

How to do a PhD in Germany

1. Entrance requirements

- Master degree (300 CP)
- Strong grade point average and record of achievement
- In Germany you apply to a specific professor or institute to do your PhD, rather than to a university.
- Therefore:
 - Select a PhD program based on the reputation of the professor/ group, rather than the reputation of the university.
 - Since the professor / institute with whom you are applying makes the ultimate decision about your acceptance, it is important to have specific qualifications related to their field of research.

2. Study sequence

- Duration: not fixed, between 3 and 4 years (depends on the subject and topic)
- During PhD study you will:
 - Take part in research-related advanced seminars, at your choosing
 - Write publications and present your work on conferences
 - Teach seminars and provide tutorials
 - Provide some teaching obligations (help correcting written exams or teach exercise courses, supervise bachelor and masters' theses)
 - Contrary to some programs, the focus of your PhD will be doing research rather than taking classes. No classes will be required. (Note: your degree will be checked for equivalence with a German Master's degree. In case it is considered not equivalent, the commission of dissertation might accept you under the condition that you complete certain "missing" classes and pass the exams.)
- You have to write a dissertation (typically 100 - 150 pages, depending on the subject)
- After submitting your dissertation, you will have disputation/to defend your dissertation
- Dissertation will be graded by two or three professors to determine if you graduate.

3. Costs/Scholarship

- There are no tuition fees for PhD students, but normal student fees
- In science and in engineering, normally every PhD student gets paid by a scholarship or is given a job as a research assistant. The payment can range from covering your basic living expenses to being comparable to an entry level job in industry. Of course, this means that the number of open positions is limited (and often announced in the form of job announcements)
- In case you bring your own funding (e.g. because you have a scholarship from an external funding agency), you circumvent many of the limitations and your chances increase

4. How to apply

- No fixed scheme of application

- Directly contact the professor who matches your interests. Be sure to state why you feel there is a match and what aspects of his/her research interest you most
- The professor will decide if he/she be your supervisor (as long as your degree makes you eligible for PhD)
- Professor will tell you what you need to submit in order to apply (e.g. CVs, master certificate, letter of reference of your former professor, letter of motivation, etc.)

5. How to choose the “best” University for your PhD

The German University system is much less hierarchical than, for example, the US or British system. For an employer it does not matter from which German University you got your PhD, but how productive and how “visible” your research work was and which Professors you have worked with. Therefore it does not make sense to choose an ‘elite university’ and do PhD in whatever field is offered.

BUT: it is important to choose a research field that has the best overlap with your own interest and education, and then find a group (at whatever university) that is well known, that publishes in high ranking journals, that has well equipped labs, ...

In Germany students are given great independence and power - it is for YOU to decide which field you will be working on, not a PhD Commission.