VU Graduate School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Social Sciences
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Information Document for PhD candidates and supervisors

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1 Introduction: Graduate School of Social Sciences

The Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is devoted to research and training in the social sciences. Since 2000 FSS has invested intensely in becoming a center for high-quality research. The faculty’s mission is to continue being a stimulating environment for committed academics who contribute to scientific and public debates. FSS aims to strengthen research in specific domains of the social sciences: e.g. integration and diversity, religion and identity, (multi-level) governance, security and conflict, media communication, societal participation and the welfare state. These themes accommodate scientific disciplines who contribute to the research program of the faculty. To increase the value, impact, and originality of research, researchers in the faculty not only collaborate across the borders of their own discipline within the faculty, but also at the university level. A multidisciplinary focus is increasingly required for scientific research that really makes a societal contribution.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam has created Inter-Faculty Research Institutes in which FSS researchers participate. Of special importance to the FSS are the Network Institute, the Talma Institute for the Study of Work, Care and Welfare, and the Amsterdam Centre for Contemporary European Studies (ACCESS EUROPE). As of 2015 our research programs are closely connected to the four research subthemes of the Institute for Societal Resilience: Resilient Governance; Resilience, Diversity and Inclusion; Resilience through Communication, Organization and Interconnectedness; and Care and Welfare in a Resilient Society.

The FSS programs have committed partnerships with various societal organizations. Continuous exchange with, and exposure to, the international research community is achieved through well-established collaborations all over the world, and an active membership of scholarly associations and editorial boards. FSS welcomes several international guests and awards international fellowships on a yearly basis.

1.1 Mission of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - Graduate School of Social Sciences

The mission of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - Graduate School of Social Sciences (VU-GSSS) is to organize activities to enhance the quality of PhD research, to organize the education of PhD candidates, and to stimulate PhD candidates in participating in, and contributing to, an inspiring scientific community.

Quality
VU-GSSS serves the FSS’s ambition to develop towards a high quality of social science PhD’s and supports them to develop international top level research skills as independent researchers. In order to achieve these aims VU-GSSS guards processes that ensure the quality of all PhD candidates in the Faculty. It organizes the internal and external review of the quality of PhD projects: from application and selection, through progress reports and meetings to final submission of the dissertation. VU-GSSS ensures a safe environment for PhD candidates to work in. It also supports supervisors in achieving a higher quality in their supervision.
**Education**
VU-GSSS ensures that training of theoretical knowledge and methodological and academic skills is available in a variety of courses that can be followed by all PhD candidates. Acknowledging the variety of starting skills, it favors an adaptive program, and allowing access to courses in other settings. Specific information about courses offered can be found in chapter 3 and in our annual Study Guide. VU-GSSS also teaches and discusses responsibility in the social sciences in three areas:
1) doing research relevant to society;
2) being responsible in our research practices, and;
3) balancing external demands and personal integrity.

**Community**
VU-GSSS stimulates the maintenance and development of a lively and internationally oriented research community. All PhD candidates are stimulated to be part of the research community, and they are supported to self-organize and join international meetings. VU-GSSS supports an interesting and stimulating environment for international scholars and young researchers in the FSS. VU-GSSS collaborates closely with the research programs in the FSS and supports these programs in attracting potential PhD candidates. VU-GSSS supports PhD candidates in their individual growth towards scholarship and in becoming independent, fully qualified and responsible researchers.
2 Admission and Registration of PhD candidates

2.1 Different types of PhD candidates

VU-GSSS is responsible for the admission and registration of all PhD candidates that aim to obtain a doctorate degree within the Faculty of Social Sciences. There are different routes towards obtaining a PhD title. Following the definitions by VSNU (2011), we distinguish four types of PhD candidates. Types 1 and 2 candidates are referred to as internal PhD candidates, types 3 and 4 candidates are referred to as external ones.

**Type 1.** PhD candidates who are employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam as an employee PhD candidate (in Dutch known as *werknemer promovendus*). They have a legally enshrined labor contract. Their funding may come from a variety of sources such as NWO, EU and public and private organizations.

**Type 2.** PhD candidates who are employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam as a lecturer or researcher, and who receive additional research time to write a dissertation and pursue a PhD title (*promoverende medewerker*). They have a legally enshrined labor contract with a teaching component and a research component.

**Type 3.** PhD candidates not employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, but with an official agreement to work towards obtaining a PhD (*contractpromovendus*). This category receives funding and/or time in order to pursue a PhD title, comprising categories as different as NWO-funded allowance-based PhD's from developing countries, NUFFIC-funded candidates, PhD's partially or fully-supported by third parties while employed or through other means connected to the PhD (the third parties being public organizations, companies, institutes of higher education, etc.).

**Type 4.** PhD candidates who do not have an employment contract with Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, but will have their doctoral defense ceremony at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and whose objective is to pursue a PhD title (*buitenpromovendus*). They do have an official agreement with the Faculty, but do not receive funding or time in order to work towards obtaining a PhD (for example pensioners or employees pursuing a PhD in their own time).

2.2 Admission (see § 4.5)

There are two ways in which PhD candidates can be admitted to VU-GSSS. The first is through recruitment as an employee PhD candidate (type I). Available PhD positions are advertised in different ways, including on the VU website and as an internationally advertised call on Academic Transfer, on behalf of an already determined supervisor(y) team. During the selection procedure all criteria, both from VU-GSSS and the project itself, will be taken into account.
The supervisor (promotor) of the proposed candidate sends all necessary documentation to VU-GSSS for further registration of the PhD candidate.

All external PhD candidates (types 3 and 4) should formally request admission and provide VU-GSSS with the following documents through our online registration form (please read this chapter before proceeding with your application):

- A Curriculum Vitae;
- A Master's degree equivalent to a Dutch Master's in the social sciences or related disciplines;
- Letter by the intended supervisor (promotor) with a description of the supervision to be offered, including the name of a daily supervisor. It is your responsibility to contact a suitable supervisor;
- A preliminary research plan of around 1000 words on the intended research and its fit within the Faculty research programs or the Institute of Societal Resilience;
- A letter stating you have sufficient financial means to complete your PhD trajectory, either with your own means or through another party. All costs mentioned in our fee overview need to be covered;
- Two academic references;
- Recent TOEFL test.

Please make sure to include all of the above documents as we won’t be able to proceed incomplete applications.

The admission committee will evaluate your application. This committee consists of a theme leader of the Institute of Societal Resilience, a member of the Assessment Board and the Academic Director of VU-GSSS. The candidate and supervisor will be informed about the decision as soon as possible.

VU-GSSS advises a preferential starting date (September 1) in order to facilitate participation in the 1st year PhD education programme. In order to proceed your application it is therefore recommended to submit your documents before 1 April.

2.3 Registration (see § 4.5)

After admission all PhD candidates need to register with VU-GSSS through submitting the following forms:

- Admission form ('Form I'), signed by the Dean of the faculty;
- Certified copy of Master’s certificate;
- Passport copy;

1 Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam requires all applicants who have not completed their education in Canada, USA, UK, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia or who have not obtained an International Baccalaureate or European Baccalaureate diploma, to take an English language test and to submit their score as part of their application.
Approved Training and Supervision Plan (Opleidings- en Begeleidingsplan or OBP);
Signed Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice.

VU-GSSS provides you with all necessary and up-to-date documents. The process of registration, monitored by VU-GSSS, needs to be completed within two months of the admission date. PhD candidates receive a letter of acceptance after completing the registration procedure, including the deadline for their 8-month product and further arrangements agreed upon.

### 2.4 Annual Fees for External PhD Candidates

The fees for external PhD candidates consist of the following components:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervision costs</td>
<td>€ 5000,-</td>
<td>€ 5000,-</td>
<td>€ 5000,-</td>
<td>€ 5000,-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>€ 1200,-</td>
<td>€ 1200,-</td>
<td>€ 1200,-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities (VUnet ID, computer costs, etc.)</td>
<td>€ 573,-</td>
<td>€ 573,-</td>
<td>€ 573,-</td>
<td>€ 573,-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total costs</strong></td>
<td>€ 6773,-</td>
<td>€ 6773,-</td>
<td>€ 6773,-</td>
<td>€ 5573,-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note the following:

1. the costs for supervision are estimated costs set by the VU-GSSS. Depending on your situation and in close consultation with the department there might be a possibility to receive a partial waiver for these costs;
2. Fees are charged annually through the department of the supervisor of the PhD;
3. Fees can increase throughout a PhD trajectory;
4. Costs for research, visiting conferences, etc. are not taken into account in this table.
3 Academic Training: The PhD Education Programme

The activities of a PhD candidate mainly consist of conducting research (about 80-85%), resulting in a dissertation. Many (i.e. internal candidates) also take part in teaching at the Ba or Ma level. In addition, all PhD candidates participate in PhD education: as of January 2015 the new VU Doctorate Regulations requires all PhD candidates to invest a reasonable amount of their time (at least 30 EC – 840 hours) to further educate themselves.

The required PhD education is intended to ensure that PhD candidates are given the opportunity to enjoy further education. This is, on the one hand, intended to enhance the individual development of PhD candidates, and to equip them with transferrable skills that are useful in their future career. On the other hand, it is aimed to support and advance their individual PhD research projects, by providing them with the relevant content, methodological knowledge and required academic skills to improve the quality and progress of their research.

A proper PhD education should thus both be seen as a privilege for PhD candidates and as an instrument to improve the progress and outcome of PhD projects in the Faculty of Social Sciences. A well designed training plan (see §4.1) should support PhD candidates in acquiring the final attainment levels that are expected from successful PhD candidates. This chapter will first specify the general final attainment levels expected from PhD candidates in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Next, it is explained how PhD candidates and their supervisors can design a training plan aimed at attaining these during their PhD trajectory.

3.1 Final Attainment Levels for PhD candidates

In order to obtain a PhD degree from the VU Faculty of Social Sciences the following is expected from a PhD candidate. Whether the candidate fulfills these final attainment levels is assessed in the final stage by the VU-GSSS (through a Training Certificate), the Supervisor(s) (through an Assessment Form completed by the supervisor(s)), and the Thesis Committee (through an Assessment Form completed by the Thesis Committee members).

With respect to content, theory building and application, the PhD candidate:
1. Has advanced knowledge and understanding of (recent) theoretical developments in the area of expertise of his/her dissertation;
2. Has made a significant, original, and coherent contribution to scientific knowledge within his/her major discipline that can pass peer review;
3. Has broad knowledge and understanding of the general field of social sciences and possesses the ability to relate and position the work in his/her dissertation work vis á vis this broader field.

With respect to research design and methodology, the PhD candidate:
4. Has demonstrated the ability to choose and apply appropriate methods and analytical instruments (e.g., research design, data collection, measurement, analysis techniques) to answer particular research questions;
5. Has demonstrated advanced knowledge and understanding of the specific research design(s) and methods used in his/her dissertation research, the ability to relate these to alternative research methods within the social sciences, and analyze their applicability, strengths and weaknesses in specific circumstances.

With respect to academic skills, the PhD candidate:
6. Has demonstrated advanced writing skills to independently write scientific texts and articles that can pass (inter)national peer reviewed evaluation;
7. Has demonstrated the skills to orally present scientific research at (inter)national seminars and conferences;
8. Has demonstrated the skills to function as a full member of the scientific community (e.g., ability to collaborate in research teams; discuss, evaluate and design scientific research; deal with and conduct peer review of scientific articles);
9. Has demonstrated the skills to contribute to the valorization of scientific knowledge by communicating about his/her area of expertise to a broader (academic) community and/or by explaining its value for society in general and/or by teaching undergraduate students;
10. Is knowledgeable of the prevailing standards of scientific integrity, research ethics, and proper scientific behavior, is aware of prevailing codes of conduct to prevent integrity violations, and follows these norms for proper scientific behavior in his/her own research practice.

3.2 Goals of the PhD training plan

The PhD training should, in general terms, support the PhD candidate in achieving the final attainment levels specified above. The heterogeneous origins from PhD candidates, significant differences in their prior training levels, combined with a great variety in their PhD research projects, demands a highly flexible approach to individual training plans. There is no single way to a successful PhD trajectory; PhD candidates differ in their path towards completing their dissertation and in developing towards achieving the final attainment levels for PhD candidates. In order to serve the needs and wishes of the varied group of PhD candidates connected to the FSS, VU-GSSS maintains a number of starting points for the PhD training.

- The ways in which individual PhD candidates can fulfill the required 30 EC\(^2\) is as much as possible tailor made. Beside some basic general elements that are considered mandatory for all PhD candidates (see §3.3.1), the training plan can be tuned to individual needs and wishes depending on already available - or lack thereof - knowledge and expertise (i.e. prior education and experience) and the requirements of the PhD project. PhD candidates are given ample freedom to choose a most fitting set of courses in their training plan, and even within VU-GSSS courses tuning to individual needs and wishes is often possible.

- In line with the previous point, the VU-GSSS course program is designed to maximize the relevance of course work to the research projects of individual participants. This link is

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\(^2\) According to the European Credit Transfer System → 1 EC = 28 hours.
often made through assignments in which PhD candidates work on developing their own research questions, methodology, analyze their own project data, or write on their own texts and articles. In that sense the courses function as an addition to the regular supervision.

- In addition to developing expertise on their own specialized topic, however, the course program is also intended to stimulate a broader development beyond individual PhD research projects. A majority of graduated PhD candidates end up outside academia, and even those who do continue in academia may work in a very different scientific field and/or research area. PhD candidates are therefore advised to design a training plan that not only focuses narrowly on deepening knowledge and expertise related to their dissertation project, but also on broadening their knowledge and skills. The training plan should incorporate courses and activities aimed at the development of transferable skills that are relevant and useful in other (academic) fields or branches.

### 3.3 Training requirements and recommendations

In the Training and Supervision Plan (Opleidings- en Begeleidingsplan or OBP, see §4.1), submitted within the first 2 months of their PhD project, PhD candidates design a training plan in consultation with their supervisors. This plan specifies the courses and activities that will be conducted during the PhD project. In general terms, the training plan should be designed such that PhD candidates aim at acquiring the final attainment levels specified above. The training program may vary per individual candidate depending on discipline, prior training, personal interest and the requirements of the candidate’s research project. The following basic elements, however, are required for all PhD candidates. These rules are in accordance with the Doctorate Regulations of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and implemented within FSS by VU-GSSS.

#### 3.3.1 Training Requirements for all PhD candidates

The following elements are required within the training plan of all FSS PhD candidates:

1. A minimum of 30 EC of PhD training (see below for potential dispensations depending on prior education);
2. Faculty PhD Induction programme. Each year new PhD candidates are welcomed in an introduction programme; participants learn about the research themes within the FSS and meet their fellow PhD candidates and colleagues in social events (1 EC);
3. Course on Research Integrity and Responsible Scholarship (3 EC);
4. Attendance (and a presentation) to at least one large (2 days or more) scientific conference (1 EC for attendance only, 2 EC for an oral or poster presentation; 1 EC is required);
5. Finally, we aim to ensure that PhD candidates develop in both social scientific theoretical knowledge, methodological expertise and in academic and transferable skills. It is therefore required that PhD candidates complete a training plan, with a balanced, but not necessarily equal, distribution of courses and training activities across the following three areas:
   - **Area 1:** Social scientific content, theory building and application
   - **Area 2:** Social scientific research design and methodology
• **Area 3: Academic (and transferable) skills**

VU-GSSS requires PhD candidates to complete at least 6 EC in each of these three areas. The next section (§3.4) specifies the various available VU-GSSS courses within each area. The choice of courses within these three areas is flexible (3 * 6 EC).

The training plan may differ depending on prior education and the type of PhD project. In order to enable a most fitting training plan, in the next section we further specify requirements and recommendations for PhD candidates with different prior education and project type. Note that a departure from these requirements may be possible in individual cases, but should be proposed and justified at the start of the trajectory in the Training and Supervision plan, which is reviewed by the VU-GSSS.

### 3.3.2 Requirements and recommendations depending on prior education

- **PhD candidates who have completed a regular one-year Master of Science (MSc) in the Social Sciences or Behavioral Science (i.e., Psychology).** This group usually has enjoyed education in all three areas, the training program should thus be aimed at further developing these to more advanced levels. For this group at least 6 EC in each of the three areas is required.

- **PhD candidates who have completed a (one or two year) Master of Arts (i.e., Humanities, Letteren, Theology or Philosophy, Business and Economics, Computer Science).** These PhD candidates, compared to the above, are usually behind in both social scientific theoretical knowledge (area 1) and social scientific methodological knowledge (area 2). For this group also at least 6 EC in each of the three areas is required, but they are further strongly advised to spend an additional 3 EC to courses within these two areas (i.e., 9 EC in area 1 and 2, and 6 EC in area 3).

- **PhD candidates who have completed a two year research Master in the Social Sciences or Behavioral Science (i.e., Psychology).** A research master is usually regarded as preparing for a PhD trajectory, and often succeeded by a 3-year (rather than 4-year) PhD trajectory. Given this additional year of prior education, this group has an advantage over 1-year-masters in all three areas, and are therefore given dispensation of 20 EC of training. The remaining 10 EC for PhD training can be used flexibly, more is obviously allowed.

### 3.3.3 Recommendations depending on type of PhD project

- **As specified in §2.1 we distinguish between internal and external PhD candidates. External PhD candidates often combine a (part-time) PhD trajectory with other obligations, which makes planning of courses more of a challenge. Obviously the regular course program (see §3.4.1/2) is open to external PhD candidates, but it is worthwhile to check out the possibilities for (individual) tutorials.**

- **Some PhD candidates start their project with a clearly specified project proposal while others start without such a clearly delimited project plan. Particularly for those who do not yet have a clearly specified project plan, we strongly recommend following the VU-GSSS courses Research design in the Social Sciences, and Proposal design and writing at the start of their PhD trajectory (see §3.4.2).**
3.4 Available courses and education for PhD training

The VU-GSSS PhD education program is designed such that PhD candidates can fulfill their 30 EC internally. VU-GSSS offers a general course program and a program specifically tailored to the needs of external PhD candidates (published and updated each year in a study guide on our website). Depending on individual needs and wishes, PhD candidates can also follow courses outside the VU-GSSS program. These different parts of education possibilities are outlined in the next sections.

The individual training plan likely varies between PhD candidates depending on their prior education and methodological differences in their research projects. In designing their training plan, PhD candidates are advised to concentrate their coursework in the first two years of their PhD project, and thus limit the course work in the last (two) year(s). It is important to note that the PhD candidates themselves are responsible for obtaining their 30 EC (minus possible dispensation) of training. The VU-GSSS PhD training certificate that is obtained after successful completion of the training plan (see §4.4.1) is required before one can enter the dissertation defence.

3.4.1 Structure and content of the VU-GSSS general PhD education program

VU-GSSS offers a strong basic curriculum in social science content, research methodology, and academic skills with a range of options (see VU-GSSS Study guide). The courses are taught by the staff members of the Faculty of Social Sciences and by international fellows. During the year the program may change, for instance when new courses or workshops are added depending on availability of international fellows. Refer to the VU-GSSS study guide for the latest program and details about the various courses, or contact the VU-GSSS management. The various courses in the VU-GSSS program can be classified in the three main fundamental areas specified above, although there will certainly be overlap and courses may attend to more than one area. These courses in the three areas are:

- **Area 1: Social scientific content, theory building and application.** These courses focus on the content of scientific knowledge, and aim to support PhD candidates to assess and build theories both within and beyond the boundaries of their own discipline.
  - Thematic course or seminar connected to the Faculty research themes
  - Proposal design & writing
  - Induction programme
  - Advanced theory construction
  - Theoretical tutorials

- **Area 2: Social scientific research design and methodology.** These courses focus on research design and methodology, and often provide hands-on experience with advanced methods of analysis.
  - Research Designs in the Social Sciences
  - Selected Analytical Methods (Quantitative & Qualitative)
  - Summer workshops
  - Methodological tutorials

- **Area 3: Academic skills.** The main focus in these courses is on the development of academic and/or transferrable skills, aimed at improving the necessary skills for current academic or applied researchers.
The courses in the PhD program are also open to PhD candidates from relevant other VU faculties (e.g. Psychology, Economics and Management Science) and other universities. These external participants are usually charged a fee (€150,- per EC).

### 3.4.2 Basic program for first year PhD candidates

A number of courses are particularly relevant and instructive in the starting period of a PhD project and thus provide essential education for first year PhD candidates. These courses provide useful knowledge and assignments that help PhD candidates to understand and delimit their research field, to review and evaluate the literature, to formulate a proper research question, to determine the right methodology, and to conduct research in a responsible manner. As such they support PhD candidates to specify the research plan of their PhD project, prepare them for the delivery of the 8 month product, and facilitate a proper start of the project.

In designing a training plan first year PhD candidates are therefore urged to schedule these courses within the quality assessment scheme (see Chapter 4) aimed to enhance progress and quality of PhD projects (i.e., the OBP and 8-month product, see §4.1 and §4.2). For the cohort of PhD candidates who start their PhD trajectories at the advised starting period in August / September, this results in the following basic course program:

- **Induction week** (period 1: Sept-Oct)
- **Research Design in the Social Sciences** (period 1: Sept-Oct)
- **Proposal Design & Writing** (period 2/4: Dec-Feb)
- **Deadline 8-month product (March / April)**
- **Research Integrity and Responsible Scholarship** (period 5: May)

The remaining courses offered in the program are usually advised for the second and third year of the PhD trajectory.

### 3.4.3 Self-organized activities and modules granted with EC

In addition to following courses offered by VU-GSSS PhD candidates can (collaboratively) organize their own activities and modules of their need, with support of VU-GSSS, and obtain credits.

Individual PhD candidates, or small groups of up to five participants, can organize *tutorials* supervised by a Faculty member focusing on a specialized theoretical or methodological topic (Theoretical and methodological tutorials; usually 3 EC). Tutorials allow PhD candidates to profit from the expertise of Faculty researchers other than their own supervisors on a topic of their need. They can be organized by PhD candidates themselves, throughout the PhD trajectory,
and are thus highly flexible both with respect to timing and content. Faculty tutors receive compensation for these activities.

*Science blogging* can be performed throughout the PhD trajectory (see also §5.4). Communicating about scientific activities in online blogs is intended to aid PhD candidates both in developing academic skills (i.e., writing, valorization) as well as in their project- and individual progress (fostering understanding, networking, publishing).

PhD candidates can also self-organize *seminars or lab group meetings* under the supervision of Faculty staff member(s). Such self-organized regular meetings in a research group can for instance be used to discuss papers, methods, or other topics related to the PhD projects of participants. Credits can be obtained in a similar way as for tutorials; participating PhD candidates have to submit a plan prior to the meeting schedule and report afterwards (maximum of 3 EC).

PhD candidates can also obtain credits for *conference presentations* (i.e. oral or poster presentations) and participation in conference workshop specifically focused on PhD candidates. Note that conference attendance to at least one scientific conference is expected from all PhD candidates. (See §3.3.1; maximum of 2 EC).

### 3.4.4 Courses offered outside VU-GSSS

All PhD candidates are stimulated to attend courses that are offered outside the VU-GSSS educational program, provided they are at least research master or PhD candidates’ level. These may be courses and workshops offered at other VU faculties or at other universities in the Netherlands or abroad, in (inter)national research schools, or in VU Interfaculty Research Institutes. Following external courses may be particularly appropriate when they offer a specialized content that is not covered within the VU-GSSS program, or when they are organized in a more convenient time period. Also, some PhD projects are closely linked to a disciplinary research school outside VU-GSSS, which justifies following (part of) the education program offered there.

VU GSSS aims to facilitate linking PhD candidates to suitable research schools, relevant courses and other scientific researchers, both in national and international contexts. The VU-GSSS also collaborates with major research schools in Amsterdam in order to increase supply of courses and flexibility to design individualized training plans. We have an agreement for exchange of course participation free of charge with ABRI (VU) and AISSR (UVA). This means that PhD candidates enrolled in the VU-GSSS can participate without fee in the AISSR PhD course programme offered at the University of Amsterdam. The actual overview of PhD courses offered by AISSR, and information about how to sign up through an online form, can be found on their website. The same holds for a limited number of courses offered in the ABRI PhD programme (VU Faculty of Economics & BA). Note that participation is only possible if space permits. Usually there is a maximum of 15 participants in a course and internal PhD’s get priority over external participants.

Many external institutes offering PhD courses provide participants with a certificate specifying the number of EC’s earned once the course requirements are fulfilled. Such a certificate is needed as evidence that a course is completed (see §4.4.1). If credits are not specified for a
course, PhD candidates can request VU-GSSS to judge the content of the course to specify whether, and how many, credits can be awarded. Make sure to submit a timely request in order to ascertain whether EC's can be obtained for a course.

3.4.4.1 Courses offered in other faculties of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
The following courses offered at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam can be included in a PhD's training plan.

- **PhD Success and Personal Efficacy**
  For first-year PhD candidates at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Human Resource Management organizes the training PhD success and personal efficacy. In this training, which is taught in English, one will learn how to set their own goals, develop a strategy for realizing them and to communicate them to others. More information about the course can be found on [VUnet](#). A certificate is provided after completion of the course. A successful completion of this training is counted as 3 EC by VU-GSSS. Participation is free of charge for PhD candidates employed at the VU, but external PhD candidates are charged a fee of €1,600,-.

- **The University Teacher Training Program (UTTP)**
  This course, currently offered within the VU Faculty of Psychology and Education, prepares academic teachers for the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ; or Basiskwalificatie onderwijs, BKO), which is nationally recognized by all Dutch universities. The UTTP has a study load of approximately 150 hours. A certificate is provided after completion of the course. A successful completion of this track is counted for 6 EC's by VU-GSSS. A short track UTTP is available for teachers with a minimum of 5 years of experience in academic teaching. The study load for this short track varies between 50 and 100 hours depending on experience. A successful completion of this track is counted as 3 EC's by VU-GSSS. For participation by teaching staff of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam only the administrative costs of €75,- apply. External participants pay €2,500,- for this course.

3.4.4.2 Courses offered at other Research Schools within the Netherlands
The following research schools offer PhD courses, and have regular attendance of VU-GSSS PhDs. These courses are accepted for the training plan. Courses of some schools are open for VU-GSSS PhDs without a fee (ABRI, AISSR). For other schools a participation fee is usually required (see Chapter 6 for financial support).

Graduate Schools where VU-GSSS has an exchange agreement for (limited) participation without fee:

- University of Amsterdam: Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR; [PhD program current courses](#))
- Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: Amsterdam Business Research Institute ([ABRI](#))

Other Graduate Schools that may ask a fee:

- [Research School for Resource Studies for Development (CERES)](#)
- [Kurt Lewin Institute (KLI)](#)
- [Netherlands Institute of Government (NIG)](#)
- [Netherlands School of Communication Research (NeSCoR)](#)
3.4.4.3 International Summer Schools
The following international summer schools are accepted for the training plan, but note that a participation fee is usually required (see chapter 6 for financial support).

- Essex Summer School (Social Science Data Analysis)
- ECPR Summer School/Winter school, Ljubljana (Methods and Techniques)
- Oslo Summer School (Comparative Social Studies)
- ICPSR Summer Program, Michigan (Quantitative Methods of Social Research)

3.5 Teaching
Make sure you discuss your teaching obligations at the beginning of your contract, to avoid conflicts while you're working on your project. Agreements made about teaching should be included in your Training and Guidance Plan. Teaching obligations differ between the various departments of the Faculty, but in general PhD candidates should not teach in their first and last year. The maximum teaching load for PhD candidates is 5% of the overall working time according to the Faculty guidelines. It is crucial that you voice your preferences with regard to teaching early on – also, if you intend to go away for research, you should make sure well in advance that this does not clash with teaching obligations. For any questions concerning your teaching obligations please contact your supervisor, Head of Department or the Director of the Graduate School.
4 Quality Assessment of PhD projects

In order to support the progress and quality of PhD projects VU-GSSS organizes a scheme of subsequent assessments. In its quality assurance program VU-GSSS aims to ensure that PhD projects follow the guidelines and requirements established in the employment contract of PhD candidates and the Doctorate Regulations applicable at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam as a whole. Quality assurance is composed of the following elements: assessment of quality on entry (admission), establishing a Training and Supervision Plan (OBP) including a project description, project planning, supervision agreement and financial resources, external assessment of the quality of proposal and first product (go/no go), and annual assessment of progress and presentation of results.

Quality on entry is assessed by the PhD candidate’s supervisors and the Assessment Board. The assessment of the project needs to be positive in order to continue the PhD project. In all PhD projects the crucial go/no-go assessment of PhD projects takes place within the first year. After the first year, subsequent annual reports provide insight in progress and delays that may occur.

The following sections describe the consecutive parts of the quality and progress assessment program in more detail. See §4.5 for an overview of the steps of a promotion trajectory and quality assessment procedures.

4.1 The Training and Supervision Plan (Opleidings- en begeleidingsplan or OBP)

To ensure a proper start of the project the PhD candidate and the supervisor(s) come to an agreement on the project plan in a so called Training-and Supervision Plan (Opleidings- en Begeleidingsplan or OBP). In the OBP, the involved parties in a PhD project document what is expected from the project in terms of research to be conducted by the PhD candidate, and the support, education and supervision offered.

The OBP is an obligatory part of the PhD trajectory, completed by the PhD candidate and the supervisor and co-supervisor(s). The plan must be finalized within the first 2 months of the date of admission. It has to be signed by the supervisors, the Head of the Department, the Academic Director of the VU-GSSS, and the Dean of the FSS. The OBP also serves as a point of reference to evaluate the progress of a PhD project in the course of subsequent years (usually four); adjustments can be made at the end of each year.

The OBP describes and contains the following:

- The planning of the research with an emphasis on the goals for the first year;
- Who is responsible for the supervision and how supervision is organized;
- The training plan, i.e. courses and other activities (such as summer schools, seminars or external courses) that are part of the PhD education (see Chapter 3 for requirements and recommendations). The training plan depends on the needs and interests of the candidate and should be developed in collaboration with the supervisory team;
- Details on research school membership;
- Teaching or other tasks;
- Project budget;
- A statement indicating the responsibility of membership costs of VU-GSSS and payment of supervisory costs (in accordance with the fee scheme, see §2.3);
- A statement on the distribution of the promotion premium (promotie premie).

The Training and Supervision Plan for PhD candidates is submitted to the Management Assistant of VU-GSSS (graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl). Adjustments may be asked to satisfy their requirements. Your OBP needs to be signed by your supervisory team, the Head of your department and yourself before submitting it to the Graduate School. The signing marks the proper start of your project and plays an important role in the subsequent assessment of the progress of the PhD project.

4.2 The 8-Month Product

Eight months after the start of a PhD project, the candidates’ project progress is assessed on the basis of a so-called 8-month product. For candidates with other obligations this term can be extended to submitting a product within the first year, if this is agreed upon in the Training and Supervision Plan (OBP). The 8-month product describes the theoretical background of the research, and contains an extensive literature review or it is combined with a first paper. The main purpose of this product is to ascertain immediate progress and planning of the project, as a basis for a PhD project to be successfully completed within three or four years (in case of a full time project) after the start of the project. The 8-month product not only gives an indication of the feasibility of the project, but also of the PhD candidates’ analytical skills and ability for scientific writing.

PhD candidates have the choice between submitting:
   a. two separate documents: research proposal & literature review, or research proposal & research article or
   b. a single product that integrates both the research proposal and the literature review

The research proposal can be an adapted version of the original proposal (NWO, or any other) for which the candidate was recruited, or which the candidate helped to write or wrote her/himself; or it can be a newly developed proposal. The precise form of the 8-month product (maximum length 10,000 words) will be determined individually in consultation between (co-)supervisor and the PhD candidate, and is specified in the Training and Supervision Plan (see §4.1). The substantive part of the proposal should not be longer than 4,000 words. The literature review can of course use relevant sections from the research proposal, even integrally if deemed possible.

The 8-month product is evaluated by at least two external reviewers and one internal reviewer at the level of associate professor or higher. Based on these reviews the VU-GSSS Academic Director decides whether the 8-month product is of sufficient quality, and if it will be accepted. A deviation from this term should be justified and settled in the OBP. A later submission date may be appropriate in case of a part-time appointment (e.g. 10 months in case of a 0.8 appointment or an external PhD trajectory) although a timely submission is highly recommended for the benefit of a steady project progress. All types of PhD candidates need to submit an 8-month product.

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3 A deviation from this term should be justified and settled in the OBP. A later submission date may be appropriate in case of a part-time appointment (e.g. 10 months in case of a 0.8 appointment or an external PhD trajectory) although a timely submission is highly recommended for the benefit of a steady project progress. All types of PhD candidates need to submit an 8-month product.
motivated response by the candidate to these reviews is necessary. A revision of the proposal or paper may be required. In case of conflicting opinions on the quality of the work, the final evaluation will be referred to the Assessment Board. The evaluation of the 8-month product plays an important role in the decision concerning the extension of the first 12 month contract of employed PhD candidates, as well as for the extension of the project of external PhD candidates. The formal responsibility for an extension lies with the Head of the Department to which the PhD candidate belongs. If the Academic Director and the Head of Department come to opposing conclusions, the final decision is referred to the Dean of the Faculty. The Academic Director of the Graduate School will inform the PhD candidate, the Supervisory Committee and the Personnel Department about the outcome.

The format of the 8-month product and related documents can be found on our [website](#).

NB: The outcome of the 8-month product will be taken into account during the annual consultation and assessment interview (see §4.3.1).

### 4.3 Annual Progress Reports

The annual progress report is essential in monitoring the progress and development of the research after the first year. It is a follow-up on the Training and Supervision Plan and the 8-month product produced in the first year. The supervisors report progress to the department. The PhD candidate is required to submit their own separate annual progress report directly to VU-GSSS. The yearly report of the PhD candidate lists the courses completed (i.e., as a follow-up on the training plan, see §4.1) as well as problems that hamper progress of the research project in the past year. In this confidential document, the PhD candidate may for instance report on his/her progress, supervision and any other activities related to the research. These documents are collected by the VU-GSSS ombudsman, Dr. Ida Sabelis, and will be dealt with confidentially. If the report notes any problems that require attention, the PhD candidate will be contacted in order to discuss a potential solution.

For PhD candidates employed by the VU an additional annual consultation and assessment is also required (see §4.3.1). Adjusting the schedule of the VU-GSSS annual progress report to the VU annual consultation and assessment is up to the PhD candidate and the supervisory team.

### 4.3.1 Annual Consultation and Assessment

Each year all employees, including employee PhD candidates 4 of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam have an annual consultation and assessment conversation (i.e. *jaargesprek*). These are not organized by VU-GSSS. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam strives for an open working relationship, in which supervisors and employees can talk freely and respectfully with each other about their mutual responsibilities as essential. Once a year, during the annual consultation and assessment, they have an opportunity to speak formally about development, results and working conditions. Supervisor and employee both look back at the previous year, and they make concrete and transparent agreements about how the employee is expected to perform and develop.

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4 Type I and II, see § 4.5
4.4 The final stage: Assessment of the PhD candidate and dissertation

Once a PhD candidate has finished writing the dissertation a number of steps are required before the actual PhD title is obtained. These steps are detailed in the VU Doctorate Regulations (Promotiereglement) and briefly explained below.

4.4.1 Obtaining a required PhD Training Certificate

To be allowed to the actual promotion procedure, the PhD candidate must demonstrate that the PhD training requirements are fulfilled by means of a training certificate. When a PhD candidate has fulfilled the required 30 EC as planned and reported in the Training and Supervision plan (see §3.3 and §4.1), they can apply for a VU-GSSS PhD training certificate which proofs training completion. In order to apply for the training certificate, PhD candidates should submit a list of all courses completed successfully (with certificates), and (if applicable) a copy of exemptions obtained at the beginning in the Training and Supervision plan (OBP). The list provides detailed information about the completed courses (i.e. courses’ titles, place and date of completion, organizers, obtained EC, etc.). For courses followed outside VU-GSSS (see §3.4.5) the list also provides contact information about the organizer. The list should be submitted to the VU-GSSS program manager together with the obtained course certificates. It is the PhD candidates' own responsibility to keep a proper administration of their course work, and to hand over a clear and complete overview that allows for a valid judgment of the completed training program. They are advised to commence keeping this administration right at the start of their project, and to make sure that certificates of completed courses (including VU-GSSS courses) are obtained and carefully archived. Continuous reporting on completion of the training plan (at first designed in the OBP, see §4.1) is also an integrated part of the annual progress report (see §4.3).

4.4.2 The Thesis Committee and Assessment Procedure

When the PhD candidate has completed his or her dissertation, and the supervisor and supervisor(s) agree that it is ready to be assessed, the supervisor requests the Dean of the Faculty to assign the Thesis Committee. The members of the Thesis Committee are appointed by the Dean of the Faculty (or deputy), based on a motivated proposal of the supervisor who in advance assures the availability of the proposed members.

The Thesis Committee should consist of at least five members of which a minimum of one and not more than two members are affiliated to the VU Faculty of Social Sciences. Not more than one member may be part of the supervisor’s work unit. At least two members are affiliated to another university than the university granting (i.e. VU), or co-granting the degree. These external members may not be co-authors on more than one article included in the dissertation. One of the members (a Full Professor preferably employed by the VU) is assigned as chair of the Thesis Committee.

The candidate's supervisor and co-supervisor(s) are not a member of the Thesis Committee. Instead, they complete the Form “Assessment of PhD candidate – form for supervisor(s)”. In this form the candidate’s supervisors elaborate on why the PhD candidate fulfils the final attainment
levels expected for a doctorate degree (see § 3.1) and is ready to defend the thesis. In the form the supervisors also explicate the candidate’s independent contribution to the dissertation. That is, which parts of the research were conducted in collaboration, and which parts of the dissertation were co-authored. It is highly recommended that the contributions of the candidate and potential collaborators to each chapter (i.e. to writing, design, analyses, etc.) are also indicated in the dissertation.

Subsequently, the members of the Thesis Committee will assess, based on the supervisors’ assessment and their evaluation of the candidate’s dissertation, whether the candidate fulfils the final attainment levels, and should be allowed to defend the thesis. The individual members report their assessment in the Form “Assessment of PhD candidate – form for Thesis Committee”, which they submit to the assigned chair of the Thesis Committee. Based on the assessments in these Forms, the chair of the Thesis Committee formulates a substantiated general advice in writing, which is, together with the completed Forms of the individual members, submitted to the Dean. The advice is unconditional (i.e. it is either yes or no), although individual members are allowed to complement their advice with suggestions and recommendations for improvement. The assessment is usually done within 30 days.

If the above assessment is positive, and other requirements (including training, see § 4.4.1) are fulfilled, Form II needs to be completed and submitted to the pedel office, which is signed by the Dean. By signing Form II the Dean confirms that all conditions are fulfilled and that the PhD candidate is allowed to defend the dissertation. Only after Form II is submitted, the candidate should contact the pedel office through pedel@vu.nl or through 003120-5985309 to plan a date and a room for the public defense. Take into account that there will be at least 9 weeks in between approval of the manuscript and the actual public defense.

The pedel will also give information that is important before printing the dissertation (e.g., strict rules for the title page). The candidate also needs to upload the dissertation in the VU-DARE repository.

4.4.3 The Public Defense and Promotion

The pedel will provide the candidate with information about (planning) the ceremony (e.g., dress code). The actual ceremony of the public defence starts with a 10 minute presentation (i.e., lekenpraatje) in which the candidate explains, in lay terms, the main points of the research and the dissertation. Subsequently, a number of committee members (usually the members of the Reading Committee) will pose questions to the candidate about the work described in the dissertation. Together this will last for exactly one hour. Then the pedel will enter the room and will call “hora est!”.

After the public defence the Promotion Committee will decide in a closed “extraordinary gathering” whether the candidate will be bestowed with the doctorate degree (i.e. Ph.D. / Dr.). During this process, the candidate will wait outside together with the two deputies (i.e., paranimfen) until called back to hear the outcome. They will return to the public room, where they will receive their diploma, and their supervisor will reflect on their achievement (the laudatio).
4.5 Overview: Time plan of promotion trajectory and quality assessment

Chapter 2 and 4 describe a number of steps required to be admitted as a PhD candidate within FSS and subsequently to successfully proceed in a PhD project. The following table provides an overview and details on all these steps from application, admission, to public defense and promotion. The steps differ at points for different types of PhD candidates (see § 2.1).

**Time Plan Promotion /Quality Assessment**

Your (proposed) status as a PhD candidate:

- **Type 1.** Employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam as an employee PhD candidate (*werknemer promovendus*) → start with step 1
- **Type 2.** Employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam as a lecturer or researcher with additional research time to write a dissertation and pursue a PhD title (*promoverende medewerker*) → proceed with step 2
- **Type 3.** PhD candidates not employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, but with an official agreement to work towards obtaining a PhD (*contractpromovendus*). This category receives funding and/or time in order to pursue a PhD title → proceed with step 2
- **Type 4.** PhD candidates not employed by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, but with an official agreement to work towards obtaining a PhD (*buitenpromovendus*). This category does not receive funding or time in order to pursue a PhD title → proceed with step 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPLICATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

REQUEST FOR ADMISSION: please submit underneath documents so the VU-GSSS can assess your application

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5 See § 2.1 for a more detailed description of the various types of PhD candidates.
### Step 2

**Year 0**

Submit an application including the following forms:

- Letter of motivation
- Curriculum Vitae
- MA grading list
- Preliminary research plan
- Endorsement by a FSS Professor guaranteeing supervision with argumentation concerning the qualities of the PhD candidate based on an open selection and the connection with the research program
- 2 academic references
- Certificate showing an adequate knowledge of English\(^6\)

Types 2, 3 & 4

Before the start of a PhD project

Application can be submitted through our [website](#)

See Chapter 2

In case you have any questions about the admission procedure please contact VU-GSSS ([graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl](mailto:graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl))

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VU-GSSS decides upon the admission of PhD candidates. In case of exceptions the VU-GSSS Assessment Board will be asked for advice. Once these steps are approved a PhD candidate can proceed with the next step.

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\(^6\) The minimum required is TOEFL 100 or IELTS 7.0. Note that this requirement is not necessary for native English speakers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Documents/Forms Required</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Contact Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Submit (online) application form (Personnel Department)</td>
<td>Employment contract document • Personal detail form</td>
<td>Supervisor/PhD candidate (Type 1 only)</td>
<td>Before the start of a PhD project</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Arrange hosting agreement</td>
<td>Department (Types 3 &amp; 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Before the start of a PhD project</td>
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<td><strong>ADMISSION TO THE DOCTORATE PROGRAM &amp; REGISTRATION IN THE VU-GSSSS</strong></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Submit the following form:</td>
<td>PhD candidate (All types) with input from supervisor.</td>
<td></td>
<td>At the start of a PhD project</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• A complete and signed form I including:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. A certified copy of your master diploma</td>
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<td>2. A copy of your passport</td>
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<td>3. A signed KNAW declaration of integrity</td>
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</table>
| 6    | 1    | Submit a completed and signed Training and Supervision Plan (Opleidings-en Begeleidingsplan or OBP) | PhD candidate (All types) | | Within 2 months after the start of a project | completed OBP can be sent to graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl | See § 4.1
|      |      | | | | | The format of the Training and Supervision Plan can be found on our [website](#) |
Step 7  
| Year 1 | Submit your 8 month product (see §4.2) | PhD candidate (All types) in close consultation with supervisor. | 8 months after the start of a project in case of a 4 year contract | Submit an electronic version to graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl | Template & Guidelines can be found on our [website](#) |

→ The 8 month product will be reviewed by both internal and external reviewers. The VU-GSSS will inform the PhD candidate and the supervisory team of the outcome. A positive advice is required before the first year contract is extended.

### PROGRESS

| Year 1 | Submit Annual Progress Report | PhD candidate (All types) | December |

→ The progress of PhD candidates is monitored on an annual basis. This is done by both the PhD candidate and the supervisors and the department. The VU-GSSS examines the reports and will take action when necessary (see § 4.3).

| Year 2 and all subsequent years | Submit potential adjustments in Training and Supervision plan (in original document with track changes) | PhD candidate (All types) in close consultation with supervisor. | Early year 2 | Submit an electronic version to graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl |
| Year 2 and all subsequent years | Annual Consultation and Assessment | | | |
| Year 2 and all subsequent years | Submit Annual Progress Report | PhD candidate (All types) | December |
| Year 4 | Submit training overview in order to obtain an official PhD Training Certificate and form II | | Submit your overview to graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl | Form II |
| Year 4 | Submit Form: Assessment of PhD candidate – form for supervisor(s) | Supervisor | Email your form to the secretary of the Faculty Office: bestuurssecretariaat.fsw@vu.nl |

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| Year 4 | Form: Assessment of PhD candidate – form for Thesis Committee | Thesis Committee | Email your form to the secretary of the Faculty Office: bestuurssecretariaat.fsw@vu.nl |
5 Scientific environment and PhD Community

VU-GSSS aims to establish a lively and stimulating scientific environment for PhD candidates, in which young researchers and staff can mutually inspire each other. This is achieved by involving international scholars of high reputation in the training of PhD candidates, by stimulating an active contribution of PhD candidates, and by facilitating the formation of a PhD community within the Faculty. The following activities aim to stimulate such an environment and active participation and contribution of PhD candidates to this environment, allowing them to create a network of fellow researchers.

5.1 International Fellows

In order to promote internationally orientated and high level research, VU-GSSS funds five two-year international fellowships to reputed scholars in the domains of the Faculty. These International Fellowships are open to scholars who are invited in the expectation that they contribute, as advisors and participants, to the training of our PhD candidates, and to the research programs of the five VU-FSS departments. A balanced mix of methods and theoretical interests with sufficient connection to the departmental programs is aimed for.

International fellows play an important role in the academic training program, in seminars and as co-supervisors of dissertations. International fellows have an affiliation with one of the Faculties Research Programs, usually as visiting professor for a number of short visits over a two-year period. In order to foster continuity, these fellowships can be extended once within this program.

5.2 Graduate Council

To facilitate and support an active community of PhD candidates the VU-GSSS PhD Graduate Council (previously known as Graduate Platform) plays an important role. Their main task is to create a social platform, and to represent the interests of all PhD candidates within the Faculty of Social Sciences. The Graduate Council consists of up to six internal and/ or external PhD candidates, representing all departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Ideally, each department within the faculty is represented within the council by one of its PhD candidates, who usually are member for one year. The Graduate Council has a couple of main tasks.

A first task of the Graduate Council is to advice the VU-GSSS management team and FSS Faculty board. The Graduate Council informs and advises the VU-GSSS management team on all PhD related issues, such as this PhD Information Document and the VU-GSSS education program, and surveys such issues for this purpose. Besides that, the Graduate Council is the contact platform regarding PhD-related issues for the Social Sciences Faculty board. In addition, the Graduate Council maintains contact with ProVU, the VU Universiteit's PhD organization.

Second, the Graduate Council has a social function in bringing internal and external PhD candidates from different departments together. Being part of a community of fellow PhD
candidates is important because it provides opportunities for peer feedback and informal exchange experiences. To this end, the Graduate Council regularly organizes PhD seminars, workshops, and informal drinks. The Graduate Council also supports and facilitates (in terms of snacks, drinks and space) activities initiated and organized by other PhD candidates if they are open for all PhD candidates of the Faculty. Regular events organized by the Graduate Council are the monthly workshops (e.g. pizza seminars) offering content and activities beyond the scope of the educational program of VU-GSSS. These involve, for instance, workshops for personal or skill development, discussions about what it means to be a social researcher, but also social gatherings and drinks. Each year, the Graduate Council also organizes a PhD Day (e.g. poster market) in order to showcase the research done by PhD candidates. Here, PhD candidates can present their research and informally interact with senior staff. A price is awarded to the best presenter.

The Graduate council is also involved in organizing the PhD induction week for first year PhD candidates. In the induction week PhD candidates are welcomed and introduced in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The week consists of a mixture of lectures by renowned researchers of the Faculty of Social Sciences, presentations about practical issues, presentations by participants, workshops and assignments, and social events etc. During the week new PhD candidates get to know their fellow PhD candidates in the FSS, both those in their cohort year and more advanced PhD candidates, which will be pleasant and valuable for the remainder of their PhD project and after.

A third task of the Graduate Council is fulfilling the role of departmental PhD buddies. The members of the Graduate Council function as a buddy for fellow PhD candidates in their respective departments. They introduce new PhD candidates to the VU-GSSS community, and are the primary contact person for PhD related issues.

The Graduate Council has a yearly budget to organize workshops, drinks and the annual PhD Day. The members of the Graduate Council receive a financial compensation for their work, which is added to their personal fund.

5.3 Blogging website

Another means by which VU-GSSS facilitates and supports the creation of a lively PhD community is through our blogging website. The website http://socializingsciencevu.com/, launched on February 19 2014, provides an online platform for all VU Social Sciences PhD candidates. On this website, PhD candidates can post blogs about their own research, scientific research they read and hear about in colloquia, and reflect on other PhD relevant issues. The blogs are disseminated through social media both within and outside the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS). The website also contains a section that introduces PhD candidates by means of a picture and brief description, and link to their profile on the departmental webpage.

The website allows PhD candidates to take note of the fellow researchers or people working in practice, and to partake in the valorization of scientific knowledge. Moreover, writing blogs gives PhD candidates the opportunity to publish in an informal manner, at an early point in their PhD trajectories, to build a reputation, and to practice writing by explaining scientific research to a broader audience.

Moreover the website facilitates the creation of a VU Social Sciences PhD community – involving internal and external PhD candidates, and candidates working abroad. Socializing
Science makes for a lively platform showcasing excellence and expertise of FSS PhD candidates and stimulates the exchange of scientific research both within and outside the VU Faculty of Social Sciences.

In addition, scientific blogging is part of the VU-GSSS education program and PhD candidates can obtain EC's for their blogging efforts (see §3.4.4). A manual is available for more information, through socializingscience.fsw@vu.nl.
6 Financial Support

6.1 Internal support: The Graduate Fund

In order to support PhD candidates to orientate themselves internationally and to promote a broad academic development, VU-GSSS provides financial support through the VU-GSSS Graduate Fund. Internal PhD candidates can apply for various international activities, for instance for attending a summer school, presenting a paper at an international conference or workshop, participation in international education abroad, or conduct of fieldwork or a research stay at a foreign university. Deadlines are twice a year in April and October. Calls will be sent out approximately 1 month before the deadline.

6.2 External Financial Support

There are some external funds available from (semi) governmental and international agencies, which are differentiated between disciplines and funding goals. Funding options are:

- Nuffic (Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education)
- Grantfinder (part of Nuffic) or Beursopener (in Dutch)
- Scholarship Portal
- The Grants and Funds page of the VU
- Fondsenboek/Fondsendisk

6.3 PhD Dissertation Remuneration

All PhD candidates who provide the University Library with a free license for non-exclusive publication of the dissertation in electronic form, if necessary with a temporary publication embargo, are entitled to a Dissertation Remuneration of € 500,-. This bonus can be used to compensate part of the following expenses:

- Printing and editing of the manuscript (see Article 24 of the VU Doctorate Regulations);
- Costs for renting suitable clothing for the defense;
- Reception costs

As of 1 January 2017, the PhD defence reimbursement will be paid out by the PhD candidate’s own Faculty or Department (instead of the Pedel). The signed license agreement is a compulsory attachment when applying for this reimbursement.

To apply for the reimbursement, you print and sign the license agreement\(^7\) for your PhD manuscript and send it to the University Library:

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Bibliotheek, afd. AMS
t.a.v. DARE-team, kamer 13B-01

\(^7\) More information about the license agreement and the document itself will be given to you by the Pedel.
The University Library will check and sign the license agreement on behalf of the Executive Board and send you the signed document by email. Please attach this document when you apply for the PhD Dissertation Remuneration. You can use the following links to proceed with your reimbursement:

**Employees**
- For employees of Vrije Universiteit/Faculty of Social Sciences:  
  https://vunet.login.vu.nl/services/pages/detail.aspx?cid=tcm%3a165-370433-16

**Non-employees**
- For non-employees at Vrije Universiteit  
  https://serviceplein.login.vu.nl/Pages/SelfServices/GenericForms/expenses.aspx

You can use the following kostenplaatsnummer/budget number: 2622104. In the attachment you can then upload the (signed and checked!) license agreement. It is not necessary to upload additional receipts. More information and FAQ's about uploading your dissertation can be found on the website of the UBVU.

### 6.4 Financial Reimbursement – General Information

PhD candidates with an employee contract need to complete their reimbursement or advance payment digitally through VUnet / E-HRM. In case you have questions, please contact the HRM Servicedesk through servicedesk.hrm@vu.nl or 020 59 82882.

PhD's without a contract need to submit an expense claim form. The form for 2015/2016 can be found on VUnet. If you have any specific questions or encounter problems going through the system please contact the financial administration for instructions: servicedesk.fsc@vu.nl or 020 59 83478.
7 VU-GSSS Governance and Organization

7.1 Governance Structure

VU-GSSS has a multi-layered governance structure and operates under the ultimate responsibility and authority of the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The Management Team of the VU-GSSS consists of the Academic Director, Course Director, Programme Manager and Management Assistant. The team meets regularly and discusses decisions in the day-to-day running of VU-GSSS.

VU-GSSS is directed by the Academic Director (a Full Professor), appointed for a term of 3 years (renewable once). The Academic Director is responsible for the development of VU-GSSS strategy. The Academic Director is responsible for the overall functioning of VU-GSSS, and answers to the Faculty Board.

The Course Director co-ordinates the content and organization of the PhD education program and coursework. The Program Director also supports and executes the development of new program elements and programs. The Course Director also serves as an educational adviser to the students, referring them to the appropriate external courses for their questions. The Course Director answers to the Academic Director.

The Program Manager supports the administrative processes for the organization of courses, evaluation and registration of coursework of the PhD program and serves as secretary for the VU-GSSS Assessment Board. The Program Manager is responsible for the registration of PhD’s, co-ordinates and manages the day-to-day functioning of the Graduate School, in close cooperation with the Academic Director. The Program Manager runs the office of the Graduate School, is responsible for the implementation of formal arrangements, administers official correspondence, registers and maintains the information on progress of the PhD’s. The Program Manager answers to the Academic Director and the Managing Director of the Faculty.

The VU-GSSS Assessment Board consists of five Professors / Associate Professors. One of the members acts as chair. The Board has as its main task: the admission of new PhD candidates, the evaluation of 8-months products that are negatively evaluated after revision, and the annual progress reports. The Assessment Board also judges the applications for financial support from the Graduate Fund by individual PhD candidates and the annual reports by the departments. The Assessment Board advises the Academic Director in all matters concerning the Graduate School, awards and fellowships. If appropriate it can delegate part of its duties to smaller subcommittees, and may create its own internal rules of decision. The Assessment Board is installed by the Faculty Board and performs its duties independently.

The Graduate Council consists of a number of PhD candidates from the various FSS departments who act as representatives of all FSS PhD candidates. The Graduate Council regularly meets with the Academic Director and one of the representatives participates in the Management Team of VU-GSSS. The Graduate Council advises the VU-GSSS management on all PhD-related issues, and funnels PhD concerns for this purpose. It also organizes social activities...
for the PhD community, welcomes and introduces new PhD candidates, and functions as the primary contact point for PhD-related issues both within departments as well as the Faculty as a whole.

7.2 Complaints: Confidential advisors

If PhD candidates feel they are receiving insufficient supervision, or a serious conflict has arisen, they can take the following steps:

- If possible, discuss the issue with their PhD supervisor or daily supervisor, for example at the annual consultation and assessment meeting (see §4.3.1). If feeling more comfortable with the research program leaders they can also take their complaint to them.
- If the above is not possible, the issue can be discussed with the PhD buddy of the relevant department. They can (anonymously) submit the complaint to the Graduate Council or PhD ombudsman.
- The VU-GSSS also has a PhD ombudsman whom can be contacted by the PhD when in doubt about issues that may hinder the progress of the PhD project.
- If the above steps are not possible or inadequate, the PhD also can contact one of the FSS confidential (staff) advisors. These advisors are for all personnel, but are also specifically charged with helping to resolve issues that can arise between PhD candidates and their supervisor(s). Their role is distinct from the roles and responsibilities of the supervisors, PhD representatives, and VU-GSSS management team. These advisors are charged with helping to resolve conflicts in as early a stage as possible. PhD candidates can also contact the confidential VU staff advisors regarding any complaints about unfair treatment by a person or organizational unit at the VU including a conflict with a supervisor. Confidential staff advisors hold an independent position within the FSS and are under an obligation of confidentiality, meaning they must address complaints in a confidential manner. An advisor will therefore not communicate any information to other parties (including VU-GSSS) unless requested and approved by the employee (PhD candidate) in question.

Annually, the PhD ombudsman evaluates PhD experiences by requesting a confidential progress report or survey (see §4.3). The VU-GSSS Academic Director will follow up on the information provided if necessary, and keeps such discussions with PhD candidates confidential. The resulting information is used to improve PhD supervision and support where possible.

7.3 Co-operation with other Graduate Schools

The VU-GSSS cooperates with a number of partner institutions:
1. Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam Interfaculty and Faculty Institutes (e.g. Camera, Visor, the Network Institute, ABRI, the Institute for Global Change)
2. The University of Amsterdam Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Amsterdam Institute for Social Research (AISSR)
3. National research schools in disciplines relevant to the disciplines of the FSS (e.g. NIG, CERES, NESCOR, IOPS, Psychology and Health)
4. International (often EU-supported) networks for graduate training
5. Bilateral partner institutions (e.g., the Department of Political Science cooperates closely with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the training of PhD candidates).
8 Practical Information for PhD candidates

8.1 Library
The VU Library not only gives you access to a large selection of academic resources, it’s team also offers research support on finding literature, data management and Open Access. You can access the library resources both from the campus and at home. More information on how to get access at home is available on VUnet.

Other topics the VU Library can help you with:

- Google Scholar (search for articles, reports, conference proceedings, etc.);
- LibSearch (for access to the library catalogue);
- Selection of databases available at the VU:
  - Picarta: catalogue of all academic and many public libraries in the Netherlands
  - IBSS: International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
  - Web of Science
- Courses on finding and managing literature and data through (online) courses and workshops

More information & Contact
Rian Kriesels: Rian.kriesels@vu.nl, +31(0)20 59 83971

8.2 Open Access
A publication is 'open access' if you are free to read, download, copy, print or distribute it. The author has given a licence for a broad (re-)use, but retains his/her copyright. This makes it possible to make material accessible via Internet or to use it for teaching and new research.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam wants to encourage and promote open access publishing. Research which is financed with public money should be publicly accessible. One of the biggest advantages of open access is that it makes scientific research findings accessible to all. This method of publishing makes the dissemination of knowledge more efficient. The main advantage for authors is that it allows them to increase their readership and therefore the impact of their publications (more downloads and citations).

More information about Open Access can be found on the Libraries website.

8.3 Webmail, wifi, surfspot & access to files at home
It is possible to check and send e-mails from home. You can do this through following this link: http://webmail.vu.nl and log in with the same codes as you normally use to log in on your computer at the VU.

It is furthermore possible to access your files from home using WebDav. Instructions on how to do this can be found in the user manual you can download here. You can use the same codes as
you normally use for logging in on your computer at the VU, adding 'VU\' in front of your VU-net ID.

For more information on wireless internet at the VU click here.

In case you have any ICT-related questions, please contact the UC-IT servicedesk through (020) 598 0000 or by e-mail through ucit-servicedesk@vu.nl.

Students and employees of Dutch universities can obtain cheap soft- and hardware through www.surfspot.nl. An English Pdf file with more information can be downloaded here.

8.4 ProVU

ProVU is the PhD organization of the VU that represents all PhDs and Postdocs of the VU and VU Medical Center (VUmc). ProVU is active in the Employees Council. They provide a community of fellow PhDs and Postdocs, and aim to build a social infrastructure for all researchers. They aim to create a stimulating environment for PhDs and Postdocs during their time at the VU and VUmc. ProVU provides academic challenges, and organizes different events. ProVU can't do this alone. They consider working together with different partners inside and outside the VU as of utmost importance. Their website at http://www.provu.nl/ provides information about upcoming events and how to become involved with other PhDs and Postdocs at the VU.

8.5 People and contact details

8.5.1 Management team VU-GSSS

- Central VU-GSSS email address, managed by MT members: graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl

- Academic Director of the Graduate School
  Prof. Dr. Peter Groenewegen
  Tel. 020-59 86734; E-mail: p.groenewegen@vu.nl

- Course Director
  Dr. Naná de Graaff
  Tel. 020-59 88762; E-mail: c.j.beukeboom@vu.nl

- Program Manager
  Saskia Jans
  Tel. 020-59 85542; E-mail: s.jans@vu.nl

8.5.2 Graduate Council

- Amber Boeynaems (Communication Sciences)

- Margo Veenstra (Organization Sciences)
• Dianka Zuiderwijk (*Organization Sciences*)

**8.5.3 PhD Buddies**

• Amber Boeynaems (*Communication Sciences*)
  Tel. 020-598473; E-mail: a.boeynaems@vu.nl

• Sandra Hasanefendic (*Organization Sciences*)
  s.hasanefendic@vu.nl

• Aalt Smienk (*Social and Cultural Anthroplogy*)

**8.5.4 Personnel Department**

• Daniëlle Cohen
  Tel. 020-59 86759
  E-mail: d.cohen@vu.nl