

PhD Progress Committee (Promotievoortgangscommissie, PVC) 2006/2007

Report of the Interviews

INTRODUCTION

In the week of 16—20 April, 2007, the ILLC promotievoortgangscommissie (PVC) held her yearly interviews with almost all of the PhD students, 34 of 40 students working at the ILLC. Some students resided abroad, and we did not have talks with the students at the CWI.

The purpose of these interviews, the tenth series already, is to evaluate, not so much the students, but the ILLC. The leading question is whether the ILLC provides good enough facilities (institutional environment, supervision, mental and material support) for the students to come to a happy completion of their work. In case there are bottlenecks, we try to solve them, or lift them to a level where the more general underlying problem can be solved. By means of the latter procedure we have been able to solve some more structural problems, consult with underachieving supervisors, improve the information supply, and get evaluative input about other organisational aspects of the ILLC. Indeed the last couple of years much less problems have shown up than in the previous years. Thus the committee is becoming more and more redundant. However, the stage where the committee is superfluous has in our opinion not yet been reached.

On the basis of interviews we write a concise personal report, which is only meant for the student and the committee, and after approval it gets filed for use at the next meeting between student and committee, about one year later. On the basis of the reports we write a more general, and depersonalized, survey, containing our findings and recommendations to the whole ILLC community. Here is this year's report.

Over the years the PVC has consisted of at least three of the following people: Peter Blok, Reinhard Blutner, Paul Dekker, Ulle Endriss, Dick de Jongh (original chair), Michiel van Lambalgen, Ingrid van Loon, Khalil Sima'an, Leen Torenvliet, Marjan Veldhuisen and Yde Venema. Due to various time constraints, it was impossible for one and the same group of three people to be available one entire week, and therefore the PVC this year displayed a mixed composition of at least three of Reinhard, Paul, Ulle, Ingrid, Leen and Marjan.

FINDINGS

1. General.

The PhD projects are of high quality, which is a pleasure to note. It is expected that the majority of the research projects will be completed in time (with possibly the defense a little bit later). There appeared to be no projects requiring major steps, presumably (partly) due to PVC's concerns in previous years

2. Supervision

(a) After the previous round of talks in 2006, we recommended that it was not required per se that each PhD students has two supervisors, and indeed it seems this has not led to

any problems. It was not always clear, though, who is in charge of the daily supervision, and the main responsible. Like in 2006, we made agreements to straighten out unclear situations in the near future.

(b) Last year we found that almost all students had an approved of Opleidings- en Begeleidingsplan (OBP, education- and supervisionplan) and this also appears to be (partly) one of the successes of our yearly plea. Only in two cases some relatively new students didn't have an OBP yet, but it seems that in the meantime these are available.

3. Education

(a) Courses given. There is still a big difference between the teaching duties of the FGW and FNWI faculties. Apart from differences of an organisational nature, there is a difference for students who do, and those who don't speak Dutch, and there also seems to be a coordination problem: assignment of teaching duties still seems to be rather ad hoc, and it may happen that one course appears in three different teaching programs, each with their own practical and substantial demands. On top of this we now face the three years PhD projects, which, it seems, hardly leave room for additional activities like teaching.

(b) Courses followed. Most students follow courses at the ILLC, mainly in the first years. Even if students do not follow these for credits, quite a few make the assignments and participate in the exams.

(c) Other skills. Only a very small number of students have ever followed a course from the Loopbaan Advies Centrum (LAC, Centre for Career Advice) or a similar organisation (learning to teach, to give presentations, to write articles, etc.) Many see the announcements, and also realize they are or can be useful, but apparently this is not sufficient to take the initiative. Besides, many courses are given in Dutch.

4. Contacts

(a) Even though many students find the great number of local events attractive, a recurring complaint is that maybe there are too many activities, workshops and lectures. Socially and scientifically, however, the PVC senses more cohesion among the students. Compared to previous years, a significantly smaller number of students remarked that they themselves were not typically core ILLC-students, but felt to belong more to the periphery. Besides, internal social and scientific contacts seem to be pretty intense --- although we did not quantify them --- and there appeared to be only a couple of exceptions. We were also pleased that no student complained about having 'yet another interview' (with us, that is) and indeed a fair number explicitly said to appreciate the additional attention we give to them. We, from our part, appreciate the presence of all the students, and the help they give us in giving support to the others.

(b) A finding from previous years is that the logic tea is unattractive for the humanities' students (program, level, location, no active local organizer), and they hardly attend. The PVC is worried about this, but finds it difficult to do something about it. It still is a very attractive initiative but, after all, it is a students' initiative.

(c) The national research in logic (OZSL) is in coma, if not dead. If, as there appears to be, there is a need for such a school, it should be revitalized, or students should be advised to join other schools, like SIKS, LOT, ASCI etc.

(d) ESSLLI remains the most attractive summer school for the ILLC students, but it is clear that students and supervisors also find their way to other schools.

5. Information supply

Almost all students are happy with the information supply mainly by means of the ILLC news.

6. System, support

Problems with computers and deficient system support seems to have spread from Humanities to other parts of the ILLC, and this is a recurring source of complaints and frustrations.

7. Administrative position of the students

We have spotted hardly any practical or legal problems or complications In respons to our final question if the student had further wishes and or complaints, the answers were mainly practical: a micro wave, better canteen facilities, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The PVC advises to hold yearly evaluation talks, which at the UvA already are mandatory after one year in order to get a go/no-go decision. We are happy that all students now have an OBP.
2. Even though we remind foreign students each year, there are still some who have not yet arranged their exemption form. In most cases this is no problem at all, but there can be complications. We repeat our recommendation from previous years that this be arranged at the very start of their appointment.
3. The PVC is still worried about the unequal teaching pressure. It seems that appointing faculty coordinators does not help very much. At least they should communicate more among themselves.
4. A different kind of worry concerns the three years PhD tracks of EU-students and those at the Humanities. For their career perspectives it is important for them to have teaching experience. We advice to work towards an extension of these research projects (for, for instance, 0.2 FTE) when a student participates in a teaching prorgam, both at Humanities and the FNWI, and we also recommend to turn this into an automatism.
5. It is a pity that LAC- and other, less directly work related courses get a sceptical reception. There are very useful courses which may be of help for the student during as well as after his or her PhD. We advice the ILLC board and active supervisors, to urge the PhD students to have a serious look at the supply, especially where it concerns career orientation, writing and presentation skills, didactics and writing research proposals. The

announcements which are meant for the students, are therefore also directed at the supervisors.

6. The status and set up of the Logic Tea remain a bit shady. Is it for students only? Is it's purpose to be a platform for our own students? Should it be low key, in order to be interesting for as wide an ILLC public as possible, or should it present the latest high level results, mainly for the experts? We do not want to have a voice in these decisions, but we do think it wise if the ILLC board, all PhD students, and all those interested, would reflect on these matters. (A member of the PVC has taken a first step, writing the organizers about such issues, upon which we received a quite positive response.) One thing that seems to be very urgent is to find another local organizer at Nieuwe Doelenstraat, for at least finding speakers, and posting announcements. (The present organizer is too much involved in the completion of his thesis.)

7. The absence of an appropriately functioning research school is a matter of major concern. The OZSL should be revived in some way, or we have to look for alternative like SIKS, ASCI, LOT, ...

8. With this tenth report we ask, for the tenth time, for action with regard to the computer situation at Humanities, and this time also at Science.

9. It seems the position of self-paying PhD students has become clearer, but a fair and clear position does remain a matter of concern. (See our report of 2006.)

10. One student criticized the ‘unwritten rule’ that the ILLC does not give cum laudes. If this is a real rule, then it is not too bad for ‘core-ILLC-ers’, because in a job-talk one can always find a means of communicating that one does not have a cum laude because the ILLC simply does not supply them. This is, however, unfair because some students just don’t work in an LLC area, but do work of a more philosophical or historical or musicological nature, and in these areas they may have to compete with researchers who do get their cum laude almost by default. Moreover, the assumption is false, because there have been 3 cum laudes in recent years, and then there is the hard fact that in the ‘Promotie Reglement’ (‘Promotion Regulations’) it is determined exactly how one should go about to get your student a cum laude. Reason enough, the PVC thinks, for reconsidering this unwritten rule, and not be hesitant when one thinks the student qualifies.

MISCELLANEOUS

Here are some minor points that came up for consideration

- Some found the ILLC news a bit one-sided; if so, you can submit your own announcements yourself, because the list publishes what’s on offer.
- A one day seminar for all PhD students would be nice (kind of an ‘Accolade’)
- An “open door policy” at the Philosophy Department would be welcomed.

July 2007, Paul Dekker and Ingrid van Loon

On behalf of the PVC 2007