



FACULTY OF LAW  
UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA



# **Guide for doctoral students**

**Doctoral Study Programme of the Law Faculty in Rijeka**

**RiDOC**  
B!DOC

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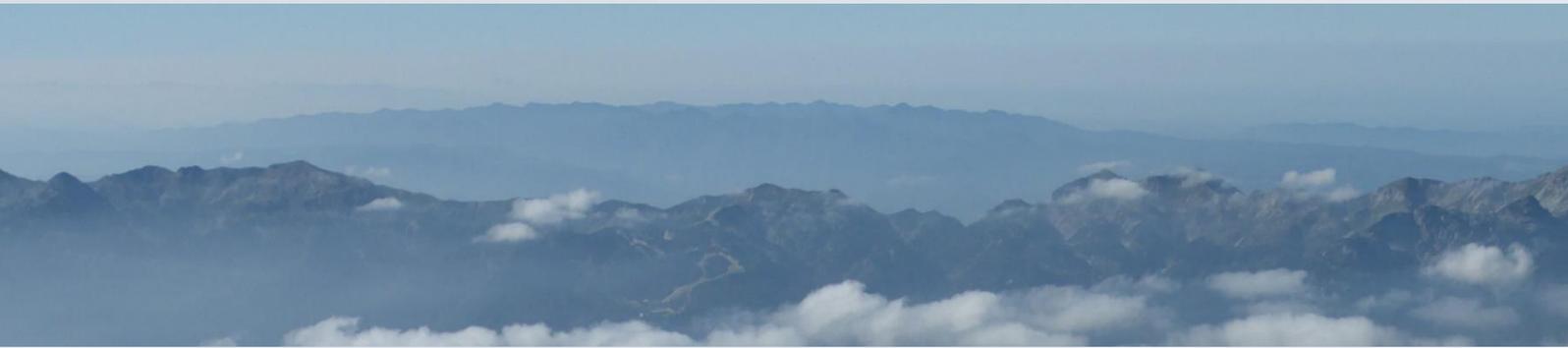
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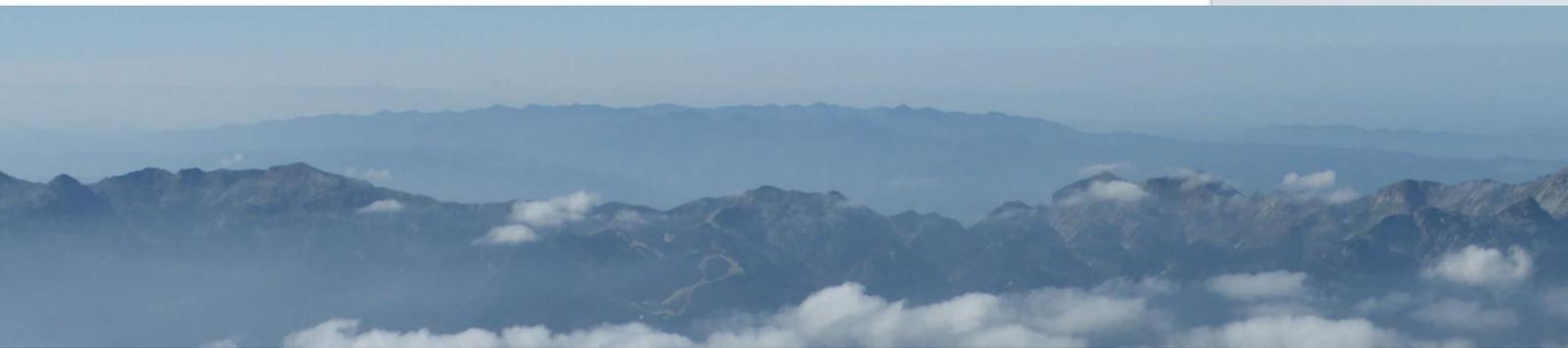
## Introduction

We are glad you have chosen RiDoc as a path towards your doctoral degree. Apart from opening the door to the doctoral degree, this study programme will enable you to deepen your knowledge in a field of your interest. Your knowledge, skills and competencies will mature and contribute to both your career and personal development. By meeting your study obligations you will develop skills at many areas, such as independent scientific research, critical and analytical thinking, developing argumentation, legal writing and speaking, team working, as well as project and time managing. The RiDoc Director, RiDoc associates, and the teaching staff of the Faculty, especially your mentor, will guide you through this path. Your relationship with the mentor will in the long-run affect both of you. It will on one hand, shape your professional and personal development and, on the other, become a valuable part of mentor's experience. For this reason we in RiDoc put special emphasis on the qualifications of our mentors. Last but not least, this study programme will also enable you to meet scientists and academics from inland and abroad and to cooperate with them on projects, which will in turn open many doors on your path towards promotion.

Although this path will be filled with excitement about new discoveries, it will also bring many pitfalls and challenges that you will have to overcome. This requires great commitment, independence, motivation, as well as the ability to carefully plan your activities. One of the most important aspects of success includes your personal attitude towards the study programme. Since there are no universal solutions that may be applied to all situations during your study, this Guide should direct you to find the answers to the questions that might arise and help you overcome any difficulties. You should, however, always bear in mind that your mentor is the first person who you can rely on, although you are also welcome to turn to other members of RiDoc staff.

### **Enrolment in this doctoral study programme is the right thing to do:**

- if you wish to dedicate your time to an in-depth research on a certain topic in the next 3-6 years
- if you are persistent and know how to motivate yourself
- if you wish to enhance your knowledge and skills



## How to enrol in RiDoc?

### Public call

The public call is open all year round, which enables you to apply for admission in the moment that best suits you. Enrolment takes place twice a year, prior to the start of the winter and summer semester. Before submitting your application you should decide whether you want to study full-time (three years) or part-time (six years). The first option includes intensive hard-work, while the second one is aimed at students whose workplace obligations take most of their time. The ECTS credits acquired within another postgraduate programme you attended or completed may also be taken into account when determining the stage of the doctoral study programme. Rules that apply in this regard are laid down by the Decision on the Recognition of ECTS credits at the admission to the Programme.

### Choosing a topic and a mentor

While thinking about your research topic, bear in mind that you should opt for a topic underexplored so far. Your next step includes choosing a mentor that will best guide you in the research you wish to engage in. You might find the list of available mentors on RiDoc webpage helpful. While discussing your topic with your potential mentor, you should ascertain whether the proposed topic is suitable and, if necessary, whether it should be reformulated, or replaced with another topic of your interest. Since your mentor will play a key role in your future career and personal development, it is extremely important to assess his or her scientific and personal characteristics before choosing one. You should also develop your personal study plan and attach it to your application. For this reason you should investigate the topic you wish to choose before applying for enrolment. Your mentor can recommend the key sources you should use, but then you are expected to complete the list of recommended sources on your own and use them efficiently. If you are not skilled at researching legal sources and databases, we strongly recommend you brush up on it, given the fact that this is one of the key skills needed for performing good scientific research.

### While developing your personal study plan:

- study the Guidelines for the Proposal on the Personal Study Plan and the Description of the Study Programme
- regularly communicate with your potential mentor
- feel free to contact the RiDoc staff



This, on the other hand, should not constitute a good enough reason to give up the enrolment since your mentor can assist you with that and, if necessary, refer you to the library staff. While developing your personal study plan you have the opportunity to demonstrate your skills in topic structuring, legal writing and critical thinking. You might find the Guidelines for the Proposal on the Personal Study Plan available on RiDoc webpage useful. Your potential mentor, whose agreement you need in order to apply for admission, will also offer support. You can always turn to the Director and the Secretary of the Study, who will help you resolve any dilemmas or pitfalls while submitting the admission application and contacting your potential mentor, especially if you are not sure whom to choose for your research field.

At the first meeting with your potential mentor you should be open and clear in terms of expressing your interests, needs and career plans. Keep in mind that the scientific interests of your potential mentor should match your own. You should thus choose a mentor who is an expert in the field or even the topic you are interested in. Pay attention to the list of his or her scientific publications and his or her reputation both inland and abroad – these are important qualities a mentor should have. A mentor possessing such qualities can include you in the activities organised by him or her or his or her research team or refer you to the scholars doing research on a topic related to the one you choose both inland and abroad. You should find out about mentor's career plans (for instance, whether he or she plans to be absent from the Faculty and/or inland, and the like) as well as take into account his or her enthusiasm about potential mentorship. You should definitely bear in mind that his or her obligations with respect to the already accepted mentorships might affect his or her availability, which in turn might influence your advancement through the study programme. If this is the case, you should carefully consider whether you will choose a mentor who has less workload, even if this includes changing your research focus, or whether you will stick to your original choice. Similarly, your potential mentor will also probably want to know how your doctoral study fits into your professional life and to which extent you intent to focus on it.

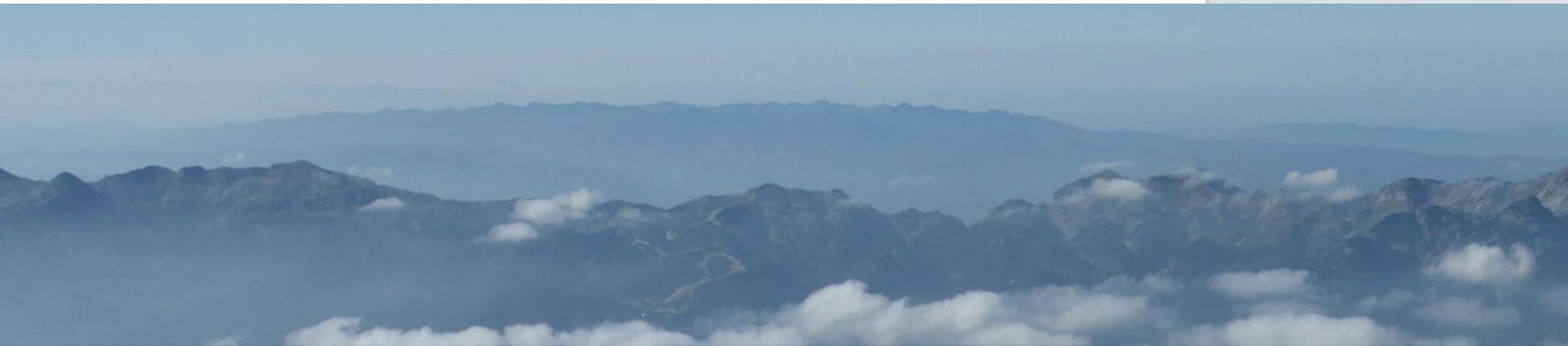
**From the first contact with your potential mentor on:**

- show eagerness and readiness for conducting independent research
- aspire to scientific and research excellence bearing in mind that the study represents the highest level of formal education
- allow your mentor to play his role – to encourage, direct, and motivate



Apart from their professional interests and achievements, mentors differ with regard to their personalities, communication style, availability, flexibility, readiness to adapt to others, as well as in terms of what they expect of your advancement. You can inquire into some qualities of your potential mentor while talking to his or her doctoral students, especially the ones who have already completed the doctoral study programme. You should try to determine whether you wish to cooperate with a potential mentor and whether you will be able to have his or her support. Giving careful consideration to the experience and working style of a potential mentor might help you choose the right person for the job as well as establish and maintain a successful relationship with that person. You should at the same time be honest towards yourself while assessing your own needs and capacities.

If you enrol in the first stage of the doctoral study programme, which does not include the recognition of previously acquired ECTS credits, you are obliged to attend courses and seminars as part of your personal study plan. Given the fact that RiDoc is entirely personalised in that the programme is adapted to each doctoral student, before enrolment you will be asked to propose five elective courses from the list of available ones, as well as two seminar papers. Methodology of Legal Science is the only compulsory course and seminar and enables you to acquire the knowledge needed for setting out the methodological framework of your doctoral research. You should talk to your mentor about elective courses and seminars that might be of most interest to you considering your research topic.



## What to expect of RiDoc?

You have become a RiDoc student. Congratulations! You and your mentor have a year-long exciting and hardworking path towards the mountain top ahead of you, but you should bear in mind that this is primarily your project. The decision on admission defines your study obligations and thus represents a guide for both you and your mentor while planning individual and joint activities. You will be asked to submit reports on your work and your mentor will be asked to do the same. You will have the opportunity to assess your mentor and vice versa. Your mentor will keep a logbook of your work and note down all important elements of your progress.

### Courses and seminar papers

You will determine the obligations that you have to meet with respect to the courses and seminars in agreement with the course coordinator. Classes usually take the form of consultations, whereby you and the course coordinator determine the dates and dynamics of consultations. If necessary, consultations are held using audiovisual communication media, which facilitates attendance for students from places other than Rijeka. It needs to be pointed out that seminar papers may, if agreed with the mentor and the course coordinator, represent parts of doctoral dissertation and as such be included in the final version thereof.

### Writing a scientific paper and participating in an international conference

One of the obligations within the programme is the writing of a scientific paper whose topic is related to the one of your doctoral dissertation. The paper should be co-authored by the mentor and presented at an international scientific conference. While helping you out to meet this study obligation, your mentor will guide you through your research, as well as through the writing of the paper, the choice of the conference, and the publication. The library staff will also assist you in your research and in searching the library's catalogue and databases. They will also provide information on the index of citations, which you might find useful when deciding which journal you will submit your paper to. In addition, the RiDoc Secretary will offer significant support by informing

### The orientation meeting:

- is organised with the aim of informing doctoral students about RiDoc
- puts special emphasis on your rights and obligations, database searching and ethical principles of scientific research
- can be useful for the development of your own personal network

### RiDoc study rooms:

- are available for use by all RiDoc students
- are aimed at RiDoc students performing research or writing their dissertation
- may be used for meetings with other RiDoc students



you about scientific conferences. Given the fact that the period from the writing of the paper to the finding of the right conference, and especially from the first submission of the paper to the actual publication, may take quite long, you should start thinking about your scientific paper on time bearing in mind the obligations of your mentor.

Participation in doctoral conferences is also encouraged. This does not earn them any ECTS credits, but they nevertheless have an opportunity to present their research findings and share their views with other doctoral students, as well as to test their findings before experts from both practice and science. RiDoc itself organises one such conference and thus offers you the opportunity to take part therein and build your own network of acquaintances. Furthermore, Secretary of RiDoc will inform you on doctoral conferences organised by other faculties.

### **Research stay**

A research stay at an internationally recognised institution of legal science of at least four months in duration is an opportunity for you to devote most of your time to the collection of sources and research on the proposed topic. This way you will have the chance to meet colleagues and experts from abroad, improve your language competencies and gain new experiences of living abroad. Your mentor, the RiDoc Director and Secretary, and the Vice-Dean for International Affairs will offer support while helping you choose the institution of your study stay and possibilities of applying for a scholarship. We are convinced that your research stay will be a positive experience worth remembering during your whole life. At the same time it will also contribute to the aspired high level of scientific research in your doctoral dissertation.

### **Application for approval of doctoral dissertation topic and its public defence**

After you meet all obligations prescribed by the study programme only two steps remain to be taken to obtaining the doctoral degree. The first represents the application for approval of doctoral dissertation topic submitted in agreement with the mentor and in the form prescribed by the University, and the second, its public defence. The application should include elaboration on the topic presented in the personal study plan attached to the enrolment application

### **The Communication coordinator:**

- is a doctoral student enrolled in a higher year of RiDoc who offers support during your studies
- in a less formal manner coordinates your meetings and work in study rooms
- administrates the official RiDoc discussion forum

### **During your study:**

- make sure you closely cooperate with your mentor
- regularly inform your mentor on the fulfilment of your study obligations



and presupposes that prior research has been made for the purpose of identifying the practical and theoretical problems more precisely, as well as formulating the research hypotheses and objectives. Prior to the public defence you should prepare a 20-30 minute presentation and be ready to answer any questions from committee members or the audience.

### **The writing and the defence of doctoral dissertation**

The writing and the defence of doctoral dissertation constitutes a crown of your doctoral study. Research on the doctoral dissertation begins at the moment of submitting the admission application and is very much present in all study obligations you are required to meet, but is especially brought to the fore in the last stage of your study when you actually approach the writing of your dissertation. At this stage you will already have developed the structure of your doctoral dissertation, but you will still need to polish it up. You will also meet your mentor and have your work assessed more frequently, which might exhaust both you and your mentor. We advise you to keep calm and not panic. Both you and your mentor are aware of the fact that your ultimate goal is within close reach. You should always keep this in mind, no matter how long the polishing up of your text and notes might last. You can expect to feel relieved once you submit your doctoral dissertation for assessment. The committee may accept your dissertation, which will be followed by the public defence, or they may request that you revise it. If the latter happens to be the case, you must not give up. Bear in mind that this is an opportunity for you to improve your text. When the date for the defence of your doctoral dissertation is finally set, make sure you prepare a 30-45 minute presentation and be ready to answer some questions from each committee member and possibly the audience, including your mentor. You should approach the defence seriously but also enjoy it because this is an opportunity for you to present the results of your year-long hard-work to your colleagues and other persons who will attend the defence.

### **Final stage**

- your hard-work has paid off
- harness your strength and do not give up
- proudly enjoy the sweet fruit of success



## Your relationship with the mentor

Your relationship with the mentor should be based on mutual respect. It should also tend to fulfil both your and mentor's expectations on the path towards the doctoral degree. For this reason it is crucial to agree on the rules of behaviour and communication at the very beginning of your study and to stick to them throughout. It is also important to enhance your own communication skills. According to the applicable regulations, you are required to attend consultations with the mentor, but their schedule will be defined in line with your needs and possibilities. It is desirable that you jointly determine the dates of regular consultations, although, if needed, you can also ask your mentor for a special meeting. It is your mentor's role to give advice and guidance. If consultations are held for a group of doctoral students, by paying careful attention to the discussions you can learn a lot from other colleague's experiences.

Make sure you are punctual and respectful of mentor's time. Always prepare in advance for consultations, and if possible, inform your mentor on the topics and questions you wish to discuss prior to the consultations. Kindly ask your mentor to inform you on the topic he or she wishes to discuss with you so that you can prepare. Show zeal and zest, study the notes from past consultations and pay attention to the scheduled deadlines, including the ones set for your study obligations. Acquire the habit of briefly noting down your joint oral agreements. This should help you avoid misunderstandings and monitor your own progress.

If you have agreed that you submit your draft or its parts to the mentor, keep in mind the necessity of a clear structure, correct language and spelling and formatting in accordance with the Guidelines on the Writing of Student Papers or other relevant guidelines. When submitting a new version, you should highlight the newly added text. This way you will make the mentor's job easier and save him or her some time with the reading. Kindly ask your mentor to comment and assess your texts and actions. Jointly define the time needed for giving feedback. Any criticism should be accepted with an open mind. If you do not agree with your mentor with respect to an issue, which you yourself consider to be crucial for your doctoral research, try to offer additional arguments for supporting your opinion.

### When communicating with your mentor:

- be innovative but also self-critical
- accept criticism in a professional manner and with an open mind and do not hesitate to ask your mentor to further explain his points
- be constructive when offering arguments and discussing, especially when defending your standpoint
- if pitfalls arise in communication, make sure you clearly express your views and jointly work with your mentor on finding solutions
- try to demonstrate a strong work ethic and professionalism



## Pieces of advice

In the course of a personalised study programme like RiDoc the climb from the admission application to the public defence of doctoral dissertation of one student often differs from the climb of another student. They are, however, alike in that they are at time steep and require great effort. RiDoc offers multifold forms of support to overcome the challenges and pitfalls that arise on this path. Here are some pieces of advices that might come in handy.

- Be prompt and punctual in your work. This way you will build trust with your mentor. You should openly discuss any difficulties and dilemmas with your mentor, and he or she will appreciate the fact that you have showed initiative. Bear in mind that you might waste precious time if your research goes in the wrong direction.
- If you have any unconventional ideas about approaching a certain question in your research, but feel insecure about them, do not hesitate to discuss this with your mentor. He or she will appreciate your innovativity and creativity.
- Take the courage to ask your mentor to include you in his or her research activities. This will not only enable you to fulfil your study obligations but also open new career opportunities. At the same time, however, you should bear in mind that this might not always be possible.
- Try to participate in national and international scientific conferences and join national or international scientific organisations. Ask your mentor to forward you any information in this regard.
- If you think you lack certain skills (for instance, presentation, language or information search), you should immediately start brushing up on them. Attending workshops and short courses might be a good idea. Some of them are organised by the Faculty, so make sure you keep up to date with the announcements posted on the webpage of the Faculty.
- Appreciate your mentor's participation in the events at which you present your work or research, especially at the defence of your dissertation. Make sure you invite your mentor to your promotion ceremony. Your success is also your mentor's success!



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