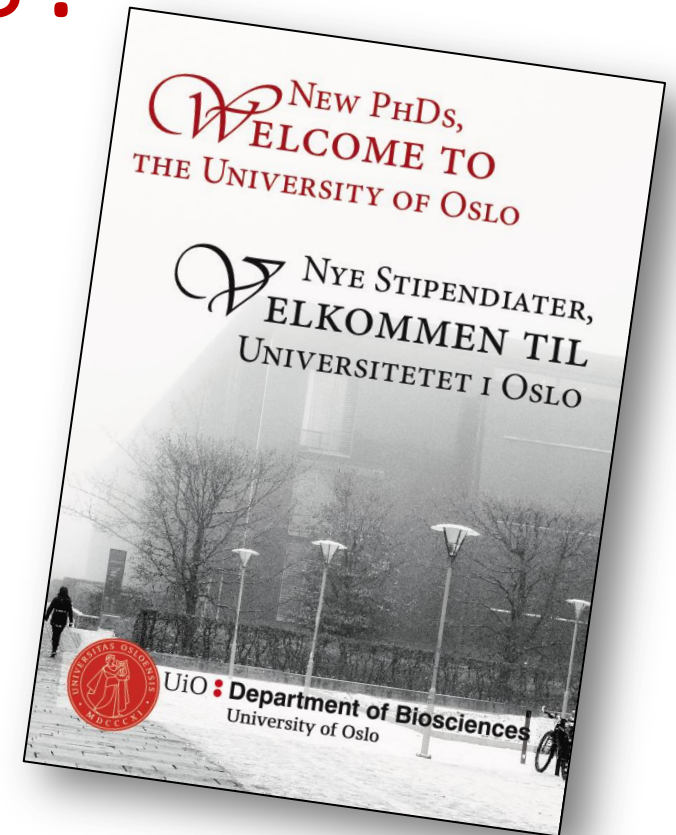


# How to welcome & integrate new PhD candidates?

Anna Mazzarella (PhD-rådgiver, IBV)



# How to welcome & integrate new PhD candidates?

- A good welcome is critical
  - Sets the tone, sets the expectations
- Good integration is, if anything, more critical
  - Doing a PhD is incredibly stressful and can be all-consuming
  - Mental health crisis among PhD candidates which can lead to sick leave and even drop-out

# "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education"

- **"Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education"**  
Article in Nature Biotechnology; doi:10.1038/nbt.4089
  - Surveyed >2.000 PhD candidates
  - 234 institutions
  - 26 countries
  - 40% in biological and physical sciences and engineering

# "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education"

- **41% show moderate to severe anxiety**
- **39% show moderate to severe depression**
- **~6x the prevalence in the general population**
- **Gender effect: more severe in female students, even more severe in transgender students**

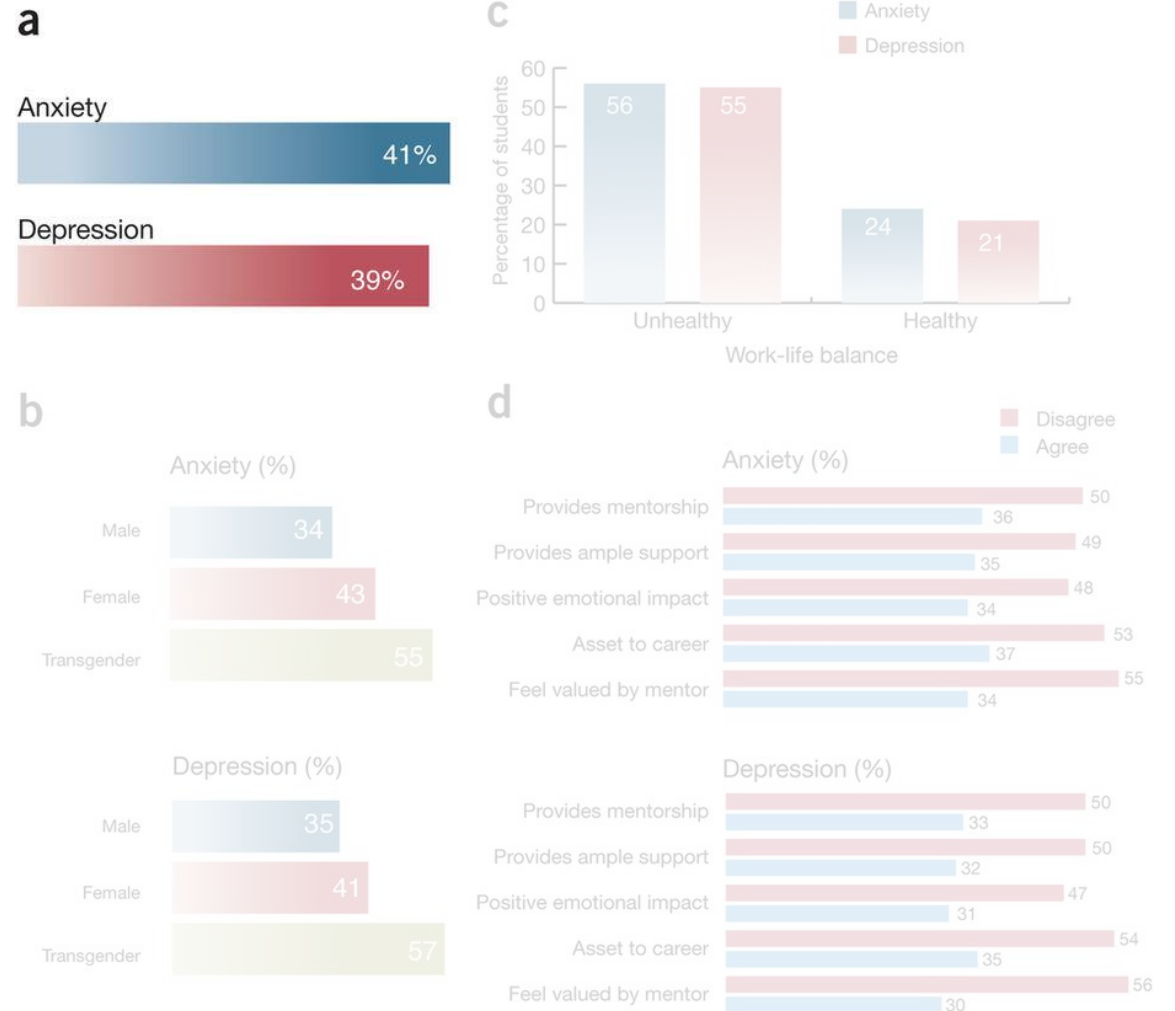


Figure 1. "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education" in Nature Biotechnology; doi:10.1038/nbt.4089

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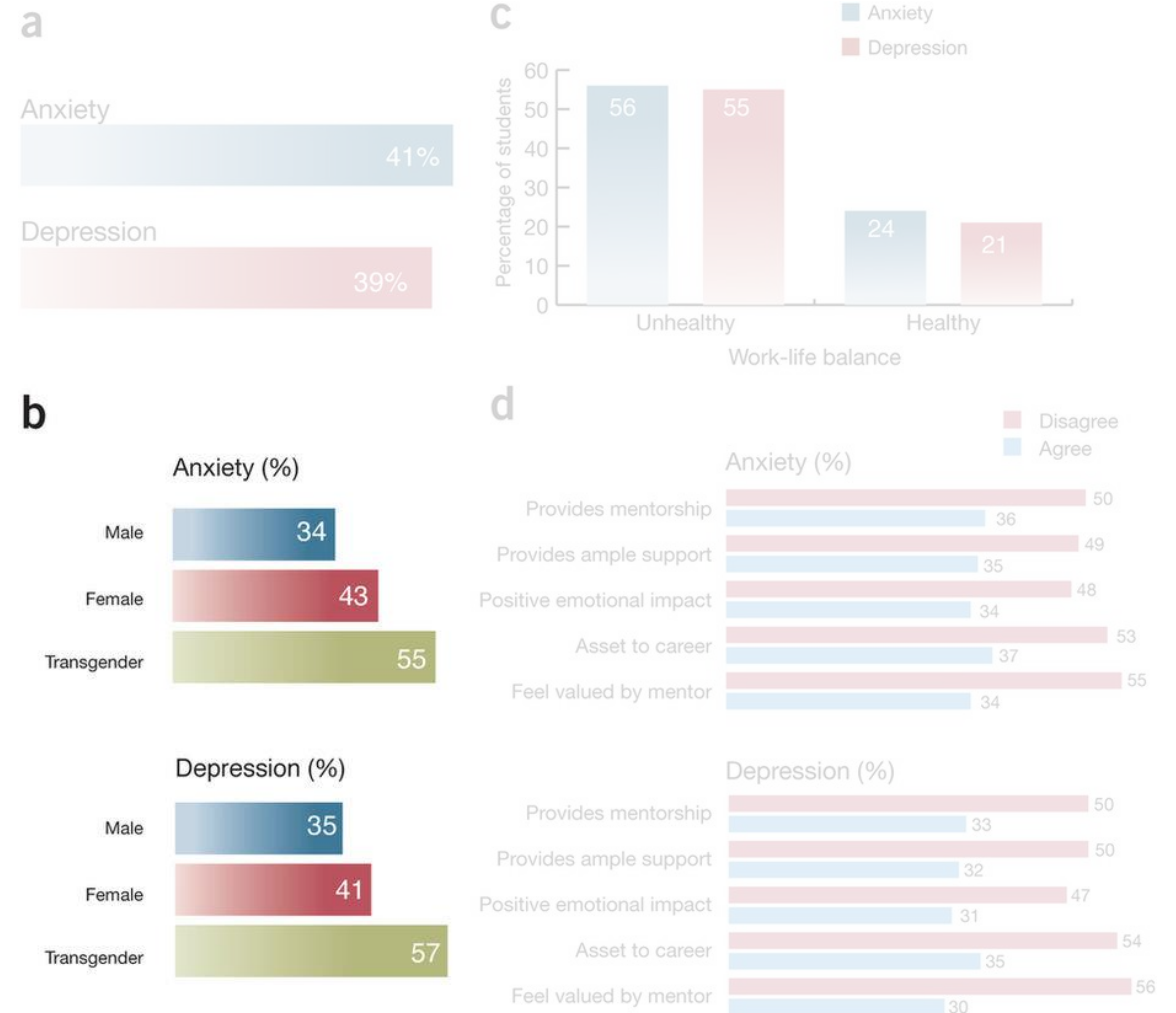


Figure 1. "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education" in Nature Biotechnology; doi:10.1038/nbt.4089

# "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education"

- Things that this study saw correlate with better mental health:

- **Healthy work-life balance**

- A strong, supportive and positive relationship with the main supervisor

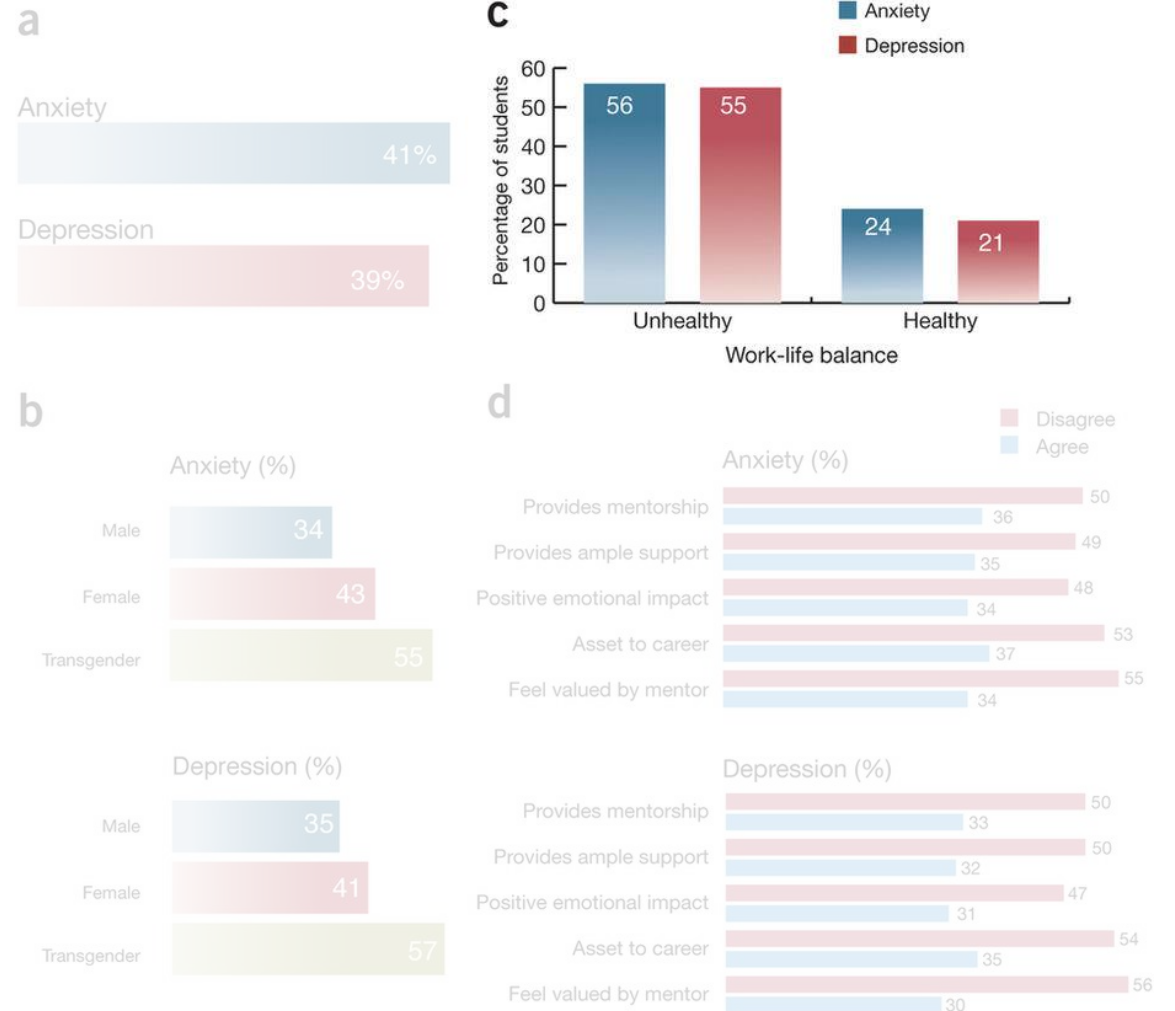


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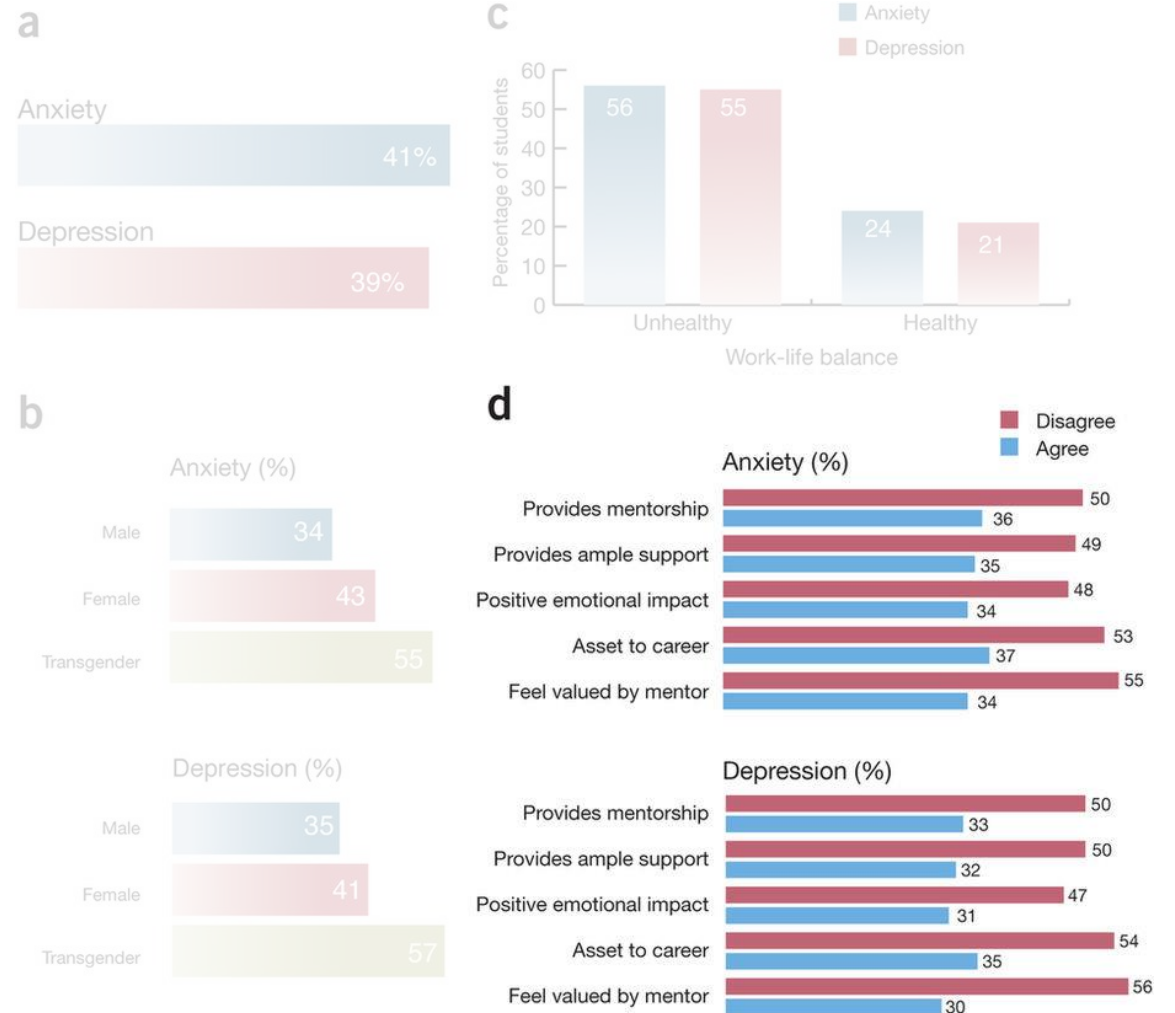


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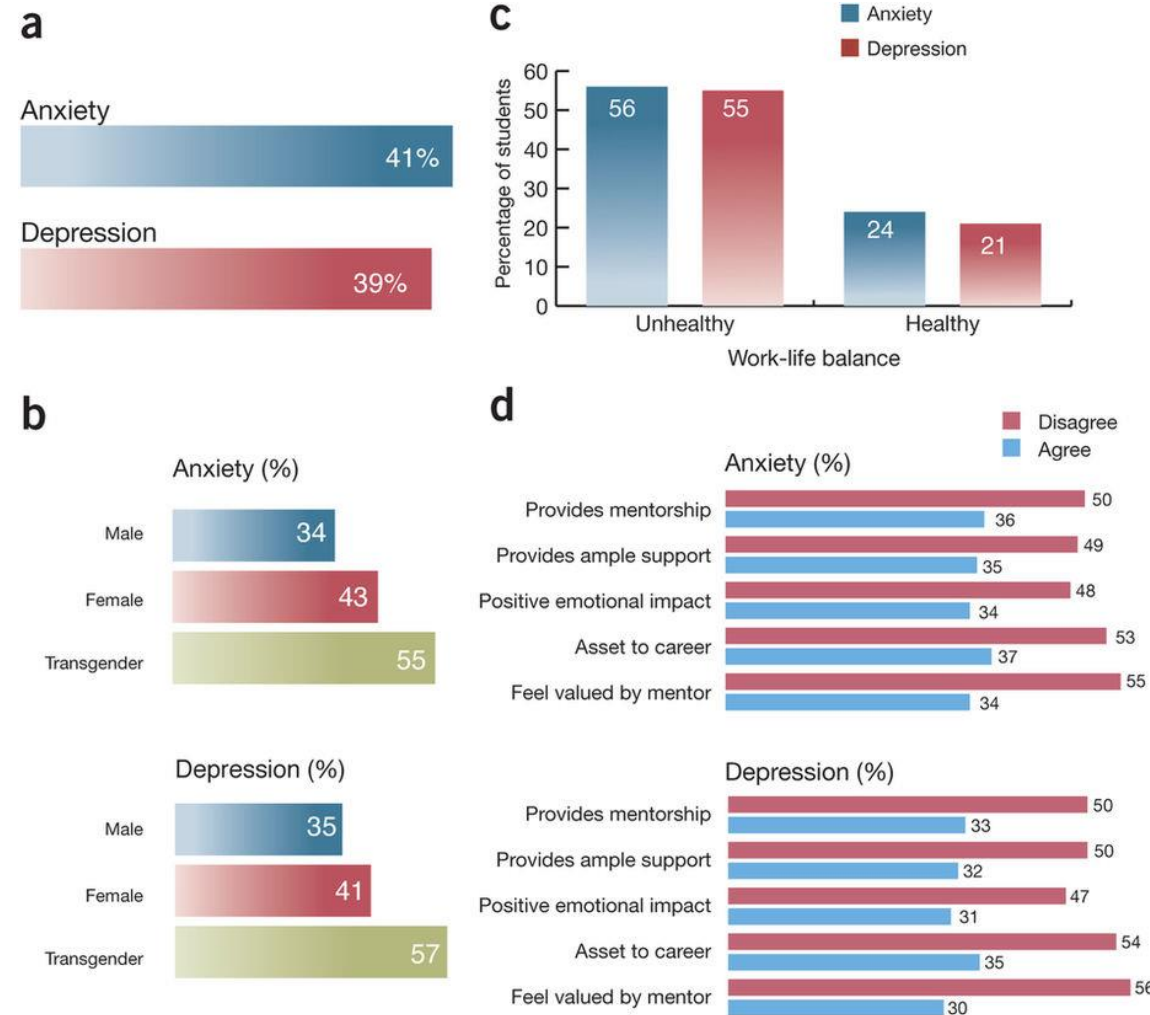


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# What we do today

- IBV centrally has a **Welcome Lunch**

- Poorly attended
- Not well-known
- Not consistent (timing)



- Otherwise, supervisors are in charge of welcome and integration for their own candidates

# Main problems with giving supervisors this role:

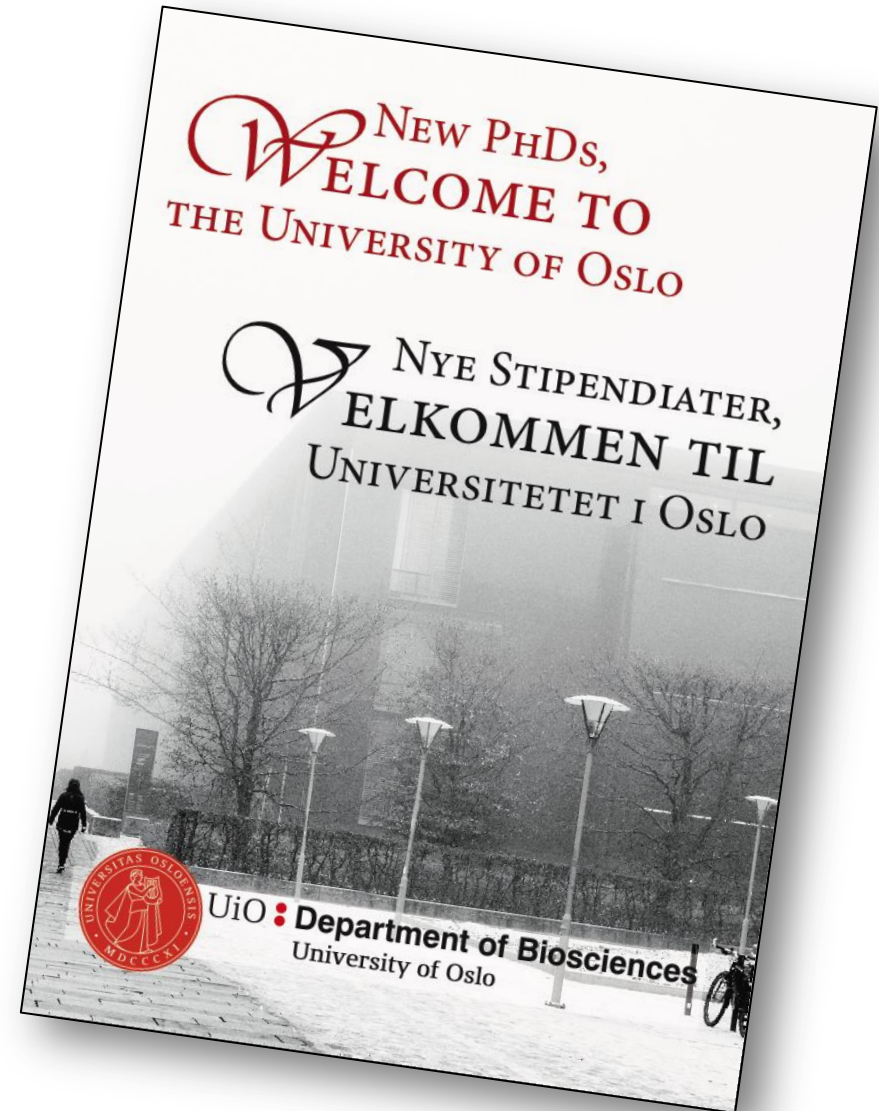
- Professors are busy people
- Often outsourced to other PhD candidates or Post Docs in the group
- Not all supervisors have someone to delegate to
- This system puts strain on new PhDs by unintentionally making them responsible for their own integration

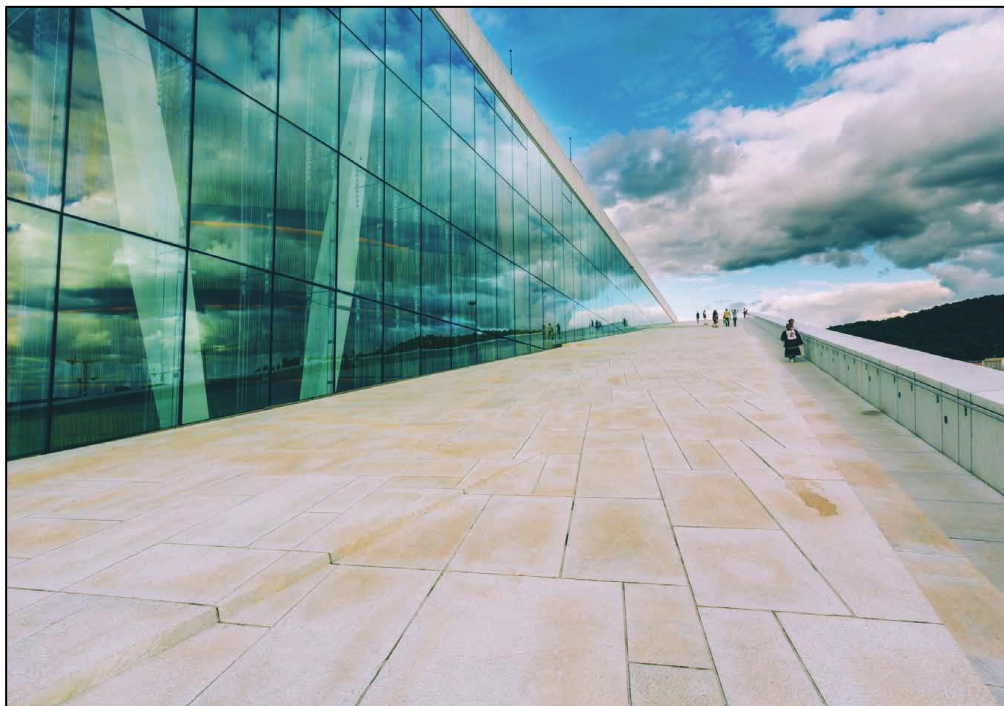
# Barriers to improving better integration

- Not all supervisors introduce the new PhDs candidates to the PhD advisor
  - Then impossible for me to get in contact with new candidates before they apply for admission to the program (~3 months after they begin)
  - Critical "Welcome" period is then already over
  - Especially true for PhD candidates who are not Norwegian and have to apply for work/residence permits at UDI, which is stressful
- The PhD advisor's schedule also doesn't allow for a huge increase in hours spent integrating new PhD candidates

# Welcome Booklet

- Full of important and practical information
  - Easily accessible both in print and online
  - Highly visual formal makes it memorable
  - Gives busy supervisors a "way out" without burdening their other PhD candidates
  - Avoids the PhD advisor answering the same questions over and over





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# GETTING SET UP

**Your contract:** You have in all likelihood already signed your contract, but if not make sure your name is registered the Norwegian way, or in other words with your given name first and surname/family name last to make sure your publications will be registered properly.

**To get your ID card:** Go to SIO Kundeservice in Kristian Ottosens hus, Problemveien 9 (SIOsenteret) which is on the back side of the book store Akademika (see below). See page 41 (the last page) for a campus map. They are normally open from 10:00-15:00.

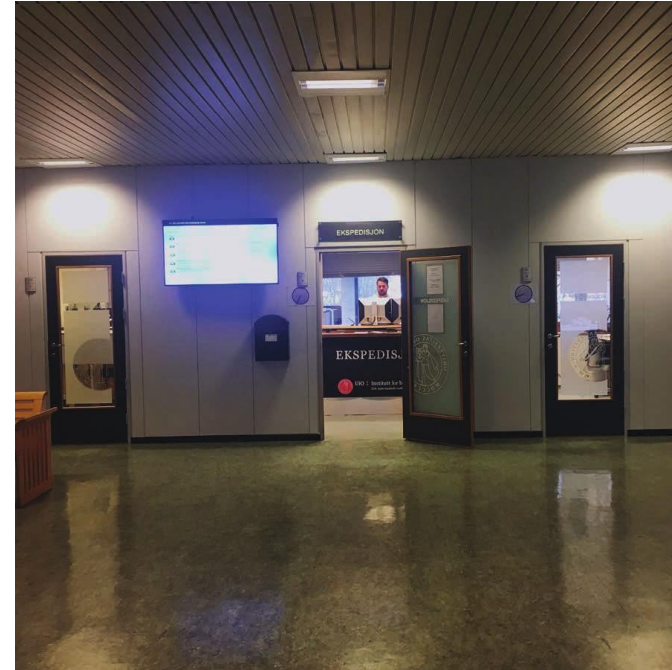
Remember to bring an ID, such as your passport or bank card with photo ID.

If you are from abroad, you will need to get your Norwegian personal number or D-number before you can get an ID card (see page 29).



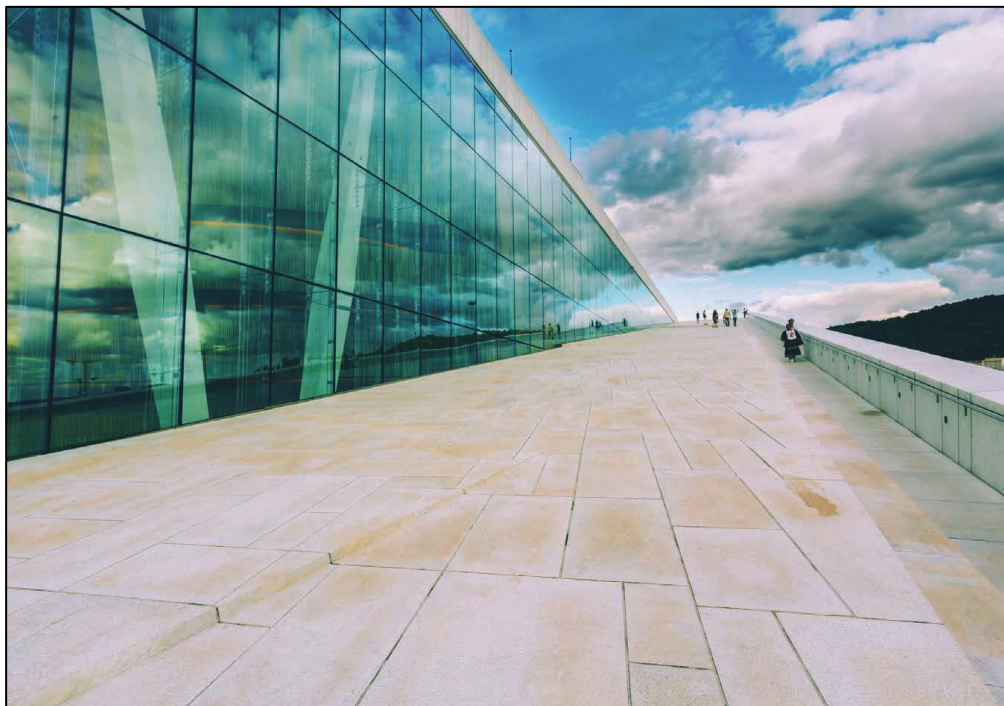
**To get office space:** This is different for every section, so ask your supervisor who will arrange this for you.

**To get your office keys:** Go to the reception (Ekspedisjon) on the first floor of Kristine Bonnevis Hus (see photo below).



**To get a computer:** This is your supervisor's responsibility, but you can go talk to IT on the first floor (room 1150) if you want to ask them what they think you will need depending on the programs you will be running. UiO supports both PC and mac platforms. IT will need confirmation from your supervisor to order your computer for you.

**To get a username and email address:** This will happen automatically after your contract gets approved and you get your ID card, but visit IT with your UiO ID card to get access to your account.



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## WORKING HOURS

Regulation of **working hours** for employees in scientific posts at the University of Oslo is different than it is for other government jobs in Norway. As research demands flexible hours, you do not have ordinary working hours mandated. PhD students should work 37.5 hours per week, but there are no regulations that state when those hours must be, other than that you may not exceed 13 hours of working time per 24 hours. PhD students as a “particularly independent post” are also exempt from ordinary overtime as this is considered part of the flexible working time. It is up to you to make sure you do not work overtime if you choose not to. This is why it is recommended for you to keep track of your working hours in the HR portal, because otherwise it can be very hard to tell how much overtime you have been working, and therefore how much extra time off you should take in compensation (if you so choose).

It might seem that 37.5 hours a week is not enough time to finish a PhD in three years, and it's true that many do work overtime even though it is unpaid. However making sure to take enough time off from working helps you to be mentally healthy and productive, which will pay off in the long run. If you work through evenings, weekends and vacations for a long period of time, you risk burning out, which will stop your progress entirely.

In the case of circumstances beyond your control that have significantly hindered your progress, please come talk to the PhD advisor about whether you can get a short salary extension from the Faculty to enable you to finish your thesis.



## UNIONS

There are several unions you can join as a PhD student in Norway. The biggest ones relevant for you are Forskerforbundet, Tekna, and Akademikerne, but there are many others. They have offers on travel insurance, they offer free legal advice, and they also have courses you can take as a member. Some even offer homeowners loans with interest below what the banks can offer you. It can be very advantageous to join a union as a PhD student, especially if you are interested in improving the working conditions for all PhD students throughout Norway. This UiO web page has more information: [www.uio.no/english/for-employees/employment/trade-unions/](http://www.uio.no/english/for-employees/employment/trade-unions/)





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# HOLIDAYS

All employees (you included!) have the right AND obligation to take holidays provided you have qualified for holiday pay.

The first year of your employment you will not qualify for full holiday pay (unless you were previously employed in Norway), but you still have the right to take unpaid holidays if you want to. You are entitled to 25 days (5 weeks) of vacation per year. Most supervisors/sections are extremely flexible about when you take your holidays, but you should register your holidays in the HR portal to avoid administrative problems down the line.

General and public holidays are work-free days in addition to holidays. The easiest way to find out which days these are each year is to go to [norskkalender.no](http://norskkalender.no) - the weekdays in red are holiday days, where there will probably be almost no one at work.

The full rules and regulations are online here: [www.uio.no/english/for-employees/employment/working-hours-and-absence/holiday/](http://www.uio.no/english/for-employees/employment/working-hours-and-absence/holiday/)



# SICK LEAVE

You are entitled to sick leave from the first day you begin work here (are physically present).



In cases of sick leave which is **more** than two consecutive weeks (so 11 work days or more), your employment period is extended by a period equivalent to the sick leave period. You will need to visit your doctor to get this. Sick leave is registered automatically, so any sick leave that your doctor registers goes directly to the section leader of the section you are in without you having to do anything.

It is recommended that you discuss your sick leave with your supervisors so that they are updated about the situation and so that you can have a plan for your re-entry when your sick leave ends. If you are on 100% sick leave, it is important that you not work during that time, as it is technically not legal.

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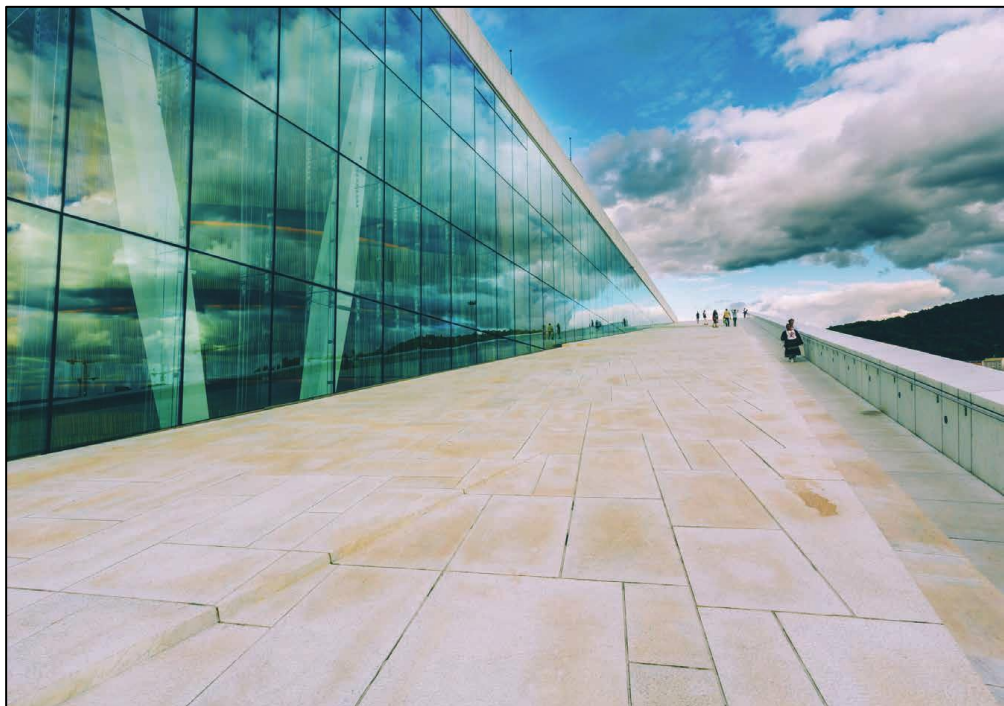
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# Peer Mentoring program

- Booklet is only good for the first few weeks/months
- The information is not personalized
- We need a system in place to ensure good guidance and mentorship even after the critical first few months
- **Peer Mentor program** (suggested by PhD candidate **Martin Falck**)

# Peer Mentoring program

- PhD candidates in 3rd and 4th year would be peer mentors for new students
- Much more adaptable and personal
- New students get advice from someone who has been there
- Mentor also gains experience mentoring (and can earn a limited number of teaching hours)
- Guidelines for Mentors will discuss promotion of **good work-life balance** for their mentees
- For serious situations (problems with their supervisor, health problems, etc.), students should go to the PhD advisor, not their mentor



# Improving the candidate-Supervisor relationship

- A good relationship between PhD candidate and supervisor is critical
- Training for supervisors?
  - Something is in the works

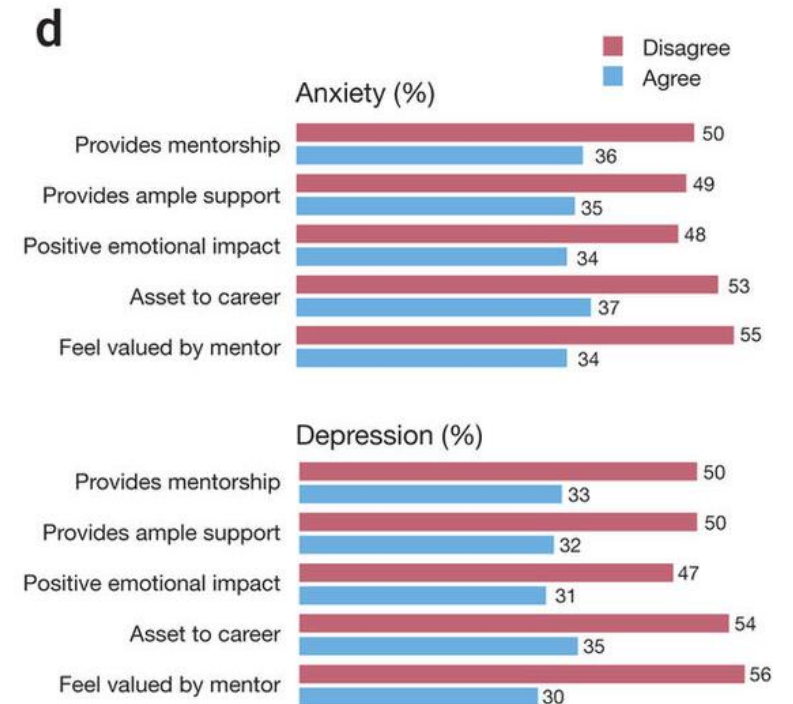


Figure 1. "Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education" in Nature Biotechnology; doi:10.1038/nbt.4089

# Start-up Discussion between PhD and Supervisor

- Conversation tools are available on the UiO web pages (search "**Samtaleverktøy**" under "for ansatte")
- We will promote using this to have an in-depth conversation between candidate and supervisor in the first 3 months
- Having a conversation about expectations can help to avoid future conflicts

**The supervisor**

*What form of supervision is one supposed to have mainly?*

1 Spontaneous talks 2 3 4 5 booked appointment

*How often will some type of supervision/discussion take place?*

Daily every week every second week every month every 6<sup>th</sup> month

*Who should be supervising?*

One supervisor one supervisor together with one or more co supervisor

*Who should take the initiative for planning the supervisor/ PhD candidate discussions?*

1 Supervisor 2 3 4 5 PhD candidate

*How quickly is the supervisor expected to read the manuscript and respond?*

1 day 2 days 3 days 1 week 2 weeks 1 month

*Who is responsible for the Individual Study Plan?*

1 Supervisor 2 3 4 5 PhD candidate

*Research is to be done:*

1 According to a schedule with strict deadlines 2 3 4 5 free from schedules and Deadlines

*Who defines any possible deadlines?*

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# Goal for our new welcome and integration system:

- New PhD candidates will feel welcome here
- Lessen burden of integration on supervisors and new students
- **Reduce stress** for PhD candidates
  - Create tighter bonds between the PhD candidates at IBV
  - Promote a culture of **good work-life balance**
  - **Improve the Supervisor-PhD candidate relationship**
- Lower the threshold for discussing stress and other problems
- Earlier intervention for mental health issues
- Reduce sick leave and drop out

