Newcomers info document

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October 21, 2022

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1 README - How to use this guide

First of all welcome to RU.

This document was made as an independent attempt to help out newcomers to get started. It is not official and the department bares no responsibility for it. If you feel like something is missing or wrong please ask the DCS (Department of CS office = Telma, Ásta, etc for now) to give you the access link I have shared with them so you can edit the project directly.

We have tried to put everything on this guide in a decent categorization. However, there is still some overlap. This means that if you are looking for something and you can't find it (especially if it only borderline belongs to your category of interest) it might also help to do a global word search on the document. If I were you though I would just read the whole thing to get an idea of what is in here, so you can refer to it in the future if it becomes relevant.

Part I

Relevant to everyone

2 Introduction

This document is an attempt at centralizing information that newcomers (especially foreigners) could benefit from when arriving at RU but won't get through official documents and will usually only get over time through hearsay.

The part for PhD students was written independently, but integrated with this document before becoming official.

- For tech issues, including setting up the printers,there's stuff on `help.ru.is` for new employees under Knowledgebade → Staff → Information for newcomers in RU (currently this url) Once set up, the website to which to upload pdfs to print is `http://myq.ru.is:8080/`.

- If you take an Icelandic phone number at Hringdu (one of the cheapest, if not the cheapest, that gives unlimited calls to the EU), you can get the first 2 months free if you're brought in by a current customer (which gets one month free). You should easily find someone that's already one of their customers in the lab.

  Getting an Icelandic phone number can be useful to use some website, and to activate an authentication system called Auðkenni `https://www.audkenni.is/en/`.

- Instead of an Icekey (Íslikill), it is more common that one links their phone number to their kennitala in some authentification system to log into some websites. This is usualy done though your icelandic bank so maybe ask them. Some websites even started to only allow for phone authentication (health services). The name of that is "Rafræn skilríki" (https://www.skilriki.is/) and to register your phone I think one either needs to go at one's bank or to something called Auðkenni (https://www.audkenni.is/). And you might need to take an icelandic phone number at Hringdu/Nova/Siminn/Vodafone... Moreover, of for example you want to not use your icelandic sim card, you can still link it and then if you download the Auðkenni and follow some instructions you can verify your phone number there though wifi.

- The department has **premium subscriptions** to overleaf and grammarly, which I think you will probably heavily need. Get them both and connect all your emails to those accounts.

- There are some **templates** you should be using for reports, thesis, proposal and presentations. Most of them are theoretically meant to be used from the school of technology and not in general (i.e. engineers and CS people who use latex a lot). Here is a links, and here is another one.

  Not everyone is using these, and I am partially aware there is one more for presentations, but I could not locate it. I personalty did not these templates per se. because I could not figure them out for the life of me. I did however create my own and mimic their form but without the layers of latex meta-commands that were in place.

- If you are not from the EU, you will need a series of check-ups when you arrive, as well as paying a fee for the application to the immigration bureau - visa and work permit. These you do not need to cover yourself, the university will pay for it, or reimburse you if you do - contact Ásta for details.

- Finally, if you are renting housing and you have a contract (which is good to have, scams and bad landlords are not rare), you can get some money back to support you due to low income (if that is the case). Google "housing benefit Iceland" and follow instructions. If you live in the student housing your contract is automatically registered, but if not you have to go manually to the district commissioner and register your rental contract. Read carefully online and you should be okay.

3 Traveling for work

During your stay here you are gonna have to travel and go to workshops conferences, summer schools etc to attend or present your work. All of the stuff I mentioned are reasonable things to spend your grant money on in order to travel for work. Your travel money also covers your expenses when you are at a conference like food and transport (not getting drunk :P). Depending on the status of your grant you can also charge to that your trips home (especially if you pair these with giving a talk or two at your home institution). Either-way if the money runs out you pay from your pocket, so it all evens out in the end. Generally, it is best to not let this money sitting. If you spend it all either you supervisor finds more or you pay yourself, but it is much better to spend it all than to leave some (or all, like me during covid). How do you do this though? This is subject to change but overall, right now, there are 3 things to know:

- **Visitor.is** This is a private company that has been hired by RU to book employee travels. All you have to do is tell them where you have to be and for what dates and they suggest a plane ticket for you. If you like it you accept and tell them what grant number to charge it on (ask supervisor for this). Their advantage is you never pay any money or have to do much paperwork. Their disadvantage is everything else. They are not very fast and have high standards about what is an okay flight for you to take. If you don't want luggage it is going to take a while to convince them to not book you with luggage (not because it is hard to say, but they are difficult to listen), and sometimes they still book you with luggage and charge the money to your project (money that does not belong to them). They don't want to book you with long layovers, even if you are willing to spend like 3 more hours at an airport to

save 200 euros and just like with luggage it is very hard to communicate this to them. Once they make a mistake and you complain they never respond. They do not have anything to lose. See Appendix 7 Also, even if they don't make mistakes the communication with them is slow, difficult and repetitive. Yes, even if you just send them a link to the flights you want. Also, they can only book flights, so you still need to pay in other ways for accommodation and registration fees with the remaining options I will explain. Given the above, I usually avoid them altogether.

- **Paying yourself + reimbursement.** This is simple. You pay yourself and find a form that you fill and explain what you spent and submit it to the finance department. The form exists online but I can no longer find it, so it feels like maybe they are moving it around as I am writing this. Your supervisor needs to sign it, and then you give it to Ásta that takes care of the rest. If you are in charge of your own grant then at some point you will have to log in the system and approve of your expenses. Then the money returns in your salary bank account. This is a decent and not too much paperwork option, but in some cases it is heavy on your bank account (for a bit until the money comes back). I always use this for the expenses during a conference for which I keep the receipts (and you should keep your receipts too).

- **Department credit card**: Ásta is in possession of a department credit card. In collaboration with her you can pay with that card for everything you need to pay. Then you send her the receipts and tell her the grant number to charge it on. If you are in charge of your own grant eventually you will have to approve of the cost just like before. This is an easy option and I usually use it for all except the local costs, unless some payment fails or if I am away from the uni and need to book something (or if Ásta is away) in which case I use option number two.

4 Learning Icelandic (for foreigners)

If you want to learn Icelandic you need to sort it out by yourself. The university does not offer it (they used to offer it for staff, not PhD students, but now it is equally zero for everyone, we are working on it tho). That being said, you would think it is not of great importance for foreign staff and PhD students to know Icelandic but that is not the case. Lots of courses have heavy material in Icelandic and locals are slow in updating it (slow = speed could be zero). Also to be able to attend many events you could use Icelandic and many things are only written in it. Locals also tent do switch a lot to Icelandic even when foreigners are there. It is claimed that knowing Icelandic would help with that and with socializing, but I am not going to put my name under this last claim. However overall yes it would definitely help to settle better if you spoke Icelandic, and it could also help you get permanent residency, citizenship or have better career opportunities if you wish to stay longer in academia or in business here. If you decide to learn it, you are gonna have to pay. There are private companies which are expensive, such as multi-kulti and mimir. The courses are about 50.000K isk for 6 weeks, which is a lot, especially if these are your first months, but it do be like that. I apologize, even though it is not my fault. I know it sucks. However, the lately discovered better option, is to register as a student to the university of Iceland. They offer a degree called "Icelandic as a second language" which is a great solution and hopefully our university will catch up to it soon or at least hop in. This degree is much cheaper overall and overs way more material

and options. Only disadvantage is you can register as a student early early in the summer, and if you miss that then you have to wait a year. Better to look into it early in the summer months.

5   Contracts

Your contract will be good to go once you have a kennitala — Icelandic SSN — and an Icelandic bank account. The people in the DCS office will sort that out. If you have an electronic ID you can also sign it virtually. The contract will note if you are in some worker union, what your pension fund is, what your teaching duties are (more on that later) and ofc your salary. For the salary, as of late and if I understand this right, it has been agreed that all equal posts are payed the same (and it goes up by years of work). For example, for PhD students all starting salaries are 412K isk before tax, so if yours is lower then make sure to complain about that (do not complain if it is higher, but I should not have to tell you that). This info might change based on year. This was the case around 2021-2022.

If you applied for the post and it said different stuff than your contract it is best to complain about it early. The office people together with your supervisor are a good place to start. Finally, make sure to ask for something called a tax card. I do not know exactly what it is and how it works, but the office people should know and it can potentially get you out of paying some taxes. Get them to ask it and to maybe explain it to you for your own sake. If you are a foreigner there is also another type of tax reduction you might be able to get, which you can read about earlier in this document.

6   Teaching

In RU everybody can be a Teaching Assistant (TA), even master or bachelor students. The amount of hours if you are a PhD student is meant to be no more than 20% of your total time (so one day per week), but if you do more for one semester then maybe you should not do it at all in the next. In general your contract and your funding determine how much you are supposed to teach at most, and how much you are supposed to get payed for it. Similar percentages are stated for professors and postdocs.

Some general info is that if you are on a department grant then your reaching is 20%. If you are on some other grant (awarded to you or your supervisor), then the teaching requirements are by default none, but it can be agreed upon mutually to actually do some teaching. In those cases you either teach voluntarily (to learn/get experience etc) or you can ask to get payed. This kind of contract is usually used when you are part of a RANNIS (Icelandic research fund) grant, or a Reykjavik University research fund. I do not know the exact rates of payment, but I suspect they can vary depending on who you ask and how you do it. If you are getting a secondary contract to get payed for your teaching then make sure to understand the rates you are given and how your hours are calculated. The department grants require the PhD students to teach some, something that usually predicts that the PhD will last longer than 3 years (although this is not yet configured properly in Iceland).

Regardless if you are getting payed or not you should still not work more hours that expected. It is very common that new PhD students, postdocs, etc, especially non locals who have not studied in RU before, or are unfamiliar with the work culture here, spend more time teaching than they should. When you are assigned to a course, as a TA or instructor, and with a payed contract or not

you should push to be told how many hours this should be taking from you. Small deviations are of course normal but I am suggesting this to avoid extremes. Currently Halgrimur (ask CS office for who that is) is in charge of teaching assistants etc, so he should inform you of your expected duties, and then the instructor of the course should discuss with you how you can help with that time that you will be spending to it. If your duties require much more time than what you should be giving then you should talk to the course instructor and Halgrimur about this. You should not just accept to do more than you should. This is a slippery slope. You also should not be assigned to a course that you do not speak the language of. The material and lectures should be comprehensible to you as a TA or instructor so you can work properly and help others instead of just being lost yourself. Discuss with the appropriate authority (supervisor or staff member) as you are expected to help only with what you understand. If you are the instructor and the working hours just don't add up then you should be granted more TAs to help you (from Halgrimur, and you can suggest TAs you want).

Regarding teaching methods here the students tend to hand a lot of expectations and rights. They are expecting personalized feedback for their submitted assignments and they generally do not look for answers to problems by themselves (aka nobody knows how to/wants to google stuff). This is a matter of style and it can be both bad and good for learning. When it comes to how that affects you it is important to know that you are not obliged to allow them everything. You do not have to grade unreadable assignments and give grades even for stuff that does not make sense. Write a comment about not being able to properly read a solution (due to handwriting, pictures of whiteboards in reports, incohesive language) and request something clear from them. You also are not forced to spend hour after hour repeating material to students who have missed lectures/give you very vague questions about not understanding in general/are confused about a technical skill that is not part of your course (e.g. how do I compile this, write that, use this etc). Direct them to the relative lecture or course material and ask them to invest their time. It is good to have links to help out and then you can spend your time on questions and issues that indeed require an instructor's time.

7 For postdocs, lecturers, research scientists...

- **(The most important, to deal with during the first 3 months)** Information on how to apply to the "foreign expert" status. It gives a significant tax break (increased my net income by about 50,000 ISK / month) This needs to be done in the 3 months following arrival.

  It's on the website of Rannis (`https://www.rannis.is` / `https://en.rannis.is/`), an/the Icelandic institution coordinating research in Iceland, notably a number of research grants. On this url

  click on 'Application system', and log in (more on that later, using IceKey)

  The application is relatively straightforward (and completely online), you only need:

  - CV
  - work contract
  - some text/letter by someone above you hierarchically or that recruited you explaining how rare and precious you and your skills are (at least in Iceland)
  - some text/letter by yourself explaining how rare and precious you and your skills are (at least in Iceland)

- filling up some basic info like name, kennitala, when you arrived...
- a residence certificate (certificate C-122, costs 2,700 ISK), which proves you arrived recently. Can get it from the `skra.is` (Registers Iceland) website, at: click here

For some steps above you need an IceKey (or at least it helps greatly), which is like an account linked to your kennitala for all sorts of administrative stuff. If you don't have one, normally it's easy to get after opening a bank account: go to island.is , try to log in and say "I need an Icekey" and "obtain it through my bank" or something like this.

Rannis claims that they answer requests within 2 or 3 weeks but they definitely didn't respect their deadline for me and it still got accepted so don't panic if that happens.

- To pay at the cafeteria by just giving the first 4 digits of your kennitala and getting the 50% employee discount (money gets directly taken out of your pay). If it's not set up for you automatically, you need to send an email to mannaudur@ru.is ("Mannauður" means human resources or something close).

- Though Rannis does not explicitly say that PhD students will not be considered "senior enough" to get the tax credit, the only application of a PhD student to this tax credit that the author of these lines knows about did not succeed. Every application by a postdoc, lecturer or assistant professor known by the same author knows about has succeeded.

- Some info for foreigners is at https://orion.ru.is/The-employee/For-new-employees/ a pdf printout of the page is in attachment, + a "manual" that's on this page, and the "transport agreement" to get some money for not using a car (note that it's not retroactive, so you might want to apply before the end of the month) Signing the transport agreement and sending it to laun@ru.is gets you 7,000 ISK / month. It has to be done twice a year (once for January-June, once for July-December).

8 A note on the weather in Iceland

The weather occasionally gets very bad in Iceland. Most people will stay at home when that is the case. **Simply put, you should probably not come to the university if there is a red or even orange weather alert.** This applies even if it's your first day or week of work at Reykjavik University.

Check the weather and weather alerts on `https://vedur.is` / `https://en.vedur.is`.

The website `https://belgingur.is/` is also good for checking whether the weather forecast could dramatically change in some area if some cloud drifts a little bit in some direction. It is notably used quite a bit by hikers (it was in fact made by one).

8.1 Glaze

There are some times in winter during which the ground can become extremely slippery due to the sudden formation of a thin layer of ice. While this only occurs at a specific time of the year at specific times of the day, having some ice crampons for your shoes in that situation feels like increasing one's life expectancy by several years. Some places you can buy some: Fjallakofinn or Útilíf.

Same idea applies to bikes and cars. Be careful of slippery roads, have the right gear for it.

9 Bonus stuff / not work related

9.1 Traveling safely

safetravel.is and weather forecast website, especially when hiking in some very empty area.

9.2 Northern lights

The Icelandic Meteorological Office also has northern lights (aurora) forecasting. It's much less precise than a weather forecast, but it's a nice idea to go around a bit away from city lights when there is some solar wind activity (4 or more on their scale) and not too many clouds. At `https://en.vedur.is/weather/forecasts/aurora/`

9.3 Volcanic activity close to Reykjavik

The Reykjanes peninsula has apparently entered a period of volcanic activity in 2020 (this volcanic system cycles between being quiet for about 800 years and being active for about 200 years). You will most likely feel some earthquakes in Reykjavik at some point during your stay. Earthquakes there are normally not very powerful. Buildings are built to withstand them, and the only injuries tend to be something high up falling on someone's head.

The eruptions that took place close to Reykjavik in 2020 and 2022 were pretty safe to get close to, and so will probably be other eruptions in the areas due to the nature of this volcanic system. Just keep these things in mind when going to an eruption site:

- Never walk on recent lava, you do not know what is underneath. It might be cold to the touch and look solid, but if an eruption is going on, there might be liquid lava under the solid surface, and it could replace it very quickly. Even if you are certain there is no liquid lava underneath, there can be air pockets to fall into, and lava can be sharp when it breaks.

- Eruptions produce volcanic gases, which in high amount can be dangerous. Children are more susceptible to it. Respect local authorities if they close access to the eruption site due to gases (see next item).

- Local authorities will close access to the eruption site if the weather conditions make it dangerous (for example, if a lack of wind makes toxic gases accumulate at the eruption site, or on a very foggy day). They might also advise approaching an eruption site from where the wind blows, if there are some significant gases but enough wind to keep it in check.

- As the eruptions occur in uninhabited territory (hopefully), phone coverage can be poor, and there might not be a clear hiking trail yet.

- The Icelandic Meteorological Office website `https://vedur.is/` / `https://en.vedur.is/` should have information about any ongoing eruption, including map(s).

Going to an eruption site not too long after the eruption started will allow you to get much closer than if you wait. The more you wait, the more lava has accumulated around where it is coming out of.

Also, ask Icelanders about these sort of things.

9.4   Hiking

Good websites for hiking trails:

`http://www.iskort.is/` has an interactive map of Iceland at `http://vefsja.iskort.is/` that includes many pedestrian routes and hiking trails that Google Maps or OpenStreetMap won't have.

The tool by Landmælinga Íslands (`https://www.lmi.is/`), who make geographical surveys of Iceland (?), is also good: `https://kortasja.lmi.is/`. During the last eruptions close to Reykjavik, they were also making and updating maps of them with recommended hiking trails.

OpenStreetMap `https://www.openstreetmap.org/` is still pretty good, and you can download a map of Iceland to consult offline with the phone app, which is useful in areas with bad phone network access.

9.5   Food and advice

Professors and the office are nice. Ask them. Dress warm and have waterproof stuff. The weather always looks better though a window than what it actually feels (there is an Icelandic expression about this). Second hand stores are nice. The public pools are even nicer. Try to not lose touch with your hobbies. Ask stuff on reddit/Iceland. Go to RUMPS events. Eat breakfast and fruit. Don't drink more than 4 coffees a day and don't stay longer that 8-ish hours at work. Don't work weekends unless necessary. Go on hikes instead when weather allows it, otherwise you will regret it when you want to go and the weather does not allow it. The westfjords are amazing to visit. Don't be loud in areas that others are working. Recycle. Use a bike in the summer. Don't destroy the nature. Don't eat puffin. Buy alcohol at the duty free when you enter the country. Value your country of origin and stuff your luggage with local products from there you wont find here. If not for you then to share ;).

For African food: AfroZone
For Asian food: fiska.is is best, Vietnam market also is ok downtown
For Easter European food: Euro Market (mainly Polish stuff)
For middle eastern/arabic: Istanbul (skeifan), family market, city market (hamraborg)
For South American food: Blóm í eggi

9.6   Car sharing & scooters & bikes

In Reykjavik there are some other ways than the bus or buying a car to get around. You will probably notice the scooters very early on. They are hard to miss. Those work by downloading an app, finding a free scooter and paying as you go. For renting a bike there is Donkey republic.

A very important think is car sharing. You can look up zipcars and hopp cars. Hopp cars are more expensive, but they have the benefit that they are a good service that works. Also the price is pretty decent overall and it can help loads with moving houses or doing heavy groceries. I cannot say the same good things about zipcars. You can explore at your own risk.

Part II

For PhD students

This is written from a couple of PhD students who wanted to also create a central information hub. I (Elli) am about to finish my PhD studies and have allegedly learned a lot during those, so I am willing to take time and put them in writing and publish them to help the youngsters in the future. Ioana started a semester ago and is fresh and has experienced a lot of the reasons why we need this document first hand. Here you will find advice, facts, and links. Unfortunately all of these things are subject to change, and somebody is going to have to update this document at some point. (Could be you! — exciting![1]).

The first priority should be reading the department PhD degree instructions[2].

10   Your first week

- **Finding a desk**. For this you should consult Telma or Ásta. They are the ones in charge of student and PhD student office matters. They are part of the Computer Science Office (a multi service including reception, administration, office and secretariat posts that keeps everything in here working) . Some professors prefer their PhD students to be in specific places (like in a given area or even in the same office as them), so if that is the case they will tell you were to go. Otherwise anywhere that you are given space is fine. We recommend choosing desks away from busy corridors (people will be able to see your screen) and hopefully close to windows and light. Your desk should have ofc access to electricity and you can connect to the eduroam network. You will have gotten an e-mail about your academic e-mail and password so you can use those to connect here and there. Take note of things you need, and don't be shy about contacting Telma or Asta for things like a(n extra) screen, keyboard, or other research related stuff.

- **Getting your student ID card.** This should be at the reception in The Sun®. It is the round big building in the middle of everything (there is an analogy in there somewhere). When you get accepted in the PhD program you also get an e-mail about requesting a student ID. We recommend doing this before you start because if you are here and it has not been issued yet you cannot open (certain) doors.

- **Setting up printing.** Sigh sigh sigh. Ok so, this can get arbitrarily hard (and for arbitrary reasons). The first thing that should happen is that you receive an e-mail with instructions and passwords (do not lose these :P) and that hopefully should set you up for good. This should get you though connecting your ID to the printers and direct you to instructions on how to print from your machine. If this don't work out then keep reading. If you are using linux it will probably be way more problematic than it should, and it is neither your nor the OS's fault (on the bright side, I personally approve of you using linux - yay!). Never the less: You should have gotten some codes regarding something called myq.

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[1]but seriously, if this helped you out is because we went in the trouble to write it, pls consider giving back by improving it.

[2]Yes, we know, it is hard to find this document on the ru.is webpage (for now).

You need to do two things. One is to link your student ID to your academic e-mail. There is decent(ish) instructions about how to do this here. If you haven't gotten appropriate e-mails with PIN numbers etc talk to the help desk of RU. It is also in The Sun®, near the reception. They are often not there so ask the reception and they go in the back and get them. Also you can e-mail help@ru.is but this takes longer and the quality of the responses has a large variance but a low mean.

The second thing you need to do is manage to print stuff from your machines. I will not tell you how to do this, firstly because it is too long and there is instructions online, and secondly because I never succeeded to do it in a proper manner. However I did discover accidentally something by myself, so I am going to tell you about that. Basically, there is this location you can access when you are connected to the school wify. You can upload documents there and make them print by scanning your card on a printer and pressing print etc. If you open this through mobile then you can also send them to a printer directly even if you are not there and not having scanned your card.

The printers will always say you have to pay to print but just press print and it never charges you (and it is not supposed too).

You can explore more as you like at the help base. Also, if you are amazing at IT stuff and figure printing out (especially for linux), or understand any instructions better than me , them you can blame the IT people but not me. I do math for a living.

- **Getting your contract set up.** See general instructions for all newcomers.

- **Straeto** If you are a local you probably don't need to read this. The Icelandic public(ish) transport is straeto. It is not great but you are gonna need it in the winter almost certainly. The uni will declare you through your kennitala in their system as a student, so once that happens, you can follow the instructions online about how to activate your discounts in the app. Also, yes you need to install two different apps (straeto app for route info, live maps, and out of city tickets, and KLAPP, for city bus tickets and nothing else) on your phone to use straeto properly because they are amazing.

- **Canvas.** You can log in to the student portal called canvas with your newly acquired academic credentials. This is where you interact with courses you are helping, or teaching, or attending. It is a good idea to invest some time to figure out how to navigate it (Google® -> how to use canvas -> YouTube® videos). When you eventually become a teaching assistant or instructor knowing how to use Canvas will be very good for you. If you wanna/have to register to new stuff you have to ask the DCS office for now.

11 The remaining 155+ weeks of your PhD

Once they register you and get you everything from the above section done, you are going to be slowly starting to have some obligations as well. For example, once you get settled you are going to have to (eventually) get a PhD degree. Here are some further comments from us on how to do that. It is very likely you'll need these:

- **Initial course list:** The research council of the department is going to review your past degree transcripts. According to the PhD rules I linked earlier, they will determine if you

need to be getting any courses in order to be ready to be a PhD student and do research. This will probably take place at some point in your first week. Either-way you will not need to take many courses, since you must have somehow finished a masters or equivalent in order to be here. Once you are told what to do then make sure they make sense (honest mistakes do happen, and you have a way better understanding of what the courses you have taken already have taught you), and they will be written formally on some document you will sigh at some point in your first week. You have to finish these in order to graduate. Its best to make sure you are not told to attend courses you already know decently. Make sure the council understands you have that course already and don't need to be repeating it. If the council decides you don't need any courses that's great, but you can also choose to take some (and probably should — I will explain later why). If they say you need to take some its best if you do it as early as possible. It will feel horrible to have to do it on your last year/semester, and no matter what you learn in them it will be almost certain at that point you will not use it in the PhD. If you do not hear back from the office with courses you should take, please double check with them as it is better to be sure that you're all set from the first weeks you arrive, rather than find out 2 years in that you need to take some Methodology 101 course. Extra points if you get it in writing (email is wonderful for this), so you have something to show if asked about it.

- **Other CS courses:** Besides the courses the committee assigns to you I have the following personal advice: The professors and researchers here are amazing (I am not kidding or being ironic here, unlike most of the time). Make sure to explore what they teach especially at a master's level. Don't hesitate to take these courses that seem like they could be useful (and also don't hesitate to ask the individual professors beforehand if they would recommend you taking their course - explain to them what your field is etc). What is going to happen if you do this is that first of all they will learn who you are which is always nice, and see what you do. Moreover, and more importantly you will learn who *they* are, and see if they have some type of expertise that will come in handy later. pls believe me here, lots of PhD students have been helped by asking professors who are not their supervisors about some specific matter that falls in their expertise. Finally, the effort you put in these courses does not go to waste. Most professors would be happy to let you pick the big projects of the course to be in line with your PhD subject and assist you with it. This is really a goldmine for you. If, however, you find courses you are interested in, but for some reason you cannot/do not want to enroll (let's say you don't have the formal prerequisites, or you already have an insane workload for the semester and cannot be bothered with extra exams and assignments), you can ask to audit the course. Many professors understand your situation and would be happy to have you sit in the course, gain some knowledge, but not hand in papers/ not sit the exam. Be brave, ask around. Also, check other departments for their courses, you'd be surprised how interconnected the world of research can be.

- **PhD courses:** Ah yes, those. These are not bad but they are not very science specific. They are university wide-courses that the uni offers to all PhD students. This means you will be in those with PhD students from the law, geology, sports department etc. This is not necessarily bad, although it can get if some other field starts monopolizing the discussion and it turns to something that can by no means be connected to your PhD career at all. The courses are in the style of "how to write a research paper". "how to write a RANNIS grant proposal". "How to teach". "Ethics in academia" etc.

However, these courses do help out and it is good to share and get feedback. Plus they are very short (even though they feel long sometimes). I would say get all of them, or most depending on what your plans in the PhD are at each point focused on — teaching, grant writing, paper publishing etc — I took one 2 times, cause it was way more relevant to me on my third year, and it did help loads (I got my grant!). Especially if you ever plan to write a RANNIS grant get the corresponding course!!! These classes are announced via email Grants: Some of you might have joined RU on a grant, on a professor's grant, or with the intention to apply for one. Every year Rannis opens a grant application (famous Icelandic Research Fund) and most people in the CS department are pushed to apply for it (Deadline 15th of June). Ask people for their previous applications if you need some inspiration, form review groups with fellow students, and stress together, as it's a stressful period for everybody. Results come out in January, so there is plenty of time to forget about it. If you receive good feedback from them, but no grant, you have a chance of getting moved to the RU funding. If you are hired on the CS department fund, you are registered on the travel fun of your supervisor, so any money you receive for travelling or conferences depends on them. Your supervisor and you can agree on applying for other grants for specific projects, travelling (Erasmus for example), etc. Ask around or google some that might apply to you and your case.

- Regarding **teaching**, see the relevant general description.

- **PhD thesis proposal:** Is a document you should be writing during your second semester. You can find instructions for it on the PhD rules. Your supervisor is supposed to start assembling a committee (which does not have to be the same as the one that you will get for your PhD even though it looks like that in the rules). The committee cannot be comprised of people you have publications with, and cannot be comprised of people of one gender only (but it can be given an exception if some special reason is explained). All you have to do is write the document. For me personally more that 40 pages is an overkill, unless you have too many pictures and tables etc. People can ask for more, and maybe they are right to do so, but it is good to know that in the general case you should be okay with 25-30 pages From a fellow PhD student perspective, this should contain: stuff you have learned so far about your field and some initial questions you started exploring, andsome preliminary results. No need to have publications yet (especially if you manage to get it done by the end of your first year as it asks for). Make sure to write clearly and motivate your approach. Don't just write theory/science. Motivate your choices and give some context and background. Your supervisor should give you good feedback on it and advice and try to do it timely. If they give you huge feedback in the last minute it is not alright (I will tell you how to handle stuff like that later). Delays do happen and you are the last person that should be blamed for that. It is not your job to find your committee, contact them or ask around for these procedures. **In fact you should avoid doing if they were outside your jurisdiction.** You will eventually present this and get feedback from a committee for that. It is easy to get defensive when you are judged for your work, but try not to. The professors are great and their advice will make you into a better scientist.

- **PhD progress report:** Is a (much shorter) document that you should be writing about a year after you defend your thesis proposal. It is supposed to be an update on how things are going. It does not have to be more than 10 pages and you do not have to defend it or anything like that. just talk about stuff you have managed or why other stuff failed and

what you learned and how you adapted. You can mention if you have been doing teaching or attending courses, conferences and workshops, and if you have helped organizing any scientific events.

- **Annual interviews:** Annual interviews are a good thing. The research council (those guys that read your transcripts and decided what courses you needed) along with (for now) Telma from the office have a one-on-one with you without your supervisor. There you can say how you have been doing. It is a great time to mention if something has been going wrong. These are private and without your supervisor and it is where you are supposed to mention any stuff you would like to be improved or that you have faced difficulty with. The feedback you give will not be shared with your supervisor directly, but all the gathered feedback will be used for improving the student life and will be addressed during staff meetings without any direct ties to you. You are gonna have to be determined in those if you need to say something tough to bite, but you can do it. Here are some examples from me (not personally just because I talk a lot to a lot of people) to break the ice and help you find the right words.

  -I never get good/timely feedback. "I always get feedback only about -this is a typo, -this is a grammatical error, and never about the content of my work. Then my paper gets rejected because I missed an important science thing". Or "The feedback always comes at the absolute last moment and after I have asked for it many many times. I don't have enough time to fix things and I end up stressed, overworked, and failing". "I often disagree with my supervisor about where to submit and then when I listen to him my papers get rejected because of bad matching (as the review comments indicate)".

  -I am working way too much. "I was supposed to TA for one course and it ended up being 90% of my time. After that I still have to do my other PhD stuff. What am I supposed to do?? "

  -I never meet my supervisor and I don't get enough guidance. "My supervisor is very busy and is hard for them to find time for me. I understand their heavy schedule, but I don't know what to do and I don't get enough guidance."

  Of course the above examples are very very rare, but this is why it is hard to handle if it somehow happens to you, and that is why I am writing these. Otherwise it is way more common to just want to mention in these interviews some minor recommendations that would assist PhD students or you.

- **Graduating**: To graduate you need a thesis defence and a dissertation. You don't have to do it in exactly 3 years,and the time varies, with an average of 4(ish) years for our type of degree . The committee is your supervisor's job and it is described in the PhD rules. You can discuss your dissertation with your supervisor and figure out how to do it. Generally there are two kinds of dissertations. So far the uni has been fine with either. The first and more transitional is where you write a big big document telling one big story about one specific field and how you contributed on one thing and refined it very much. This is called a monograph (google it) and it is meant to be in a book style where you find a way to put your contributions in order and present them in a single story line. This kind however is getting less and less popular, as people tend to branch a lot and not stay super focused to one and only on question in their PhDs (myself included). Moreover as times are changing it is usually the case that you take time to write papers and publish your work before you graduate, which means that your research is naturally fragmented due to that. It also means you take time during your

studies to present your results properly, something that means that you end up having to redo this writing if you decide to put them in a monograph style. The second and more modern kind is a collection dissertation (google it). This is usually made out of two parts, one that is an original text that introducing all the fields you worked in, and explains why they are relevant to the world and to each-other. There you motivate your work, explain how it flowed in your PhD studies (this result lead to the necessity for that experiment etc), and give any necessary knowledge and broader background. Then there is a second part where you just attach your existing publications as you have explained them in the previous part and just put them there verbatim. You can adapt them a bit of course to avoid repetition and add all necessarily proofs or extra examples, since at a dissertation there are no page limits (to the best of my knowledge). Once you and your supervisor write this and finalize it you send it to the committee the supervisor has formed. It is important to let the committee have about a month to read this and send you feedback before you defend it.

All dissertations are meant to be printed in B5 page size (probably at some point there will be a nice template distributed that complies with this). This printed copies are meant for the library, and according to our department they are not very important for our priorities (meaning the department mostly cares about the online copies you have to submit to skemman and opin visindi - see instructions at the library website and our department). However, you still have to print it (by yourself) until the rule changes. Thus when you write it make sure your plots graphs etc fit the B5 size.

Moreover, in order to print your dissertation you need a BOOK COVER. this is not the front page, but a separate pdf file distributed by the department. This will be printed on hard paper and used to bind your book (and thus it also contains space for the spine of the book etc.). I am linking here the pdf I was eventually given, as an example of what you need. You have to provide this things to whatever printing shop you go to so they can print your copies.

If you are using latex then the template I made and used can be found here. Hopefully though the department will distribute something official pretty soon. This is only a placeholder.

- **Semester meet-ups:** This has not yet been implemented but it was discussed and I think it should be done so I am going to describe it here for everyone to have access to it. Every semester, all PhD students, supervisors, some research council members and the office representative (i.e., right now, Telma) meet. Each PhD student is given 2-3 minutes to say which semester and phase of their PhD they are in and to give a super short elevator pitch about some science/research work they are currently doing. New PhDs introduce themselves to the community and everyone gets to have an impression about what others are doing. The office representative also gives and overview of what should be happening at some point in the next semester depending on each student's stage (i.e. those of you in semester x have to submit this by time y). This is important as all supervisors, students and generally everyone is aware of what they should do, and it has clearly and publicly been agreed upon. No surprises at the end of

- **Research Centers:** Most researchers in the CS department belong to at least one Research Center (CADIA, CRESS, ICE-TCS, FINTEC, CISDAS etc). You can find those online easily so I will not put links here. The centers do research, collaborate, give seminars and organize science stuff. You should participate to those, definitely to the ones of the center you are in, and even maybe events and seminars of other centers. This is important and you should

just listen to me about it because I am finishing my PhD and I am wise. These centers also have retreats, writing/reading groups, or general encouragement to publish together, share info and act as a closer community.

12   Good for you to do

First of all, RUMPS is good for you. RUMPS is a PhD and Master student group of the Computer Science department. It is chill and has a few chill events now and then. Board game nights, pizza, a party or two per year are the normal stuff plus visiting companies (e.g. science trips) to talk about business for potential job seeking grads and mostly just for fun and curiosity. It is a good way to meet people for a start, and just make some friends in general. You can find them on Facebook or by chatting with other PhD students at the department. Part of the ship, part of the crew.

12.1   Tools, perks, useful to know

Read the general instruction written in earlier in this document for all newcomers. You should also book a meeting with the **library** staff and they will talk to you about open access policies, ORCID numbers, and what they can offer you. They will explain why open access is good and why you want to have to full version of your papers somewhere openly available, if for example but due to page limits or closed access policies, the conference you published in is not satisfactory on that. Before graduating you also need to upload your thesis to skemman via our library. See here.

It would also be good to have a page on **Arxiv, and a personal web-page**. There you can upload your manuscripts whether they have been accepted or not, so that they are openly available. You can talk to about the research center (CRESS, CADIA, ICE-TCS etc) you belong in to give you some place to put your web-page and they should be able to host it for you while you are a PhD student here.

We have already discussed **Straeto**.

HI also offers a writing help counseling for free. See here and act accordingly.

Unfortunately this is the last of the perks. We have no more, for now. It has been discussed to register PhD students with contracts as stuff and thus also gain some staff privileges such as the Malid discount but for now that is only fiction. If you really want to get this you should probably talk to RUPA (see PhD socialism section 12.2).

You have 2 days of **holiday** per month. Most people in RU are on holiday in July, but you do not have to be if you have stuff to work on or you decided so with your supervisor. Use Virtus.is to see where your money goes (tax breakdown)

(Other) Student discounts There are some limited student discounts you can get. Mostly they are though the student association of the uni of Iceland. Check them out and see what applies to you. Check them out and see what applies to you. Many restaurants/bars/gyms/whatever have student discounts, so do ask before buying/signing up for them, even if not in the link above. Also the student cellar is the student association-run-bar at the uni of Iceland and people with student IDs have happy hour prices all night all the time.

12.2   PhD student socialism (hehehe)

The most important thing to talk about here is RUPA. They are the RU PhD association and they have successfully managed to support PhD student rights. For example, they have ensured that all

PhD students must be getting payed 412.000 kr/month before tax (currently - this can change, but it should still stay the same for everyone if it does). If your salary is not that, you should probably ask your supervisor, the CS office people and even RUPA itself what is going on. Same applies if the advertised salaries and funding data (for example if you are in a RANNIS grant or not - which affects how much you teach etc) is not the same in your contract.

12.3   Your supervisor

Your supervisor should be your number one supporter in this. The professors here are very nice, and they tend to honestly want to help. However, we are academics, and not necessarily managers, teachers, accountants and all the other duties that are often assigned to academics along the way. This means that sometimes it might be harder for your supervisor(s) to plan things and stay organized, or to know exactly rules and regulations. I will write here some basic stuff that for most supervisors-students come easily, but it is never bad to state them, just in case. Mostly you should expect:

Weekly meetings. Set up a meeting as soon as you settle in and keep it. Ideally it will not change throughout your PhD, although of course it might and that is okay as long as it exists. Especially during covid such meetings stopped being necessary and I cannot say at all this was a good thing.

To be told what is expected of you each semester. Overall there is a plan for you to follow, but time moves in many ways and it is best to be able to trust your supervisor to inform you about things coming up in your PhD progress. If they do not do this it is not your fault. If you believe they are slow and not keeping everything under control you should ask for help and advice from the research council (annual interviews people as explained earlier). Assign committees, inform you about your duties, meet with you for approximately 1 hour per week (best to set up fixed weekly meeting).

To be given good instructions. Supervisors are supposed to work with you and direct you. In your weekly meetings you should be able to discuss ideas and it is usually the case that supervisors listen to yours and help you materialize them, encourage you to explore them, but also help you understand when your ideas are bad (which happens to everyone), and help you understand why. Doing research is a two way street and you should be able to find your place in those meetings to both be productive, but also to listen and learn. The lack of either activity I would say is not ideal. However there is more. In your PhD you are gonna have to write and publish papers. Writing is particularly hard no matter how good you are at it. Your supervisor is responsible to advise you where to submit your papers, how to present your good ideas, read your work and help you perfect it. They should also advise you when it comes to managing your expectations, and they should direct you properly to where your ideas fit the best. They should be able to also direct you on how to write a document, such as your thesis proposal, and have a good idea about what you are supposed to write and how much of it. I have given instructions on this before, so hopefully your supervisor should be able to advise you further, reduce (and not increase) confusion and give you better specific directions. Their directions should be reasonable and not just come with no explanation. ("Write more" is not a very helpful suggestion for example.)

Basically, as your supervisor works with you and helps you, they should be **providing good feedback.** That is, feedback that is not only commenting on language issues (which grammarly could also handle), but instead also improving your content. Examples of this are understanding what you mean to say and helping you say it, thinking of ways to strengthen your arguments,

finding weaknesses and calling you to think of how to answer them and many many more. On top of the above, supervisors should give you feedback in time. Especially when it comes to things with deadlines, a supervisors should make sure to return a document after reasonable time they were given it, and with reasonable time remaining until the submission. Your supervisor for example can ask you to have something ready a month before a deadline, but then they should also make sure to return you the feedback at least 2-3 weeks before the deadline as well. If the above don't happen (which I doubt, but it is good to be safe) you can always talk to the research council, or mention it in your annual interview). If you are unsure of how things are "supposed to be" (which we all went through, no worries), reach out to your supervisor and open a conversation about it. If you don't feel comfortable about it, or are unsure of your ideas/expectations, ask your fellow PhDs what their experience has been like, and what you should expect. If that's not something you are comfortable with, reach out to the administration. If that's not something you want, google it.

13 Who to ask for things

Just a small list here as some stuff have been repeated:

- CS office: For procedures with your PhD, for finding out who else to ask about other things.

- Reception in The Sun®: Stuff about your student ID, reception things, maybe getting some types of office supplies. To find someone from the help desk if no-one is there.

- IT department: for printing, screens, help with software and hardware in classrooms, for helping you organize conferences at RU.

- International office: if you are international, for intentional student and staff events and info, and for help to move to Iceland. I will not write a guide here about how to move to Iceland. This is relatively well-documented online, and I do not want to write my non-expert and possibly wrong impression about complicated procedures here, and potentially advice you wrongly. The international office of RU has decent guides and you should follow those.

- Student study counselors: If you have some general student issue and need some guidance, especially when it involves the Icelandic educational system and university regulation.

- CS research council and Telma: If you have issue with your PhD or supervisor. Or for guidelines when your supervisor does not know.

- Building administration: For booking spaces and organizing events. If you mention you are a student they will say no alcohol at events, so if you don't say it or organize it as an ambassador to a not student body that is best.

- Your supervisor: ask often about anything. It is for the best.

Appendix

A brief (foreigners) perspective of þetta reddast

Disclaimer: I am not writing the following about people in our department at all. However, locals know about it, and thus it is only fair I tell everyone else how to deal with it as well, for equality reasons.

Here we go. Lots of people here say þetta reddast often and they think it means "problems will work themselves out". Often it means "I will not make a priority to help you with this because I do not care very much". In general things take time, people don't respond or respond vaguely to emails. They will also avoid doing something or not do it even though they said they would. I am told the problem is me because I do not understand the local culture. I.e. I have been advised to insist heavily on things because that is what the locals would do it something is urgent, as the fact that non insisting implies nothing getting done is very well rooted in their mentality. If that is the case, then by learning from my mistakes I advise you to push people a lot if they seem slow and are not doing their job. Otherwise you will repeat my mistake of being a foreigner and thinking asking for people to do their job should be enough in the first attempt.

Other advice includes: Make sure to CC people more important than you to unanswered e-mails so it is obvious at least you did your best. Always call instead of emailing if you can. Don't wait and hope they will remember. Send lots (and I mean lots) of reminders. Get written confirmation of stuff (after face to face chats send an e-mail with all info and get them to respond "yes this is correct" to it).

Etc.