

## Memorandum on the Aptitude Colloquium for Doctoral Studies

ETH Zurich provisionally admits doctoral students on the basis of their academic records. Sufficient academic records do not universally guarantee that a student will successfully complete doctoral studies. The most common obstacles are a lack of independence, which may not have become obvious during Master studies, and a serious mismatch between candidate and project. These problems cannot be recognized before doctoral studies start, yet they should not be realized too late. ETH Zurich stipulates that the students are assessed within twelve months after provisional admission. Assessment is by submission of a doctoral plan and by an Aptitude Colloquium. A failed Aptitude Colloquium can be repeated once within three months, if either the examination commission was not unanimous in their decision or the supervisor agrees to a repetition. Students, who have passed the Aptitude Colloquium, should fail at a later stage only in exceptional cases.

### Aptitude Committee

The examination is performed by an Aptitude Committee that normally consists of a chair, who is nominated by the Doctoral Committee of the Department, by the thesis supervisor, and by the second advisor. A unanimous decision of this committee on “pass” or “fail” is binding. If the vote is split, the Doctoral Committee of the Department decides on “pass” or “fail”.

### Doctoral Plan

With the introduction of an Aptitude Colloquium, the Doctoral Plan gains in importance and becomes more formalized. It must address research objectives, teaching tasks, other duties in the group, and a timeline for extended doctoral studies, if any (Art. 11 Ordinance, RSETHZ 340.31en). D-CHAB further stipulates that the part on research objectives contains an abstract of one page and is no longer than four pages. This length limit will be enforced. It is important that, after reading the Doctoral Plan, the Aptitude Committee and Doctoral Committee can judge the following points

- Is there a clear set of research goals?
- Is it realistic to reach these goals within a duration of four years?
- Is the candidate aware of the state of the art in the research field?
- Is the candidate aware of the risks and are large risks mitigated?

### Aptitude Colloquium

The colloquium consists of a presentation by the candidate that must not be longer than 15 minutes. The whole colloquium should not be longer than 45 minutes, including the final internal discussion of the Aptitude Committee. It addresses the questions mentioned above and establishes independence of the candidate. To this end, the candidate is asked about results obtained between provisional admission and the colloquium and about details of the Doctoral Plan. If there exist only negative results at the time of the Aptitude Colloquium, this is not in itself a reason for failing the Colloquium. If the candidate is unable to explain the results (in a broad sense), be they positive or negative, or if the candidate is unable to explain the Doctoral Plan, this is a reason for failing the Colloquium. An insufficient amount of results, negative or positive, can also be a reason for failing the Colloquium.