

Workplace Assessment 2019

PhD students, Department of Computer Science

Working group:

- PhD student Ida Larsen-Ledet (CMA)
- PhD student Simon Enni (DB)
- PhD student Martin Torp (PL)
- Sofia Rasmussen (Admin.)

Overall observations

In general, the PhD students show a lower satisfaction on all parameters when compared to other groups at the department. This is disturbing, and the working group has used this observation as a basis for the work done. Through our work with the survey results, we have identified three main areas to work with; stress and general well-being, community, and relationship to manager.

Stress and general well-being

From the survey it is clear that there is an imbalance between the time available and the time needed, which affects the work-life balance and stress level negatively. This must also be considered in relation to the many cases of stress-related sick leaves the department has at PhD level. PhD students have to balance their research, teaching, following courses, and going away for conferences/workshops/summer schools. Simultaneous, the culture at the department is competitive (the very successful are always highlighted, which can cause stress for others), which puts pressure on all to perform better and faster all the time.

“We get encouraged to publish fast and often rather than doing good research. There is no time for thoroughness.”

The PhD students feel there is not time for thoroughness, as successful research is measured in publications rather than actual results. This causes many to lose the motivation for their work, which also shows in the survey (p. 24) with a lower score in relation to meaningful assignments. Another layer of stress is the feeling that it is not allowed to opt out of (with salary deduction) teaching, which could be a parameter to get more time and energy in a stressed period.

The department has previously tried to address this issue by establishing the [support group system](#) for PhD students. Each student gets a support group with two senior staff members who are not in their own research group. The support group meets twice a year, to talk about anything relevant – work-related and personal issues. The initiative is, in theory, very good and appreciated, but some of the support group members seem to not take their role seriously. This is indicated by not showing up for meetings, saying the meeting could be cut short, or only asking a few shallow questions. For the support groups to be successful a trusting relationship must be build.

Problem/initiative	Action	Responsible
Feels it is not allowed to turn down teaching	Make it more clear to the PhD students how much they according to the rules and regulations have to teach, and how they can opt out of teaching. <i>2020: We are continuing to inform the PhD students</i>	Sofia Rasmussen, Gudmund Frandsen and Anders Møller
Support groups are not taken seriously	Make sure the staff members take their role as support group serious, and also ask the tough questions. Possibly create a list of questions for the support group to go through. The list might be based on the based on inputs from the folder " Forebyg stress i fællesskab " <i>2020: We will follow up on the role and figure out if a list of questions are needed.</i>	Anders Møller & PhD administrator
Not all want to be star researchers	Tone down the competitive nature, and allow it to be okay to do great research without aiming to be a star researcher.	Department-wise (responsible TBA)

Community

The feeling of belonging to a larger community is important, but at the department each research group is its own tribe, and do not mix much with others. This is problematic, especially for those PhD students in the smaller groups, as it can cause the feeling of not being included and thus loneliness, which affects the general wellbeing and motivation.

“One time in the Friday bar, I heard people talking negatively about the work we do in my group. They simply forgot that I was there. This attitude creates negative mindset towards certain groups, which can spread through the department.”

It is crucial for the department to break down barriers – and in some cases prejudices – between the research groups. However, it is important that the department not only focus on creating a stronger community for PhD students but that they are also included into the department as employees.

“I find it very frustrating to be perceived as a student but expected to deliver as an employee.”

Below are suggestions to actions that could help break down barriers and create a greater community feeling among PhD students across the department.

Problem/initiative	Action	Responsible
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<p>Retreat for PhD students and Postdocs</p>	<p>Continue to arrange the annual retreat but make sure the program has time for social activities. Next retreat is planned for August 26.</p> <p><i>2020: The retreat is cancelled due to Corona – we will plan one as soon as possible. We are looking in to online social events.</i></p>	<p>PhD and Postdoc Committees – Sofia Rasmussen & Dorthe H. Nielsen</p>
<p>Junior club</p>	<p>Continue to support the junior club so events for PhD students can be created. Next event: PhD BBQ in July. In 2019, 10.000 DKK has been allocated for events. It is suggested this also will be done in 2020.</p> <p><i>2020: The students have stopped the events. We will support it again, when the students wish to start.</i></p>	<p>PhD students (currently Lau Skorstengaard and Aina L. Georges) arrange events. PhD administrator handles administrative tasks.</p>
<p>Weekly PhD lunch/breakfast</p>	<p>After the summer holidays, a new initiative for PhD students to meet across research groups will be started. PhD students will meet informally for breakfast or lunch once a week.</p> <p><i>2020: First in 2020 the students arranged lunch, but it stopped due to Corona.</i></p>	<p>PhD students Ida Larsen-Ledet (CMA), Simon Enni (DB), Martin Torp (PL)</p>
<p>PhD lunch with presentation about journal clubs for inspiration</p>	<p>In the fall 2019, the PhD committee will invite all PhD students (and Postdocs) to an inspirational lunch with presentations about journal clubs in CMA/UBI and possibly Madalgo/DB.</p>	<p>PhD administrator arranges event and reaches out to presenters. Ida Larsen-Ledet (possibly Frederik and Alexander) will give presentation.</p>
<p>Break down prejudices</p>	<p>At all levels, it must be stressed that each research group is important for the department, and that we do not talk negatively about each other.</p>	<p>TBA</p>
<p>Offer more PhD courses at the department</p>	<p>There is a wish for more PhD courses offered at the department, due to two main reasons;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many feel the courses offered at GSST is a waste of time 2. Transferable skill courses that are targeted at CS like the Science teaching course 	<p>PhD committee/Education Committee??</p>

	<p>3. Relationships across research groups will be established.</p> <p><i>2020: It would be discussed, but we think it is a possibility.</i></p>	
Feels more like students than employees	<p>To make sure, that PhD students (and postdocs) feel included as employees, it is suggested that a short sum-up from faculty meetings will be shared to make sure all at the department are informed about goals, strategies etc.</p> <p>Also it is important to include PhD students in department events such as Christmas party etc.</p> <p><i>2020: Unfortunately, we will not have any events this year due to Corona.</i></p> <p><i>We talked about having meetings for the PhD students, but it hasn't been a success earlier. The research leaders have a responsibility to communicate Department messages.</i></p>	Department management/Communications

Relationship with manager

The PhD students found that some of the questions were difficult to answer. For instance, who is their manager (GSST, supervisor, research group leader, head of department)? This might have affected how people have answered the questions. For this report, we have decided that manager is the PhD students' supervisor.

Overall, the PhD students have a good relationship with their manager, but there are areas that can be improved. Many feel they are not acknowledged (p. 24) or get enough feedback for their work (p.25), they need more clear goals and the Staff Development Dialogue (SSD) is not perceived as meaningful (p.25).

“Especially in the beginning of my PhD, I was both confused and worried if I was on the right path. I really just want my supervisor to tell me if I am on track to get my PhD completed on time.”

Problem/initiative	Action	Responsible
Unsure if I live up to my managers expectations	Encourage supervisors to continuously match expectations with their PhD students to break down insecurities. Feedback on both the actual work and the work effort is wanted.	Department management / PhD committee

<p>Lack of acknowledgement that leads to insecurity</p>	<p>Encourage supervisor to acknowledge work even if it does not lead to publications. In a very competitive environment the lack of acknowledge or feedback can lead to insecurity and loss of motivation.</p>	<p>Department management / PhD committee</p>
<p>Many do not use the offer of a SSD</p>	<p>It is suggested that the SSD is made mandatory in 2019, as many PhD students did not have a SSD because they (or supervisor?) do not see the difference between SSD and regular supervisor meetings. The supervisors must be informed about how to make the SSD meaningful.</p>	<p>PhD committee/Department management</p>

2020: We plan for a presentation and reminder of the role as a PhD supervisor in January 2021.