EPFL

Regulation concerning the doctoral program in Neuroscience (EDNE)

Dated April 25, 2023 *(date of entry into force)*

Please note that only the French version of this document is legally binding.

The EDNE doctoral program Committee,

taking into account art. 3 al. 3 and 6 al. 2 of the Ordinance on the Doctorate conferred by the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne of January 26, 1998[1] and 2 al. 4 ch. 3 of the Directives concerning doctoral studies at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne of November 21, 2005[2],

decrees:

1.   Field of Application

The study regulations concerning the doctoral program in Neuroscience (hereinafter: "EDNE program") sets forth the rules relating to the study plan of the EDNE program as well as the candidacy exam for the formal admission to prepare for the doctoral thesis in the EDNE program of the EPFL. Furthermore, it reiterates and specifies the application of certain essential rules concerning the doctorate at the EPFL.

2.   Study Plan

2.1   Doctoral candidates need to earn **12 ECTS credits** (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) before the final thesis defense.

      4 ECTS credits must be earned within the first year. These credits must be obtained by following at least one course.

      Doctoral candidates can earn ECTS credits from all EPFL doctoral programs.

2.2   Doctoral candidates must take a minimum of **4 ECTS credits** from EPFL doctoral courses, preferably from EDNE doctoral courses (transferable skills courses are not eligible to fulfil this requirement).

2.3   Doctoral candidates can take a maximum of **4 ECTS credits** from the Lemanic Neuroscience Doctoral School (UniL, UniGe, UniFR) and from other universities with the approval of the thesis Director and the EDNE program Director.

2.4   Doctoral candidates can earn a maximum of **8 ECTS credits** from the EPFL Master programs. Courses must be from research fields fundamentally different from the candidate's pre-doctoral background. All these courses have to be approved by the EDNE program Director (procedure is described on the EDNE website: Course information > Signing up for Courses).

2.5   Attending a LNAM meeting (Lemanic Neuroscience Annual Meeting) earns **1 ECTS credit**. Doctoral candidates must (1) be first authors on poster/presentation, (2) and write a one-page document summarizing

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[1] RS 414.133.2

[2] EPFL LEX 2.4.1

what they newly learned from the discussions and poster presentations of other participants. In total, up to 2 such ECTS credits can be earned.

2.6   Up to **4 ECTS credits** – but not those required for the first year – can be chosen by the doctoral candidate from all EPFL doctoral program's course books, for example [transferable skills course book](#), without the approval of neither the program Committee nor the thesis Director (Doctoral Commission decision, Cdoct 107, May 2015).

2.7   Doctoral candidates can earn a maximum of **2 ECTS** for attending BMI Seminars, BMI progress reports, and NeuroX Seminars. Attendance can be either in person or via zoom. After attending 15 events, a document containing a brief summary and learning outcome of each talk attended must be handed into EDNE for 1 ECTS to be awarded.

3.   Mentoring

3.1   Within 3 months after enrolment, each doctoral candidate chooses a mentor, with the help of the EDNE program Director. The mentor will follow the progress of the doctoral candidate up to completion of the PhD. The mentor offers guidance to doctoral candidates regarding academic or career choices, as well as the resolution of any difficulties met within the context of their training, in particular regarding the preparation of their thesis or cases of conflict. The mentor must not be a Director or co-Director of the thesis, nor a member of the candidacy exam or oral thesis exam committee.

3.2   Mentors are chosen from a pool of EDNE-affiliated professors. Upon request of the doctoral candidate, any EPFL professor or MER can be a mentor. If the doctoral candidate wishes to change mentor, this should first be discussed with the EDNE program Director.

3.3   The identity of the mentor will remain anonymous to the thesis Director, and co-Director of the doctoral candidate.

3.4   The mentor will see the doctoral candidate at least once a year at the time of the annual progress report form (available on the EDNE website). The mentor signs the annual progress report and is available to meet the doctoral candidate in case of any problems.

3.5   The mentor should contact the EDNE program Director, if he·she sees or foresees any problems with the thesis.

4.   Candidacy Exam

4.1   To be formally admitted to start a doctoral thesis at the EPFL, the doctoral candidate must successfully pass the candidacy exam **at the end of the first year after enrolment** (art. 6 and 8 al. 1 let. a of the Ordinance on the Doctorate and art. 8 al. 1 and 2 of the Directive concerning doctoral studies at the EPFL).

4.2   The candidacy exam (CE) is comprised of:

   a. A research plan of 12 to 15 pages length. See "Research Plan Instructions" on EDNE website.

   b. An oral presentation of approximately thirty minutes by the doctoral candidate about their research proposal, followed by questions from the jury. During the presentation, the candidate must demonstrate the originality and feasibility of the thesis subject, the objectives and methods envisaged, as well as the hypotheses and related scientific arguments, including the general context of the thesis subject, the state of the art of research in the area, the plan and the methodology for the research project as well as the timeframe for its completion. The progress achieved during the first year must be included in the research plan as well.

   c. The jury is composed of at least two experts in the pertinent field (holding a PhD and entitled to supervise a doctoral thesis) and the thesis Director. One of the experts is an EDNE-affiliated Tenure Track, Associate- or Full Professor and chairs the CE as President. Co-authors, former lab members, or other persons which have a possible conflict of interest with the thesis Director, cannot be members of the CE jury.

There will be two deliberations of the CE jury. First, the doctoral candidate is asked to leave the room and the members of the CE jury decide on the pass/fail of the candidate. The doctoral candidate is then invited back into the room and is informed of the jury's decision. Finally, the thesis Director is asked to leave the room, and the CE jury asks the doctoral candidate whether they see any issues with the supervision of the doctoral thesis. Content of the discussion is confidential unless the candidate agrees to disclose. The thesis director may re-enter the room at the end, if desired.

d. In a final discussion with all involved persons, any possible issues are discussed, and the recommendations of the jury are given in writing on the CE form.

e. The research plan cover page must be signed by the doctoral candidate and thesis Director(s), while the CE evaluation form must be signed by the doctoral candidate, all jury members and thesis Director(s). All documents, including the 12-15 pages research plan, are returned to the program administrator who will collect the EDNE program Director's signature on the research plan cover page.

f. If the doctoral candidate fails the CE, a second and final candidacy exam must be rescheduled within 15 months after the enrolment date.

5. Year 2 and 3 Scientific Discussion

5.1 Two and three years after the enrolment of the doctoral candidate, the former CE jury re-convenes with the doctoral candidate. Should any of the CE jury members not be available, another EDNE-affiliated professor/MER will fill in that position.

5.2 The doctoral candidate gives a 30-40 minutes presentation on the progress of their PhD project work. Following this, a scientific discussion evolves, during which the former CE jury members and the thesis Director ask questions, with the aim to explore ways how to maximize the success of the PhD project. Recommendations of the former CE jury and thesis Director are added to the annual report, available online, by the thesis Director in the comments section.

6. Annual Report

Each year after the CE, the doctoral candidate as well as the thesis Director (and co-Director if applicable) must submit the online annual report (art. 10 al. 3 and al. 4 of the Ordinance on the Doctorate). The EDNE administrator initiates the process by sending the information and link to the doctoral candidate who fills in their part, and submits. This begins the cascade of submissions by the thesis Director (and co-Director if applicable), mentor, and program Director. The doctoral candidate is responsible for following up on the progress of the online annual report through the cascade of signatures. Detailed information is available on the EDNE Website. The deadline for submission is the anniversary of the enrolment date.

7. Oral Thesis Exam

7.1 The oral thesis exam (OE) should take place within 4 years after the enrolment date (art. 9 al. 2 of the Ordinance on the Doctorate).

7.2 Under exceptional circumstances, the OE may be delayed. An extension, typically no longer than 6 months, must be well justified. A "Request for an Extension" (form on the PhD website) must be established by the doctoral candidate and the thesis Director, in which the reasons for the prolongation must be clearly stated. The " Request for an Extension" must be approved by the EDNE program Director, and then by the Doctoral School. As submission of this form does not guarantee approval, **the form should be submitted more than two months prior to the fourth year of enrolment.**

**For an overview of all the major steps to obtain a PhD in Neuroscience, see the
"EDNE Timeline" on the EDNE website.**

8. Final Provisions

The present regulations entered into force on April 25, 2023, and replaces any prior EDNE doctoral program regulation.

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