

International Max Planck  
Research School  
for Organismal Biology



**Agreement of the  
International Max Planck Research School  
for Organismal Biology**

***Preface***

The International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS) for Organismal Biology is a close cooperation between the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology (MPIO), the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior (MPI-AB) and the Department of Biology at the University of Konstanz (U KN). Its aim is to provide first-class training and education for outstanding doctoral students from all over the world in a stimulating research environment. This competitive doctoral program will provide its fellows with an excellent starting platform for a successful career in the fields of animal behavior, ecology, evolution, physiology, and neurobiology.

**§1**

***General structure of the PhD program***

- (1) Usually, all IMPRS for Organismal Biology students are enrolled as doctoral students at the University of Konstanz. It is also the U KN who awards the doctor title (the German *Dr. rer. nat.* which corresponds to the American PhD). Participation in the IMPRS for Organismal Biology will be documented on the official PhD certificate. The graduation criteria of the U KN, as laid down in the *Promotionsordnung Biologie*, are therefore applied to their full extent. However, students may choose whether to graduate at the U KN or at another university. In general, the PhD work should be completed within three years. All scientific work in the program is based on the Max Planck Society's rules of good scientific practice.
- (2) The IMPRS for Organismal Biology program consists of the PhD thesis and an additional PhD curriculum. The thesis will be conducted under the guidance of the direct supervisor and a PhD advisory committee (PAC).
  - a. *PhD thesis*. Independently compiled scientific output of the PhD work. It has to be written in English and should be composed of several single scientific manuscripts with a detailed summary in English and German.

- b. *Direct supervisor.* Senior scientist and IMPRS for Organismal Biology faculty member in whose lab the student is performing her/his PhD work.
  - c. *PhD advisory committee (PAC).* Committee of at least three senior scientists who will guide the PhD student in all aspects of her/his PhD work.
- (3) The additional curriculum contains
- a. *Transferable skills.* Workshops on any personal skills which will improve the student's employment opportunities and future career performance in academia and elsewhere.
  - b. *Specific research skills.* Training in techniques that are relevant for research in organismal biology.
  - c. *Outreach.* Presentations of results at international conferences, publications in international journals, and explanation of one's own scientific work to the general public (either in Germany or in the student's home country). Participation in the IMPRS for Organismal Biology should be acknowledged in all outreach activities.
  - d. *Other scientific activities.* All other activities that are relevant for a scientific career (e.g. organization of scientific events) can also be credited.
- (4) All of these curricular elements should be shaped to the specific demands of every single fellow. The PhD training is completed with the following curricular elements
- a. *Scientific events of the department.* Active participation in events organized by the supervisor's department such as lectures, lab seminars, or journal clubs.
  - b. *IMPRS events.* Active participation in symposia and retreats organized by the IMPRS for Organismal Biology two or three times a year.
- (5) The participation in the IMPRS for Organismal Biology and the detailed additional curriculum will be certified individually by the IMPRS.

## §2

### ***PhD thesis and supervision***

- (1) Once admitted, the doctoral fellow will work closely with her/his direct supervisor on finding a PhD topic. Besides the guidance from their direct advisor, students are also supervised and mentored by a PhD advisory committee (PAC). A PAC is composed of the direct supervisor and at least two other senior scientists. This committee should be formed within the first 3 months and meet for the first time after 6 months. At least one of the committee members has to be from an institute other than the direct

supervisor's institute. The members of the PAC are jointly elected by the student and her/his direct supervisor. The purpose of these meetings is to monitor the student's work progress and to advise the student regarding the development of the research project. In addition, they are also intended to assist the student in all aspects of career planning and networking.

- (2) Within 6 months of admission, the student should have completed a written thesis proposal. This PhD proposal should clearly develop the research questions out of a detailed overview of the recent research in this specific area. Furthermore, a method section on how to answer the research questions, possible results and their implications for recent research in this area, and a timeline with defined milestones are mandatory. A preliminary program for the additional curriculum, tailored to fit this research program, should also be presented in the proposal. This proposal will be sent to all PAC members, and two weeks later a major PAC meeting will be held. At this meeting, all committee members will have read the proposal in detail and will discuss the proposed thesis work in great detail, the main aim being to provide critical and constructive feedback to the student before the main practical work is done.
- (3) The second PAC meeting has to be called by the student after 12 months of PhD work. The student will present her/his research progress. A positive evaluation by the PAC members at this meeting is essential for the student to continue in the program. Thereafter, PAC meetings should be called by the student at least once a year. Before each meeting the student will send a brief progress report to each committee member, and give a short (10 min) presentation at the meeting itself. The research and additional curriculum schedule for the next period should also be planned / adjusted during these meetings. The student and the PAC members are obliged to document their meetings briefly to the program coordinator using standard forms.
- (4) PAC members are asked to actively collaborate with the student, e.g., to read and comment on drafts of manuscripts.

### **§3**

#### ***Scientific results and publication***

By law, all scientific results (e.g., original lab-books) have to be stored for ten years in the labs and are lab-property. Only copies for private documentation may leave the labs. All results should be published following the Max Planck Society's rules of good scientific practice. Preferably, all manuscripts should be submitted (ideally also accepted) before the deadline for finishing the PhD and leaving the host lab. If results

are not fully published by this time and the student does not have the time to finish the publication work in her/his new affiliation, the direct supervisor may ask someone else to finish the work. This third person might gain the right of first authorship depending on how much work still needs to be done. All documents that shall leave the lab such as grant proposals, manuscripts (and also revisions of manuscripts), and abstracts for conferences have to be approved by the direct supervisor prior to leaving the lab.

## **§4**

### ***Additional curriculum***

- (1) Besides their own scientific research culminating in the PhD thesis, the students are obliged to complete an additional training program. This additional curriculum encompasses courses and workshops on transferable and specific research skills, scientific and public outreach, as well as seminars, journal clubs, and retreats. The additional curriculum is individually tailored to the student's specific demands. These activities are meant to improve the student's personal skills, foster research collaborations and the exchange of experiences among PhD students, and broaden their horizon within the field of organismal biology.
- (2) In the course of the three-year doctoral program, a minimum of 15 credit points (CP) have to be achieved. Four CP are mandatory each in transferable skills, specific research skills, and outreach activities. Additional CP can be achieved by further scientific activities like scientific event organization or teaching (Table 1).
- (3) Courses and workshops will be offered by the IMPRS for Organismal Biology. Nevertheless, students are encouraged to participate in activities offered by other scientific institutes and universities after prior consent of the direct supervisor and the program coordinator. The CP system is closely related to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and courses attended elsewhere are therefore easily creditable (1 ECTS = 25-30 hours of work).
- (4) It is the student's responsibility to verify and document their achieved CP to the program coordinator.
- (5) Besides these highly-individual aspects of their curriculum, all students are obliged to participate actively in all scientific events of their advisor's department (journal club, lab seminars, ...) and to fulfill possible further requirements specific to the department. Furthermore, active participation at IMPRS symposia and retreats is also mandatory. Although these additional curricular events are rated as very important for the student's scientific

training, the student's own scientific work will have priority where time constraints are an issue (e.g. field work). Not-attendance has to be agreed by the supervisor prior to the IMPRS event.

- (6) The participation in the IMPRS for Organismal Biology and the detailed additional curriculum will be certified individually by the IMPRS.

**Table 1 Overview of the minimum credit points per curricular element**

Curricular elements	Credit points (CP)	
	Calculation	Min
<b>Transferable skills</b>		<b>4</b>
Workshops (scientific writing, statistics, presenting, time management, grant writing, experimental design, teaching, research ethics, career development, database management, animal care,...)	According to ECTS	
<b>Specific research skills</b>		<b>4</b>
Lab courses, summer schools, internships, ...	According to ECTS	
<b>Outreach activities</b>		<b>4</b>
Presentations at international conferences	1 CP / presentation	1
First author publications in international journals	2 CP / publication	2
Non-first author publications in international journals	1 CP / publication	0
Public outreach (radio, newspaper, public talk, ...)	1 CP / outreach	1
<b>Other scientific activities</b>		<b>0</b>
Active participation in PhDnet, organization of scientific events, active participation in scientific societies, teaching, ...	Depending on effort	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

## §5

### **Funding**

- (1) The direct supervisor is responsible for providing the student's funding for a minimum period of 3 years. In some cases, the IMPRS may support the funding if the direct supervisor should be unexpectedly unable to take on the student's funding.
- (2) All IMPRS students are entitled to 1,500€ of IMPRS travel funds during their PhD work. Only travelling, housing, and fees for conferences and/or workshops can be paid from this source, subject to previous approval by the direct supervisor and the program coordinator.

## **§6**

### ***Resolution of disputes***

- (1) Scientific conflicts of opinion may be discussed and resolved within the PAC. Members from different groups within and outside the IMPRS shall guarantee a balanced composition of experts in the respective area.
- (2) In case of any other disputes or conflicts, the doctoral candidates are encouraged to approach the IMPRS board members or the coordinator. Also, the Academic Staff Development of the U KN offers free counseling and coaching in English and German for doctoral candidates.
- (3) The ombudsperson of U KN and/or of the respective MPI may be contacted in cases of scientific misconduct.

With their signature both, the PhD fellow and her/his direct supervisor agree to the agreement of the IMPRS for Organismal Biology.

Date

Signature PhD Student

Signature Direct Supervisor