

# White Rose University Consortium: College of Arts and Humanities

## Arts and Humanities Research Culture in Germany

### Academia

- [Norms of Behaviour](#)
- [Applications and Registration](#)
- [Costs](#)
- [Funding](#)
- [PhD](#)
- [Beyond PhD](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Web Links](#)



### ***Norms of Behaviour***

#### *Modes of address*

In all lectures, tutorials and seminars (no matter how big or small), you are best off raising your hand to indicate that you would like to ask a question or contribute to a discussion. A student then waits until the lecturer has indicated that it is your turn to speak.

In emails, just like in class, initially it is best to be as polite as possible. Address your lecturers as 'Sie' not 'Du', be friendly and patient. In written correspondence it helps being well-informed and ask a very specific question. Some lecturers/professors receive many more emails than they can handle each day. You might be more successful getting an answer when you approach your lecturer just before or just after the session he or she is teaching you. Always address people with their highest academic title and surname. They might offer you to drop the title, but do not expect to be offered the 'Du'. This doesn't mean they're unfriendly, it's just not seen as appropriate in a professional setting.

When writing a formal email you would begin like this: 'Sehr geehrter Herr Prof. Müller, ...' and sign 'Mit freundlichen Grüßen und herzlichem Dank, [your full name]'. Generally, from an English perspective, this might all seem a little stiff and formal, but sticking to these few rules will help you in the long run.

#### *Dress*

Dress as you would in England when you come to class, but do avoid wearing your comfy grey pants if you can. Have a look around yourself and check what others are wearing – it'll give you a good idea of what is appropriate. When you give a presentation, you might want to go for smart-casual clothing, and for your viva, smart clothing is probably best.

[Back to top](#)

## ***Applications and Registration***

### *Essential documents*

The documents applicants from the UK must present to the university of their choice are largely the same as those for German applicants. At the University of Münster, for example, you apply online, and then submit certified photocopies of your original A-level certificates, a CV, and a printed copy of the online application. There are several places where you can get your photocopies certified (make sure to bring along the originals!): at most town halls (for a small fee), or at your university's AstA (once you are enrolled, this is usually for free).

On top of that, mainly if you are intending to study a subject that is taught in German, you must prove sufficient proficiency of German in order to be able to follow lectures, and write papers and exams. At Münster, this is considered to be the case when you can prove a proficiency of level B1 (according to the European standard guidelines). There are two ways of doing this: You can either submit a certificate of having passed e.g. one of the following tests: Telc Deutsch B1, Deutsch-Test für Zuwanderer B1, Deutsch für den Beruf B1, Goethe Zertifikat B1, onDaF B1. If a prospective student has not yet taken a language test, he or she can apply to take part in a preparatory language course that the university offers. At Münster, for example, this should be done in May, or November (depending on if you want to start studying in the summer or winter semester).

You can for more information on applying to a German university on the [Study in Germany](#) website.

### *Time scale*

It is never too early to start looking into the application process. There might be additional documents or photocopies required that can slow down your application process. If you leave plenty of time, you can relax about such eventualities. To stay with the example of the University of Münster, to begin your studies in a winter semester (usually October), you can apply online from the beginning of August and until the 15<sup>th</sup> of September. In order to begin your first semester at university in a summer semester (usually April), apply between the beginning of February until 15<sup>th</sup> of March. Later applications will not be possible, and do not expect any exception being made for you if you are late.

### *Who to contact*

It is always advisable to contact the 'Studierendensekretariat' or the International Office to double-check you have understood the application process so you submit all the necessary documents.

If you are applying for a PhD, it may be even more important to have been in touch with your potential supervisor(s) and have their consent to take you on as their doctoral student. As this is the most important working relationship you will have over the next three years or more, make sure you and your prospective supervisor have discussed all the questions you might have about embarking on a PhD, and that you have considered your supervisor's as well as your own

expectations. If possible, do visit the university and your prospective supervisor for a face-to-face conversation.

### *Application process*

It is very easy as long as you have all the required documents at hand. Overall, as in other European countries, there has been a move towards electronic submission and applications should be possible remotely, even if followed by registration (a few months later) in person. On the day of your registration, you would typically have to bring along documents such as a passport photo, your original school leaving certificate (stating your A-Levels) and other original documents, and proof that you are covered by a health insurance. If in doubt about any of these points, make sure you seek clarification beforehand. The University of Stuttgart, for example, has an office just for dealing with applications from abroad: the 'Admissions Office for Foreign Citizens and EU-Citizens for enrolment'. The University of Hamburg has a similar office, their [Servicestelle Internationale Doktorand](#) offers support before and after arrival. Most universities nowadays will have similar points of contact for you.

### *Study Visa / Residency Permit*

UK citizens will not require a study visa or residence permit. If you hold a non-EU nationality, you will have to present a photocopy of your passport and a residence permit on the day of your registration.

[Back to top](#)

## **Costs**

### *Tuition fees*

Since February 2013, there are no tuition fees anymore at German state universities. Originally introduced in 2005, they were around 500 Euros per semester. While this might seem comparatively little from an Anglo-American perspective, these fees were discussed controversially from the start in the German public and media, and accompanied by students' protests, were eventually dropped in all of the Bundesländer. The [Insider Higher Ed](#) website has more on the topic and the surrounding debate.

Semester contributions are to be distinguished from general tuition fees. There is a small semester contribution you will have to pay before the beginning of each academic semester (see Semesterbeitrag and Rückmeldung in the glossary). This varies from one university to another, but you can expect it to be between 100 to 200 Euros a semester. This money goes towards e.g. supporting the university kindergarten, the subsidised Mensa, and similar social projects and administration costs. Often this means that in return you get a free train and bus pass for your region, the value of which is much higher than the semester contribution you pay. In Germany, universities do not distinguish between domestic and international students. All students pay the same semester contribution as determined by their university, and no tuition fees (an exception of course are private universities).

### *Living costs*

In comparison, living costs in Germany are slightly lower than in the UK. In particular rent and food is (sometimes considerably) cheaper in Germany. Of course, what you need per month depends highly on your lifestyle and also which German city/region you decide to live in. In many cities in what was formerly the GDR, e.g. in a town like Magdeburg, you can still live off very little, especially because your rent will only be around 200 Euros a month for a room in a flat share. In e.g. Munich, Frankfurt am Main or Hamburg, on the other hand, you must expect your rent to take around 400 Euros a month out of your budget. For more details and estimates on living costs visit the [DAAD](#) website.

[Back to top](#)

## **Funding**

### *Scholarships*

Scholarships for high achievers are available for you at any stage of your studies – UG/ PGT/ PGR. While every university student in Germany will tell you these are hard to get, most lecturers and those students holding scholarships are very encouraging when they hear you would like to apply for one. They will normally help you by sharing their experience of the application process. The success rate is higher than most people think – around 40 % of students applying for scholarships manage to secure one.

There are twelve big funding bodies (Stiftungen) in Germany which are supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung](#) (BMBF). Visit their joint website to find out what they are about, and in what ways they are different from each other: While they do not differ in financial support (typically calculated on the basis of your parents' income, therefore varies from student to student – some only receive the minimum of 300 Euros, plus 'ideological' support/ mentoring, other receive a few hundred Euros on top of that each month), they do differ in terms of 'ideological' support or extra-curricular learning and opportunities. You will find that most of these funding bodies loosely link to a political perspective or party, e.g. the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is a social democrat funding body and the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung stands for liberal values (loosely affiliated with the FDP, which is the biggest liberal party in German parliaments), etc. Two of the 12 big Stiftungen, namely the Cusanuswerk (Catholic) and the Studienwerk Villigst (Protestant), are Christian funding bodies. An exception is the [Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes](#), or German National Academic Foundation. It is non-political and non-denominational, as well as that it is Germany's biggest funding body.

It is important to get an overview over the big funding bodies and understand how they differ in their perspectives and the seminars and network/ mentoring they offer. Choose the Stiftung you will apply to wisely – the more you match their profile, the higher your chances to get in. Tailor your CV to the funding bodies' values, stress voluntary work that you might have done, political commitment if you can boast any, instruments you play or other hobbies that might set you apart from other applicants.

Another type of Stipendium is the [Deutschlandstipendium](#). It arose from a national initiative by the German government in 2011. Per month, you would receive 300 Euros. For the politically undecided, this might be the right Stipendium as it works with industry partners, and is less interested in your political orientation. The way you spend this money, as with all scholarships, is entirely up to you.

This similarly applies to smaller, e.g. subject-specific funding bodies of which there are growing numbers. An internet search should give you an overview over opportunities out there. For instance, if you study architecture, check [Detail Das Architekturportal](#) as just one of the opportunities offered by less big funding bodies to gain a scholarship. The [StartStiftung](#) offers scholarships to students with a migratory background (typically students who grew up in Germany but whose parents immigrated to Germany from e.g. Turkey). Or, if you are coming from a working-class background, [ArbeiterKind](#) might be the right funding body for you.

A comprehensive website that helps you find a Stipendium that matches your life experiences and political/ societal beliefs is [My Stipendium](#) - unfortunately, so far, the site is only available in German.

Beware: It is not allowed to hold two scholarships from different public funding bodies at once. An exception can be if your funding comes from a smaller, private fund (e.g. industry-related), i.e. you might be able to combine this with e.g. the Deutschlandstipendium. A further exception is Erasmus money; this can nowadays be combined with funding from e.g. the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes. However, these things change – always double-check at the time you apply. Note also that the scholarships mentioned in this section are designed for students completing a whole degree in Germany (whether undergraduate or postgraduate) – if you are only planning to spend a year or so abroad in Germany, but know that you will then return to the UK, it is probably not worth the effort to apply for any of the above scholarships.

The best place to start looking for funding is the website of the [DAAD](#), the German Academic Exchange Service. Their online database is an excellent first port of call for both PhD students and junior scholars, and even senior academics that are planning e.g. short stays at another institution. Filling in arts and humanities as subject area and British as nationality currently finds you 24 scholarship opportunities.

If you plan to do your PhD in Germany, there is other/more funding available, see the [academics.com](#) website. A major funding source for PhDs and academia in general is the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), or in English the German Research Foundation.

An overview of the German funding organisations for PhD students can be found on the [Research in Germany](#) website. [EURAXESS](#) is another good port of call for internationally mobile researchers; they offer an extensive database of funding programmes for graduates and doctoral students planning a research stay in Germany.

It is worth researching the various scholarships available to you as soon as you know that you are planning to take up your studies in Germany. With many of them, you can apply at the same time that you apply for the degree course of your choice. Others might want to see proof of your

acceptance at a German university first. Up until a few years ago, it was generally the case that you could not apply any earlier than from your third semester onwards; this was mainly to see how you would be coping at university (as opposed to maybe having had very good marks at school). This practice is now more or less obsolete. There are typically two or three deadlines a year for you to submit an application, set individually by each funding body, so they might vary slightly. The green [Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung](#) for instance has two deadlines: 1 September and 1 March of each year.

There is only one application period a year for the Deutschlandstipendium: This is in the Wintersemester.

### *Student loans*

If you have no luck getting into a scholarship programme or decide against applying for one, there is another popular way of funding your studies/ living costs: BAföG. BAföG is short for Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz, or Federal Training Assistance Act, which provides state funding for school pupils and students to pursue education and training. The stated aim of BAföG is to enable young people to take up education or training, especially if their individual economic circumstances might make this difficult. It works like this: Students receive 50 % of BAföG aid as a state grant and 50 % as an interest-free loan. This loan must be repaid in installments once you have finished your studies and work in a job. You do not have to be German to apply for BAföG, but you must have intentions to stay and live in Germany after finishing your studies.

There is more information about BAföG on the [Hochschulk Kompass](#) website and, if you speak German, visit the [BAföG](#) website.

Another option enabling you to support yourself is taking out a so-called Bildungskredit. This 'education loan' is available to pupils and students of full age who are in an advanced phase of their studies, that is, e.g. studying for an MA or a PhD, or being a mature student. Non-German students can apply for this loan only if they fulfil certain conditions, similar to those required in the BAföG regulations – check their website (German only) or visit [Bundesverwaltungsamt](#) website. If you do not speak German, contact the International Office at the university of your choice. They will be able to assist you in finding out if you are eligible for a Bildungskredit.

For more information on the Bildungskredit and to compare other loans offered by various banks (besides the financial assistance from BAföG, scholarships, or the education loans), see the information provided by the [Hochschulk Kompass](#) website.

[Back to top](#)

## **PhD**

### *Structure of doctoral programme*

The traditional individual path to a PhD remains the most common in Germany, even though more and more excellent graduate schools are established. When undertaking a traditional/individual PhD, you have typically only one professor supervising you. You as the doctoral student work on

your supervisor's specialist subject in consultation with the professor, but you do so largely independently. This form of PhD study offers a great deal of flexibility (i.e. it is up to you when, where, and how much you work), but demands a high degree of personal initiative and responsibility, maybe more so than you might be used to from completing your M.A. in the UK (especially if it was a taught M.A. you were doing). How long a traditional individual doctorate takes depends on your own time schedule – or on the duration of your work contract (if you have one). The Regelstudienzeit is often stated as being three years. Taking three to five years to complete a PhD is normal in Germany. In graduate schools (structured programs leading to you obtaining a PhD), the level of supervision might be higher, and there is generally more structure (e.g. in forms of lectures or events you are expected to attend) and more interaction/networking opportunities with other academics and PhD students from your subject area, as you are likely to be one of a larger group of PhD students affiliated with a department or a whole faculty. Therefore, in graduate schools, there might be slightly more 'pressure' to ideally finish the PhD within the Regelstudienzeit of three years.

### *PhD support*

PhD support will vary from university to university, subject to subject, and even depending on who is your supervisor. Make sure you understand the various forms of support there are at the institution of your choice, what is expected of you, and how to best manage your studies.

Supervisors will meet with you on a regular basis to discuss your work, progress, and plans for next steps. Note that it is expected that you ask for and arrange the meetings, just like it is you who will approach the supervisor to have them read drafted work whenever you feel it is necessary – if you do not do so, the assumption will be that you need more time to work by yourself, and people will leave you to it. Overall, the supervision of doctoral candidates is as intensive as you want it to be. Your Doktorvater or Doktormutter has your interests at heart – after all, your later success will fall back on them, too.

Additional ways of getting the input you need to advance your work is by presenting at a Kolloquium that your supervisor or one of his/her colleagues in the department might run. There, you and other PhD students of the Dept. might come together on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, and discuss each other's work by e.g. practicing conference papers etc.

### *PhD training*

What other training you undertake is often up to you. Some people decide to concentrate fully on working on their theses, others from the beginning actively seek out opportunities such as workshops and seminars offered at their university to take part in. These could be offered by the careers service that every university has, in form of mentoring programs some universities offer, or something your supervisor recommends to you. With view to equality, the University of Frankfurt, for instance, offers apposite mentoring for doctoral students in the arts and humanities, for international students or for women especially. If you are part of a graduate school, there may be certain research training modules you are expected to take part in already built into your



academic year. The [Humboldt University](#) in Berlin specifically offers mentoring for PhD students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study, to help master their next career step.

Generally, try and set yourself goals with your own research training in mind: If there are public speaking workshops offered for your faculty, go along. Or there are other gaps you identify in your experience/ skill set, e.g. you have never organised a conference or you would like to become an editor for a postgraduate journal. In such cases, make sure to get involved with the people you know at your university who have set up such a journal or are involved in organising a big conference. They will most likely be grateful for the help you offer – and in turn, you get valuable experience out of this, plus a boost for your CV.

Overall, there is often no formalised training needs analysis – it is down to the individual student to identify their needs and seek to work on them (e.g. by booking yourself onto seminars etc.). A traditional doctorate therefore does not typically involve compulsory attendance at lectures or seminars. The focus is on your individual research for the doctoral thesis. If you are not yet tied into a doctoral network (e.g. as part of a graduate school, or through your funding body), do therefore make an effort to establish contacts with other researchers or doctoral students. Most if not all universities nowadays do offer platforms of some kind where doctoral students can meet and exchange views, for example, or in weekly or monthly doctoral student colloquia (see glossary: Kolloquium) where different doctoral research projects by other PhD students affiliated with your department are presented and discussed under the guidance of a professor at that institution.

If you are doing your PhD in a more structured environment, e.g. as part of a graduate school, it is more likely that there are compulsory lectures or seminars for you to attend, and possibly interim assessment of some form. To take the graduate school 'Exzellenzcluster: Religion und Politik' at the University of Münster as an example, there it is part of the programme that PhD students have bi-weekly mentoring meetings plus one meeting per semester with both their supervisor and another mentor. They have to attend one seminar per week in the first two semesters, are expected to organise and attend workshops, and have their progress monitored at the end of the first and second year on the basis of a report they write. In general, therefore, structured PhD programmes as offered by graduate schools/Graduiertenschulen/Graduiertenkollegs (different terms for the same thing, used interchangeably and equally often) are the ones that offer the kind of support with mentoring, targets and deadlines students from the UK would maybe expect to find. This does not mean, however, that a traditional individual doctorate is 'worse' in any way; it is simply less formalised.

### *Monitoring*

Monitoring may vary, and in some places, your work may not be monitored in any formalised or standardised way. However, to take the graduate school 'Practices of Literature' (University of Münster) as an example, there, the basis of your PhD is a 'Betreuungsvereinbarung' (agreement of supervision) you will have agreed upon and signed together with your supervisor(s) at the very beginning of your first year. This document, functioning as a contract between you and your



supervisor(s), lays out your and their expected commitment, so you have got something to rely on. An example for such a document can be found on the [University of Muenster](#) website.

This particular *Betreuungsvereinbarung*, for example, specifies that the PhD student hands in a 50-page work sample after the end of the first year, but it also specifies that supervisors are expected to have read and discussed your work within 2 weeks whenever you have handed something in. It is a good way of managing expectations and gives both sides something to rely on. Many other universities will have similar templates you can use.

### *PhD thesis*

The expected length of a thesis might vary considerably from subject to subject. Theses authored in the arts and humanities are normally longer than in the sciences. Around 250 pages in the arts and humanities can be considered standard. However, there often is no upper limit, which can lead to theses commonly being twice or three times as long. You will normally learn early on what is expected – the length of your thesis might be determined in the agreement you sign with your supervisor(s) at the start of your PhD studies.

Formal requirements will have been outlined to you by your university or faculty at the beginning of your studies. This normally includes choice of citation style, minimum or maximum length, and sometimes includes margins and font size, as often, the length of the thesis is stated in pages rather than words.

In order to submit your thesis, check your university's deadlines for submission. At the University of Cologne for instance, there are 7-8 possible deadlines per year, specified on their website under the headings *Termine&Info*, *Promotionstermine*. To be handed in together with your thesis (4 copies), in Cologne, other documents like your CV and photocopies of degree certificates are required.

### *Viva*

Besides the thesis, there will be an oral exam/viva (sometimes called *Rigorosum*, *Disputation* or *Verteidigung*, literally meaning 'defence'). In Cologne, for example, this is meant to take place two months after the submission of your thesis. You will be given a mark for your PhD on the basis of both the thesis and your performance in the viva. The possible grades in Germany are, expressed in Latin (from best to 'worst', i.e. sufficient): "summa cum laude", "magna cum laude", "cum laude", "satis bene" and "rite".

However, before you can officially bear the title Dr. phil., you must be able to prove you have published your thesis. Up until then, you are *Doktor designatus*, or *Dr. des*. You publish after you have implemented the corrections you were asked to do in/after your viva. If you publish with a specialist publishing house, this can be fairly expensive (around a few hundred, but up to a few thousand Euros). The universities therefore offer the possibility to publish online with them, which should be for free, or to simply print the required number of copies yourself and deposit them in your university library for others to access. Of course, there are disadvantages to this, too: While

you save money, on the other hand, you will gain a wider readership when publishing professionally.

Organisation of the viva may be your responsibility. This means you have to plan ahead, and book a room through the university on a day that suits you and your examiners. As they might have busy schedules, start planning early.

Supervisors might offer you to have a mock viva with them. Do signal that you would be interested in having one. If you know others in your subject who have recently had their viva, or have friends who are willing to practise it with you, seize the opportunity to have mock vivas with them. The more confident you are on the day of your actual viva, the more you can focus on the content-side of your viva – speaking as an expert in your field, on a par with your examiners.

There is no standard length of the viva. The procedure typically is as follows: The candidate begins by giving a short presentation on his/her topic. A discussion with the examiners ensues – they might ask further question on the basis of their reading of your thesis, or on a point you raised in the presentation. You will find information on your viva in the Promotionsordnung of your faculty. Some outline the exact structure of the viva, and also length of e.g. the presentation you are expected to give. Traditionally, the viva is open to members of the academic staff of your university, so you might have a small audience.

At the Freie Universität Berlin, for instance, the presentation you are expected to give should be 30 minutes in length, with 30-60 minutes of discussions and question time afterwards. You can, but do not have to, accept questions from other academics which might have come to watch your viva. Compare here [Promotionsordnung](#) for the arts and humanities subjects at the FU Berlin, in German.

Your university might have different regulations, but they will be set out in a very similar document. A point of interest about the regulations outlined by the FU Berlin is that you may be able to have your viva in German, English or another language, according to what you have arranged with your examiners beforehand. You should check early on if this is of interest to you.

The number of examiners depends on your home institution. Expect a small examiners' board with several professors (often at least three people), including the head of your faculty's examination board and your supervisors, but also possibly at least one external academic, and one academic who will be there just for minute taking.

### *Employment*

Just like in the UK, students completing a traditional doctorate with a supervisor will often have to raise the necessary funds themselves (e.g. by securing a scholarship – see 4.2. and 4.3.). Alternatively, a teaching appointment as wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter at the university may provide your income. Typically, you would be employed on a part-time contract at the institute of your supervisor, where you are then deployed in teaching a seminar or two and/or in (usually third-party funded) research projects. While these are described as 50% or 65% positions, the work load varies. You would earn between c. 1,100 and 1,600 Euros a month. Some get paid this

kind of money but do not really need to work on anything else but their own research (i.e. effectively like having a Stipendium), others find themselves working in the evenings and at weekends to accommodate both their own research and obligations they have to fulfil as research assistants. Tasks for research assistants besides contributing to research or teaching can include supervising undergraduate students, all kinds of organisational and admin tasks, as well as invigilating and marking exams for the professor their job is associated with.

In Germany, it is very common to work alongside studying. For some students, this may only be a couple of hours per week, e.g. in a café in the evening, others work up to two full days a week, or full-time for several weeks in the summer. If you are from the UK, you are free to work in Germany (EU law). However, doctoral candidates from third countries that do not enjoy free movement of labour within the EU must apply for the appropriate visa from the German embassy or consulate responsible for their place of residence before entering the country. Students who want to earn a little extra money with a side job during their doctorate although they are holding a scholarship or receiving BaföG should do so only to a limited extent – you can find out how much you are allowed to earn on top of your scholarship by getting in touch with your funding body as they will have regulations about this – you don't want to risk having to pay back a part or all of your scholarship money.

If you do decide to work alongside your PhD studies, think wisely about how many hours a week you think you can spare. You don't want your studies to suffer. Once you have a job lined up, there are a few legal things to consider to your advantage: You will probably want to stay below the threshold of (currently) 8,004 Euro for tax-free earnings per year, or 400 Euros a month, to make working on the side worthwhile financially. For more in-depth information see this article from [Pflichtlektüre](#), a university paper in German. Similar articles are published regularly in university magazines and national newspapers; speaking to fellow students is a good idea, too, as they will know about these thresholds.

Financing training courses, travel to conferences, etc. should not be a worry if you hold a scholarship. You can apply for extra money with your funding body for these purposes. If you are doing your PhD in affiliation with a graduate school with a structured programme, you will often find that in the application to the graduate school, an application for funding is incorporated. If you are accepted onto the programme, funding is then automatically already secured.

If you are self-funded, talk to people working in your field about how they covered the cost for trips to conferences, summer schools, etc. when they were PhD students. They might know small specialist organisations that you can apply to for small travel grants and the like.

Be open for opportunities that might come your way – depending on your career goals (working in- or outside academia), a job you do as a student – mainly for the money – will provide you with valuable work experience for afterwards. It can ease the way into a full-time job with a certain company or organisation, or (e.g. when asked if you want to work on a research project at your university while still doing your PhD) will teach you key skills that improve your CV and with that your chances of securing a post-doc position.

### *Visiting other institutions, exchange programmes and placements*

Some universities have established relationships with universities abroad, and advertise some places only to their PhD students (not B.A. or M.A. students). The Freie Universität Berlin, for instance, has a place each at Cornell University, Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, New York University, Princeton University, Stanford University, University of Michigan, and Washington University. These exclusive places are meant for their most promising PhD candidates, and a semester or two at one of these institutions will certainly make you stand out among other PhD candidates who stay at their home institution in Germany for the whole of their studies.

The [University of Erlangen](#) has some advice on their website, pointing out what to consider when thinking about spending a period of time abroad (in German). Early planning is advisable. A stay at another institution (regardless if this is somewhere else in Germany or abroad) makes sense when this is necessary or beneficial for the work on your thesis and/or your personal profile, e.g. when required for data collection, interviews you want to conduct with authors or witnesses of historical events, or if there is a research centre matching your interests with an outstanding reputation.

If you are unsure about if you should integrate some time at a different institution into your work on your PhD, consult with your supervisor. He/she will normally be happy to help or suggest institutions. Thereby you can also take advantage of your supervisor's international academic network.

For further reading there is another blog, on the [academics.de](#) website, about the pros and cons of spending a period of time (or the whole of your PhD) outside of Germany (in German).

If you are looking for a placement the first step would be to talk to your supervisor. If you are planning to go abroad, do also make contact with your institution's international office who will normally be very helpful and enthusiastic. They will also know about funding for shorter stays abroad such as the Erasmus Praktikum stipend ('Praktikum' meaning placement/internship), see for example the website of the [Universität Wien](#) for information on this.

If you are planning to carry out archival research elsewhere in Germany, or want to visit another German university for a shorter period of time because someone at a different institution works in the field you are interested in or runs a research group or centre there, it might again be advisable to discuss this with your supervisor, think about how this will fit in with your timetable for completion (if you have one), and maybe establish first contacts with the institution you would like to visit through your supervisor. This will make it look more official and minimises your chances of getting turned down.

[Back to top](#)

## **Beyond PhD**

### *Jobs*

According to the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, in Germany, 2.7 % of the corresponding age group completed an advanced research degree (i.e. a doctorate) in 2011. Only

in Switzerland and Sweden were there more graduates at this level: 3.2 % and 2.8 % respectively. With Germany out of all European countries boasting by far the highest numbers in terms of completed PhDs every year (c. 25,000), it may be obvious that not all of the young academics actually stay and work at universities. However, for those who plan to do so, this article titled '[A Taste of Life as an Academic in Germany](#)' gives a positive outlook on working in German academia. Ask around for other people's opinions and experiences. The more different people you talk to, the more accurate your picture of what it might be like will be, bearing in mind there are, just like in England, differences in funding for the arts and humanities as compared to the sciences, which has an effect on lecturers income and job opportunities as well as research conditions. According to the Ministry of Education and Research, out of all PhD graduates who aim for a job at a university, around half of them manage to advance an academic career.

[\[Source\]](#)

The country can also boast the world's third lowest unemployment rates for academics. There is virtually full employment for people with PhDs. The OECD reports that in 2011, only 2.4 % of higher education graduates were unemployed; the average for OECD countries was twice as high. A study from 2006 suggests that around 20-40 % PhD students work in academia once they have completed their PhDs.

[\[Source\]](#)

However, this highly depends on which subject the PhD is in. In areas like chemistry or medicine, for instance, the PhD is indeed a very commonly expected qualification before people enter their respective job markets. In the arts and humanities, this is much less the case.

What is certainly true is that if a PhD graduate is planning an academic career, it will involve switching universities at least once in the process. It is highly unusual to become a professor at the institution you have earned your doctoral degree at; and the professorship (involving a six-year long postdoctoral qualification – the 'Habilitation' – resulting in the publication of a second book) is still the benchmark in the German academic system.

For more information tailored to junior researchers, see the [Research in Germany](#) website.

### *Career progression*

There are many ways in which you can make use of support structures while undertaking PhD research. First and foremost, there is a careers service at every university. They offer soft skill seminars, public speaking seminars, and more specialised seminars preparing you to go into a certain profession. Your PhD programme itself, especially when you are integrated in a graduate school, may contain certain modules designed to improve both your academic and other professional skills. The internet is another source of information, advice and knowledge exchange and you will find peer support in fora etc. To name just two, [academics.de](#) and [doktorandenforum.de](#) will prove useful for you over the course of the years.

To look for academic jobs advertised in Germany, the '[Bildungsserver](#)' summarises the most relevant websites. The two biggest websites to check regularly for advertisements when searching e.g. a post-doc position are [academics.de](#) and [jobs.zeit.de](#).

[Back to top](#)

## **Glossary**

### *Academic abbreviations and acronyms*

The most extensive list of academic titles and their abbreviations is to be found on [German Wikipedia](#).

### *Academic terms*

**BAföG:** BAföG is short for 'Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz', or Federal Training Assistance Act, which provides state funding for school pupils and students to pursue education and training. The stated aim of BAföG is to enable young people to take up education or training, especially if their individual economic circumstances might make this difficult. Students eligible for BAföG receive 50 % of the aid as a state grant and 50 % as an interest-free loan. This loan must be repaid in instalments once you have finished your studies and work in a job. You do not have to be German to apply for BAföG, but you must have intentions to stay and live in Germany after finishing your studies there.

**Betreuungsvereinbarung** (agreement of supervision): PhD students often complete and sign a *Betreuungsvereinbarung* together with their supervisor(s) at the very beginning of their first year. This document, functioning as a kind of contract between you and your supervisor(s), lays out your and their expected commitment, so you have got something to rely on.

**Beurlaubung** (leave of absence): You can request a 'Beurlaubung' for various reasons, such as illness, pregnancy, or a year abroad. If your 'Beurlaubung' is granted permission, the time you take out will not count towards the overall number of semesters you study for your degree.

**Bildungskredit:** This 'education loan' is available to pupils and students of full age who are in an advanced phase of their studies, i.e. studying for an MA or a PhD, or those who are mature students. Non-German students can apply for this loan only if they fulfil certain conditions, similar to those required in the BAföG regulations.

**Blockveranstaltung:** Instead of visiting weekly seminars, you might find that some lecturers offer 'Blockveranstaltungen'. These are seminars which take place over a number of weekends or in between semester-times as short but intense courses, and can be taken instead of other weekly seminar if this suits you and your timetable better.

**Careers Service:** Every German university runs a Careers Service office or department. Their aim is to help you find work placements and point out job opportunities for after your studies. They are often a good first port of call when you are thinking about getting some part-time work or a work placement etc., but do not know where to start looking.

**c.t.:** (cum tempore; latin) When you see lectures or seminars scheduled for 14 Uhr c.t., this means the actual teaching begins at 2.15 pm. [see also: s.t.]

**Doktorvater/ Doktormutter:** your PhD supervisor; literally: 'doctoral father/ mother'.

**Dozent:** lecturer.

**Habilitation:** Highest possible qualification in the German academic system. Those who strive to become professors work on a second book-project (the first being your PhD) during a six-year long postdoctoral qualification.

**HiWi:** short for 'wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft'; these are students who are near completion of their degree and who – as a part-time job – work for a professor or, in some cases, lecturer, carrying out tasks as diverse as compiling bibliographies, doing photocopies, supporting lecturers in designing exams, invigilating.

**Mensa:** university food court.

**N.N.:** latin, short for 'nomen nominandum'. If you find this printed below a seminar title, this means the class you are taking will take place, but it is not yet clear who exactly will be teaching it. This is often the case over the summer – a time in which you might start thinking about how to put together your timetable for the next semester, but not all lectureships or teaching assistantships for the coming semester have yet been appointed.

**Promotionsordnung:** similar to a **Prüfungsordnung**, but for PhD candidates, outlining formalities and regulations concerning your thesis, viva, and publication requirements as applicable to your thesis.

**Regelstudienzeit:** average time for completion. It is fairly normal to need a semester or two longer than what the official 'Regelstudienzeit' is for your degree, but do check what the maximum length of study says for your course: You do not want to take as long as that. Example: For a B.A., your 'Regelstudienzeit' might be 6 semesters. You go abroad after your first three semesters, and thus need a year longer to complete. This means you are finishing your degree after 8 semesters, which is perfectly fine if your maximum length of study for the degree is e.g. 10 semesters.

**(Semesterbeitrag)** of typically 100-200 Euros into your university's bank account once you have received a letter asking you to do so.

**Semesterbeitrag:** semester contribution. Not to be confused with tuition fees (there are not any in Germany at the moment). Small sum you pay every semester. This money goes towards supporting the university kindergarten, the subsidised Mensa, etc. Normally this means that in return you get a free train and bus pass for your region, too, the value of which is much higher than what you pay as semester contribution.

**Semesterticket:** A student's free regional bus and train pass. One of the biggest perks of being enrolled at a German university.

**Stiftung:** funding body.



**Stipendium:** scholarship.

**wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter** (research assistant): A part-time position as ‘wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter’ at your university may provide part of your income. Typically, as a PhD student, you would be employed on a part-time fixed-term contract at the institute of your supervisor, where you are then deployed in teaching a seminar or two and/or in (usually third-party funded) research projects your supervisor has successfully attracted.

[Back to top](#)

## Web Links

Information on applying to a German university can be found on the [Study in Germany](#) website.

For details and estimates on living costs visit the [DAAD](#) website.

The website of the [Federal Ministry for Education and Research](#).

Further information on support for early-career researchers in Germany is available at [Bundesbericht Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs 2013](#).

This part of the [DAAD](#) website collates blogs from various students from all over the world who decided to take the plunge and study in Germany – be it for a semester, a year, or a whole course of studies. Read what they have to say about living and studying in Germany.

Planning to move to Germany for your PhD? [Academics.com](#) is a helpful website to learn more about what this entails, helping you to make the decision and start planning. The website also offers Germany’s largest online job market for researchers.

There is a passage in this [Nature](#) article assessing German PhDs and how they compare to those from the rest of the world.

A collection of blogs [academics.de](#) on all aspects of PhD life from life-work-balance, balancing being a parent and doing a PhD, to career steps after finishing you PhD in Germany (in German).

[Doctoranden Forum](#) is a friendly, informative forum in which PhD students give each other advice in and on the various stages of their studies (in German):

[e-fellows.net](#) is a useful networking site originally initiated by the Deutsche Telekom AG, McKinsey & Company und der Holtzbrinck Publishing Group. It is all about your studies and career opportunities.

[Toytown](#) is an English-language community online for people working in Germany. This website might be particularly useful if you are already living in Germany, mainly for its discussion board and the large number of members who have already lived in Germany for quite a few years:

[The German Way](#) is a website focusing on cultural differences.

The [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung](#) (BMBF), Federal Ministry of Education and Research, supports twelve big funding bodies (Stiftungen) in Germany.

The [Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes](#), or German National Academic Foundation, is non-political and non-denominational and Germany's biggest funding body.

[My Stipendium](#) is a comprehensive website that helps you find a Stipendium that matches your life experiences and political/ societal beliefs.

[Research in Germany](#) provides an overview of the German funding organisations for PhD students.

[EURAXESS](#) offers an extensive database of funding programmes for graduates and doctoral students planning a research stay in Germany.

[Hochschulk Kompass](#) has information about the Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz, or Federal Training Assistance Act, which provides state funding for school pupils and students to pursue education and training.

To look for academic jobs advertised in Germany, the '[Bildungsserver](#)' summarises the most relevant websites. The two biggest websites to check regularly for advertisements when searching for a post-doc position are [academics.de](#) and [jobs.zeit.de](#).

[Back to top](#)



Copyright © 2013 University of Leeds. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>.

