

Course evaluation, Doctoral supervision in practice, spring 2021

Course leaders

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About the course

The course consists of 6 scheduled days and 4 days of individual work and was given online, in Zoom. This evaluation was conducted in two steps, first as a group evaluation and then as an anonymous individual survey. In total there were 24 participants in the course, all contributed to the group evaluation and 20 answered the individual survey.

Course goals

During the course, you have the opportunity to develop:

- a reflective and mature role as supervisor
- insight into the various roles involved in a tutoring situation
- your knowledge of research supervision as a process and its phases
- knowledge about the importance of ethnicity and gender in the supervisory situation
- experience and increased knowledge of dialogue as a tool in the supervisory situation
- preparedness for conflict and problems that can occur in a supervisory situation
- your knowledge and understanding of ethics in research supervision.

How much supervision experience did the participants have from research level?

● None	2
● Very little	11
● Some	5
● A lot	2



In this group, a majority of the participants had none or very little experience from doctoral supervision. Two had a lot of experience and five had some experience.

What worked well in the course, according to the participants?

Exchanging experiences and learning about other parts of the university was perceived as both interesting and rewarding by most of the participants. The opportunity to meet colleagues from different departments was one of the most valuable parts of the course, as was the conflict management part. The films and exercises in the conflict management session received lots of praise since they allowed for self-reflection and tools for managing conflicts in the supervisor – student relationship.

The course book and literature seminars, in combination with the various group discussions, were also highlighted as valuable. There were three written assignments in the course, and the first and second were especially mentioned in the evaluations, although some participants thought it was difficult to arrange an auscultation if you were new at a department and didn't know anyone yet.

- *The conflict styles made me reflect in a good way. Increased understanding*
- *Exchanging experiences and discussion with colleagues from other dept. gave a broader perspective*
- *Also, the course book and the other readings have been a valuable source of information.*
- *The most valuable was for me to learn more about the relationship between supervisor and student.*

The digital format, with course days in Zoom and a course site in Canvas, received mixed responses. Some struggled with keeping the focus during long days in Zoom, while most appreciated the structure of the course site, with detailed instructions about preparations and assignments. The course leaders were acknowledged for creating a nice and friendly atmosphere and were described as both structured and attentive. On the whole, a large majority (ca 80 %) of the participants were satisfied with the course and agree that it felt relevant for their current or future role as a doctoral supervisor, figure 1. This was rewarding to see since this is the overarching goal of the course.

What can be developed further, according to the participants?

The Rules and regulations session received some criticism, mainly due to a lack of time to go deeper into specific questions. In this course the format of this session was changed. All groups worked on all cases instead of focusing on a few cases each. The time was not adjusted to this new format and this resulted in frustration when all questions could not be answered fully right away. Also, the open access/data management presentation raised some comments, either that it needed more time to become relevant, or that it did not really fit in this course. There was also a wish to strengthen the link between the presentations in the course and the course book (which was found useful and informative). Information regarding what to discuss in the break-out rooms was unclear for some, although this was something the course leaders tried to emphasize each time.

As mentioned above, the Zoom-format was challenging with long days in front of the screen and some participants thought the presentations became less interactive and interesting due to Zoom. There were some comments that point to varying engagement in the discussions and lack of respect among the participants, which is troublesome and might have impacted negatively on the learning environment for others.

- *Attitudes within the participant group were also harsh against some practices*
- *In some groups not everyone have been actively involved in the discussion*

Comments from the course leaders

The varying disciplinary backgrounds and supervisory experiences among the participants are both a strength and a challenge in this course. We deliberately invite guests from different parts of the university, and mix the groups throughout the course, in order to maximize the exchange of experiences and stimulate a better understanding of how doctoral supervision can be organized and conducted at Umeå University. This exchange was very appreciated by most participants but also raised frustration in some who might have expected a more directive, "how-to-do-it-in-my-discipline" course. We do hope that the main message has come through: that there is no single best model for supervision on research level, and that a successful interaction depends on the reflective ability of the supervisor, the dialogue and relationship with the student and the mutual courage to explore different strategies to enhance the doctoral journey.

In future courses, we will adjust the schedule to allow more time for the Rules session. We will also look into how to strengthen the connection between the course book and the individual sessions in the course. This will be easier for the parts that the course leaders are responsible for, than the parts where we have invited guests. Hopefully we can run the course on campus again in the near future. The informal meetings in between sessions add another dimension to the course. But there are still benefits with the distance-format that might justify offering the course via Zoom now and then. For instance, if people are not living or working in Umeå.

When reading the written assignments, it became evident that the participants had reflected on the course content, the literature and group discussions, and that most consider themselves better prepared for their future supervisory tasks.