



# Academics without Borders

## USF-AWB

### Universitaires sans Frontières

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#### Three best practices for joint and cotutelle PhD degrees

We have heard many disputes concerning joint and cotutelle PhD degrees. Indeed increasingly PhD candidates move towards doctoral theses in international co-supervision, that is to say doctorates validated in two universities from different countries, some universities reporting 25% of doctoral theses carried out in this context. Unlike the co-supervision (two or more supervisors) that entitles a thesis under one single seal, cotutelle entitles a joint doctoral testamur or more often two doctoral testamurs (sometimes named diplomas or parchments). Consequently, the concerned PhD students must comply with two regulations which sometimes greatly differ.

Let us remind that joint or cotutelle PhD's constitute a nice international experience by the cross-fertilization from two countries, two cultures and very often the mastering of another language.

There are unfortunately no legal frameworks. In some countries, some recommendations provide guidance primarily based on the existence of an umbrella framework agreement which merely specify the periods in each country, language, defense organization and various other legal issues such as tuition fees, intellectual property and other possible matters.

Although sometimes there are standard agreements to resolve such problems, larger troubles must be reported and anticipated. The first is that the degree of doctor does not meet the same requirements in each country. In some places, the topic is given the PhD student on the very first day after consultation between the co-supervisors; whereas in other places during the first year, the PhD student receives additional training that will lead to draft and propose himself an original thesis topic. The second point relates to the organization of the defense; in some countries, it is private (that is to say, with only members of the committee), in others it is public, that is to say before a more or less numerous audience. Sometimes the student presents a summary of his work followed by discussions; in others there is no presentation at all, only the discussion. In case of divergence, a solution must be found.

Because of these differences often sources of litigation, our experience in 17 countries leads us to propose three best practices to anticipate and resolve some of those problems:

- an additional clause to the agreement,
- the presence of the agreement and its possible additional clauses as Appendices in the PhD manuscript,
- and the writing of unique defense report.

#### 1 - Additional Clause

Once the defense is over, difficulties of recognition of such doctoral theses come for various administrative reasons. To anticipate and address these issues, a good practice is to write about six months before the defense, an additional clause to the cotutelle PhD agreement. This clause gives the composition of the committee, terms of defense and the issue of testamurs. This clause must be signed by all concerned people and not just university presidents and the concerned PhD student, but also the supervisors, heads of doctoral studies, etc. Indeed, between the date of the original agreement and the date of the defense (about three years or more), some officials have changed and also the legal framework has been modified. Although formally such an additional clause is not necessary, everyone involved will be aware of all details. And if there have problems, they will appear at the signing of this clause and not during or after the PhD ceremony. In short, this additional clause allows to anticipate problems, to smooth organization of the defense, namely, the conduct of the defense, the drafting official documents, etc..

#### 2 - Minutes of defense

Agreements often indicate the preparation of a single defense report. If there is one for each university, each one will be written in its own language with its own habits. In the case of a unique report, many difficulties have been reported to us. To avoid those problems, we suggest that one or two weeks before the defense, the supervisors submit to their respective bodies examples of minutes to obtain their approval. In the event that there are indications of PhD quality level according to different countries, we suggest to include them in Latin, "summa con laude", "maxima cum laude" and "cum laude".

#### 3 - Appendices to the PhD thesis manuscript

We propose to add the texts of the joint supervision agreement and of its additional clause in one appendix of the manuscript and so any reader can understand the legal context in which the doctorate was carried out.

It could be interesting to provide a sort of international framework for joint and cotutelle PhD's because they tend to be increasingly common. An international organization such as UNESCO should be a good linchpin.

For the implementation of such framework or recommendations, USF-AWB proposes to be a partner. We will certainly return to these issues in future issues of our newsletter. What do you think? ■

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