



CTNR Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) Programme

Information and Guidelines

Content

1. CTNR Educational Programmes	1
2. CTNR Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC)	1
3. TAC members.....	1
4. TAC Meetings	2
4.1 Initial Report Meeting	2
4.2 Annual Report Meetings.....	3

1. CTNR Educational Programmes

The Centre for Transdisciplinary Neurosciences Rostock (CTNR) bundles the scientific activities of neurosciences to improve the visibility and outcomes of the University Medical Centre Rostock (UMR) in the field. The centre focuses on “Resilience in Neurodegeneration – from model to patient to population” and represents one of the three main scientific areas (Forschungsschwerpunkte) at the UMR. The CTNR creates an interface between clinical and basic research and improves its translational approach. The overall strategic aims of the CTNR contains concepts of educational training and qualification programmes corresponding to the different carrier levels of clinician and medical scientists of the UMR to support them and to generate the appropriate environment.

2. CTNR Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC)

The CTNR provides the framework for an educational programme for doctoral candidates of CTNR members. The doctoral researcher gets the possibility to be supervised by a Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC aims to provide guidance for both the doctoral candidate and their supervisors, in order for them to reach a successful end of the project. It evaluates the doctoral candidates’ and projects’ progress in annual intervals and provides constructive scientific advice how to improve potential theoretical and practical weaknesses. This includes comments on the written report, the oral presentation, theoretical knowledge and research performance, and binding recommendations regarding the continuation of the research project and further training. The TAC might also be approached in matters regarding the relationship between the student and the supervisor.

3. TAC members

The TAC consists of 3 CTNR members: the 1st supervisor (official doctoral supervisor, offizieller Betreuer der Doktorarbeit) assists the doctoral candidate in choosing the 2nd and 3rd TAC member to complement the expertise in the committee with respect to the specific PhD topic the doctoral candidate is working on. At least one member of each TAC must be a university professor of the UMR which awards the PhD degree. The second supervisor must be closely related to the PhD topic. The third supervisor may be unrelated to the subject and must have held a doctoral degree for at least three years. The doctoral candidate is free to choose the supervisors faculty wide. As a selection, the CTNR provides a pool of potential TAC members who have declared their willingness to join on the webpage.

4. TAC Meetings

The TAC Meetings will be organised by the doctoral candidates. Typically, the TAC meets twice in the 1st year and once per year thereafter. However, additional meetings are possible, if desired either by the doctoral candidate or the TAC:

- Meeting 1 (after 3-6 months): **initial report**, discussion of project proposal
- Meeting 2 (after 12 months): **first annual report**
- Meeting 3 (after 24 months): **second annual report**, discussion on preliminary future career plans
- Meeting 4 (after 36 months): **third annual report**, thorough discussion of future career plans

For each TAC meeting, a written report and an oral presentation (max. 30 minutes) has to be prepared by the doctoral candidate. The written progress reports has to be submitted to the TAC members two weeks before the meetings, highlighting the latest results, anticipated obstacles and the plans for the coming year. The templates for the written reports (initial/annual) are available on the CTNR website.

The TAC meeting starts with a brief assembly of the TAC members to allow the first supervisor a short introduction. The oral presentation will be no longer than 30 minutes. The presentation is followed by 30 minutes of discussion, including an evaluation of the theoretical knowledge. Any shortcomings should be identified and suggestions for improvement (e.g. theoretical or practical training) should be made. After the general discussion, the doctoral candidate will be asked to leave the room for the evaluation of the presentation and project performance. Thereafter, the first supervisor will be asked to leave the room to allow discussing any additional items between the doctoral candidate, the second and third TAC members in the absence of the primary supervisor.

4.1 Initial Report Meeting

The initial report meeting contains the evaluation of the PhD student's performance (written report, oral presentation, research performance, motivation/commitment, creativity). In case the TAC has identified deficiencies in theoretical and/or practical skills, specific suggestions for additional training (e.g. additional lab training, extended reading, participation in Journal Clubs/lectures) will be made. The TAC evaluates the quality of the proposed PhD thesis project in regard on (i) its suitability as a high-quality PhD thesis project, (ii) its scientific impact (competitiveness) and (iii) its publication perspectives. If appropriate, suggestions for

improvement or modifications of the project will be made. On a routine basis, the first supervisor leaves the room to allow discussion of any additional items with the second and third TAC member only. The initial report meeting ends with an overall assessment. In case a severe problem is identified, a follow-up meeting in presence of the dean and the program manager needs to take place within 3 months in order to resolve the situation. The evaluation will be given on a (standardized) form that is signed by all TAC members and the student. The template for the evaluation report of the initial report meeting is available on the CTNR webpage.

4.2 Annual Report Meetings

The annual report meetings focus on the evaluation of the report, presentation, research performance and theoretical knowledge, the evaluation of the thesis project and work done so far, and recommendations for the following year.

At the 3rd Annual Report TAC meeting, experimental results to be obtained for a high quality thesis and the preparation of scientific publications within the given time will be specified. In addition, the details (such as reviewers for the thesis) and the actual thesis duration including the time line for the doctorate (as time remaining for experimental work, and date of submission to the UMR) will be defined. An agreement on the time frame for finalizing the thesis is to be signed by the first supervisor and the doctoral researcher. If agreed, a 4th Annual Meeting will be scheduled (usually without Annual Report) according to the needs of the doctoral researcher (between 40 months and end of the contract).

The templates for the evaluation report of the annual report meetings are available on the CTNR webpage. The evaluation sheets have been specified for each report (Initial Report, First, Second and Third Annual Report) to meet the different requirements during the progress of the thesis work.

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