



Focus on Teaching: win-win for master's students and supervisors

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Topics: Organisation & Staff

Besides research and consultancy, teaching is the third major aspect of Eawag's work. Around 140 master's students are supervised every year at the Institute, some of whom are directly involved in research projects. This integration of teaching and learning, along with the flat hierarchies and Eawag's interdisciplinary culture together create a unique environment that is greatly valued by students and supervisors alike, and which results again and again in outstanding master's dissertations.

It is impressive to note that five of the 11 master's dissertations in the environmental engineering sciences recognised by ETH Zurich as outstanding in 2018 were the work of students being supervised at Eawag. But it's not only in the environmental sciences that Eawag is excelling: the supervisors in other disciplines also say that their students are highly motivated and that they work to a high standard.

Master's dissertations carried out at Eawag are normally integrated into research projects. This gives students the advantage of working within a set framework but nevertheless having the flexibility to inject their own perspective. Dominik Boller, one of those whose master's dissertation in environmental engineering sciences was commended by ETH, especially valued this point: "I had a great deal of freedom to put my own ideas into practice. The openness of the researchers, and also the ultra-flat hierarchies, were very motivating. There was never any reason to be afraid to ask questions if I didn't understand something". Livia Britschgi and Viviane Furrer, who were also recipients of the ETH award, found it invaluable to be able to go directly to Group Leaders and ask questions. They also appreciated the help and support they always received in the workshop with setting up their experiments.

The supervisors also benefit from the collaboration with master's students, who constantly bring fresh

perspectives, and sometimes will introduce approaches or methods that are quite new to a supervisor. Samuel Renggli, a supervisor in Eawag's Sandec department, loves seeing how original ideas develop and uncertainties are unpicked: "Master's students are already in a position to carry out real research work, and in the best case scenario this can also be helpful for the entire research project". Karin Ingold is a Group Leader in the Environmental Social Sciences department and has been a master's dissertation supervisor at Eawag and the University of Bern for the past ten years. She stresses the importance of being flexible and not setting one's expectations too high at the beginning, as the students are after all still in education, and the quality of their work can vary in different areas. But, she says, "If there is a desire to cover new areas of research and the capacity is there in terms of supervisors, I would encourage the involvement of master's students. As a supervisor, I derive both personal and professional benefit from working with the students". Karen Ingold sees the involvement of students in cross-departmental projects as one of Eawag's particular strengths: "We can offer the students real-life interdisciplinarity through these research projects, while they, for their part, sometimes introduce us to new cross-discipline research methods that we may not even be aware of".

This highly cherished work environment at Eawag provides a good basis for further outstanding work.

<https://www.eawag.ch/en/info/portal/news/news-archive/archive-detail/focus-on-teaching-win-win-for-masters-students-and-supervisors>