



FACULTY OF LAW  
UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA



# Guide for mentors

Doctoral Study Programme of the Law Faculty in Rijeka

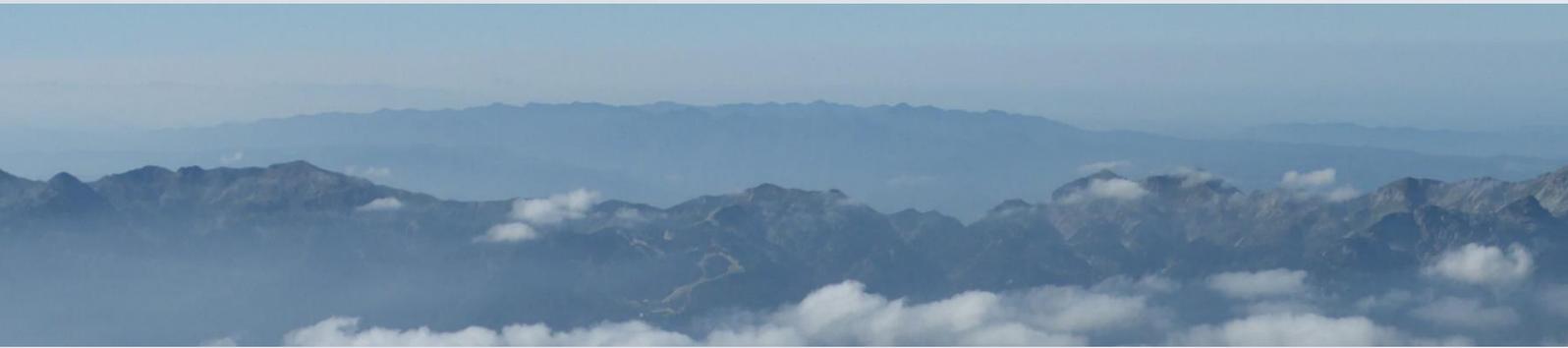
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**Authors** Prof. Dr. Edita Čulinović Herc, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sandra Fabijanić Gagro, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivana Kunda  
**Translation** Matea Butković  
**Design** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivana Kunda  
**Photos** pixabay.com (cover), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dionis Jurić (inside pages)  
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## Introduction

Mentorship at the doctoral study programme is a multi-layered relationship between the mentor and the doctoral student in which both are focused on the academic and personal development of the doctoral student. In that relationship, you as a mentor – a more experienced and more professional colleague – play a key role. You are taking on the responsibility of supporting the doctoral student in overcoming all study obligations and achieving the ultimate goal – successful defence of the doctoral dissertation. At the same time, this is the student's preparation for the role of an independent researcher who can compete equally in the European Research Area. Doctoral studies can be compared to a mountain climb, where you are the leader of the march, while the doctoral student is a mountaineer who aspires to climb to the top. To be a successful leader, you have to observe the prescribed rules and have certain qualities. Your mentoring obligations, as part of wider organisational policies of the Faculty, are prescribed by, among other things, University regulations on study programmes and the rules on this Study Programme. With expertise and experience in the professional field in which you operate, additional professional and personal competences are desirable for giving a proper support to the doctoral student. In raising awareness and improving their quality, a lifelong specialized education helps as well. The Faculty's institutional support is part of the effort aimed at developing a culture of mentorship at the Faculty.

This Guide is a part of the support. It is intended to direct you in finding answers to the most common challenges at different stages of the mentoring process. This Guide does not include ready-made recipes for dealing with doctoral students. It draws attention to the initial and following-up questions in relation to the doctoral student, which are essential for a successful completion of the Programme. Rather than a linear path, doctoral students pass an exponential one and at different rates. Previous mentoring experience at a doctoral study programme puts you in an advantageous position. However, the possibility of transferring your own (and others') experiences is limited because doctoral students, as well as mentors, have different abilities and personalities. Even if you do not have mentoring experience at a doctoral study programme, you at least have the experience as a doctoral student, which can also be helpful. This Guide is a tool for mentors in the mentoring process while additional support to mentors and students is given through communication with colleagues and/or with the Director of the Programme.

### Did you know?

Mentor (greek *Μέντωρ*, *Méntōr*) was a mythical person in Homer's *Odyssey*. He was a citizen of Ithaca and *Odyssey's* friend, to whom he, by going into the Trojan War, entrusted the care of his home and the upbringing of his son *Telemachus*.



## First meeting

The first meeting with the doctoral candidate takes place before his/her enrolment in the Programme. According to the Description of the Study Programme, the candidate should draw up a research proposal for the personal study plan and attach it to his or her application upon study enrolment. Your agreement with the proposal is confirmed by affixing your signature thereto. Given that the proposal should contain an outline topic and briefly explain the need for and methods of research, you already then have a chance to get to know the candidate and his or her former academic, professional and personal experiences. It is desirable to specify the areas or topics that you consider appropriate for doctoral research, while taking into consideration the candidate's interests. If he or she suggests a research topic that you believe is not appropriate, you should explain this to him or her by stating the reasons for your position. You need to agree on a list of elective courses that will be useful for the candidate's future research. Also, you may wish to discuss his or her experiences with his or her former mentors, ask him or her to think about his or her own expectations and time available for the doctoral study. If you think that it would be useful to express his or her expectations and plans in writing, ask the candidate to do so. Whether written or verbal, you should think about them carefully and openly express your opinion.

Once you have agreed on an outline topic, you may wish to refer the doctoral candidate to the basic literature in the field. It will be an opportunity to check the extent to which he or she is skilled in researching sources, including databases. If necessary, refer him or her to the staff at the Faculty library, who might be of help. Apart from the abilities of logical setting and structuring of the topic, pay attention to his or her skills of legal writing and reasoning. Give him or her some time to explore the outline topic, but at the same time define a deadline by which you expect feedback, usually in the form of an initial draft proposal of the personal study plan. Setting up and responsible adherence to communication rules and deadlines at this stage are important preconditions of a successful cooperation.

### Before you become a mentor:

- think about your own interests, needs and plans
- do not take up a large number of students
- synchronize your future obligations with already known or planned ones
- be prepared to take part in additional training



## Stages of the doctoral study

You have become a mentor in the moment of your candidate's enrolment in the study. Congratulations! You are now both on a several-year-long exciting and exhausting path to the top, but bear in mind that you are spearheading this endeavour. The decision on admission defines the doctoral student's study obligations, so for both of you it represents a framework for planning your individual and joint activities. Your mentorship obligations are described in detail in the Description of the Study Programme, so it is strongly recommended that you study them. You will be expected to submit reports about your work, as will the doctoral student. You will have the opportunity to evaluate his or her work, and vice versa. It is desirable that all forms of cooperation and agreements are recorded in a log that you keep with the doctoral student, which is also a part of the reference documentation that monitors the progress of doctoral students on the institutional level.

In the initial stage it is important to carefully plan and track the progress of the doctoral student in accordance with his or her obligations. In order for the student to progress in the study, he or she must have an array of abilities. His or her development is part of your responsibility; therefore, it is desirable to evaluate his or her knowledge, skills and competences which he or she had already gained, as well as those which he or she is still lacking in order to conduct doctoral research. The Programme provides students with in-depth knowledge of the methodology of legal science, which is necessary to successfully set the methodological framework of doctoral research. If you notice that the doctoral student is missing certain other knowledge, skills and competences (such as informational or linguistic), point this out to him or her and jointly consider how they could be improved. Different workshops or short courses could be of great help; some of them are even organized by the Faculty. The Programme differs from other forms of education precisely because knowledge and skills are acquired through much fewer classes, and much more by taking part in various research activities. This is where your role comes into play.

### Initial stage

- create an outline plan of the student's doctoral study
- become better acquainted with the abilities of your doctoral student
- discuss with him or her the possible need for additional training



After having fulfilled a significant part of study obligations, the doctoral student begins preparing for the application for approval of the doctoral dissertation topic. This part presents a major challenge for students. He or she has to conduct exhaustive research of all relevant legal sources on the topic, including sources from selected legal systems. In addition, the application for approval of the doctoral dissertation topic must offer hypotheses which already at that point are likely to be successfully verified. In the application, the student is expected to provide clarification of the scientific contribution of the doctoral dissertation. The student will need your help in doing so, and it is useful and desirable for him or her to consult a teacher of Legal Methodology as well.

In carrying out activities that are lengthier or that represent greater difficulty to the doctoral student, you may try with dividing tasks into smaller tasks and communicate more frequently. Note that the student has to achieve a critical information mass exchange with you so that he or she could make progress hence encourage regular contact. It may happen that the student fails to carry out the task on time or at an appropriate level of quality. If you regularly communicate, you will quickly find out how successful the student responds to your recommendations and requirements, and evaluate what he or she might lack and if he or she needs support in researching. A communication pattern has already been established. It is essential that you both act in accordance with it, but with certain flexibility. This is a stage of details, and the quality of further work and final outcome depend on it.

The work stage with support is the longest and most sensitive. The doctoral student conducts research while also working on the text of the doctoral dissertation. A part of the research will take place at a foreign institution of legal science, because that is one of student's obligations. You may want to advise the student when choosing this institution. It may be useful to jointly define a period which the student will spend at the institution, as well as his or her obligations and what you expect in the course of his or her research stay and upon return. If you are aware of a scholarship opportunity to fund the student's research, share this information with him or her. In case of difficulties in finding appropriate institution, you may refer the student to the Vice-Dean for International Affairs.

#### Details stage

- regularly communicate
- share and allocate obligations
- be consistent, but flexible

#### Work stage with support

- closely cooperate with the doctoral student
- periodically monitor the doctoral student in fulfilling his or her obligations
- be critical, but constructive



In this stage you have an obligation to produce at least one scientific paper as a co-author with the doctoral student, which he or she will present at an international conference and which will be published in an internationally recognised publication. Point the student to publications and conferences that would be appropriate for the fulfilment of his or her study obligations and jointly select them. Together discuss and define the topic, the structure of work and the main issues. Before writing a paper as a co-author with the doctoral student, it is useful to clearly define what is expected of him or her and which obligations you will be taking over.

Although you have the freedom to agree on the scope of text, which the student will send to you for reviewing and evaluating, as well as on the deadlines, consider whether it would be more appropriate that you receive shorter or longer parts of text so that the student does not lose precious time in case he steers in the wrong direction. As a mentor you should be honest and open, prepared to (re)direct him or her, provide feedback, praise, but also criticise constructively. Except for the work on the text, it is necessary to work through consultations. Considering that this is a stage where the student's work is being constantly evaluated, that process could be exhausting for both sides. For the student this stage seems endless, which might lead him or her to a crisis, especially if the feedback he or she receives from you is not encouraging and supportive. Doctoral student's reactions to criticism are multifaceted – some get discouraged and give up, while others are encouraged by criticism and keep on going. In this stage, endurance and patience are crucial for both sides, because fatigue is constantly growing. Also, it is essential to harmonise the rhythm and to bear in mind that the pace of progress depends primarily on the student.

In the final stage, all structural elements of the doctoral dissertation already exist, but adjustments are still necessary. Both you and the doctoral student are aware that the goal is at hand reach. Although the stage of text and notes adjustment can take some time, psychologically it is easier than the previous one. It is also the final stage of evaluation of student's work before it is submitted to the evaluation committee.

#### **Final stage:**

- previous efforts has paid off
- put in your final efforts and do not give up



## Timetable of activities

The doctoral student's commitments and your obligations are already sufficiently defined with the Description of the Study Programme and the decision on admission, because they are planned on semester basis until the end of the study. However, there are no obstacles in making this relationship even finer structured by producing a detailed work plan. Successful fulfilment of some study obligations often depends on the preparations that both you and doctoral student are jointly going through, e.g. the doctoral student's obligation to write a scientific paper in co-authorship with you, presentation of this paper at a conference and its publication. The fulfilment of these obligations may depend on a number of circumstances: the timing of the conference, acceptance of the proposed topic and abstract, availability of sources for conference funding, duration and outcome of the paper review process and other.

Similarly, it is necessary to plan and organise study visits abroad for longer periods of time. Choosing potential institutions and establishing contacts to obtain a letter of invitation or applying for scholarship to fund the study visits can also take a long time. It is recommended to divide the period of four months into two or more research visits, not only to coordinate the visits with employment commitments, but also to undertake them at different stages of research.

This requires coordination between you and the doctoral student, as well as coordination with the selected institution. By creating an internal plan of activities, you are showing to the student that you appreciate his or her time, but also that you expect him or her to appreciate yours. It is even justified to make internal timetable of activities if mentoring is shared with a colleague because it is necessary to harmonise dedicated time and share responsibilities. Following the decision on admission, in the plan you can simply specify the type of study obligations, steps and periods of its execution. Strive for clarity and sustainability of the plan and define essential rules. Once you have created a draft plan which reflects your realistic expectations, enable the student to consider it and present his or her own ideas and expectations, and also be open to adapt the proposed time frames.

### A good plan:

- is realistic and sustainable
- is acceptable for both
- has a precisely determined end



## Consulting with the doctoral student

Consultations with the doctoral student are an integral part of your mentorship. This can be done with one or more students at the same time, verbally or in writing, in a room of the Faculty (exceptionally outside the Faculty) or by using communication technology, including e-mail, telephone or audio-visual connection. The latter is especially useful if it is too costly or time consuming for the student to come to the Faculty, for example, while at the research stay abroad. Insisting on individual verbal consultations by mutual presence should be a priority because they are the most effective. Arrange consultations in accordance with the rules of the Programme and timetable of activities, but at the same time be flexible and available for more contact. While writing the dissertation, or participating in some other study activities, circumstances might occur which you could not have predicted. Allow the doctoral student to ask for your advice even in such situations.

Ask the student to always come prepared to the consultations and, if possible, to provide you in advance with a list of topics and questions that he or she wishes to discuss. At the same time, by specifying the subject of the consultations, demonstrate your commitment and enthusiasm for mentoring. If it has been agreed that the student will hand in his or her draft or parts of it, ask him or her to submit the material which is clearly structured, linguistically and graphically correct, and shaped form in accordance with the Instructions for Writing Student Papers. Ask the student to highlight new parts when submitting new versions of his text, so that you could concentrate on it. Clearly define how long it will take you to read and comment on the received text.

Actively listen to the student during consultations. Ask stimulating questions. Be ready to comment, praise and critically analyse student's texts and other activities. Remember that it is always good to start with positive comments, therefore praise at the beginning. It is desirable to point out the details you liked, especially those you want the student to keep in the future. Follow up on this with critical comments, but do this with care so as not to be overshadowed by praise. Form criticism as a piece of advice or a proposal. Make the purpose

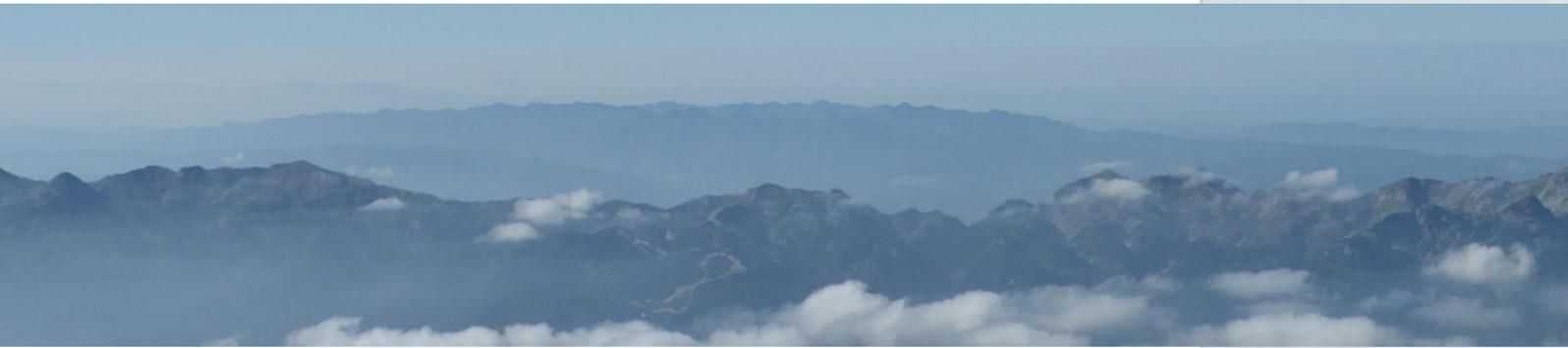
### Some important communication qualities for mentor

- availability, especially in circumstances of increased doctoral student's needs
- restraint in praise and criticism
- address with respect, taking into account personalities diversity
- important critics and instructions is better to write



of the criticism clear and whether it refers to facts or an impression. Avoid criticism in front of others – the effect on the recipient can be extremely negative. Criticising a doctoral student should encourage change, not resistance. You can express your reservations in the form of questions in search of additional explanation or as a verification of your impression.

Express both praise and criticism with everyday tone, using simple words and short sentences. Be prepared to additionally support your thinking and to engage in constructive discussion. After verbal consultation, you may find it useful to ask the doctoral student to consider the proposed recommendations and conclusions, and to deliver a summary in writing. Thus you will have the opportunity to check if the student has properly understood the instructions and conclusions. These summaries will help you to avoid misunderstandings and they will also allow better monitoring of the student's progress.



## How to overcome a crisis

During the mentoring process, a crisis could come up. Do not be surprised if it does. If this is the case, be ready and open for adjustments. You may need to re-examine your style of mentoring and adjust it if you come to the conclusion that it is one of crisis factors. What has proven to be a good practice with one student might not bear results with another.

If the crisis emerged as a reaction to the writing process, it is important to differ if the doctoral student is missing the tools (getting information from relevant sources) or if the difficulties have occurred while putting "thoughts on paper" (paper structuring and reasoning). The doctoral student who has experience in justice, administration or the corporate sector, works on legal texts casuistically, which is both an advantage and difficulty. The advantage is in the brevity of their claims (in medias res) and the clarity with which they see practical effects. However, difficulties may arise in their generalisation and in arguing by employing legal-scientific methods. Furthermore, the fact that the doctoral student cannot distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information or questions may pose serious problems. Direct him to find a focal point of research.

On the other hand, mentors at times consider certain issues as too simple to explain. We advise you not to "take anything for granted" because what seems simple to you, might pose a difficulty to the doctoral student. If there is an issue in structuring a scientific paper, explain the procedure to the doctoral student on your own work. A good practice opportunity before writing the doctoral dissertation is writing essays under your guidance or writing scientific paper as a co-author for a conference presentation and publication.

The key to solving crises is their timely detection. A significant slowdown is a sign that you need to detect obstacles, yours and doctoral student's. Be prepared to slow down if you see that the doctoral student is languishing. Do not forget your role – you are a guide; a doctoral student follows your lead. Look back at him or her, wait for him or her and encourage him or her. He or

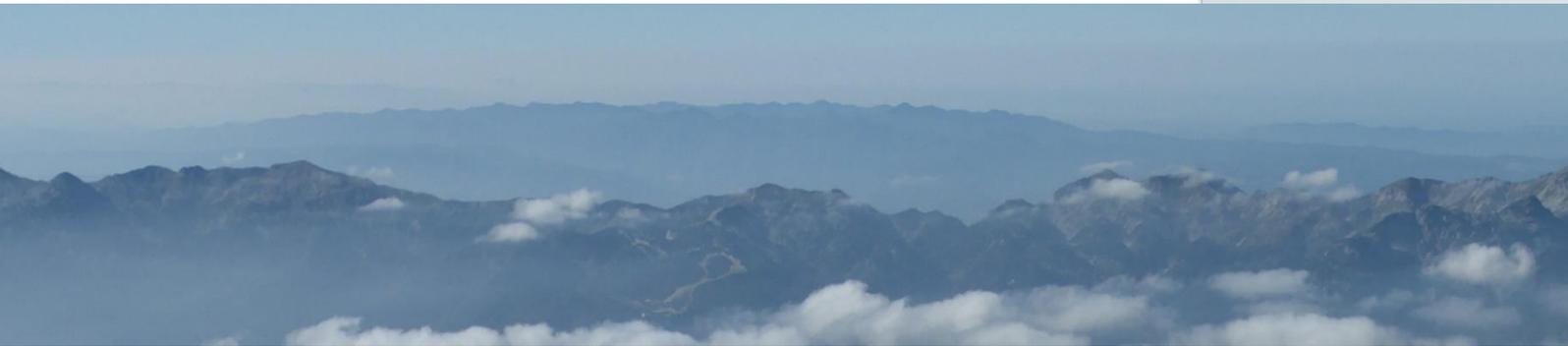
### Handling crisis

- have a "plan B"
- do not take crisis as a problem; take it as a challenge



she is not going at your speed, and neither does he or she have your experience or knowledge. Do not assume that the doctoral candidate knows or does not know something or can or cannot do; asking questions will make sure that you find that out. Think if you maybe expect from the doctoral student knowledge and experiences that he or she does not have or could not have at this point.

You as a mentor need to be also honest with yourself; it is possible that you are also experiencing challenges in mentoring. Share your concern with other colleagues. Mentoring is a strenuous and demanding task, especially considering the time you need to dedicate to it. Try to find and keep motivation throughout the entire journey. Motivation is equally important for the doctoral student as it is for the mentor. Mentors have to work on their motivation, so they could, in addition to general values and responsibilities related to the care for young scholars, find their own special motivation.



## Pieces of advice

In order for the relationship between a doctoral student and a mentor to be as fruitful as possible, it should be based on mutual respect. It should also be strived to fulfil mutual justified expectations on the path to a successful completion of the doctoral study programme. The far-reaching effects of this relationship are evident in permanent marks it leaves on the professional and personal development of the doctoral student and the fact that it forms an essential part of the mentor's experience. These following guidelines could be useful to you:

- Make sure you get to know your doctoral student, bearing in mind that this is an adult person with already built attitudes and partially formed professional identity. Encourage him or her to engage in independent work, direct and motivate him or her. Show him or her that you are reliable, committed to mentoring, discrete, patient, flexible and tolerant.
- Try to demonstrate ethical and professional behaviour; only then can you require the same from your doctoral student.
- If some challenges show up in your relation with the doctoral student, show your attitude and mutually seek for solutions. Do not leave the impression that you are avoiding the doctoral student, especially if he or she encourages communication or requests feedback.
- Try to provide objective, timely, constructive and encouraging feedback about the doctoral student, his or her work and progress even when you are voicing criticism.
- Encourage the doctoral student to participate on (international) science conferences or to apply for membership in national and international scientific associations. Distribute respective information to him or her.
- Try to participate in events in which the doctoral student presents his or her work or research.
- Attend the defence of the doctoral dissertation topic and the defence of the doctoral dissertation, and celebrate with him or her the promotion. The doctoral student's success is also your success!



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