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Summary of Young-OGEMID Symposium No. 20: "PhDs: A Cross-Jurisdictional Conversation (April 2025)"

by S. ElSalamony

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TDM has become the hub of a global professional and academic network. Therefore we invite all those with an interest in Investment arbitration and Dispute Management to contribute. We are looking mainly for short comments on recent developments of broad interest. We would like where possible for such comments to be backed-up by provision of in-depth notes and articles (which we will be published in our 'knowledge bank') and primary legal and regulatory materials.

If you would like to participate in this global network please contact us at info@transnational-dispute-management.com: we are ready to publish relevant and quality contributions with name, photo, and brief biographical description - but we will also accept anonymous ones where there is a good reason. We do not expect contributors to produce long academic articles (though we publish a select number of academic studies either as an advance version or an TDM-focused republication), but rather concise comments from the author's professional 'workshop'.

TDM is linked to **OGEMID**, the principal internet information & discussion forum in the area of oil, gas, energy, mining, infrastructure and investment disputes founded by Professor Thomas Wälde.

Summary of Young-OGEMID Symposium No. 20: "PhDs: A Cross-Jurisdictional Conversation (April 2025)"

by Shehab ElSalamony[1]

Executive Summary

Young-OGEMID organized its twentieth (20th) virtual symposium, **"PhDs: A Cross-Jurisdictional Conversation"** ("Symposium") from April 23 to 30, 2025. This symposium focused on the doctoral journey in law, from identifying a research topic to the necessary preparation for undertaking a doctorate.

The Symposium examined the doctoral journey in law by combining the knowledge, expertise, and experience of leading academics from different jurisdictions around the world. It also aimed to help participants understand the challenges and opportunities presented by a doctorate in law, and to provide them with practical advice for successfully navigating this demanding academic journey.

The distinguished panelists addressed a wide range of topics, from identifying a viable research topic to preserving mental and physical health during the doctorate.

Here is the list of speakers who generously agreed to share their thoughts, along with their respective themes:

> **April 23, 2025** - *Welcome + Identifying a research topic* - with **Prof. Freya Baetens** (Oxford University), **Prof. Susan Finder** (Peking University School of Transnational Law), **Dean Susan L. Karamanian** (Hamad Bin Khalifa University), and **Prof. S.I. Strong** (Emory University)
>
> **April 25, 2025** - *Approaching potential supervisors and their expectations from applicants* - with **Prof. S.I. Strong** and other panelists
>
> **April 28, 2025** - *Finishing your PhD on time and maintaining your health* - with **Dean Susan L. Karamanian** and other panelists
>
> **April 30, 2025** - *Preparing for a PhD (readings and resources for prospective candidates)* - with **Prof. Freya Baetens**, **Dean Susan L. Karamanian**, and **Prof. S.I. Strong**

The participants, members of the Young-OGEMID mailing list, were junior practitioners, early-career academics, and law students from different regions of the world. Several of them made relevant contributions by sharing their comments and asking questions that enriched the discussions.

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[1] **Shehab ElSalamony** is a Public Prosecutor with the Egyptian General Prosecutor's Office since December 2021. He holds an LL.M. in International and European Business Law from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, specializing in arbitration and litigation.

Mr. Earvin Delgado acted as the moderator of the Symposium.

Day 1: Welcome + Identifying a Research Topic

Mr. Delgado officially opened the first session by introducing the distinguished panelists: **Prof. Freya Baetens**, **Prof. Susan Finder**, **Dean Susan L. Karamanian**, and **Prof. S.I. Strong**.

To launch the discussions, **Mr. Delgado** posed the following question to the panelists: "*How can one identify a viable research topic that makes a significant contribution to the field?*"

Prof. S.I. Strong[2] was the first to respond to this fundamental question. She began by explaining that she is frequently asked to suggest thesis topics, but she never does. According to her, "*the best topic is identified by your own research in areas that already interest you*." She encouraged participants to explore their existing interests, whether ethics, contract law, or comparisons between arbitration and national procedures, even before drafting a proposal or contacting potential supervisors.

Prof. Strong emphasized a crucial point: "*Your first idea is never your last, so you can explore several avenues.*" She explained that this preliminary exploration is never wasted time, as the research can be used to refine the final proposal or even for a separate article. She insisted that a thorough knowledge of a subject is necessary before one can identify an area of interest and adequately narrow the research question for a doctorate.

"*The best topics are narrow but allow for in-depth analysis*," she specified. **Prof. Strong** explained that "*the goal of a PhD is to become the world expert in a small area of law on which you can then build the rest of your career*." This long-term perspective is essential, because if the doctoral student does not truly like their topic, they risk either not persevering to the end, not producing work good enough to be published, or not wanting to revisit this topic for the next 20 to 30 years.

Prof. Strong also addressed the different types of doctorates: some focus on current topics, others are empirical (requiring appropriate training and rigor), others are timeless (such as theoretical or jurisprudential questions), and some are comparative, contrasting two different countries. She advised participants to consider their personal interests and skills before committing to a particular path.

She warned against the temptation to simply take up a well-known topic without bringing anything new to it. "*PhDs must be innovative, so you need to make a new contribution to the literature*," she emphasized, while specifying that one should nevertheless choose a topic with useful documentary resources.

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[2] **Prof. S.I. Strong** is the K.H. Gyr Professor of Private International Law at Emory University and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University. She has previously taught at the Universities of Sydney, Missouri, Cambridge, and Oxford. Prof. Strong supervises doctoral students in international commercial arbitration, international commercial mediation, private international law, and comparative civil procedure. She is also known on this mailing list as the former moderator of Young OGEMID, a position she held for ten years.

Prof. Strong concluded by reminding that identifying a topic requires a lot of work, which explains why it is not appropriate to ask a future supervisor to do it. She also suggested that if someone does not want to do this preparatory work, they should perhaps reconsider their desire to do a PhD, which represents "*3 to 7 years of pure research, often followed by an academic career with even more research*."

For those who claim not to know enough about a subject to choose a topic, **Prof. Strong** responded bluntly: "*Then you are not ready to do a PhD.*" She explained that a PhD is high-level research that requires a sufficient body of knowledge and skills to undertake this task, even if one does not need to know everything about their field or possess all the skills from the start.

Regarding research methods, **Prof. Strong** recommended "*reading widely, especially articles, which will give you an idea of relevant topics and the type of research on a topic*." She advised using treatises only for general information, as they are "*too general and too slow to be updated to provide cutting-edge information*." She also suggested consulting blogs, white papers, and association reports to identify current issues.

Prof. Susan Finder[3] enriched the discussion by adding: "*I would also recommend students read materials from other jurisdictions to get a new perspective on their potential topic of interest, and if relevant, talk to practitioners.*" She pointed out that a topic can be so new that it has not yet been published on.

Another interesting contribution came from **Petra Butler**, who shared information about the German system, where it is not uncommon for a professor to suggest a doctoral topic. She explained that these suggested topics are often related to the professor's own research interests. However, she specified that students' personal ideas regarding a topic are also very welcome.

Ms. Butler described the German "Chair" system, where students often start as research assistants during their studies. A Chair is led by a professor, usually supported by doctoral students writing their habilitation (a more substantial research work), doctoral students, assistants, and research assistants. Each Chair is associated with a particular research area, thus creating natural research hubs, hence a natural progression from research assistant to doctoral student.

She clarified, however, that it is not mandatory to be part of a Chair to do a doctorate in Germany, and that if one has a good topic idea and the required grade in the State exam, it should not be difficult to find a "doctor mother or father" (thesis supervisor).

Prof. Strong noted her understanding that thesis supervisors in Germany typically look after the doctoral student's career. Once a student has been identified as having been supervised by a particular "doctor mother or father," it is very difficult to change specialty. In common law

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[3] **Prof. Susan Finder** is Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the Peking University School of Transnational Law. Her research focuses on the Supreme People's Court (SPC), much of which is published on her blog, the Supreme People's Court Monitor. She has been studying the SPC intermittently for over 30 years. In 2018, she was appointed to the Expert Committee of the SPC's China International Commercial Court and was reappointed in 2022. This is Prof. Finder's second academic career. She joined the School of Transnational Law after twenty years of China-related practice at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer and in other roles. In her first academic career, she published the first comprehensive study on the operation of the SPC.

countries, on the other hand, it is not necessarily mandatory to stay in the same field as one's doctorate, although this is often the case, with the doctorate serving as a springboard for future articles.

During a post-Symposium call for additional commentaries, the following academics and practitioners had their take on the question posed:

Dr. Eva Litina said, "The topic must be one you are really passionate about, as you will literally have to live with it for the next three to seven years. An LLM class/workshop/webinar that sparked your interest may be a good starting point for your research. Of course, you should already have some knowledge/experience in the broader area (e.g. commercial law to start research on the CISG)."

Dr. Nobumichi Teramura answered:

> This is the most challenging question as I am still exploring the best approach to identifying such a topic. However, I have always been trying to write on a less explored topic that appears to be important, and I wonder if a PhD candidate finds the following two-step approach helpful. The first step – identifying less explored topics – requires reading many books and articles in the candidate's area of interest. The second step – identifying a less explored but 'appears-to-be-important' topic – requires the candidate to exercise his/her imagination and creativity as much as possible. Some issues are less explored because they are insignificant or useless, so once the candidate identifies less explored topics, s/he will need to consider whether it is worth writing on one of those topics, taking into account various legal and social issues and also diverse perspectives. Adopting different 'perspectives' might help the candidate identify less explored but important topics. For instance, there should be many topics on international business law that are explored from Western perspectives but not from Asian perspectives despite the significance of Asia in the world economy and global politics these days. Of course, we should not forget the diversity in 'Western perspectives' – American, English, Australian, French, German, etc – and 'Asian perspectives' – Bruneian, Filipino, Singaporean, Japanese, Chinese, etc. We may also seek a viable research topic by adopting diverse methodological and disciplinary perspectives. In any event, the candidate may flexibly decide the value of his/her 'less-explored topic' by him/herself based on a perspective or perspectives.

Dr. Shahla Ali added:

> I think identifying a viable topic is one of the most challenging aspects of the PhD journey. A viable topic emerges at the intersection of legal theory and a real-world problem. A good PhD proposal grounds existing challenges/questions facing the arbitration field within a given theoretical frame with the aim of advancing understanding of how law operates. One approach to identifying a viable topic is to follow broad global trends alongside those within the arbitration sector (OGEMID is a great resource!) to identify overlaps, tensions or intersections and consider its theoretical significance. Finally, a good topic ideally is meaningful and intrinsically motivating to the researcher.

This first day of the Symposium thus offered participants a rich and nuanced perspective on identifying a doctoral research topic, highlighting the different approaches according to academic traditions and the crucial importance of passion and prior research in this process.

Day 2: Approaching Potential Supervisors and their Expectations from Applicants

For the second day of the Symposium, **Mr. Delgado** posed the following question to the panelists: "*How should one approach potential thesis supervisors, and what do they generally expect from doctoral candidates?*"

Prof. S.I. Strong quickly responded by emphasizing a fundamental point: "*It is crucial that you research the areas of expertise of your potential supervisor before contacting them or submitting an application to the university in question.*" She warned against a common mistake: choosing a supervisor solely for their reputation, without consideration for their area of expertise. She shared her personal experience, having been approached by people wanting to do theses on the WTO, investment arbitration, human rights, and other subjects far from her areas of specialization, applications she all rejected outright.

Prof. Strong explained that "*your supervisor needs to be an expert in the field to be able to guide you appropriately*." She specified that the supervisor may not be an expert in all aspects of the proposal, but must know enough to direct the doctoral student to a co-supervisor if necessary.

Regarding the approach method, **Prof. Strong** expressed a clear preference: "*I don't find it necessary for people to come to me directly, since I won't make the final decision about accepting the person as a candidate - that's a decision of the university/law faculty.*" She also mentioned practical concerns, such as her reluctance to open attachments from strangers due to malware risks, preferring that these documents reach her through the university system equipped with anti-virus software.

Prof. Strong also emphasized that she may not be the most appropriate person to supervise a particular candidate. She explained that "*if you apply directly to the university, they will generally circulate your proposal to a group of people working in the field. Someone else might be better qualified, or might have a spot available, which will increase the chances of success for your application.*"

She summarized her advice in these terms: "*In short: research potential supervisors and apply directly to their institutions rather than to the supervisors themselves. Don't waste your time applying to institutions or individuals who don't work in your field. As always, do your homework upfront.*" She also discouraged participants from asking for recommendations of potential supervisors, considering that this research is part of the preparatory work that the candidate must do themselves.

A particularly rich contribution came from **Ruchira Kaur Bali**, a. Phd student in Law and business at LUISS Guido Carli University and a member of the mailing list, who shared practical advice for obtaining a fully funded doctorate in Europe. She identified several target countries where "*PhDs are treated as paid research positions*," including Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, and

Switzerland. In these countries, doctoral students receive a monthly salary (between 1800 and 3500 euros), do not pay tuition fees, and benefit from health insurance and paid leave.

Ms. Bali emphasized the importance of being proactive in searching for positions, regularly consulting sites like Euraxess, Academic Positions EU, FindAPhD, university career pages, and department or laboratory websites. She also suggested directly contacting professors whose research interests match her own.

To stand out, **Ms. Bali** advised preparing research-oriented documents: "*To stand out, your application must scream 'ready to do research'*." She recommended preparing a research proposal that builds on the laboratory's current work, a CV highlighting relevant skills and experience, and a cover letter that establishes a link between the candidate's background and the laboratory's objectives.

She also emphasized the importance of networking via LinkedIn: following European professors, engaging with their work, and contacting doctoral students and alumni. "*Networking opens doors you didn't know existed*," she affirmed. She encouraged candidates to discuss professors' work (current, ongoing, and past) to demonstrate their knowledge and interest.

Ms. Bali concluded by advising candidates to highlight their achievements in their chosen field, while showing their desire to learn and progress, and to be proactive in seeking collaborations, as prior contact and an established relationship can be valuable in the process.

During a post-Symposium call for additional commentaries, the following academics and practitioners added their answers:

Dr. Litina shared, "Approaching a potential supervisor depends primarily on their research interests and availability. Seeking a paid doctoral/research position will also play an important role in your choice. Calls for applications usually specify a topic or broader area (and other requirements), so you should keep an eye on those."

Dr. Teramura expressed:

> That depends on where the PhD candidate's potential supervisors are, but anyway s/he should contact them by any means, like email, (video) call and in-person meetings. Then, the candidate should not forget to ask them whether they are open for PhD supervision. Sometimes, s/he can find the information on their website, but it might be outdated, so it is better to check with the potential availability directly. Before approaching potential supervisors, the candidate should make sure s/he is comfortable with his/her research proposal and familiar with the application process for the universities' PhD programmes. Note, however, that the candidate might want to avoid contacting a potential supervisor (1) who has little publications in his/her area, (and (2) who has no PhD (or otherwise has a PhD from a very obscure institution) and no significant research experience.

Dr. Ali added, "I think it is fine to email potential supervisors, though recently at HKU, we've been advised to reply with a standard form emails given the high volume of inquiries. HKU has a generous stipend for PhD students (will share more below). I would encourage exploration of a range of possible jurisdictions/supervisors. The admissions decisions at HKU

Law are made by the Faculty Higher Degrees committee. They tend to look for an academic track record (modest initial publications) and a well-developed research proposal."

This second day of the Symposium thus provided participants with practical and strategic advice on how to approach potential thesis supervisors and prepare convincing applications, emphasizing the importance of prior research, matching research interests, and preparing documents that clearly demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct quality research.

Day 3: Finishing Your PhD on Time and Maintaining Your Health

For the third day of the Symposium, **Mr. Delgado** posed a crucial question to the panelists: "*How do candidates finish their doctorate on time while preserving their mental and physical health?*"

Dean Susan L. Karamanian[4] was the first to share her experience and advice on this delicate subject. She began by addressing the issue of finishing on time: "*Setting a schedule for research and writing is important, while recognizing that delays are inevitable (sorry, but it's true). And if you devote the necessary time and energy to it, you should not feel frustrated by the delay. A reasonable delay is inevitable…*"

Dean Susan L. Karamanian is the Dean of the College of Law at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Doha. Before joining HBKU Law, she was Provost at the American University of Sharjah, Associate Dean for International and Comparative Legal Studies and Burnett Family Professorial Lecturer at the George Washington University Law School, and Associate at Locke Lord LLP in Dallas. Dean Karamanian serves on the board of directors of various institutions, including the American Society of International Law (ASIL). She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a life fellow of the American Bar Foundation and the Texas Bar Foundation. She is a graduate of Auburn University (B.S. Econ.), Oxford University (B.A. Hons.) where she was a Rhodes Scholar, and the University of Texas (J.D.).

Regarding research, **Dean Karamanian** shared a relevant observation: "*The time allocated to research at the outset is probably far less than what is needed. Yet, for some, the research can be consuming if left unchecked.*" To avoid this trap, she encouraged doctoral students to keep their supervisor informed monthly of their research results, as the supervisor can help them avoid going down blind alleys. She mentioned that at HBKU Law, they organize a student-led colloquium for their SJD students to get feedback, which is a good way for students to track their progress.

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[4] **Dean Susan L. Karamanian** is the Dean of the College of Law at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Doha. Before joining HBKU Law, she was Provost at the American University of Sharjah, Associate Dean for International and Comparative Legal Studies and Burnett Family Professorial Lecturer at the George Washington University Law School, and a partner in the law firm Locke Liddell & Sapp (now known as Troutman Pepper Locke LLP) in Dallas. Dean Karamanian has served on the board of directors of various institutions, including the American Society of International Law (ASIL). She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a life fellow of the American Bar Foundation and the Texas Bar Foundation. She is a graduate of Auburn University (B.S. Econ.), Oxford University (B.A. Hons.) where she was a Rhodes Scholar, and the University of Texas (J.D.).

colloquium for their SJD students to get feedback, which is a good way for students to track their progress.

Dean Karamanian explained that her concerns as a supervisor intensify when a student does not devote the necessary time and energy to their thesis. She emphasized an important point: "*Inevitably a student will face a firm deadline to finish the thesis, and when this happens the student will need to forego travel for conferences or participation in moot court competitions. At this point, the doctoral student simply must focus on their thesis.*" She specified that in the early stages occasional presentations are acceptable, but more than two per year, when drafts are not submitted on time, raises concerns.

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Dean Karamanian emphasized the importance of submitting chapter drafts to the supervisor close to the set deadlines. "*If you need more time, which, again, is likely, please inform your supervisor*," she advised. She shared that she wanted the student to feel comfortable with the content before submission and that she had been generous in granting extensions as long as progress was being made.

On the issue of health and well-being, **Dean Karamanian** offered a refreshing perspective: "*Take one day at a time. I am an avid golfer and one thing that sport has taught me is that each shot is a new opportunity, and one should not dwell on the previous one. See your day or even an hour that way. Find comfort in each accomplishment.*"

To deal with writer's block, she suggested setting modest but achievable goals: "*I mentioned earlier that to deal with writer's block, one might set a goal of one page per day. In fact, one or two paragraphs per day would work too… any progress is important.*" She also reassured participants by reminding them that if they feel overwhelmed, they are not alone, and they should not let this feeling stop them.

Dean Karamanian acknowledged the importance of having a life outside the thesis, while emphasizing that there are times when total concentration is necessary. She shared the example of an excellent SJD student who had a busy job in his home country: "*He would come to the United States for 2.5 months in the summer and do nothing but focus on research and writing. It worked very well, but it was very intense for him.*"

In response to a follow-up question from **Aayushi Singh** about institutional or supervisory support structures that make a difference, **Dean Karamanian** shared her philosophy: "*I firmly believe that the supervisor should have an open door because we are there for the student. When a student writes, we should respond quickly.*"

She explained her personal approach: "*At the beginning, especially, I tend to be generous with my time and energy. But if the student is always at the door and no progress is being made, I start to set some limits. And I do it for the student's own good.*"

During a post-Symposium call for additional commentaries, the following academics and practitioners had their take on the question posed:

Dr. Litina said:

> An outline in the form of a draft preliminary table of contents should be prepared early on, so that you have a map. Then, the best piece of advice I have ever received is that you should start writing early. Don't wait until you have read all books, articles and materials, but try to formulate your outline, chapters and arguments. It will not be perfect and you will have to go back and redraft but writing always takes longer than you have anticipated. So, the more you delay starting writing, the more you also delay your PhD's completion! On mental and physical health: Keeping a steady work schedule is important, treat doing a PhD as a job. Connect with other PhDs and discuss, present parts of your research in appropriate conferences or fora. Daily physical exercise really made a difference!

Dr. Teramura shared:

> Make a schedule for your PhD project as soon as possible and follow that schedule as much as you can. You should share the schedule (and any change in the schedule) with your supervisors to let them monitor your progress. Your supervisors might not always have time to check your progress closely, but they can compare your progress with the schedule and see your performance anytime. Of course, you are encouraged to report your progress to your supervisors from time to time. What is important is that you feel your progress is being monitored by your supervisors, which will pressure you to focus on your research project. You should not forget that your supervisors are the primary examiners of your PhD project (and your performance in the project). They evaluate not only the quality of your work but also your attitude and commitment to the project. They also check whether you have the ability and perseverance to implement the research schedule you have decided by yourself. Do not forget they will be your referees for your job applications once you have finished your PhD.
>
> Depending on the importance of a PhD for your life and career, you might need to sacrifice your relationships, including romantic ones, to finish your PhD on time. During my PhD, I witnessed many people had given up their PhD or otherwise delayed their PhD project almost permanently to priories their personal matters.
>
> Striking a balance between our private life and our PhD is not the most straightforward task (for most of us). You should consider carefully what your important life choice is. A PhD will bring you (temporary) joy and excitement, but you can be happy without a PhD.

> Exercise regularly to maintain your mental and physical health during your PhD (or after). It will not be too difficult for you to spare (say) 3-4 hours every week to exercise, like jogging and weight training, to stay healthy. Do not rely on energy drinks or alcohol. Eat healthy and sleep well (every day) – no overnight work. Also, avoid toxic people in your PhD office. Socialising with your colleagues is important, but that should not be your top priority. Your mission is to complete your PhD 'on time' but not to become a 'perpetual' PhD candidate in your office.

Dr. Ali shared:

> Physical and mental health are incredibly important. Our body is the horse that carries the jockey of our soul/intellect. Taking care of the external helps us take care of the internal. For our physical health, short periods of exercise can make a huge difference. For our mental health, spaces to build community and reflect on one's purpose can be valuable. At HKU, we have a 'reflection space' for students/faculty to build community. This is an informal supportive space to share insights from diverse scientific, philosophical and spiritual perspectives on topics of interest to participants including gender equality, overcoming prejudice and the achievement of peace.

This third day of the Symposium thus offered participants practical advice and realistic perspectives on how to finish a doctorate on time while preserving mental and physical health. The discussions highlighted the importance of a structured schedule, regular communication with the thesis supervisor, and a balanced approach that recognizes both the need to focus intensely on the thesis and the need to maintain personal well-being.

Day 4: Preparing for a PhD (Readings and Resources for Prospective Candidates)

For the last day of the Symposium, **Mr. Delgado** posed the final question to the panelists: "*How does a prospective candidate prepare for a PhD? Are there any resources or preliminary readings which you would recommend?*"

Prof. Freya Baetens[5] was the first to respond, starting with the most obvious recommendation: "*Try to read as much as possible about your PhD topic (including case law)*". However, recognizing that this advice echoed what had already been mentioned regarding proposal preparation, she shared additional suggestions.

"*If possible, try to venture beyond the language you are working in*," advised **Prof. Baetens**. "*I work mostly in English but I have often been surprised at the different approaches to solving a legal problem taken by lawyers working in French, German or Spanish, and I'm sure the same is true of those working in Chinese, Arabic, etc.*"

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[5] **Prof. Freya Baetens** (Cand. Jur./ Lic.Jur. (Ghent); LL.M. (Columbia); Ph.D. (Cambridge)) is Professor of Public International Law (University of Oxford), Research Director at the Oxford Human Rights Hub (Pembroke College), Project Director GIC+ (Regent's Park College) and recipient of the 2024 Francqui Chair. She is also affiliated with the LEVEL project (University of Oslo) and holds the Chair of EU External Economic Law at the Europa Institute (Leiden University). As a Member of the Brussels Bar and Special Advisor at Fietta LLP, she regularly acts as counsel or expert in international and European disputes. # Conclusion

Her second suggestion was to examine doctoral theses that have been successfully defended on completely different topics: "*It might help you sharpen your own methodology and structure.*" This approach allows candidates to understand the different ways of approaching a subject and structuring a thesis, regardless of the specific field.

On a lighter note, **Prof. Baetens** shared a resource that might resonate with many doctoral students: "*I've always enjoyed reading 'PhD comics' (https://phdcomics.com/) - many situations are highly recognizable across disciplines.*" This recommendation highlights the importance of humor and perspective in the doctoral journey, which can sometimes be stressful and isolating.

Dean Susan L. Karamanian agreed with **Prof. Baetens**' suggestions, particularly emphasizing the importance of examining completed dissertations. She also added a specific recommendation for candidates planning to write their thesis in English: "*I would encourage you to read some of the works of Bryan Garner, who has focused on clarity and simplicity in writing.*" She specifically recommended his book "*Legal Writing in Plain English: A Text with Exercises*" (2nd ed., University of Chicago, 2013) as well as his "*Modern English Usage*", which she described as a great guide.

Prof. S.I. Strong also expressed her agreement with the recommendations of **Prof. Baetens** and **Dean Karamanian**. She shared her personal experience: "*I had to defer entry for a couple of years, since I needed to save the money/apply for scholarships, and I spent that time doing a lot of background reading that set me up nicely to jump into my PhD.*" She emphasized that this preparation also allowed her to publish four articles, even though most of this research was not incorporated into her thesis, illustrating that "*no research is ever lost!*"

Prof. Strong strongly recommended, as **Prof. Baetens** had done, reading other doctoral theses from one's institution. "*They will have them on file. If your institution gives prizes for the top dissertation (the Yorke Prize at Cambridge), then read those - it may help you win that prize in a few years' time (as I did!)*" This practical suggestion underscores the importance of learning from examples of excellence.

She explained that reading these theses would be very helpful as it would show: "*(1) the diverse ways you can approach a subject and structure a dissertation; (2) how PhDs differ from both books and articles, even books/articles derived from a PhD.*" **Prof. Strong** emphasized that "*PhDs are their own unique beasts (often differing from country to country and institution to institution as well), and it is really useful to have a model.*"

Returning to a topic discussed earlier (how to get into a PhD program), **Prof. Strong** suggested preparing for a PhD by taking advanced coursework in the chosen subject: "*For example, if you want to do a PhD in international arbitration, consider doing an LLM in the same subject to get both a broader and deeper understanding of the topic and issues.*" She specified that it is not necessary to do one's PhD at the same institution, but it may help find a topic one likes and help direct some of the ancillary reading they had been discussing.

Another way to prepare for a PhD, according to **Prof. Strong**, is to practice in the field (or indeed any field) for a while. "*It will not only help with some of those life skills we've been talking about (perseverance, focus, life balance, etc), it will also help you with your substantive skills and knowledge (ability to know when you're going down a rabbit hole, ability to write,*

ability to research)." She acknowledged that while it may seem efficient to go straight through from one's undergraduate degree to a PhD, expanding one's experiences is really really useful.

Regarding languages, **Prof. Strong** cautioned: "*Do make sure you are legally fluent (as opposed to simply conversationally fluent) in those other languages, otherwise read comparative studies in your native language.*" She shared that she was originally going to do a lot more comparative work in her PhD, but her supervisor noted she didn't have the necessary fluency, so she switched a bit.

Prof. Strong nevertheless pointed out that in arbitration, there are many English-language works written by specialists from other countries, thus allowing one to benefit from excellent comparative analyses. "*Even within English, try to get different perspectives - the US and UK can differ significantly, for example, both in terms of their commentary and their laws.*"

In conclusion, **Prof. Strong** shared a fundamental piece of advice: "*Be sure that you want to do a PhD and have a specific reason for doing so. Doing a PhD because you've been a good student and don't know what else to do with your life is a recipe for procrastination and disaster.*" She explained that doing a PhD is really different than doing a taught course, and one can be good at one but not the other. Also, if the PhD is being used to put off bigger life decisions, that will subconsciously lead to procrastination in the PhD. On the other hand, "*if you know why you want your doctorate and want it as an ends to itself (not just an ends to a means, ie a job), then you are more likely to enjoy and succeed in the process.*"

During a post-Symposium call for additional commentaries, the following academics and practitioners added their answers:

Dr. Litina shared, "Doing a LLM and advanced courses on your subject will help you in identifying topics and potential supervisors. I would also recommend refreshing your knowledge on methodology (e.g. legal methodology or interview research, if you are conducting interviews)."

Dr. Teramura answered:

> If you are thinking about doing a PhD in international arbitration, you should make sure you are 'familiar with' core textbooks on the subject, like Redfern and Hunter on International Arbitration. Going through Professor Gary Born's *International Commercial Arbitration* will also help you identify issues that are not fully discussed. Of course, these are 'preliminary readings'. Also, if you do not have a strong background in English legal education, I encourage you to read a few textbooks on English legal writing. For instance, I benefitted enormously from Professor S I Strong's *How to Write Law Essays and Exams* when I was an MA student at a university in Yorkshire long ago, as that was my first time studying in an English educational institution. I am still keeping a copy of the book on my bookshelf inJapan.

Finally, **Dr. Ali** advised, "Take a look at completed projects for insights into the process and method of writing a viable dissertation. You can review ProQuest Digital Dissertations for completed PhD projects in your area."

This final day of the Symposium thus provided participants with a rich collection of resources, practical advice, and perspectives on preparing for a doctorate, highlighting the importance of

prior research, exposure to various methodologies and structures, and above all, clarity of personal motivations for undertaking this demanding academic journey.

Conclusion

The Young-OGEMID virtual symposium on PhDs offered an in-depth and multidimensional exploration of the doctoral journey in law, addressing the challenges and opportunities that mark this demanding academic experience. Throughout the four days of discussions, the distinguished panelists shared their valuable knowledge, experiences, and advice, covering the entire doctoral process, from identifying a research topic to the necessary preparation for embarking on this intellectual journey.

The first day highlighted the crucial importance of passion and personal research in identifying a viable thesis topic. The speakers emphasized that the best topic emerges from the candidate's own interests, through thorough exploration and extensive reading. Differences between academic traditions were also highlighted, particularly between the Anglo-Saxon approach, where students generally identify their own topic, and the German "Chair" system, where professors may suggest topics related to their own research interests.

The second day addressed strategies for approaching potential thesis supervisors and their expectations of candidates. The discussions emphasized the importance of thoroughly researching the supervisors' areas of expertise before contacting them, and debated the respective advantages of a direct approach versus an institutional application. Practical advice was also shared for obtaining funded doctorates, particularly in Europe, where several countries treat doctorates as paid research positions.

The third day focused on the challenges of completing a doctorate on time while preserving mental and physical health. The panelists shared concrete strategies for establishing a realistic schedule, managing research time that can seem endless, and maintaining a balance between the total immersion necessary in thesis work and personal well-being. The importance of regular communication with the thesis supervisor and institutional support structures was also emphasized.

The fourth and final day provided a rich collection of resources and advice for preparing for a doctorate. Recommendations included reading successful theses to understand methodology and structure, exploring literature beyond one's primary working language, and acquiring complementary professional or academic experience before undertaking a doctorate. The panelists also emphasized the fundamental importance of having a clear and intrinsic motivation for this demanding journey.

Through these rich and nuanced exchanges, the symposium offered participants a realistic and comprehensive view of the doctoral journey in law, highlighting both its considerable challenges and its profound intellectual rewards. The practical advice, diverse perspectives, and shared resources constitute a valuable guide for anyone considering or currently pursuing a doctorate in law, facilitating navigation through this transformative academic journey.

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Young professionals and students with an interest in transnational disputes, international investment law developments and related issues, are hereby invited to join the Young-OGEMID discussion group. Membership is free.

Simply visit www.transnational-dispute-management.com/young-ogemid/ and fill in the registration form. Other summaries of our Young-OGEMID virtual seminars focussing on career development can also be found there.