

# White Rose University Consortium: College of Arts and Humanities

## Arts and Humanities Research Culture in Germany

### Universities

- [Higher Education](#)
- [University Departments](#)
- [Language](#)
- [Studies](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Web Links](#)



### Higher Education

In Germany 43.3 percent of school leavers enter higher education, making up approximately two million students. Germany's higher education system boasts a total number of 415 institutions – made up of roughly 100 universities (Universitäten), 200 universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen), and 50 colleges of art and music (Kunsthochschulen/ Musikhochschulen), plus other. Due to Germany's federal governmental system, each of Germany's sixteen states has its own laws and guidelines governing higher education. In practice, this means that it is the regions that make decisions on student numbers, semester contributions, and semester dates. The majority of higher education institutions are financed and regulated by the state. A minority of institutions are run by the Protestant and Catholic churches or by private institutions that are officially recognised by the state (a growing phenomenon particularly in fields such as law and business). Most private higher education institutions are Fachhochschulen.

Universitäten are the only higher education institutions in Germany with the right to confer doctorates. They are strongly research-oriented and most offer a wide range of subjects. Some Universitäten specialise in particular fields (e.g. technology, art, or medicine). The Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg is a public research university located in Heidelberg, Baden-Württemberg, and, founded in 1386; it is the oldest Universität in Germany. The Kunst-/ Musikhochschulen are higher education institutions of equivalent status to Universitäten. They provide an education in the visual arts, creative arts, performing arts, and musical subjects, with an emphasis on practice that universities cannot offer to the same extent. Certain Kunst-/ Musikhochschulen can also confer doctorates, but not all of them. Fachhochschulen put a strong emphasis on practical work and application. They offer a narrower range of subjects and typically focus on the fields of engineering, business, and social sciences.

The so-called Higher Education Compass provides a comprehensive overview of the German higher education landscape, and you can use their search form to narrow your selection to match specific criteria. The [Hochschul Kompass](#) website also enables you to find more information, and main contact details for all institutions.

[Back to top](#)

## ***University Departments***

The faculties and departments of German universities largely map onto those in the UK. To take the University of Münster as a representative example, there are fifteen Fachbereiche (faculties):

- F. 1: Protestant Theology
- F. 2: Roman Catholic Theology
- F. 3: Law
- F. 4: Economics
- F. 5: Medicine
- F. 6: Education and Social Studies
- F. 7: Psychology and Sport and Exercise Sciences
- F. 8: History/Philosophy
- F. 9: Philologies
- F. 10: Mathematics and Computer Sciences
- F. 11: Physics
- F. 12: Chemistry and Pharmacy
- F. 13: Biology
- F. 14: Geosciences
- F. 15: Music

Fachbereich 9, for example, subdivides into sixteen individual departments, ranging from General Linguistics, book sciences, Baltic studies to the maybe more common English, German, Dutch, Slavonic-Baltic, and Roman Languages departments.

[Back to top](#)

## ***Language***

Typically, the language used in teaching and learning at higher education institutions is German. In foreign language departments, e.g. departments for English/American studies or Spanish or French literature/linguistics departments, the language you will be expected to use is largely the language that is studied. Especially in schools of language and culture, lecturers are used to working in more than one language and you may have the choice, for example, of which language you write an exam paper in (e.g. German or Spanish, German or English, etc.).

However, a not insignificant number of universities offer courses wholly taught in English instead of German. The DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, or German Academic Exchange Service) currently lists 1551 degree programmes at German universities which it classifies as international, which means that these will be taught in English. These are – most typically – not arts and humanities subjects, but certain sciences, technology and business studies.

On the [Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst](#) (DAAD) website you can search for an international degree programme (i.e. taught in English) that suits you.

If you are a proficient speaker of German, you can also use the DAAD website to search all available [degree programmes](#).

Another database you can search is on the [studienwahl](#) website. This one includes information on admissions and the application process.

It is always advisable to get in touch with the university or department of your choice and enquire about language requirements and how they can accommodate you. The [sprachnachweis](#) website has more in-depth information on German language requirements you might have to meet.

You can learn more about German culture and everyday life in Germany, and test your language skills, on the [Deutsch-Uni Online](#) website.

[Back to top](#)

## **Studies**

Due to changes under the Bologna process, an initiative to increase mobility and standardise degree structures in over 40 European countries, the content of courses and degrees has changed dramatically at some German Universitäten. After a few initially turbulent years, most changes have been implemented successfully and the old German degree titles 'Diplom', 'Staatsexamen' or 'Magister Artium' are now obsolete. Undergraduate courses are now, like in the rest of Europe, called B.A. courses, postgraduates work towards M.A. titles. German universities have moved to a three-tier system (UG/ PGT/ PGR) set out by the Bologna Process. Some fields such as law and medicine have a combined UG + Masters' programme.

### *Undergraduate*

The official time for completion (Regelstudienzeit) of a Bachelor's degree is three years. However, in contrast to the UK system, this depends highly on the student. It is the student's responsibility to design his or her own timetable, attend lectures and seminars regularly, and fulfil all requirements to pass a module at the end of the semester. It is still common for lecturers to expect their students to know and tell them what exams they need to take (e.g. Hausarbeit (paper) or a written/oral exam). It is therefore important to plan and manage your timetable right from the start, make sure you take enough modules to gain the right number of credit points each semester, and familiarise yourself with your 'Studienordnung' (a document that lays out for you which exams need to be taken when, how many modules to complete per semester, etc.). Of course, there are people who help (secretaries, administrative staff), especially when you are new. Do not be shy to approach people, and ask questions until you have fully understood what is expected of you. This applies to undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes.

If you decide to go abroad for a semester or two, or take some time out (e.g. an 'Urlaubssemester'), you end up studying for longer than three years to obtain a first degree. This is very common. The advantages of this are that the students are independent and flexible, and many students make sure they gain work experience in form of internships in either the summer break ('vorlesungsfreie Zeit') or an 'Urlaubssemester', as well as that they go abroad for either work experience or to experience a different university culture and improve a language they are speaking.

As an incoming student from the UK, you might be surprised to find many of your course mates are older than you. This is for the above reasons, as well as the fact that a lot of students might have taken a gap year after finishing school at the age of 18 or 19, so many of them are at least 20 when they start their first year. A second major difference from the UK is that many students in Germany, upon finishing their B.A., embark on studying for a Master's degree. This is because the 'old' German degrees are usually seen to be equivalent to an M.A., not a B.A. Yet perceptions of this are slowly changing, and the B.A. is more and more seen as a degree in its own right.

Semester times, e.g. at the University of Mannheim, are roughly from mid-February to the end of May, and from the beginning of September to mid-December. Note that these vary from one university to the next. At most universities you will find that the so called 'Wintersemester' lasts about four months, the 'Sommersemester' last around three months. During the 'vorlesungsfreie Zeit' in between (literally: the lecture-free time), a student might go on holiday, but must also expect to still have papers to write or prepare for the coming semester or an exam (which can be scheduled to take place in that time).

Marks at German universities range from 1,0 (the best-possible mark, i.e. 100 %) to 6,0 – yet anything below 4,0 is a fail and means you have to either re-sit the exam or take the whole module/lecture/seminar again the year after.

### *Postgraduate*

Master's degree programmes can take one or two years to complete – again, this depends on the plans of the student. There are consecutive and non-consecutive Master's; as an example, MBAs typically are non-consecutive, which means anyone, no matter what he or she has studied before, can enrol for the course. When you find a consecutive Master's degree programme that interests you, check that you are coming from the right academic background; to give an example, if you would like to become an English teacher in Germany, you will be expected to have a first degree in English philology before then moving on to the M.A. which will in turn lead you to being able to apply for teacher training afterwards. If your aim is to study toward a PhD in Germany, a Master's degree is obligatory. When studying towards your M.A., you are expected to be able to work independently, be organised and manage your time well, even more so than during your B.A.

In Germany, some 25,000 graduates successfully complete the doctoral process every year – far more than in any other European country. There are different ways of doing a PhD: either as an individual doctorate or within a structured PhD programme.

Read about the experiences by other international students who ventured to Germany for a PhD on the [academics.com](http://academics.com) website.

### *Access*

To study at a German university, you need a so-called 'Hochschulzugangsberechtigung' (HZB), which is a higher education entrance qualification. This is a secondary school-leaving certificate that corresponds to the German 'Abitur' (A-levels) and entitles you to study. For more information

consult the [DAAD](#) website where you will find an admissions database that helps you understand which documents are required when applying to a university depending on your country of origin.

Depending on which city or university and which specific degree course you are applying for, it can be very easy or very difficult to get in. Popular cities will attract more students, and the number of students accepted every year is capped (this is done by setting a 'Numerus Clausus' for most subjects, an average mark which can vary slightly every year). If it comes to a selection process (i.e. when more prospective students apply than a department can cater for), those with the best average mark in their Abitur or from their first degree get in first. There are waiting lists, and the admission offices will tell you what your chances are to get a place. Increasingly, subject-specific aptitude tests are introduced and you may be asked to both sit such a test and show proof of your marks at school or during your first degree (if you already have one). You will also have to submit a CV, and possibly proof of sufficient financial resources to pay for your living expenses. Expect application deadlines to end a few months before the start of the semester.

For the application process, do not worry if your marks are from abroad – they can be converted into 'German' marks for this. It is advisable to contact the International Office (akademisches Auslandsamt) at your chosen university. There you can find out about any admission requirements and selection procedures specific to the individual university. You can generally expect that university staff speak English competently, particularly when they work in the Auslandsamt.

[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*

**ASTA:** short for 'allgemeiner Studiausschuss', a body of elected students who represent your interests.

**Exmatrikulation:** de-registration. The removal from the official register of students for any reason, most typically because of graduation. Universities send out postal reminders when students do not pay the semester contributions (typically 100-200 Euros per semester; see **Semesterbeitrag**) for the coming semester within a certain deadline. They might remind you in such a letter that if you do not pay by a certain date, you might be faced with 'Exmatrikulation'.

**Fachbereich:** faculty.

**Fachhochschule:** university of applied sciences.

**Fachschaft:** organisation of students within one department/ subject, e.g. English literature. These are often a group of maybe ten students who voluntarily take on small responsibilities and

organise parties for all English literature students, etc. They listen if you have a problem and try and give you advice. Also a good way of meeting people, especially when you are new.

**Hausarbeit:** essay/ academic paper students write at the end of the semester (a form of assessment).

**Immatrikulation (or Einschreibung):** registration.

**Kommilitone:** fellow student.

**Matrikelnummer:** your registration number.

**N.C.:** short for Numerus Clausus, which designates the average mark needed to be granted a place to study the subject of your choice at the university you applied to. These change slightly every year so it is always worth applying even if you might think your marks are not good enough to stand a chance. You might be positively surprised how many people turn down offers – thereby making space for people with less good marks to get a place to study.

**O-Woche:** short for orientation week or intro week.

**Philologie:** philology. The study of literature and language in its respective historical context. A term more commonly used in German academia than in the UK system.

**Propädeutikum:** preparatory classes, normally offered over the summer before the start of the semester, and relevant only for some subjects. These might be maths or language courses.

**Prüfungsamt:** examination office. This is where you enroll for exams. They also help you to understand the deadlines relevant to you.

**Prüfungsordnung:** examination regulations. Every subject has these, and you should make yourself familiar with these from the start of your studies. You will be introduced to matters such as this in your **O-Woche**.

**Rückmeldung:** formal re-registration – every student re-registers before the beginning of every semester; this is an easy process and is normally done simply by transferring the small semester contribution

**Semesterferien:** ‘Holidays’ which are not entirely that. During this ‘vorlesungsfreie Zeit’ (literally: the lecture-free time), a student might go on holiday, but must also expect to still have papers to write or prepare for the coming semester or an exam (which can be scheduled to take place in that time).

**Semesterwochenstunden:** short SWS; the number of hours spent attending classes. An academic ‘hour’ in Germany is 45 minutes.

**Seminar:** A type of class with maybe 30 students and one lecturer in which students actively participate and e.g. give presentations, discuss a set topic under the guidance of a lecturer, etc.

**s.t.:** sine tempore; if a lecture begins at 14 Uhr s.t., it indeed starts at 2 pm on the dot. [see also: c.t.]

**SS or SoSe:** summer semester.

**Studentenparlament:** student's parliament, short 'Stupa'. The Stupa represents all students and elects the **AstA**.

**Studienordnung:** a document that lays out for you which exams need to be taken when, how many modules to complete per semester, etc.

**Tutor:** older/ more advanced student who does some first-year teaching or support.

**Tutorium:** a class accompanying a lecture in which a 'Tutor' helps you understand the lecture content by reading and discussing texts and generally revising what has been taught in the lecture that week.

**Universität:** university.

**Urlaubssemester:** a semester in which you officially take some time out (this will be listed in your student record), e.g. to go abroad for a semester or two, to gain some work experience, or because of serious illness, childbirth, etc. The advantage of officially taking an Urlaubssemester in such cases is that you will not be paying any semester contributions during that time, and that the semester(s) will not count towards the overall number of semesters you took to complete your degree. It gives you some real time out.

**Vorlesungsverzeichnis:** a schedule of all classes offered that semester. Nowadays often to be found online. Gives you an overview over what is on offer (in terms of specialisms, your special interests,...) in the coming semester and helpful to consult when putting together your timetable. Often comes with a little abstract for each class, explaining what the aims and objectives of the class are, and what it will be about.

**WS or Wintersemester:** winter semester.

[Back to top](#)

## **Web Links**

The [Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst](#) (DAAD) has information for foreigners on most aspects of studying in Germany. [Study in Germany](#) is a similar website.

The [Hochschul Kompass](#) provides a comprehensive overview of the German higher education landscape.

On the [Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst](#) (DAAD) website you can search for an international degree programme.

If you are a proficient speaker of German, you can also use the [DAAD](#) website to search all available degree programmes.

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[Back to top](#)



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