **Composition/structure of the doctoral thesis:** type of doctoral thesis (a monograph or a collection of papers) planned and its planned structure
- **Work plan:** time schedule and description of the financial resources and the support structures in place to help complete the doctoral thesis

As a member of our Faculty, you have the following responsibilities in preparation for and around the public presentation of the research proposal. These responsibilities are outlined below, organised by the specific roles in the process.

### Are you a member of one of the doctoral advisory boards?

If yes, please consider the following aspects:

**Goal:** The public presentation is a mandatory milestone for doctoral candidates at the University of Vienna and serves as an early feedback mechanism. It is designed for candidates to share their ideas

with a panel of experts who provide guidance on their research trajectory. The doctoral advisory boards give advice and provide an opinion on the intended doctoral thesis project. Following the public presentation of a doctoral project, the DSPL decides on the research proposal based on the recommendation of the doctoral advisory board. Only after the successful public presentation at the Faculty the doctoral candidate and the supervisor(s) can finalise the doctoral thesis agreement.

**Composition of the doctoral advisory board:** Doctoral advisory boards are formed every two years at the recommendation of the DSPL. Each board includes representatives from one or several fields of doctoral research and is chaired by, preferably but not exclusively, a member of the DSPL. The chair is responsible for adherence to the timetable during the presentation session, moderating discussions and questions, conveying the board's opinion on the intended doctoral project to the candidate and summarising all comments of the board members (see below under "Procedure of the public presentation at the Faculty"). The chair may only contribute to the joint recommendation of the board if they are not a member of the DSPL. Supervisors are also not eligible to contribute to the joint recommendation. The chair has to delegate their task to another board member during presentations given by their own doctoral candidates. Each board member has to contribute to finding suitable dates for the presentations and has to attend a presentation if they have confirmed their participation (planning via the StudiesServiceCenter Social Sciences/Doctoral Studies (SSC) and the chair).

**Procedure of the public presentation at the Faculty:** For each public presentation, the board convenes in person (hybrid and online formats should be chosen only in exceptional cases) and evaluates the research proposal and presentation of each candidate. Each board member has read the submitted proposals in detail and has prepared questions based on each proposal. Each presentation is allocated a minimum of 45 minutes, consisting of a 10-minute presentation of the research proposal, a 10 to 20-minute Q&A session and a 10 to 15-minute confidential deliberation session by the board. Following the presentation, the chair moderates the Q&A session. During the confidential deliberation of the board, the chair collects comments to convey to the candidate immediately afterward. Each board member notes their individual comments on a provided form. The audience may attend the presentation and the Q&A session but must leave the room afterwards. The candidate also leaves the room before the board deliberates, while the supervisor(s) may stay.

During the confidential deliberation session, the board addresses any remaining questions with the supervisor(s) and decides whether to recommend the approval of the doctoral proposal in its current form. To provide a joint recommendation, at least three eligible board members must be present (i.e. three persons who are neither a member of the DSPL nor a supervisor of the doctoral thesis project).

There are three ways of involving the supervisor(s) during the confidential deliberation session: (a) The supervisor(s) is/are present for the entire confidential deliberation and the decision-making, (b) they stay for the discussion of the board but leave before the board takes a decision, or (c) they stay only for a few minutes so that the board can address any remaining questions. At the beginning of the term of office, each doctoral advisory board needs to agree on one of these procedures which then has to be communicated to the candidates and the supervisors and which applies to all candidates.

**Decision-making:** At least three members who are eligible to contribute to the joint recommendation of the board must be present for the decision. The board votes on whether to recommend the approval

of the research proposal. In the event of a tied vote, the board should recommend the approval of the project.

The chair communicates the decision of the board to the candidate and summarises immediate feedback. The chair's communication represents the board's joint decision and does not single out individual members. Each board member provides detailed and typewritten feedback on the research proposal and the presentation by submitting the relevant form to the SSC after the presentation. The SSC sends the comments of the board members to each candidate. This may take up to three weeks.

If the board recommends that the DSPL rejects the proposal in its current form, the candidate is asked to withdraw their proposal and is urged submit the proposal again at a future date after making the necessary changes. If the candidate refuses, the DSPL rejects the proposal. In this case, the candidate can apply for the public presentation at the Faculty again only with a new topic. The Directorate of Studies thus strongly recommends to withdraw the research proposal, allowing the candidate to change the proposal and present it again.

**Evaluation criteria:** Feedback during these presentations should be constructive and should aim to aid early-stage academics in developing their doctoral research project. These sessions do not serve the purpose of a general academic debate but serve to provide mentoring and support, addressing weaknesses and challenges to benefit the candidate's academic development. The doctoral advisory boards evaluate projects based on the following criteria:

- **Feasibility:** Can the project be completed in the time planned? Is the scope realistic and suitable for a doctoral thesis project? Have access to data and ethical issues been considered? Does the doctoral candidate have the necessary support for completing the project?
- **Contribution:** Is the relevance of the research project for the academic literature clear? Does the project relate to established lines of work in the discipline?
- **Coherence:** Does the research endeavour form a coherent single project and address a specific overarching research question or problem? Are the theories, methods and analytical approach aligned?

<b>Overview: responsibilities of members of doctoral advisory boards</b>		
<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribute to finding dates for the public presentations</li> <li>• confirm attendance at public presentations</li> <li>• read proposals and prepare questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ascertain attendance of board members who are eligible to contribute to the recommendation of the board</li> <li>• ascertain any conflicts of interests (e.g. chair has their own candidates presenting)</li> <li>• engage with each doctoral candidate based on the evaluation criteria of feasibility, contribution and coherence to assist them in furthering their project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide detailed and typewritten feedback using the relevant form (provided by the SSC) for each candidate</li> <li>• send feedback form to the SSC immediately after the public presentation</li> </ul>

## Are you the supervisor of a doctoral project?

The public presentation at the Faculty provides the members of a doctoral advisory board with an initial glimpse into the progress of the doctoral projects you supervise. Therefore, the DSPL encourages supervisors to see these presentations as an integral part of their responsibilities alongside those of the doctoral candidate. Supervisors are tasked with guiding their candidates through this process, sharing their expertise on relevant aspects within their respective research fields.

Specifically, this means that all supervisors should assist their candidates in writing their doctoral project proposals and in presenting these proposals to the Faculty in a timely manner (within the first year of doctoral studies). Information about the contents of the research proposal and the criteria used by the doctoral advisory board to evaluate the proposal can be found above.

Additionally, supervisors should ideally follow the procedural steps specified below:

### **Before the public presentation:**

- Besides working on the proposal, encourage your candidates to make use of additional training offered by the Vienna Doctoral School of Social Sciences or the doctoral programme in Social Sciences (e.g. peer mentoring, introductory courses).
- Ensure your candidates are well-informed about the evaluation criteria and the general procedure of the public presentation at the Faculty.

### **During the public presentation:**

- Supervisors are expected to be present during the time slot of their candidates' presentations to provide direct support. If you are unable to attend the full duration of the public presentations on that day, you may join for part of the time. If necessary, you may attend online from another location.
- If no member of the supervision team can be present, the DSPL recommends that another team member (e.g. a postdoctoral researcher) attends as a member of the audience. They may not be present during the confidential deliberation session of the board.

### **After the public presentation:**

- Respect the confidentiality of the deliberation of the board. The decision-making process is confidential, meaning no single board member should be named as approving or rejecting the approval of a specific research proposal.
- Evaluate any comments from the board with your candidates, advising them on how to proceed with their doctoral thesis project. If the board recommends that the candidate withdraws their proposal from the current session, your candidate may present again at a future public presentation session.
- In this case, the candidate needs to draft a short report describing how they revised the proposal and submit it, including the signatures of the candidate and the supervisor(s) upon registration for the public presentation). This provides information to the board on how the proposal has developed between presentations.

- After the successful public presentation at the Faculty, the doctoral candidate and the supervisor(s) need to discuss and fill out the doctoral thesis agreement which includes information about the time schedule, the practicalities of supervision and the requirements that the candidate has to fulfil during doctoral studies. The DSPL has to approve the doctoral thesis agreement.

<b>Overview: responsibilities of supervisors regarding the public presentation</b>		
<b>Before</b>	<b>During</b>	<b>After</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prepare research proposal with the candidate</li> <li>• coach candidate for their public presentation at the Faculty</li> <li>• encourage candidate to take part in preparatory activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attend the public presentation of your doctoral candidates</li> <li>• provide feedback to the board during the confidential deliberation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• help candidate to integrate any useful feedback into the doctoral project</li> <li>• if applicable, prepare candidate for another public presentation</li> <li>• finalise the doctoral thesis agreement with the candidate</li> </ul>

The doctoral candidates are informed about the public presentation at the Faculty of Social Sciences in the following documents:

- [General information and FÖP procedure](#)
- [Guidelines for writing a doctoral research proposal for the public presentation at the Faculty and evaluation criteria](#)

For further information about the doctoral programme in Social Sciences, please visit the website of the **Vienna Doctoral School of Social Sciences**: [vds-sosci.univie.ac.at](https://vds-sosci.univie.ac.at)