

diss:kurs – Basel doctoral students present their research



The first *diss:kurs* event was initiated in October 2014 with the overall aim to give doctoral students in Basel a platform to present their exciting research projects to a broad audience. During one afternoon participants are given the opportunity to gain insights into the latest research projects combined with information about doctoral services at the university. The event is also meant to attract interested students for a PhD thesis in Basel. With its interdisciplinary approach the *diss:kurs* is an excellent format for bringing people from different scientific backgrounds, higher education professionals, representatives from the University rectorate and, ideally, the society together. The project was implemented by the Vice Rectorate for Research in collaboration with the communication office at the University of Basel.

The key element of the *diss:kurs* consists of a program of eight presentations by doctoral students of their inspiring projects. Prior to the event doctoral candidates are invited to apply for a 10-minutes presentation. In 2014, eight talks were selected according to the following criteria: 1. one representative per faculty, 2. gender balance, 3. mix of presentations in either German or English and 4. the quality of the research project. The phase of the doctoral thesis, that is, whether it has just started or is almost finished, is not a selection criterion.

To give a presentation during the *diss:kurs* offers different incentives. In preparation the candidates have a two-days intensive presentation training by an experienced trainer. During the workshop candidates are specifically trained to present their research in simple

words in 10 minutes to a broad audience. We observed that the intensive training supports the interdisciplinary exchange and creates a strong peer effect among the eight candidates. Only a few days after the training, the candidates present their work at the *diss:kurs* and are thereby given an opportunity to actively practice their presentations skills in a real setting. After the official *diss:kurs* program the doctoral speakers receive a signed certificate of participation by the Vice Rector for Research.

In 2014 the first *diss:kurs* was organized in a lecture hall in the main building of the University of Basel. The info market and the coffee breaks were arranged before and after the presentations outside the lecture hall. The presentations were personally chaired by the Vice Rector for Research, Professor Edwin Constable.

To evaluate the outcome of the first *diss:kurs*, hard copies of evaluation sheets were provided to the participants. The feedbacks revealed that the *diss:kurs* 2014 was attended by 41% doctoral candidates and postdocs, 22% master students, 22% professionals from the University of Basel and 11% other guests. 96% of all respondents enjoyed the nice atmosphere and almost 90% would recommend the event to friends and colleagues. Most of the individual comments acknowledged the diversity of the presentations as well as the high quality of the talks. Improvements were suggested towards a location with better open access.

In 2014 our major obstacle was to attract a critical mass of around 100 people to attend the *diss:kurs*. The university organizes plenty of events and scientists are often overwhelmed with information and social events. Therefore it is not easy to attract them for yet another new format. Finally, more than 120 people, mainly from inside the university, attended the first *diss:kurs* in the University main building. In order to leave the "ivory tower" and thus make the *diss:kurs* more attractive for external guests, we will organize the *diss:kurs* 2016 in the old auditorium of the university at the Museum of Natural History in Basel. This venue offers an excellent environment at the interface of academia and society in a historical setting. Participants and guests of the *diss:kurs* are invited to spend an afternoon in the museum and to also visit the BBC wild life photography exhibition.

Individual feedback and the evaluation results indicated a clear need to improve the info market about available services on doctoral education. In 2014 each administrative office of the university had its own booth to present their service. This approach was inflexible and

hard to organize due to logistic problems. In 2016 the *diss:kurs* offers an information and network zone for professionals, young researchers and interested master students. Attending higher education professionals and experts are clearly labeled with big name tags which should make it easier for participants to approach them during the coffee break. Sofa corners will offer opportunities to talk and network.

To initiate a project like the *diss:kurs* you need a team of two responsible project leaders with strong communication skills and to act as a contact point for students, the trainers and the various stakeholders. The project team needs a good network and a good overview of the University infrastructures. A professional communication office and a graphic designer help to advertise the initiative and to attract guests from inside and outside the University.

Please find more information on our homepage: www.unibas.ch/disskurs