

Satisfaction survey

Valuable insights for the well-being of PhD students

A survey of PhD programmes at the University of Fribourg has shown that satisfaction is good at approximately 80%. More than half of the PhD students have already thought about dropping out at least once. There are significant differences between PhD students who are enrolled and those who are not. The university is taking the findings as an opportunity to make further improvements.

The general satisfaction with the common conditions of the PhD programme is 79% for the enrolled PhD students and 77% for the exmatriculated PhD students. With regard to the supervision, the satisfaction for the enrolled PhD students is also 79%, while it drops to 68% for the exmatriculated PhD students.

Potential for improvement in terms of employment conditions and high workloads

PhD students complain in several comments about a lack of transparency regarding employment conditions and salaries. For example, more than one-third of them reported not having a requirements specification or not knowing if they had one. 44% of enrolled PhD students report doing additional tasks that are not within their scope of duties (own research or work for chair); among exmatriculated PhD students, this figure is as high as 55%.

Useful agreements, potential in providing supervision

Approximately 40% of the enrolled and 29% of the exmatriculated PhD students report using a PhD agreement. This agreement is considered useful by about two thirds of the PhD students and even 78% of the supervisors.

About 60% of the supervisors believe that the PhD supervision could be improved and 48% of them state that they would like to see further training offered in this regard.

19% of the enrolled PhD students have frequently to constantly and 35% sometimes considered terminating their dissertation. The most frequently cited reasons were concerns about their own competencies, the heavy workload, and doubts regarding better career prospects. 18% of the exmatriculated doctoral students have discontinued their dissertation.

Discrimination and abuse of power

Critical issues have also been addressed in the survey. For example, 6% of the enrolled PhD students stated that they have experienced discrimination during their PhD programme. 11% of them have experienced abuse of power by their doctoral supervisor. These rates are doubled among the responses of PhD students who have been exmatriculated (10% and 20%, respectively).

The results of this survey will serve as the basis for the University to formulate best practices for doctoral supervision. The survey was sent to PhD students enrolled in the Fall 2021 semester (1357) and their PhD supervisors (260), and to PhD students exmatriculated as of October 1, 2020 (241). The response rate was 28% for enrolled PhD students, 26% for exmatriculated PhD students and 62% for supervisors.