

Jury report Supervisor or the Year award 2014

NIG PhD council

As probably everyone knows, supervision is one of the key factors that make a PhD project successful. While the importance of supervision is generally acknowledged, good supervision is not self-evident. Nevertheless, in contrast to the horror stories we've all have heard, we should not forget that there are also positive examples. As a PhD council we feel that at least once a year these examples deserve attention, not only to acknowledge their good work, but we also want to show other supervisors what it is that PhD students value in the work of their supervisors.

At the beginning of October we asked all PhD members of the NIG to nominate their supervisors if they felt that they would deserve the supervisor of the year award. In contrast to last year, however, we have slightly altered our question to the PhD members. To encourage PhD students in the first two years of their PhD project as well as PhD students who are finalizing their dissertation to consider nominating their supervisor, we did not ask them to pass definitive overall judgment on the quality of supervision, but we asked them to highlight which aspects of their supervision they valued highly and why. After all nominations were collected, we as a PhD council critically reviewed the letters of nomination, and in the end we decided on one winner.

This year, we received five nominations, resulting in the nomination of six different supervisors. Four supervisors were nominated individually, and two supervisors were nominated as a team. Even though we decided on one winner in the end, we want to pay attention to all nominees. After all, being nominated reflects a supervisor's quality, actually winning is as much about the PhD students' writing qualities as it is about the supervisors.

In random order, the first nominee for the supervisor of the year award is Michiel de Vries. He is a professor of Public Administration at Radboud University Nijmegen. In his nomination letter he was praised by one of his PhD students for his efforts in creating an international network of scholars from which also his PhD-students could benefit.

The second nominee for the supervisor of the year award is Ben Crum, who works as a professor of Political Theory at VU University Amsterdam. What he is among others valued for is that he challenges his PhD-students when they are too easily satisfied with their work, while at the same time he also plays down the many concerns his PhD-students may have. This helps to stay motivated and to retain the confidence of PhD students that they will be able to complete the project.

The third nominee is the supervision team consisting of Barbara Vis and Gijs Schumacher, both working at VU University. They are among others praised for how they show PhD-students the ropes of academia. How does a university work? How to write academic texts? Etcetera. As it was put in the letter of nomination: 'they are guiding me to write the best dissertation I can, rather than letting me write a dissertation'.

The fourth nominee, is Trui Steen. She works at both Leiden University and Leuven University, but it were the PhD-students from Leiden University who have nominated her. In the nomination letter written on her behalf, numerous aspects of her supervision are highlighted and unfortunately only some points can be highlighted here. She is valued for the in-depth feedback provided on draft papers and chapters, and that she always keeping her promises. She does what she said she'd do, and she does so in time. Moreover, point of the departure is successfully completing the PhD project and keeping the project manageable, but when it helps the PhD student, also additional activities can be taken up. Finally, the last thing I want to highlight is that you work both in Belgium and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the PhD students who have nominated you feel that despite the distance, you are very approachable and that you're style of supervision is very personal. Not only are you interested in the PhD project, but also in other important aspects of life.

Finally, the fifth and final nominee for this award is Kees Aarts, professor of Political Science at Twente University. In the nomination letter written for I support of Kees Aarts, also multiple aspects were highlight, and only some of them will be paid attention to. He is praised for accommodating to the changing supervision needs. The type and frequency of supervision and meeting is different in the initial stages of the project as compared to later stages. Nevertheless, the transition went smooth. Moreover, Kees was valued for being highly approachable, and for sparing time to answer quick questions that came to mind. Finally, also the international opportunities were valued and especially the responsibility that PhD-students were given in this respect. This helps to raise confidence and to gain invaluable experience.

Although it is a cliché to state that it has been very difficult to decide who is supervisor of the year, in fact this year it has really been the case. In the end, the amount of 'evidence' – in this case meaning concrete examples – was decisive in addition to the qualities that were attributed to each supervisor (and which have been described above). As such, the winner of this year's supervisor of the year award is: Trui Steen of Leiden and Leuven University.