



## Doctoral Student Union (DSU) Annual Report 2015

The 2015 DSU board consisted on the following members:

Name	Faculty	Role	%	Funding
Erik Karlsson	LS	President	25	Central administration
Eric Snodgrass	KS	Vice President and secretary	12	Central administration
Dimitris Paraschakis	TS	Treasurer and responsible for memberships	8	Central administration
Zahra Hamidi	KS	Communications officer	8	Central administration
Claudia Fonseca Alfaro	KS	Communications officer	8	Central administration
Erliza Lopez Pedersen	KS	Board member. Responsible for coordination of the doctoral collegium at the faculties	12 days	Faculty level
Maria Rubin	LS	Board member. Responsible for coordinating the mentorship program	12 days	Faculty level

As stated in the board's Activity Plan 2015, the main goal of the DSU is to remain actively engaged in creating a dynamic, reliable and creative research and work environment for all doctoral students at Malmö University (MU). By actively and continuously partaking in conversations on all administrative levels of MU, the DSU's ambition is to create and maintain influence in the decision making process of areas that touch upon the education, research environment and employment of doctoral students. To this end, the DSU strives to ensure that all levels of representation and influence can be easily identified and proactively engaged with. Priority was given to the following issues in 2015.

**The goals stated in the Activity Plan (AP) 2015 were:**

### **1. Website and communications**

Background from AP: *“The board would like to transform the DSU homepage into a website that provides relevant information for all doctoral students at MU and not simply links to other websites. A primary goal will be to provide more information about a PhD student's rights and obligations. A further goal will be to provide tips on where to apply for research grants. The website will be updated to also include more information relevant to PhD students that are new to Sweden. An objective of pursuing more communication between members will also be pursued.”*

What the board has done:

- The layout of the DSU website was updated and simplified. New information on academic life (grants, PhD courses, publishing, resources at MU), doctoral student rights (supervisors, Individual Study Plan) and tips for new doctoral students has been developed and published. A 'News' section has been constantly updated and contains calls for, both internal and external, papers, conferences, seminars, courses and summer schools. Information the DSU's structure and role was also expanded, along with information on MU's internal governance.
- A DSU page was created on Facebook where news are also published. It has served as a second channel to inform and share news and has hopefully, facilitated new students connecting to the MU doctoral network and the DSU.
- A summary of the regulations that govern doctoral students and the common grievances that they suffer was developed and published on the DSU website. This document was developed with information from Lund's Doctoral Student Ombudsman and can be a resource for members and future boards.

### **2. Increased representation & increasing the number of members**

Background from AP: *“This will always be a priority for the the DSU and this year we would like to make a specific push at recruitment in order to build a solid membership base across all faculties. In addition to recruitment, the board will work to further encourage involvement by DSU members in the different organs at MU that are relevant to doctoral issues. In order to attract more members to the DSU, a DSU BBQ will be organized. The aim of the board is to organize this in the beginning of the Fall semester.”*

What the board has done:

- Organised a “DSU Breakfast” that was open to all PhDs and engaging with issues relevant to doctoral studies.
- The DSU presented at two doctoral introduction days, presenting the work of the DSU and encouraging participation in the union for those that are interested.
- Increased the number of members from 97 students in 2014 to 117 students in 2015

### **3. Continued work to appoint a part-time “doktorandombudsman”**

Background from AP: *“The previous board established contact with Alexandra Popovic, the Doctoral Students’ Ombudsman (DOMB) at Lund University, and the current board will continue the collaboration. . . This issue will also need to be pursued within the administration at MU. While this process takes place, the board will negotiate with Alexandra Popovic on the possibility of receiving training for the DSU board members in basic legislation regarding a PhD student’s rights and obligations. The DSU board will summarize this information and provide it to its members through the DSU website (see point 1 above, FAQ project). . .”*

What the board has done:

- Had an introduction on basic legislation regarding doctoral students’ rights and obligations with Alexandra Popovic, the doctoral students’ ombudsman at Lund University. The Board has also shared and received counsel from Popovic on the proposal document for a doctoral ombudsman at MU.
- Submitted the formal proposal to the Central Research Board (forskningsberedningen) and the Research Education Committee (forskarutbildningsutskottet) requesting the creation of a doctoral student ombudsman position at MU. The proposal provided an example of the ombudsman position at Lund and proposed the general characteristics that an ombudsman position could have in Malmö.
- Hans Lindqvist, head of the Research Board, has promised to take up the matter with the vice chancellor as well as the “ledningsgrupp” (the main decision makers of MU). This of course needs to be followed up by the DSU during 2016. The Research Board will also make their own investigation into how this matter is handled at other Universities.

#### **4. Routines for introduction of new doctoral students**

Background from AP: *“The DSU will work for the implementation of a more standardized way to introduce new doctoral students to Malmö University. . . The DSU board will push to further the administration at MU to make all relevant information known and accessible to all new doctoral students. . .”*

What the board has done:

- MU did an evaluation during 2015 in which they assessed all PhD. programs at the University. The former DSU board, as well as our appointed representatives in various boards and committees, was invested in this evaluation. Currently there are plans at MU to incorporate the suggestions this evaluation put forward. Many of them relating to the introduction of new PhDs. The DSU should continue to monitor this development.
- The DSU presented at two doctoral introduction days, presenting the work of the DSU and highlighting important sources of information relevant to doctoral studies.

#### **5. Increase the role of the doctoral collegiums at the faculties.**

Background from AP: *In order to further the bottom-up structure of the DSU, the board will this year work on developing the doctoral collegiums at faculty level. We will appoint a board member responsible for coordinating the collegiums and to develop structures for the collegiums ongoing communication with the central board of the DU. A priority will also be the creation of a doctoral collegium at HS, which currently does not have a doctoral collegium.*

What the board has done:

One of the DSU board members assumed the collegium coordinator position, and had been responsible for helping set up a collegium at HS as well as keeping in contact with the chairpersons of the faculty collegia. Currently there are collegia at all the faculties, with KS and TS having a joint collegium. In addition, the chairpersons of the collegium have been given access to the Box folder for uploading their meeting protocols.

Having a collegium is appreciated by many PhD students, however there are also challenges that need to be looked into, such as sustainability of the collegium and engagement from our colleagues. Each faculty collegium has its own particular concerns with regard to the abovementioned challenges.

HS Collegium (Ida Runge)- Started in the autumn term by Ida Runge. Since this is a new collegium, it is perceived that its existence is not well known among the HS PhDs. Ida, however, has been active in inviting colleagues to meetings. It also appears to be that there is a certain amount of satisfaction among PhD students at the HS faculty, therefore the existence of a

collegium is not seen as a prioritised need. Nevertheless, the existence of a collegium at HS has been of added value, for instance, Ida has been contacted by the faculty for consultation as well as being a contact person for PhD aspirants.

KS and TS Collegium (Erliza Lopez Pedersen)- Due to low number of PhD students at TS and the fact that KS and TS have been sharing the same work place, the two faculties have been merged into one collegium. However, TS has not been active in attending collegium meetings, but several from TS have been active in email correspondence, specifically when the language letter proposal was circulated. An email address is set up for the KS-TS collegium, where all the correspondence and documents are saved. Two proposals to the DSU have been put forward by the KS-TS collegium (see below info). There is an institutionalised meeting between the collegium chairperson, faculty board representative and the KS faculty management. This set-up helps both the collegium and the faculty to discuss concerns and proposals from the KS PhDs. Having a joint collegium poses problems too, for example, the chairperson does not have a close contact with the management of TS. It is perceived that TS will not be able to form and sustain its own collegium, so having a joint one is an option, however, TS should be more active in attending meetings to provide updates to the collegium. Erliza gets her faculty collegium compensation from the KS faculty.

LS Collegium (Maria Rubin, Erik Karlsson) has been active during the year with introducing several new PhD students. We have also been collaborating with the vice dean on the issue of the internal review of the research education at LS, a collaboration that has been very successful. In addition, we have, together with the vice dean and the faculty been in charge of planning two PhD-days that were well received with the doctoral students. We are currently planning for a “mini PhD conference” for all doctoral students at LS to take place sometime in August 2016. Overall, the collegium at LS is working as intended and seems to be regarded by the PhD students as an important factor in their education.

OD Collegium (Liv Kroona)- The OD faculty is a little different from the other faculties for many of the PhD students in OD are also practicing their profession, some are funded through scholarship/external funding, and there is a decreasing number of PhD students that are hired by the faculty. These factors affect the active involvement of the PhD students in the collegium, and those who are hired by the faculty are the only ones who are active and can see the direct need of a collegium. Nevertheless, Liv together with a small core group have been active in maintaining small meetings discussing the research environment at OD. The representatives at OD believe that specific activities and added PhD days can gather the members better and make them more active.

Recommendations:

1. It could be a good idea to set up activities that can help convene the members of the collegium, such as PhD days.
2. Also, it could be useful for the collegium if there is an institutionalised meeting with the faculty management (PhD Director of Studies and Pro/Vice Dean, for instance). Having a close collaboration with the faculty management is advantageous.
3. The collegium is a bottom-up structure, suggestions and proposals to the DSU are highly encouraged.

## **6. Scholars at Risk**

Background from the AP: *“The previous board initiated cooperation with Scholars at Risk (SAR). The goal for this year is to see if this cooperation needs to be deepened. The president of the DSU board will initiate an informal dialogue with the SAR contact person at MU Naser Eftekharian to investigate if there is a need for a more profound cooperation between the DSU and SAR.”*

What the board has done:

- The DSU board has met with Naser Eftekharian, head of SAR at MU. For the moment it was agreed that there is no need for a more profound cooperation between the DSU and SAR since there is very little overlap in content.

## **7. The Swedish National Union of Students (SFS)**

Background from the AP: *“The Board will investigate the possibility as well as pros and cons of the DSU joining with the SFS.”*

What the board has done:

- The Board prepared an application for joining the SFS. However, the Board has still not made a final decision to join. This is due to some uncertainty in regards to issues of finance, which have impacted this particular this decision. It will thus fall on the new board to decide on whether to join with SFS.

## **8. Survey. Employment status of PhD students**

Background from the AP: *“The DSU will make an attempt to improve the statistical information available from MU about the employment status of PhD Students. The president will raise this issue with the central administration at MU. In a first step a survey will be carried out to get an initial mapping of how the MU PhD Students are employed, to what degree they do research work and how much time is devoted to other tasks.”*

What the board has done:

- This issue has been brought up with the central administration, and we have asked for such statistical information. The central administration is currently investigating the possibility of buying in an improved technical system for the administration and management of the Individual Study Plans, and the Board has recommended that this potential system include a section that captures the employment status of PhDs. For the moment though, not much more concrete has happened on this. This issue needs further follow-up from the new board.

**In addition to the above, the DSU board has done the following in 2015:**

### **9. Language letter**

The language letter is an initiative from the KS and TS faculty collegium which highlights the situation of our fellow international PhD students, who have been experiencing problems in their workplace due to language concerns. A proposal to the DSU to draft a letter addressing this issue was put forward, and after several deliberations, the DSU decided to send out the letter to the PhD students at KS and TS for support through their signature. The language letter has since been presented at the FUU (forskarutbildningsutskottet) and FN (forskningsberedning), and a meeting with Hans Lindquist has been arranged discussing the content of the letter and possible solutions to address the language problem. MU is now planning to revise their University wide language policy. This new policy will address some of the language issues that the DSU has raised. The DSU has been invited to partake in the development of this policy and thus it is important that this significant issue is followed-up by the new board.

### **10. Forskarservice**

It has been brought up at the KS-TS collegium meeting that Forskarservice does not offer clear information for PhD students. One PhD student at KS drafted a proposal which was eventually presented at the KS-FFN meeting. The collegium at KS-TS recommended the proposal to the DSU, which in turn presented the draft proposal at the FUU meeting. At FUU, the received comments from the central administration at MU was that Forskarservice currently does not have a direct task to provide specific information and help to PhD students. The DSU finds this somewhat peculiar since that amounts to saying that the PhDs are not part of the research done at MU. Further investigation on this matter will be needed in order to get to grips with what sort of proposal the DSU can and want to take.

## Suggestions for work ahead

The DSU board has identified the following issues that we believe need to be stressed during 2016.

- Strengthen the doctoral student network at Malmö University and the channels of communication between the DSU and its members. For example, developing a DSU newsletter that includes interviews with doctoral students from different faculties. Another suggestion is to continue with the 'DSU breakfast' idea, in which speakers invited to speak on particular topics (ex. other topics that can be addressed during the breakfast are individual study plans and resources provided by the library.)
- Continue pushing for an ombudsman. Follow up on the Research Boards and ledningsgruppens receptions and plans for this proposal. This might include discussion with the general student union at MU of a potential joint ombudsman.
- The situation for international PhDs needs to be further discussed and improved. For instance issues around introduction and pressing issues that relate to international students when starting PhD work in Sweden. In particular, the issue around language in the university might continue to be pursued.
- Continue looking into issues relating to research services (forskarservice) for PhDs.
- Continue work and development of the DSU website (ex. a monthly or bi-annual DSU newsletter).
- Follow the proposal of the new online management system for digitising the Individual Study Plans, as this could be an important and powerful tool in PhDs' research. The FUU will continue to work on this and our representatives in the FUU should be invited to partake in that work.
- Look into the possibility of raising the issue of creating a centralised and searchable online site for all PhD courses in Sweden (similar to what exists in Denmark). This would involve collaborating with various national networks.
- Magnus Lindquist and alumni coordinators are planning to meet in 2016 regarding the future of the mentorship program, which has temporarily been dormant. There is still some doubt over what they want from mentorship program and the vice chancellor will be responsible for making a decision regarding how to take forward. The next board could be responsible for letting the vice-chancellor and relevant parties know what PhDs would like from a mentorship program.

*Malmö, January 2016*

Erik Karlsson

Eric Snodgrass



Dimitris Paraschakis  
Zahra Hamidi  
Claudia Fonseca Alfaro  
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Maria Rubin