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# How and why to do a PhD in Heidelberg?

Dr. Helke Hillebrand

Director Graduate Academy  
Heidelberg University

Heidelberg, July 2022



# Who are we?



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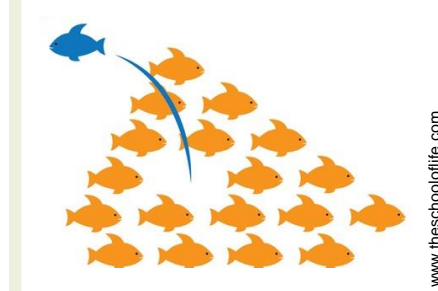
The **Graduate Academy** serves as

- A **central point of contact and support** for young researchers (PhD and postdoctoral level) and their mentors.
- A dedicated provider for efficient and effective tools for **tailor-made career development** towards supporting the transition into academic careers and facilitating the identification of ambitious career opportunities outside of academia.
- A facilitator to enable the **transfer of science into society**.

## ORIENTATION



## INDIVIDUALISATION



## NETWORKING



## Information services & consultancy



Janelle  
Ramaley



Chiara  
Rottaro



Daniel  
Davies



N.N.



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## Sponsorship for doctoral candidates



Elif  
Avcu (EZ)



Melanie  
Spiegelhalter



Saltanat  
Amantayeva

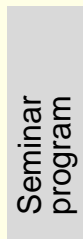


Silke  
Hoffmann



Mayte  
Dächer

## Career development support



Seminar  
program



Melanie  
Niese



Sarah  
Herzog



Mayte  
Dächer



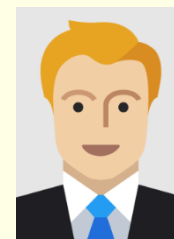
Language &  
writing skills



David  
Jara



Marike  
Telgen



N.N.

## Communication & events



Dr. Claudia  
Falk



Pablo  
Naranjo



Nanina  
Föhr



Alicia  
Kopsch



Lead



Helke  
Hillebrand



Office



Silke  
Hoffmann

# Our mission



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metadisciplinary skills!

Serving excellent PhD candidates  
carefully attended to  
by 12 different faculties  
across campus !



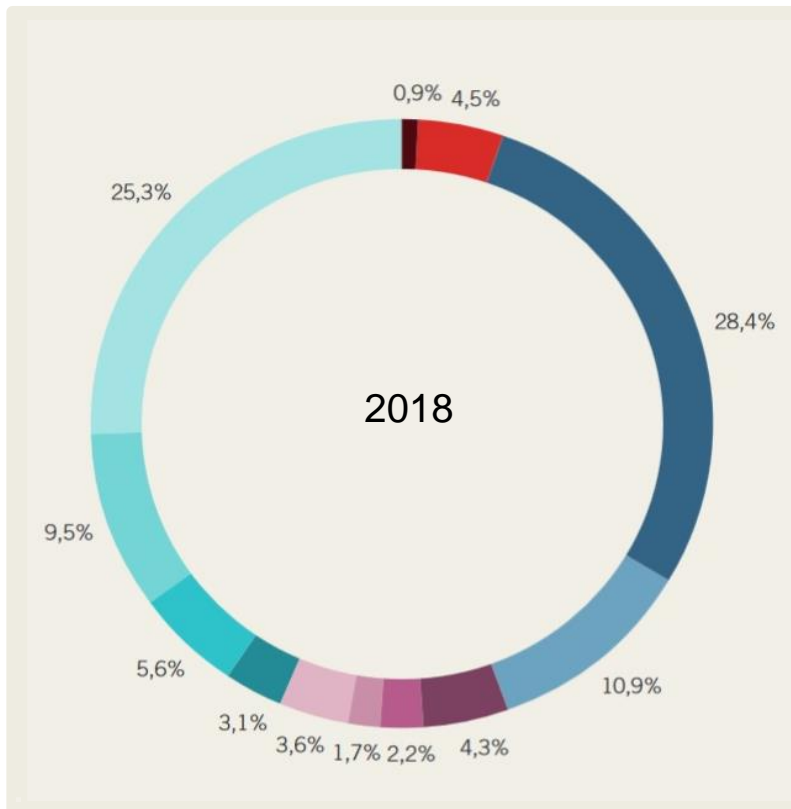
# Our target audiences in numbers



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■ About 1200 doctorates per year

- Diversity matters: About 30% international PhD candidates
- Gender balance: About 50% female and male graduates



12	Theologische Fakultät
54	Juristische Fakultät
367	Medizinische Fakultät Heidelberg
140	Medizinische Fakultät Mannheim
64	Philosophische Fakultät
34	Neuphilologische Fakultät
15	Fakultät für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften
28	Fakultät für Verhaltens- und Empirische Kulturwissenschaften
19	Fakultät für Mathematik und Informatik
58	Fakultät für Chemie und Geowissenschaften
103	Fakultät für Physik und Astronomie
270	Fakultät für Biowissenschaften

# Our target audiences in numbers



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- About 8500 doctoral candidates steady state
- Four major Graduate Schools  
(Life Sciences, Mathematics, Physics, Humanities & Social Sciences)
- More than 40 structured PhD Programs  
(DFG, Excellence Cluster, EU-ITN, LGFG (MWK), participation in IMPRSs and Helmholtz International Graduate Schools, else)
- About 500 early postdoctoral researchers

## Heidelberg University in international comparison

<http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/university/rankings/>

### Heidelberg University ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in Germany - Shanghai Ranking 2020

University ranks 57<sup>nd</sup> worldwide and 18<sup>th</sup> in Europe (August 27, 2020)

### Heidelberg University ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in Germany - QS World University Ranking 2021/2022

University ranks 63<sup>th</sup> worldwide and 18<sup>th</sup> in Europe (June 9, 2021)

### Ruperto Carola among the world's top 50 - THE Ranking 2020/2021

University ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> worldwide, 12<sup>th</sup> in Europe and 3<sup>rd</sup> in Germany (September 2, 2020)

### Heidelberg University ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in Germany – THE Global University Employability Ranking 2020

University ranks 44<sup>th</sup> worldwide and 18<sup>th</sup> in Europe (November 19, 2020)

# Who are YOU?



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Where are you from?



What are you passionate about?



What do you most enjoy doing?



**What is your way to enjoy academia?**



**What is your career dream?**



What do you expect from doing/gaining a PhD?





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# What's in for you?

1. Graduate Academy services
2. Managing a PhD





# What do we offer today?

## Core activities Graduate Academy:

- Information services & consultancy  
(Beratung)
- Sponsorship for doctoral candidates  
(Förderung)
- Career development support  
(Seminarprogramm/ Karriereentwicklung)
- Writing and text production support G/E  
(Sprachberatung und Textproduktion D/E)
- Service on demand for faculties & structured programs: Supporting the advancement of excellent PhD framework conditions (e.g. *heiDOCS*)





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# Graduate Academy offerings (I)

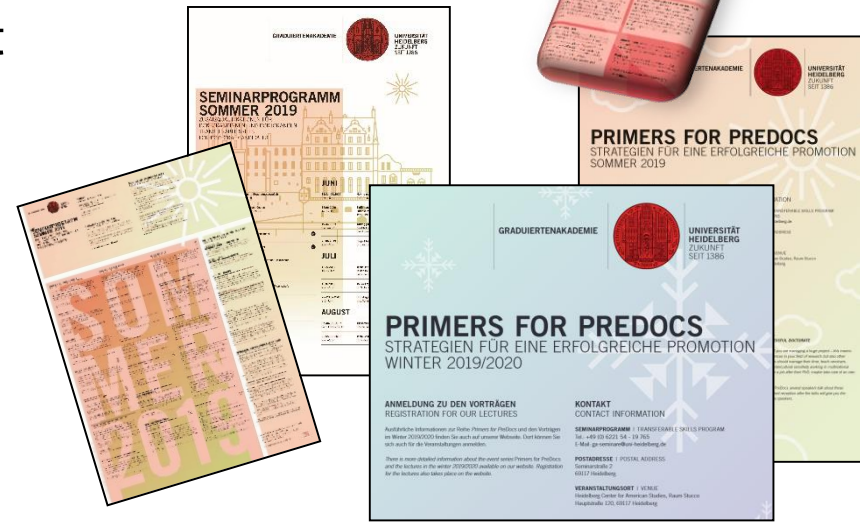


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- Consultations  
- Welcome events
- Seminar and workshop program  
(about 50 courses p.a. in D & E)
- Primers for Predocs
- Digital (e-learning) resources
- Language and text production support
- German language courses
- Summer Schools (SHS, LERU, HISS)

Themes
Personal skills / Self management
Communication skills
Digital future – technologies - skills
Open Science
Transfer & Entrepreneurship
Research Ethics
University teaching
Enabling tools

**NEW!**



# Graduate Academy offerings (II)



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- Cotutelles: Negotiating contracts for dual affiliations incl. supervision with international partners 📄
- Brochure Kiosk – see <http://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/downloads/> (Graduate Academy downloads)
- Newsletter (please subscribe on our homepage)
- Bulletin board (seeking partners for research, scientific or language co-operations; [https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/aktuelles/index\\_en.html#board](https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/aktuelles/index_en.html#board))
- Jour fixe Doktorandenkonvent
- Coordinating the Ombudsprogram for doctoral candidates



# Sponsorship for doctoral candidates – *status quo*



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- Fellowships for doctoral candidates (Landesgraduiertenförderung; LGF)
  - Individual 3-year fellowships
  - Completion fellowships (3-6 month)
  - Small-scale PhD programs (Promotionskollegs)
- Short term fellowships (heiDOCS; DAAD STIBET )
  - Travel stipends (courses, conferences, collaborations, field trips)
  - Stipends for printing costs (contribution)
  - Short term fellowships towards completion of PhD
- Support towards identification of suitable (external) fellowships for (international) doctoral candidates
- Support towards establishing a meaningful application/ exposé writing





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# How to manage a PhD?



# What is a PhD?

Philosophy Doctor  
Doctor of philosophy  
doctor philosophiae



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PhD / Ph.D. / Dphil / Doctorate

*BR*

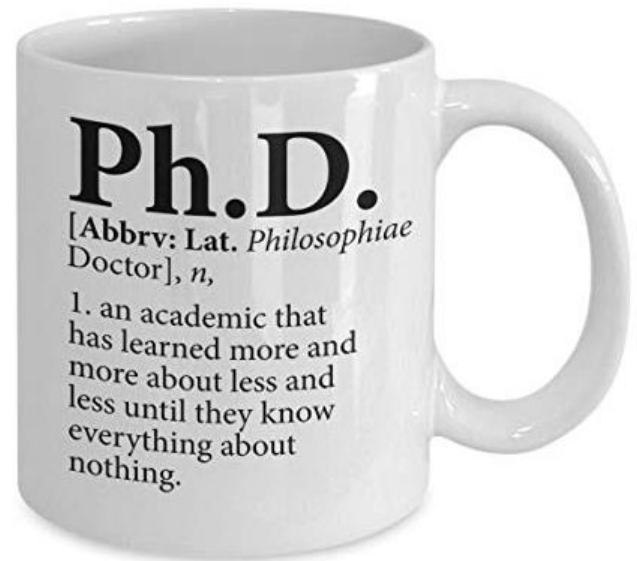
*AM*

*Latin*

*Germanism*

## Doctor of philosophy - Definition

- **Oxford Dictionary:** the highest college or university degree, or someone who has this.
- **Wikipedia:** is the highest university degree that is conferred after a course of study by universities in most English-speaking countries.
- **Amazon.de:**





# What does a PhD entail?



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The degree is conferred for producing **independent, original research** that expands the limits of current knowledge (can be published in a peer-reviewed journal).

- Identifying a PhD-worthy **research question**
- Pursuing original independent **research**
- Writing a **dissertation** (thesis) about the new findings
- **Submitting** the dissertation
- **Defending** the thesis (against experts in the field)
- **Publishing** the findings
- Being **promoted** to PhD (award of the title)
- Using the **title** Doctor (as awarded!!!)
  - In non-English-speaking countries, variants such as "Dr. phil.", "Dr. rer. nat.", "Dr. med." are in use.
  - In English spoken countries often abbreviated "Dr" or "Dr." or with post-nominal letters such as "Ph.D.", "PhD", or "DPhil" (depending on the awarding institution).
  - Never use both, the title and post-nominals, at the same time!

*The proper etiquette associated with this usage of the doctoral degree may also be subject to the professional ethics of the own scholarly field, culture, or society*

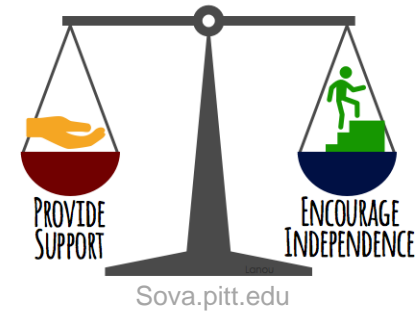
# What is special about doing a PhD?



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- You are not a student any more
- At Heidelberg University: PhD research is the first phase of a professional research experience and NOT(!) a third cycle of studies

- Independence (various degrees of)



- Life in a sandwich position



- Preparing for growth and leadership





# What is expected from me when entering into PhD research?



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## Exhausted or ready for taking off?

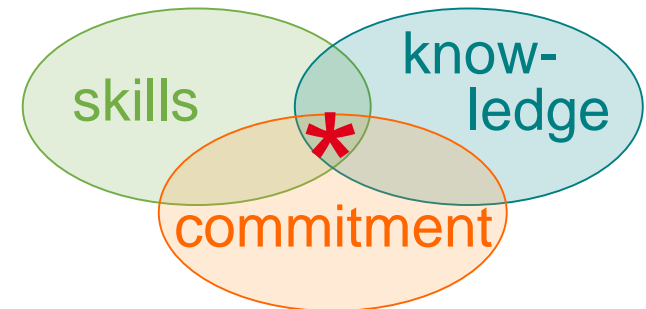


# What is expected from me when doing PhD research?



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- Passion to perform ✓
- Taking pleasure in (interdisciplinary) thinking, in writing and in contributing
- A profile matching a supervisor's / mentor's expectations regarding the requirements of a specific project
- Enthusiasm, curiosity, dedication, creativity, diligence ...
- Becoming a valuable team member!



\* where excellence originates ...

# Why to do a PhD?

Good reasons (not) to do a PhD...

- Excited about learning and solving problems
- In love with thinking, writing & freedom of thought
- Enthusiastic about doing research
- Genuinely interested in the subject area
- Want to set the stage for life-long learning
- Want the title
- Deemed important for my career aspirations
- Want to become a professor



- Interested in the training programme
- Admire my supervisor
- Curious about the university doings



- I was always a successful & diligent student
- No better job in sight



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# How to prepare for a PhD? (I)



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- Talk and listen to your peers

- <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07332-x>

Article by recent PhD graduate Lucy A. Taylor sharing the advice she and her colleagues wish they had received (06/11/2018):  
Twenty things I wish I'd known when I started my PhD.



- Test your abilities (validated tests only!)

- <https://www.academics.de/angebote/promotion-test-soll-ich-promovieren>

*Academics* in collaboration with Heidelberg University (Institute for Psychology) developed a test for assessing personality traits, skills and qualifications relevant for a successful PhD (see also link on GA-web).



- <https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/> A free, web-based career-planning tool that was created to help PhD candidates and postdocs in the sciences define and pursue their career goals.



- <https://www.bachelorprint.de/promotion>

Checklists by Schneider & Molitor (on-line or book) - basis for the 2004 nation-wide THESIS-Study)

- Talk to your previous academic advisor(s) & mentor(s)



# How to prepare for a PhD? (II)



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- What is the subject area/research question you are interested in?
- Identify your “doctorfather” or “doctormother”
- Agree on a PhD-worthy research topic
- Set-up your personal funding plan
- Get a copy of your faculty’s “Promotionsordnung” – become acquainted with the specific rules and regulations
- Sign a “supervision agreement”
- Register with heiDOCS – and create your personal copy of the on-line PhD file
- Apply for admission as a PhD candidate with your faculty
- Register with Heidelberg University as a PhD-candidate (Immatriculation for PhD candidates)
- Focus on your research and your skills portfolio!



# How to finance a PhD?



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- Your PhD is financed by integration into your (university) supervisor's team:
  - Departmental position, (most likely) integrated in research and teaching at your department
  - Third party funding available to your supervisor
  - You pursue an "external" PhD
- You are pursuing a job outside of your PhD project
  - You hold a contract somewhere within the university (e.g. "Geprüfte Wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft" )
  - You have a job elsewhere
- You hold a fellowship/ you are preparing to apply/ applying for a fellowship
- You are naturally born rich 😊

# How to structure a PhD?



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## Individual PhD

## Structured PhD

### Typical characteristics

- Single supervisor
- Thesis subject solely agreed upon with supervisor; may or may not be embedded in broader context
- No obligatory course work
- No formal definition for time-to-submission

co-tutelles, research abroad;  
conferences &  
summer schools;  
meta-disciplinary skills training &  
Graduate Academy

### Typical characteristics

- Multiple supervisors/mentors (thesis advisory committee (TAC))
- Research topic is embedded in a doctoral program [Promotionskolleg (5-10), Graduiertenkolleg (*up to 25*), Graduiertenschule ( $\geq 100$ )]
- Requires formal application/admission
- Overarching funding/funding rules
- Programs define (disciplinary) training curricula
- Programs are set for 3-4 years of PhD research until submission
- Regular performance reviews

# How to structure a PhD?



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## Individual PhD

## Structured PhD



- Participate in welcome events (department, GS, GA, else)
- Get to know your peers and colleagues
- Network in an interdisciplinary fashion
- Go to lectures, PhD seminars, else...
- Get organized: Make sure to have **regular meetings with your supervisor(s)**, compile your **strategic questions**, foster your **critical thinking**
- Get acquainted with basics in project management, research ethics & good scientific practice, avoiding plagiarism, mental health, statistics, ...
- **Keep talking & writing** - about your research, your career aspirations, your doubts, your disappointments, your successes
- Seek opportunities for **teaching** in your field and for presenting your work
- Try out **applying for funding** – travel, conferences, research stays, ...
- Continuously work on your portfolio of qualifications and skills
- Don't forget to **strive for submission!**

**Network and  
broaden your  
horizons**



# How to structure a PhD?



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## Graduate Academy

a central service for early stage researchers:

- fostering attractive framework conditions
- providing meta-disciplinary skills training
- offering career orientation and career development support

<https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/>

the structured  
module  
for individual  
PhDs

## Heidelberg Graduate Schools

**HGSFP**  
Physics

<https://hgsfp.uni-heidelberg.de/>

**HBIGS**  
Biosciences

<http://www.hbigs.uni-heidelberg.de/>

**HGS**  
**MathComp**

<https://www.mathcomp.uni-heidelberg.de/home>

**HGGS**  
Humanities and  
Social Sciences

<https://www.hggs.uni-heidelberg.de/>

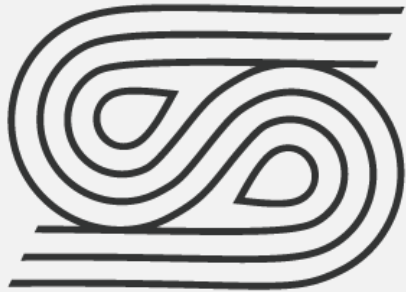
Structured PhD Programs

Individual PhD Training

# Heidelberg Graduate Schools



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HGS MathComp



Watch out for  
upcoming information sessions  
by the  
Graduate Schools  
at Heidelberg University!



HGSFP

HEIDELBERG GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR PHYSICS

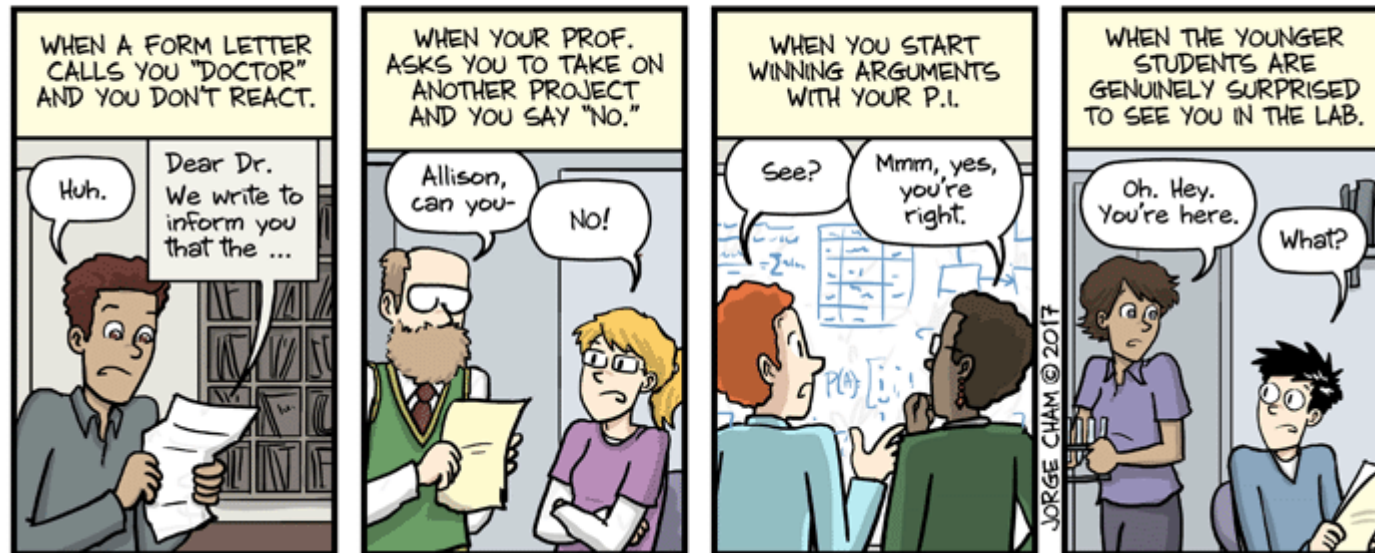
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GRADUIERTENSCHULE  
FÜR GEISTES- UND  
SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN

# How do I know I am ready to graduate?



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## SIGNS YOU'RE READY TO GRADUATE



WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM



# What is expected from me after the PhD?

What is a PhD good for?



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## What will you gain?

Resilience

Endurance

Critical thinking

Self esteem

Intrinsic motivation

Can do-attitude

Courage

Leadership skills

Respect

Friends for life

...

## What will society expect from you?

Resilience

Endurance

Critical thinking

Initiative

Motivation and advice

Accountability

Courage

Insightfulness

Trustworthiness

...

**DON'T  
QUIT !**



# Entering the labor market with a PhD



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## What will be easier ?

- Avoiding routine
- Life long learning
- Work-life integration
- Freedom of thought
- Taking responsibility
- Visibility
- Securing leadership positions
- ...

## What will be harder ?

- Securing your first position
- Over qualification risk
- Work-life balance
- Higher expectations
- Visibility
- You follow the job market
- ...

## What are myths ?

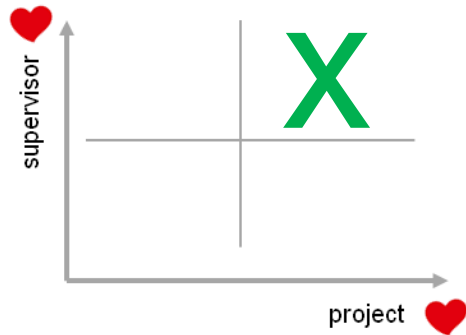
- Making more money
- Broader choice of jobs
- Job security
- ...

# How to manage a PhD?

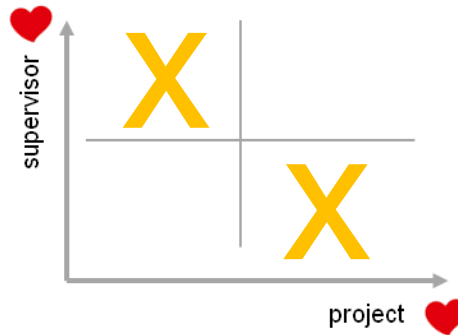


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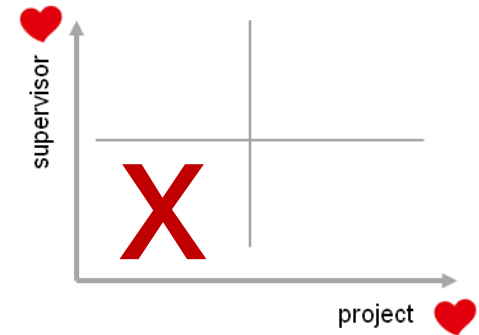
Happiness, satisfaction, resilience, work-life balance



Great –  
■ keep going,  
■ nurture  
■ and enjoy!



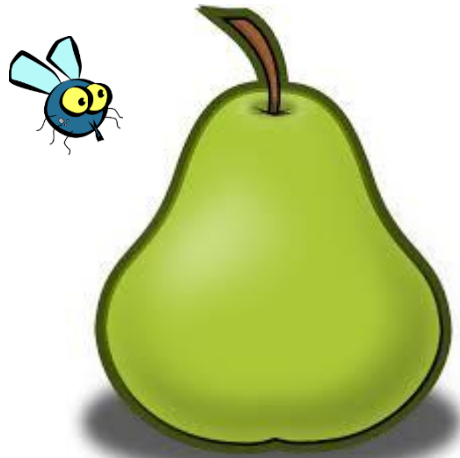
Fix it –  
■ talk to people  
■ identify sinks  
■ keep observing!



Drastic change is  
much needed –  
■ talk to people  
■ think about plan B!



# Whom to contact if anything goes pear-shaped?



# Avoid the fly



# turning into a big white elephant...



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Talk (*selectively!*) to

- your supervisor
- your 2nd supervisor/mentor/TAC members
- your peers or the postdoc you work with
- the student representative(s)
- the PhD program coordinator
- **us – contact the Graduate Academy**
- the department head / Dean of Graduate Studies
- the equal opportunity office (Gleichstellungsbüro)
- the ombudsperson

**... and start talking early on; communication is key!**



# Get in touch – stay in touch!



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There is always  
space for YOUR ideas:



© Manfred Bofinger & Ming Fai Chow

**To PhD or not to PhD ?**  
—  
**if this is the question,  
please, do not hesitate  
to make an appointment!**

<http://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/>  
[graduieretenakademie@uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:graduieretenakademie@uni-heidelberg.de)  
[helke.hillebrand@uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:helke.hillebrand@uni-heidelberg.de)

