

# Interuniversity Doctoral Program in Organismal Biology

## Annual report 2009

Christiane Bobillier & Ted Turlings



Annual Ph.D. students meeting 2009. Photo: Madalin Parepa

## Activities 2009 (January - December)

At last count, in December 2009, 62 Ph.D. students were registered in the doctoral program. During 2009 14 Ph.D. students obtained their doctoral degree. The mean duration of their doctoral theses was 3 years and 10 months.

Eleven courses or workshops were offered (see Table), which were attended by a total of 222 doctoral students. Of the participants 44% were from the University of Neuchâtel, 23% from Bern and Fribourg, 17% from Geneva and Lausanne, and 16% from the other partner institutions (University of Zürich, ETH Zürich, Agroscope, etc.) and foreign institutions. Each course was evaluated by the students. The results from the evaluations were sent to the course instructors and the information will be used for the selection and improvement of future courses. The evaluation showed a global appreciation of “good” to “excellent”.

Activities	Dates (2009)	Duration [d]	Speakers	Participants [nr]	Credit points	Appreciation (max 4)
<b>Communication</b>						
How to make scientific presentations and posters interesting	4-5.05	2	J. McNeil (Univ. Toronto, Canada)	11	1.5	3.8
BIOFORUM	24.09	1	Poster competition	21	0.5	-
Planning a career strategy - Part I	19-20.10	2	P. Kraus (aht' intermediation)	18	1.0	3.8
Scientific writing clinic	27.10, 10.11, 8.12	3	H. Murray (Univ. Zurich)	13	2.0	3.7
<b>Research tools</b>						
Analyzing and attributing natural selection to particular sources	26-27.01	2	B. Ridenhour (US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Atlanta, USA)	18	1.5	3.0
An introduction to the practice of statistics using R	13-14, 19-20, 27-28.05	6	Thomas Gsponer (Statoo consulting)	18	3.0	3.5
Animal model - quantitative genetic techniques for animal and plant studies. <i>Joint workshop with Ecology &amp; Evolution</i>	13-15.07	3	K. Foerster (Univ. Neuchâtel)	12	1.5	3.5
Introduction to plant metabolomics	5-6.11	2	J.-L. Wolfender, S. Rudaz (Univ. Genève)	31	1.0	3.6
Scanning electronic microscope	14-16.12	3	J. Frei, M. Vlimant (Univ. Neuchâtel)	6	1.0	3.6
<b>Scientifics topic</b>						
Social interactions. <i>Joint workshop with Ecology &amp; Evolution</i>	20-22.04	3	J. Stevens (Max Planck Institut, Berlin, D), Gilbert Roberts, Newcastle Univ., UK), S. Gosling (Univ. Texas, USA), Andrew Young (Univ. Exeter, UK), S Reader (Utrecht Univ., NL), J. Call (Max Planck Institut, Leipzig, D)	26	1.5	3.4
Social evolution: from theory to data (and back again). <i>Joint workshop with 3e cycle romand</i>	4-5.06	2	R. Bshary (Univ. Neuchatel), A. Gardner (Univ. Edinburgh, UK), A. Griffin (Univ. Oxford, UK), G. Roberts (Newcastle Univ., UK), C. van Schaik (Univ. Zurich), C. Wedekind (Univ. Lausanne)	26	1.0	-
25 <sup>th</sup> meeting of ISCE 2009	23-27.08	4.5	Registration fee for poster or oral presentation	3	0.5	-
The many roles of plant cell walls. <i>Joint courses with 3e cycle romand</i>	3.09	1	S. Persson (Max Planck Institut, Golm, D), H. Höfte (Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique Versailles, F), B. Sundberg (Umea Plant Science Center, S), T. Zimmermann (EMPA Dübendorf), R. Hüchelhoven (Technische Univ. München, D), J. Traas (ENS-Lyon, F)	36	0.5	3.4
Seminars in ecology, evolution, and behaviour	Autumn term	14 x 1hr	M. Dufay (Univ. des Sciences et Technologies de Lille, F), S. van Doorn (Univ. Bern), J. Hines (Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science & Technology), A. Peters (Max Planck Institut, D), Ch. Parisod (Univ. Neuchâtel), A. Jacot (Max Planck Institut, D), S. Karrenberg (ETH Zürich), T. Janicke (Univ. Basel), P. Schmitz (Univ. Geneva), Ch. Haag (Univ.		1.0	-

			Fribourg), P. Wandler (Univ. Zürich), S. Martinez (Swiss Academy of Sciences, Bern), T. Bukovinsky (Netherlands Institute of Ecology, NL), B. Marazzi (Univ. Arizona, USA)			
Monocot systems for fundamental plant research	3-4.12	2	A. Osbourn (John Innes Center, UK), M. Bevan, (John Innes Center, UK), E. Guiderdoni, CIRAD Montpellier, F), D. Jackson (Delbruck Laboratory, USA), B. Keller, Univ. Zurich), P. Schweizer, Leibniz-Institut, D)	25	1.0	3.6

Table: Activity of the doctoral program 2009

### Seminars

The series of seminars in ecology, evolution, and behaviour in autumn term was partially financed by the doctoral program. A credit point could be acquired with some extra work on the seminar topic. Although the seminars attracted many Ph.D. students, none of them registered for the extra credit point.

On 14 December, Karl-Heinz Kogel (Justus-Liebig-Univer. Giessen, D) gave an additional seminar on "Induced resistance triggered by *Piriformospora indica*"

### External activities

BIOFORUM 2009: the poster competition we organised was attended by 20 participants (13 Ph.D. students and 7 post-docs).

25<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the International Society of Chemical Ecology (ISCE 2009): 3 Ph.D. students of the doctoral program presented their poster or gave an oral presentation.

### Annual Ph.D. students meeting 2009

The annual meeting of the doctoral program is organised by the Ph.D. students themselves (this year Elvira De Lange and Christelle Robert of the University of Neuchâtel). It took place on 28 April 2009. Marine Grandgeorge (CNRS, Rennes, France), Ties Huigens (Wageningen University, The Netherlands), and Philippe Reymond (University of Lausanne) were invited to give a talk. A total of 41 Ph.D. students attended the meeting. They presented the results of their research to their peers (5 oral presentations and 22 posters).

### Mobility grants

Four congress travel grants (total CHF 6'000) were awarded, which gave the awardees an opportunity to present their results (poster or oral presentation) to an international audience. In addition, 5 requests for mobility grants were received and were granted (total CHF 8'400), allowing the students to visit other laboratories to conduct experiments, learn techniques and/or discuss research results with experts in the field.

### Global evaluation of the year 2009

The graph in the annexe provides a summary of the global evaluation made by the participants. The global questionnaire was sent to all registered Ph.D. students and those who ended their Ph.D. this year. It was completed by 51% of the students.

Overall the evaluation by the students was good (first line).

The comments show that the demand for interdisciplinarity is not always fulfilled. Some scientific workshops are sometimes too specialized. On the other hand, some participants complained that courses were not specialized enough! Research tools courses should be reinforced (statistics, novel laboratory techniques). According to some students, plant biology thematic courses were overrepresented.

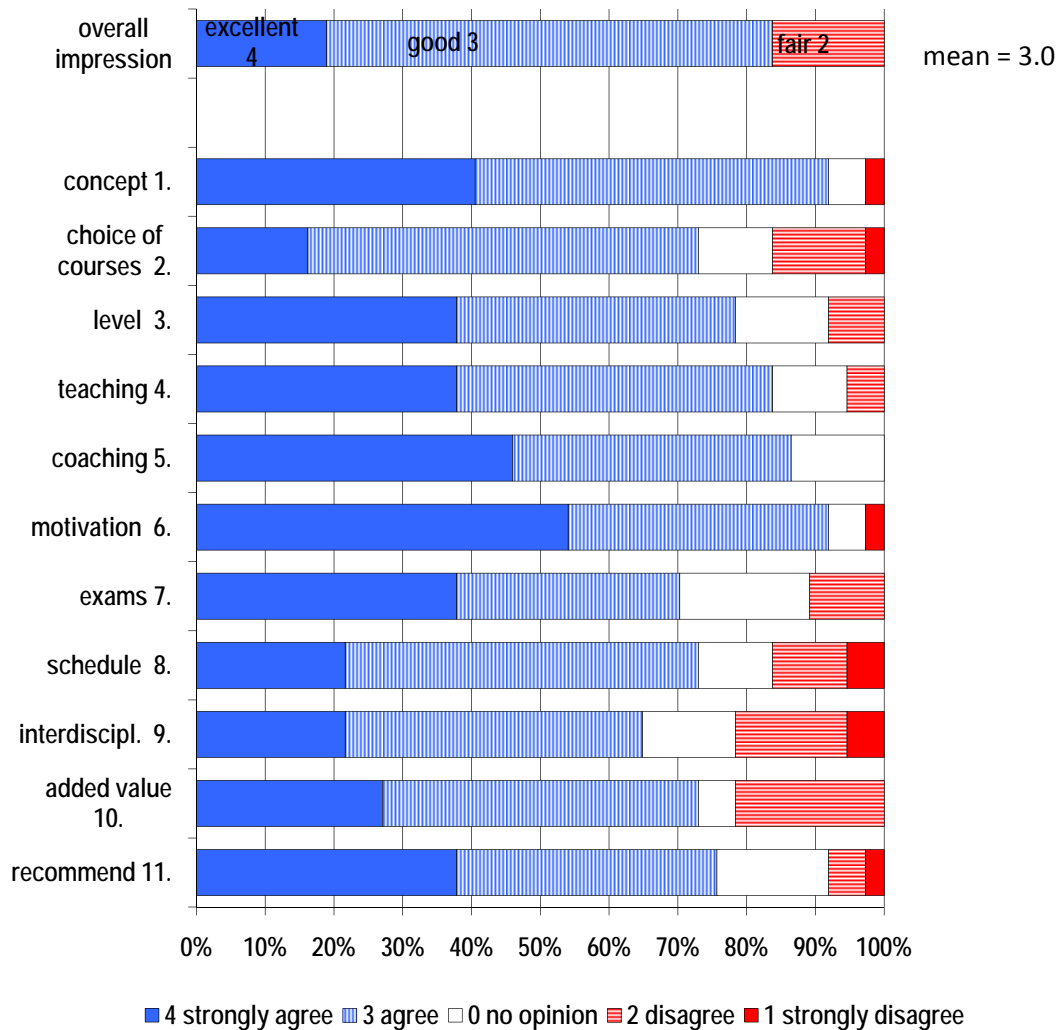
Annex:

Graph: Results of the global evaluation of the courses 2009

First line shows the overall impression.

The lines below detail the answers at the different questions.

**Global Evaluation 2009**



1. The Doctoral program concept is good.
2. The choice of courses was appropriate.
3. The courses were of high standard.
4. Methods and teaching style were adapted for a Doctoral program.
5. Overall, the professors' coaching was good.
6. I was motivated and did my best to actively follow the courses.
7. The examination system was appropriate.
8. Time schedule of the courses during the terms was good.
9. The main objective of the Doctoral program, i.e. to contribute to interdisciplinary learning, has been met.
10. The added value of the Doctoral program justifies the time that I invest.
11. I would recommend the Doctoral program to others.