



Assignment feedback

1. What problems do you expect with this PhD student?
2. What is your strategy?

You will have a performance review with her/him soon.

3. How will you discuss this issue with your PhD student?
4. Which results would you like to agree upon with her?
5. What other actions will you undertake?

Situation 1

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. In general you are pleased with her: she is striving for quality and doesn't mind working hard. A good professional attitude is important to her. She finds it hard to understand when others do not act equally professionally. She knows what others are doing right and wrong. Sometimes this makes her come across as very critical. She likes specific guidelines and schedules, division of tasks and responsibility; she wants to know who is responsible for what.

After a year you want to try to let her cut loose more and encourage her to find her own way. But you are not sure how to go about it. Sometimes she can be obstinate in defending her way and she gets stuck in her critical attitude. She also displays risk-avoidant behavior because she is scared of making mistakes.

Situation 2

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. She seems to get her sense of identity entirely out of her work. She ended her relationship because she felt she wasn't receiving enough support from her partner and she has moved so that she now lives at walking distance from the university. 'So easy when I have to refresh lab cultures over the weekend.'

She is very sensitive to criticism, has a great need for attention and recognition and likes to be involved in everything. She tries to make herself indispensable by often taking on work from colleagues. She is the coordinator of various parties and has organized many fun outings for the department. Everything is always fantastically okay.

She likes to find things to do for you, sometimes gets you coffee without you having asked for it and helps you make slides for your lectures. She may get on your nerves sometimes but it is quite convenient that she takes so much work off your hands.

Sometimes you wonder if her own work isn't suffering under all these extracurricular activities, but her input in her own project is also up to scratch. However, she does seem a little timid in defending her own ideas to the professor. Lately she has been ill now and then for a day and she told you she is suffering from headaches.



Situation 3

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. He is very goal-oriented and has a personal enthusiasm which he can transfer to others. You are very satisfied because every week he delivers a new text to you for discussion. Nevertheless, you do notice there is always quite a lot of room for improvement. Also in teaching he always takes the shortest route and does many different things at the same time. 'Details will follow'. Effectiveness and time saving are priorities.

He is rather convinced of his own qualities. In passing he once told you he thinks the university pays rather badly.

Last week you were faced with an unpleasant surprise. Without informing you he had submitted an abstract to an important conference in your professional field 'because he was ready for a new challenge'. He did not seem daunted by your comment that the paper was still lacking on several fronts. Because you were absent in the week that the abstract had to be submitted, he had presented it to a professor and that gave him the encouragement he felt he needed to go ahead and submit the paper. He has now promised to work hard on a new version and submit it anew, but you are worried.

Situation 4

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. She always seems a little discontent. She is rather focused on achievement and has the tendency to imbue her performance with a sense of uniqueness. She has decided to write a dissertation that is so amazing it will impress the whole world. Everything always has to be special. She is inspired, for example, if she discovers a new theory and then she plays with it for a few weeks, looking for a way to fit it into her theoretical framework. But if she then discovers someone else from the department is already using that theory, she loses interest. She doesn't like routine work. You are concerned about the upcoming statistics analysis, because she will have to process stacks of data by hand.

You involved her in writing a subsidy request recently, because you are impressed with her creative writing style. She delivered an important contribution but because it has been very busy lately you haven't yet had the chance to discuss it with her afterwards. You haven't talked to her at all lately. She did ask the professor for advice.

Situation 5

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. He seems a perfect fit for a career in research. He is an independent thinker and likes to determine his own timetable. He works hard and is motivated by the freedom to pursue his personal interests. He often has brilliant proposals that he discusses at length with you. He also turns out to be a stimulating sparring partner for your own ideas.



There is one disadvantage: you find him lacking in sociability. He doesn't want to spend time and energy on what others want from him. He opts out of supervising work groups, for example. He has asked you for a room of his own more than once, because it is hard for him to concentrate in the presence of others. You also find him inaccessible. If he disagrees with you, you receive an email with arguments but it never really leads to a discussion. You are frustrated that it is so difficult to get through to him.

Situation 6

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. He is very analytical. He questions standard models and studies contrasting opinions. To doubt and mistrust that which is obvious, leads to clarity in the academic discussions in your department. This quality is appreciated by many of the people and is viewed as tough perseverance. There is a flip side though. Because he doubts himself to such an extent, he often experiences well-intentioned comments from you as criticism. He always assumes the worst, unless you provide him with plenty of information in advance and pay him lots of attention. As a conference last week he seemed to freeze when it was not clear beforehand if he would have to use a microphone to present. He lost his nerve, which made the other PhD students also become jumpy. That is a great shame because otherwise it is going very well with the group. At times the others see him as a wet blanket, because he is not happy about the success they are having.

What's more, he has a tendency to postpone things. He often has long discussions and wants to hold endless meetings with you before he gets to work.

Situation 7

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. She is cheerful and optimistic, started work at a great pace and is full of ideas. She networks, plans and brings together different ideas and approaches. She gives excellent presentations of her research. She has already done many courses outside of the faculty and at each course she has connected with someone to collaborate with afterwards. In this way she is linking her project to many other interesting areas.

It is a pleasure to work with her; you have a friendly and equal way of dealing with each other. She is creative in difficult times. This makes her popular with colleagues and she is often asked to join in brainstorming on new options or if someone is stuck in their research. She likes everything equally.

But now, after a year, you have not yet received one single completed article from her. Various first drafts have passed your desk, but her attention is always caught by something new and then she goes to work with that. You did comment on that, but criticism seems to slide off her like water off a duck's back. And now she just told you with great enthusiasm that she is going to work on the new Masters program of the faculty.



Situation 8

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. He has been firmly in charge of his own project from the beginning. He seems very responsible and solves difficult problems on his own too. He is confident and does not change course easily. He entertains no doubts about his actions and doesn't notice when he goes off track. It seems like nothing stands in his way. He has various students who carry out parts of the project for him; he is a natural leader.

He can get very angry if he or his students are treated unfairly. He is very direct in dealing with the injustice, and then also forgets quickly. He is the chair of the national consultation of research assistants and fights a strong battle for research assistant interests, for example a higher salary.

This attitude evokes respect in other PhD students, as well as anxiety. It makes them slightly insecure that someone else of the same age is so sure about what needs doing. They may be jealous of his confident actions, but also see that he is cutting corners. He sometimes just denies there is a problem and seems to 'forget' things he doesn't want to hear.

You feel like you still have a battle to wage with this PhD student to be able to steer the project at all. It sometimes feels like you are working for him instead of the other way around.

Situation 9

Your PhD student has been working for a year now. He is working on a follow-up project that is building on your own work and works on that on a regular basis. He likes to work using clearly described procedures and assignments and doesn't like surprises. In your thoughts you compare him to a diesel car; it takes him a while to warm up but after a day's work he has covered a lot of ground. He has become a stable factor in the department in short time. He is very friendly and everyone likes him although he can be quite invisible. He has no strong opinions and thinks every viewpoint holds a kernel of truth in it.

He keeps to himself and hates competing with his colleagues. He dislikes self-promotion and has for example never been to a conference. He asks for little, but does get a boost when given positive support.

Actually you think that after a year it is time now for some input and action on his part in the project. You started a discussion with him once about gathering his own data. He then indicated that he would still need a lot of time to analyze all the data from the preceding project. Moreover, he has now begun teaching which also takes a lot of his time.