

Assessment of the Third Cycle Education in Rhetoric

**General Rhetoric Department
Faculty of Philosophy
Tübingen University, Germany**

for

**Division of Rhetoric
Department of Literature
Uppsala University, Sweden**

Contents

I. Introduction.....	2
II. Formal structures	3
III. Internationalisation	4
IV. Social impact.....	5
V. Development and adaptability.....	6
VI. Legal requirements	6
VII. Conclusion.....	9

I. Introduction

Comparative Perspective Tübingen/Uppsala

This is an assessment of the Uppsala University Third Cycle Education in Rhetoric. It is based on the General Self-Assessment, the In-Depth Self-Assessment of the Division of Rhetoric of Uppsala University, and a discussion between Prof. Otto Fischer, Prof. Mats Rosengren, and Karl Ekeman (PhD Student) of Uppsala University, and Prof. Dietmar Till, Viktorija Romascenko (PhD Student), Frank Schuhmacher (PhD Student), Pia Rox (PhD Student), of Tübingen University.

PhD Programme at the General Rhetoric Department of the Tübingen University

The legal and formal requirements for obtaining a Doctoral Degree at the General Rhetoric Department of the Tübingen University are defined by a multitude of laws and legal rules: From federal, to state laws (Baden-Württemberg for Tübingen), to university statutes, and regulations of each faculty. In order to receive a PhD degree, the candidate must submit a doctoral dissertation and partake at an oral exam (*rigorosum*) that consists of thesis defence and a presentation on a topic other than that of the thesis. No mandatory courses are taught. Twice a year each supervisor holds a doctoral colloquium for the student he supervises. Each colloquium session has several students presenting their projects or sub-projects they are currently working on and receiving feedback from the group of attendees. The participation is desired, but not mandatory.

At the moment there are two chaired professors and one senior-professor at the department. The senior-professor is still supervising doctoral projects, but has no formal teaching obligations and is offering courses on a voluntary basis. Both chaired professors supervise doctoral projects and fulfil a set amount of teaching hours. Professors lecture and offer seminars on various levels, including advanced courses. Structurally, there would normally be two associate professors (*Akademischer Rat*) at the Rhetoric Department. Currently, however, the two full-time positions of associate professors are divided between four part-time teaching- and research assistant positions for doctoral students.

New doctoral students could be accepted all year round. Almost all of the doctoral students have received the M.A. degree of General Rhetoric prior to enrolling in the doctoral programme. At the beginning of November 2019 there were 21 students enrolled as doctoral Students of Rhetoric at the Tübingen University. However, many of the students that are working on their doctoral projects are not officially enrolled at the university until they submit the thesis.

All in all, the department counts 33 doctoral students in Rhetoric at the moment.

Six doctoral students work directly at the department, five at third-party financed associated projects (several have defended recently and the number is thus lower than usual). Three students receive grants and are able to pursue their doctoral thesis full-time without any working obligations. The rest are working elsewhere (part- or full-time) and are pursuing their doctoral project in their free time. As a result, for many it takes many years to submit their thesis. Full-time positions for doctoral students within university structures (both teaching departments and research projects) are highly unusual for the humanities. As a result, most of the PhD students employed by the university have half-time positions (50 %), in research projects 65 % positions are common.

II. Formal structures

Education programme content and form

The structure and form of the academic content of the Uppsala University doctoral programme of Rhetoric is based on solid scholarship and experience. The Subject matter is implemented and acknowledged by the international academic community. The learning of doctoral students is ensured by the mandatory courses on one side, and autonomous research on the other. The possibility to choose courses within the field of interest of a PhD student offers a junction between the predetermined contents of an obligatory course and the pursuit of personal research interests. The ability to choose the form of the doctoral thesis – either a monograph or an academic article compilation – is appropriate and reflects diverse modes of academic work in humanities. The regularity of learning is ensured by the regular seminars in the first year and continuous discussions of the thesis project afterwards.

Structure of learning

The structure of doctoral studies in Uppsala, and Sweden in general, comprises not only the writing and defence of a doctoral thesis, but also a number of mandatory courses specially designed for this level of education. This represents a major difference between Tübingen and Uppsala. In Tübingen doctoral students are not expected to pass any courses. Formally, it is possible for PhD students to take part in courses, especially in courses for skill improvement. Foreign language, IT and many practically oriented courses are free of charge for the PhD students. However, the participation in such courses does not count towards the degree and takes place voluntarily.

Examiner and teacher qualifications

The Division of Rhetoric at Uppsala presents a multi-competent faculty with specialists in various areas and sub-disciplines of rhetoric. The courses for the PhD students are taught by academics with at least a PhD Degree (this includes Associate Professors and full Professors), which is indubitably an adequate qualification for teaching doctoral candidates. The number of teachers, unlike the number of students in the PhD programme, appears to be sufficient. The supervisors of the thesis have a doctoral degree or equivalent, at least one of them is employed by the department.

Work-/study environment

Unlike in Tübingen, where doctoral students who work at the department, are only employed part-time and are supposed to work on their thesis in their free time, the Uppsala University doctoral programme is directly linked to full-time employment at the faculty. This creates a different work-/study environment, whereby both are directly interlinked. It is laudable that students receive contracts of four years already from the beginning: This offers more sense of stability and allows to make long-term plans. In Tübingen, through a relatively recent self-commitment of the university, the employment contracts are also issued for the duration of the PhD studies. The timespan of each contract is, however, considerably shorter. Contract prolongation is possible in most cases, but it has to be negotiated individually. As to the working conditions, the doctoral students have all the essential amenities (shared rooms, a personal computer, work areas) and an access to the libraries.

III. Internationalisation

The doctoral programme in Uppsala is without doubt internationally oriented. The doctoral students are supported and encouraged by senior academics to go abroad. The financing of extended stays is made possible by third-party grants. The PhD-students are vividly encouraged to spend at least a part of the time of their education abroad, and thus far doctoral candidates have stayed for longer or shorter periods at institutions in France and the United States. The department is also internationally active within the Linnaeus-Palme programme for teachers and students at undergraduate and master's level of higher education. This programme aims at strengthening co-operation between institutions of higher education in Sweden and developing countries.

Unlike in Tübingen, where the financing of conferences and international visits is a matter

of negotiation and must be discussed and decided for each visit separately, Uppsala doctoral students have a formally structured fixed budget that they themselves coordinate. This budget is, though, very limited and third-party financing is necessary for most of the foreign visits. The survey of the Rhetoric Division in Uppsala revealed that some experience difficulties when trying to acquire extra financial means for attending conferences.

IV. Social impact

Individual and societal needs

One of the points of difference between Uppsala University and the Tübingen University are the prerequisites for being accepted as a doctoral candidate. A prerequisite for being accepted as a doctoral candidate within the Swedish system is that the department can provide sufficient funding (internal or from external projects) for four years of employment. This might indicate that the chance of becoming a doctoral candidate is determined by employment and financing and is dependent less on merit than on chance. That is, a very deserving candidate with academic ambitions might miss out on the opportunity just because there are no employment positions available at the moment. Making an educational and an academic qualification directly dependant on an employment opportunity could be seen more as a matter of luck and the right moment. This could be seen critically on a societal level. Although the perspectives of gender equality are integrated into the education, there is a little imbalance in numbers when it comes to student count.

Career planning

As most of the alumni continue their careers within the realm of teaching and very few go into business, it is essential that the students are provided with the possibility for pedagogical education. This education is offered by the academic pedagogical course by the Faculty of Arts. This crucial career skill is supported by the opportunity to engage in teaching on graduate and undergraduate levels.

The quality of career-guidance cannot be judged as contradictory evidence was presented through the survey of doctoral students. Yet, the PhDs that have so far completed the education have all found employment either in the university or outside in fields relevant to the education or in communication.

Sustainability

Sustainability is present in the education, mainly through the research interests of the doctoral

students themselves and their projects. Since research in rhetoric to a large degree deals with the present day political and social reality, these perspectives for natural reasons tend to be in the forefront of the contemporary discussion also within the discipline. Consequently, to an increasing degree questions of sustainability also attract the scholarly attention of research in rhetoric. On a pragmatical side, the faculty and doctoral students are encouraged to use sustainable means of transportation when attending conferences or going on research trips.

V. Development and adaptability

The doctoral students have ample possibilities to influence their education. The doctoral students are represented in the departmental board, and representatives of the body of doctoral students are required to participate in the work of various boards and committees, including, importantly, the committee for equal terms and conditions. The doctoral students are organised in an association, common for the PhD-students of Literature and Rhetoric, where questions of general concern are discussed. This association is an important dialogue partner for the faculty as well as for the head and board of department. Thus, the education is continuously assessed and developed.

On a level of personal academic development, the individual study plan is to be reviewed annually and amended by the department to the extent required after consultation with the doctoral student and his/her supervisors. The period of study may only be extended if there are special grounds for doing so.

VI. Legal requirements

According to the Annex 2 "Qualifications Ordinance" of the "Higher Education Ordinance" (1993:100), issued by the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, a Degree of Doctor is awarded after the third-cycle student has completed a study programme of 240 credits in a subject in which third-cycle teaching is offered. The ordinance defines that for the Degree of Doctor the third-cycle student shall have been awarded a pass grade for a research thesis (doctoral thesis) of 180 credits. The third-cycle education in Rhetoric leading to a doctorate degree offered by Uppsala University is equivalent to four years full-time study and comprises course work worth a total of 60 academic credits, and a doctorate thesis corresponding to 180 academic credits. The Ordinance defines **ten** sets of outcomes divided into three competence fields.

As to the outcomes in the field of "Knowledge and understanding", the third-cycle student, in order to obtain the Degree of Doctor, is expected to **(1)** demonstrate broad knowledge

and systematic understanding of the research field as well as advanced and up-to-date specialised knowledge in a limited area of this field, and (2) demonstrate familiarity with research methodology in general and the methods of the specific field of research in particular.

When it comes to Rhetoric expertise (1), the doctoral students of Rhetoric are encouraged to participate in national, Nordic as well as international conferences. The PhD-students are further encouraged to rework conference presentations et cetera into articles or reports, and to publish in suiting media - for example through co-publishing with senior faculty members at the department in national as well as international journals. As to methodological competence (2) the PhD-students are engaged as teachers in courses on graduate and advanced level.

As to the outcomes related to "Competence and skills", the third-cycle student, in order to obtain the Degree of Doctor, is expected to (3) demonstrate the capacity for scholarly analysis and synthesis as well as to review and assess new and complex phenomena, issues and situations autonomously and critically; (4) demonstrate the ability to identify and formulate issues with scholarly precision critically, autonomously and creatively, and to plan and use appropriate methods to undertake research and other qualified tasks within predetermined time frames and to review and evaluate such work. At the same time, the student is expected to (5) demonstrate through a dissertation the ability to make a significant contribution to the formation of knowledge through his or her own research; (6) demonstrate the ability in both national and international contexts to present and discuss research and research findings authoritatively in speech and writing and in dialogue with the academic community and society in general; (7) demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and (8) demonstrate the capacity to contribute to social development and support the learning of others both through research and education and in some other qualified professional capacity.

The ability for the highest learning objectives (3) is being displayed through specialised and individual discussions that are constantly carried out in the context of supervision. The students are encouraged to engage in scholarly debates on topical issues, as well as to organise reading circles, seminars and workshops themselves. The goals of academic precision and creative appropriateness (4) are achieved by the supervision-sessions. These sessions take different forms, throughout the course of the education: they may be conducted as open discussions, in dialogue or in group, of themes and problems relating to relevant topics; they may consist of co-reading and discussion of specific, selected and important texts; in later stages of the work, supervision increasingly focuses on the students own texts, that the supervisors comment and criticise, so as to both, in practice, show how to read and criticise scholarly work and give precise feedback to the students own work.

The goal of making a significant academic contribution (5) is not only achieved by writing a thesis, but is further facilitated by encouraging students to write in internationally accessible languages. To this end, the department provides a financial support for proofreading of the PhD-thesis. Students are also encouraged to make book proposals, based on the thesis, to high quality international academic publishers. Thus, the contribution to the existing body of knowledge could be received internationally. The presentation competence (6) is apparent not only in national and international conference participation, but also by inviting renowned scholars to Uppsala and encouraging own PhD students to seek possibilities to organize a stay at foreign research institutions. The ability to identify the need for further knowledge (7) is manifest in both supervision and the seminars as forms for collective learning and enhancement of the collective abilities of the faculty as well as of the PhD-students. The contribution to social development and learning of others (8) is evident in involving the PhD-students in the organisation and execution of public seminars, workshops and other events where the department or the discipline collaborates with society at large. Additionally, the doctoral students are encouraged to accept proposals to give lectures at libraries, for NGOs, and to partake in topical debates where the specific competence of rhetoricians may be needed.

As to the outcomes in the category of "Judgement and approach", the third-cycle student, in order to obtain the Degree of Doctor, is expected to (9) demonstrate intellectual autonomy and disciplinary rectitude as well as the ability to make assessments of research ethics, and (10) demonstrate specialised insight into the possibilities and limitations of research, its role in society and the responsibility of the individual for how it is used.

The autonomy and application of research ethics (9) is shown by challenging the doctoral students to come up with projects that allow them to use specific individual qualities, specific competences and interests in identifying scientifically sustainable and defensible ideas and positions. This includes in-depth assessments of possible ethical and legal implications involved in the research. The faculty constantly include the PhD-students in discussions of issues of this kind, both in general and in relation to specific projects. The responsible and conscious handling of research (10) is, in its turn, made visible by meta-discussion of the discipline of Rhetoric, of humanistic research in general, of specific projects and how academics can find their place.

In sum, the goals stated in the law are attained in an appropriate and correct way. One recommendation would be to closer implement some of the measures into the study programme itself. For example, by offering credit points for rhetorical NGO-activities or workshops for a broader public.

VII. Conclusion

All in all, the doctoral programme in Rhetoric at Uppsala University complies with highest academic and pedagogical standards set by law, international academic community and society at large. The goals are met through course work, dissertation work (including supervision), active participation in seminars, participation in the scientific community through e.g. publications, conference presentations and through continuously keeping up-to-date with current research in (sub) fields of Rhetoric relevant for the dissertation.

The strengths of the programme that deserve highlighting include the licentiate after two years as an achievable milestone; regular feedback on the thesis project (including commentators from other disciplines when necessary); the annually reviewed timetable for the PhD project; pedagogical courses within the programme for the students and faculty; the multi-competent faculty and interdisciplinary connections within Sweden and abroad; the international connections and the possibility to publish and visit conferences; interest and ability to host foreign guests.

When it comes to weaknesses of the programme, the ability to pursue a doctoral project being defined through employment opportunities needs to be mentioned. Plus, the department is clearly underfinanced – a property many humanitarian departments share, including Tübingen.

Pressing issues addressed by the Self-Assessment

1.

Issue: Not enough PhD Students (3 being financed at the moment) and resulting difficulties in organizing specific teaching, representation in administration, and the upkeep of a lively academic discussion

Existing measures/ideas:

- Applying for research funding in order to finance more PhD positions
- Cooperation with the Division of Literature in order to compensate for a shortage in staff
- Common course for all new doctoral students of the faculty
- Advanced seminars for both Rhetoric and Literature students
- Writers seminar for producing scholarly texts

Recommended measures:

- Considering the limited realistic possibilities of dramatically increasing the budget for additional doctoral positions, one might consider to prioritise addressing the negative

consequences of the limited student number. For example, re-thinking the teaching, changing administrative representation, etc..

- Explore the extended possibilities of Erasmus Programmes
- Use virtual spaces for creating a sense of community. At least within the Swedish Universities with the Rhetoric Study Programme

2.

Issue: Pronounced gender imbalance within the faculty

Existing measures/ideas:

- Increase the presence of female researches through cooperation
- Topics and perspectives that are attractive to all sexes
- Gender balance within work distribution
- Recruiting external female supervisors
- Teaching position with specialisation in topics that are likely to attract women scholars
- Equal involvement in the activities of the senior staff
- Supplementary education on gender-sensitivity for supervisors

Recommended measures:

- Look into reasons why female students tend to quit the doctoral project in order to construct a potentially more supportive environment.
- Represent female authors in course literature in order to partially compensate the absence of senior female academic 'role models'.

3.

Issue: Shortage of PhD-specific advanced courses

Existing measures/ideas:

- Professors teach tutorials/reading circles/colloquiums on their current research topics
- Plans for joint Scandinavian course in rhetoric for PhD students

Recommended measures:

- Explore the extended possibilities of Erasmus Programmes for Staff Exchange

- Consider offering courses for different disciplines. For example, each session has a topic and rhetoricians read a rhetorical text on the topic, the PhD students from another discipline read a text from their discipline. This will not only increase the number of course participants, but also teach all of students to communicate their expertise outside their field (talk to academics from other disciplines).



Assessment prepared by Viktorija Romascenko



Prof. Dietmar Till, Chair of General Rhetoric Department



Prof. Olaf Kramer

Tübingen, 21. Nov 2019