

Should I Stay or Should I Go? - Will better guidelines and assessment criteria for article-based dissertation prevent ph.d-student attrition?



Rune Johan Krumsvik  
Professor (dr.philos)

Presentation March 17<sup>th</sup> 2016,  
Annual Gathering for PhD-  
candidates

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UNIVERSITETET I BERGEN

**Ph.d. course in literature review:**

June 9<sup>th</sup> 2016  
09.00-16.00

Contact: [Kare.helleve@uib.no](mailto:Kare.helleve@uib.no)

**Course location**

The Faculty of Psychology, Christiesgate 13

**Academic responsibility**

Professor Rune Johan Krumsvik, UoB and  
Assistant professor Fredrik Mørk Røkenes, NTNU



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**Recommended literature:**

Golde, C. M. (2000). Should I stay or should I go? Student descriptions of the doctoral attrition process. *The Review of Higher Education*, 23, 199-227

Golde, C.M. (2005). The Role of the Department and Discipline in Doctoral Student Attrition: Lessons from Four Departments. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 6 (76), 669-700

Krumsvik, R., Øfstegaard, M., Jones, L. (2016). Retningslinjer og vurderingskriterier for den artikkelbaserte ph.d-avhandlingen. *UNIPED* 1(39), 78-94.



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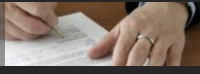

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## Outline

1		Introduction
2		Ph.d scholarship – the process
3		Guidelines and assessment criteria
4		Prevent attrition and “drop out”?

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## Introduction

- 1  • Congratulations! You are the most carefully selected students in higher education
- 2  • You have received a scholarship of 3,2 mill. Nkr.  
• “Flying start”? Well....
- 3  • New job, new environments, new daily routine, “new order”, etc.  
• Newcomer and novice in the research community  
• Important with “a pat on the back”...



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## Introduction

- 1 
- 2  • How will you bridge the gap from your former communities of practice – to solitary moments in an “academic marathon”...?
- 3 

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## Introduction - "The achievement-culture"



- A shock? Or not?
- If so, get used to it – we are measured on our achievements: completing courses, presenting papers, publishing articles, writing The Thesis in another language, surviving the disputation,...
- We are challenged both professionally....
- ..but also mentally.....




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## Introduction- "The achievement-culture"



- "Publish or perish"
- Break the "publishing-code" incomprehensible, difficult, yet necessary
- The academic, scientific genre is stringent
- Just get used to it!
- Referee-feedback: a formative assessment and quality assurance
- A lot of "downs" in the beginning
- Ask every researcher – they have all been rejected! (if they are honest...)
- Constitutes all this an "achievement-culture"? Or not? What do you think?

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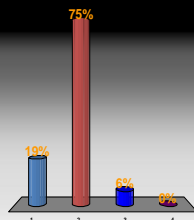
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To what extent do you think there is an «achievement culture» in ph.d-programs in Norway today?

1. To a great extent
2. To some extent
3. To hardly any extent
4. Not at all




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## How do we deal with this?

Persistence, resilience and formative assessment



- As a ph.d-scholarship you need a high degree of persistence and resilience (the ability to cope with change)
- But, who will support you in your “ph.d-journey”...?
- And what kind of formative assessment to do you receive during this “academic marathon”?
- And who disappear from ph.d-programs without a “fingerprint” (internationally)?

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## Formative- and summative assessment

- When the cook tastes the soup, that’s formative; when the guests tastes the soup, that’s summative (Schriren 1991, s. 169)

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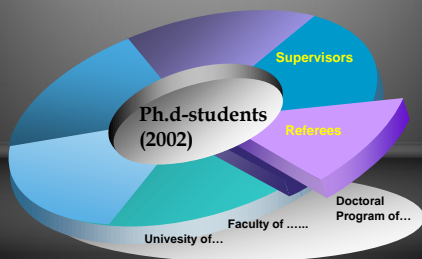
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## Formative assessment, 2002 (NRC 2002)



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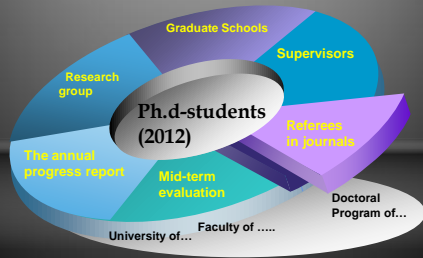
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## Formative assessment, 2012 (Nifu Step 2012)



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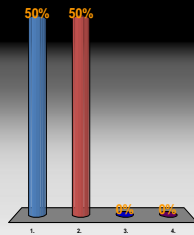
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To what extent are you satisfied with the support you receive as a ph.d-scholarship?

1. To a great extent
2. To some extent
3. To hardly any extent
4. Not at all



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## Formative- and summative assessment

- Formative assessment in 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle (ph.d.) is well developed in Norway since 2002 (NCR 2002, Nifu Step 2012)
- But what about the summative assessment of ph.d.-thesis?
- Any "missing link" ...?



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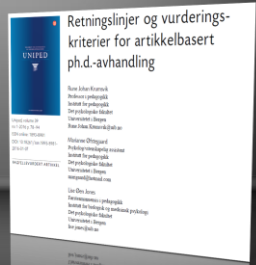
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## Guidelines and assessment criteria

- PhD by publication is becoming increasingly more common both nationally (77%) as well as internationally.
- But what are the guidelines for such a thesis, and how is such a thesis assessed?
- Through a literature review we find that there are relatively few scientific articles published on the topic, there is a variation both nationally and internationally in terms of whether educational institutions have policies and criteria for such theses or not (Krumsvik et al. 2016)
- 29 % of the ph.d.-programs in Norway had no guidelines (Nifu Step 2012)



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## Guidelines and assessment criteria

- The article finds that there are many similarities both nationally and internationally, but also some differences with regards to what is expected from such a thesis, requirements when it comes to the content, and how it gets assessed (Krumsvik et al. 2016)
- Based on this, the present article recommends that, although diversity can be good at times, predictability and transparency when it comes to guidelines, requirements and evaluation criteria for the candidates are important with regards to evaluation (Krumsvik et al. 2016)



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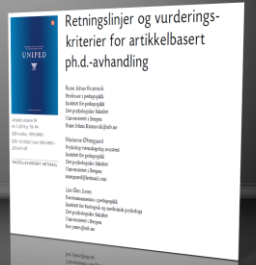
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## Guidelines and assessment criteria

- On this basis and the fact that PhD is a cross-disciplinary, international degree one should as far as possible have fairly common guidelines, requirements and assessment criteria across disciplines, institutions and countries when it comes to the article-based dissertation (Krumsvik et al. 2016)



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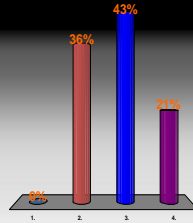
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To what extent are you familiar with the **guidelines and assessment criteria** of doctoral dissertations at University of Bergen?

1. To a great extent
2. To some extent
3. To hardly any extent
4. Not at all



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**The international perspective- attrition**

“Paradoxically, the most academically capable, most academically successful, **most stringently evaluated**, and most carefully selected students in the entire higher education system--doctoral students--are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals”

“Stunningly high rates of doctoral student attrition, which consistently range from 40 to 50%, are one of academia’s well-kept secrets” (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde 2000).

Norway? Institutions response to the statement: “We have problems with dropout”:

Humanities and Social sciences: 24%,  
Medicine and Health Sciences: 14%,  
Natural sciences and Engineering: 23%  
(Nifu Step 2012)



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**The international perspective - attrition**

“The practice has been (for understandable reasons) to concentrate on those students who actually earn doctorates, allowing those who drop out to disappear from sight” (Bowen and Rudenstine 1992, p. 107).

“Such systematic inattention means that students usually leave quietly” (Golde 2000, p. 199)

“Seldom is any information gleaned from departing students; their reasons for leaving doctoral study and institutional factors that exacerbate attrition remain hidden” (Golde 2000, p. 199).

It seems like several, different factors influence the “drop out”-rate (Golde 2005)-> but lack of solid empirical evidence

Assessment-related factors can be one of these factors (Krumsvik et al. 2016)



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### The international perspective – why dropping out?

- Some of the narratives of attrition:
  - "Don, a geology student, left his program at the end of his second year because he failed his candidacy exam and his advisor told him she would no longer work with him. He transferred to another institution and completed"
  - "Nathan, an industrial psychologist, left school for an attractive job opportunity after his fourth year in school; after a year, he gave up his plan of writing his dissertation long distance".
  - "Jane initially loved her art history program but, after a falling out with her advisor, ultimately chose to pursue interests outside the academy" (Golde 2000, p. 199)




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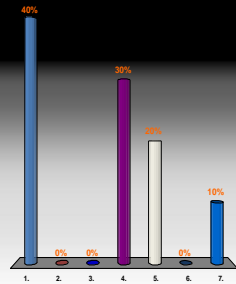
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### What do you think are the main reason for «dropping out» of the ph.d-programs in Norway

- Supervisor
- Research group
- Graduate schools
- Motivation
- Other jobs
- Department
- Other alternatives




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### From a critical point of view:

Why should we have such guidelines and assessment criteria? This is ph.d.-level...?




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