How and why to do a PhD in Heidelberg?

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Who are we?

Graduate Academy is the central point of contact for early career researchers (ECR) and their mentors contributing to excellent framework conditions for ECR and supporting career orientation and development towards ambitious career paths inside and outside of academia.

- seminars
- workshops
- service on demand
- lectures
- e-learning tools
- digital resources
- language support
- text production support
- individual advice
- visa support
- 1-o-1 meetings
- ombudsprogram
- cotutelles
- fellowships
- heiDOCS2.0
- events
- welcome pack
- brochure kiosk
- bulletin board
- newsletter
- instagram
- working space
- media room & training
Who are we? (about 66%)
Our mission

Serving excellent PhD candidates carefully attended to by 13 different faculties across campus!
Support for early-career researchers

Empowering desirable employees targeting ambitious careers in all sectors of society
Cornerstones of the PhD lifecycle...
Cornerstones of the PhD lifecycle...

- Successfully fight your 2nd year depression
- Win Nobel Prize
- Revolutionize your field
- Get a job at a top University
- Take top job
- Submit your thesis
Our target audiences in numbers

- On average, about 1200 doctorates per year
  - Diversity matters: About 30% international PhD researchers
  - Gender balance: About 50% female and male graduates
- It takes on average 4.3 years to complete a Doctorate (w/o Dr.med.)
Doctoral community Heidelberg University

- About 9000 doctoral candidates steady state (incl. Dr. med.)
- Heidelberg doctoral community is the largest in Germany
- 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)

Heidelberg University in international comparison

Heidelberg University ranks 1st in Germany - Shanghai Ranking 2023
University ranks 55th worldwide and 16th in Europe (August 15, 2023)

Heidelberg University ranks 3rd in Germany - QS World University Ranking 2024
University ranks 87th worldwide and 31st in Europe (June 27, 2023)

Ruperto Carola among the world’s top 50 - THE Ranking 2024
University ranks 47th worldwide, 14th in Europe and 3rd in Germany (October 16, 2023)

Heidelberg University ranks 5th in Germany – THE Global University Employability Ranking 2024
University ranks 70th worldwide and 31st in Europe (November 23, 2023)
Graduate Academy in context

Vice-Rector Quality Development & Sustainability

Advising & Support

Academic program & Professional orientation

Sponsorship programs

Events

Information & Networking

Service on demand

Projects & Partnerships

Infrastructure KLF*

Council for Graduate Studies

heiDOCS Committee

* Käthe Leichter Forum, KLF (https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/klfzentrum/index_en.html)
Who are YOU?

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?
What’s in for you?

1. Graduate Academy services
2. Managing a PhD
What do we offer today?

Core services Graduate Academy:

- Advising & support (Beratung)
- Sponsorship for doctoral candidates (Förderung)
- Academic program & Professional orientation (Akad. Programm & Karriereorientierung)
- Events (Veranstaltungen)
- Information & Networking (Infomaterialien & Vernetzung)

Supporting the advancement of excellent PhD framework conditions

Unterstützungsangebote für die Verbesserung der Rahmenbedingungen der Promotion
Graduate Academy offerings (I)

- Consultations
- Welcome events & welcome packs
- Seminar and workshop program (ca. 60 courses p.a. in D & E)
- Primers for Predocs
- Digital (e-learning) resources
- Language and text production support
- Guided writing groups
- Media room
- Events calendar

Themes

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

### Self-management
- Intercultural Awareness
- Imposter Syndrome
- Procrastination
- Mental Health Support

### Transfer
- Entrepreneurship online resources and courses
- eDOCation – Initiative for young researchers

### Communication
- Online Open Source Journal Club Initiative
- Scientific Writing and Publishing (E-Learning: Nature)
- Advancing Your Scientific Presentations (E-Learning)

### Research Ethics
- Reproducibility for Everyone: Workshops and resources

### Digital Skills
- Digital Future / Technologies / Digital Skills online resources
- Programming skills
- Digital Humanities
- Machine Learning
- Web Design

### Open Science
- Online Open Science information and training resources
- Online Open Source Journal Club Initiative: Reproducibility for Everyone: Workshops and resources

### University Teaching
- University Teaching online resources

### Tools
- Online Project Management Training-Resources
- Statistics
- Career Development
- Interpreting Scientific Results (E-Learning: Nature Masterclasses)
- Persuasive Grant Writing (E-Learning: Nature Masterclasses)
- Data Analysis: Planning and Preparing (E-Learning: Nature Masterclasses)
- Data Analysis: Conducting and Troubleshooting (E-Learning: Nature Masterclasses)
- Networking for Researchers (E-Learning: Nature Masterclasses)
- Effective Collaboration in Research (E-Learning: Nature Masterclasses)

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https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/karriere/digitale_welterbildung/digitale_ressourcen_selbststudium_en.html
Free access to e-learning resources

via Moodle

Coming soon

Strengthen your core skills & extend your understanding in statistics to deliver research excellence at all levels

https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/karriere/digitale_weiterbildung/e-learning_en.html
Graduate Academy offerings (II)

- 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)

- Instagramm www.instagram.com/ga_uniheidelberg

- Bulletin board (seeking partners for research, scientific or language co-operations; https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/aktuelles/index_en.html#board)

- Jour fixe Doktorandenkonvent

- Coordinating the Ombudsprogram for doctoral candidates
Sponsorship for doctoral candidates

- Fellowships for doctoral candidates (Landesgraduiertenförderung; LGF)
  - Individual 3-year fellowships
  - Completion fellowships (3-6 month)
- Short term fellowships (heiDOCS 2.0; else)
  - Travel grants (courses, conferences, collaborations, field trips)
  - Bridging grants
  - Publication & project grants (contribution)
  - Doctoral initiatives
    - https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/foerderung/heidocs_main_en.html

- Support towards identification of suitable (external) fellowships for (international) doctoral candidates

- Support towards establishing a meaningful application/exposé writing
How to manage a PhD?
What is a PhD?

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**: 


PhD / Ph.D. / Dphil / Doctorate

BR AM Latin Germanism
How much of an academic career do I want?
What does a PhD entail?

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!
What is special about doing a PhD?

- 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?

Exhausted or ready for taking off?
What is expected from me when doing PhD research?

- 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

!?
How to prepare for a PhD? (I)

- Talk and listen to your peers
  - [https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07332-x](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](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/](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](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)

- 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?

- 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?

Individual 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

Structured PhD

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 (≥ 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

co-tutelles, research abroad; conferences & summer schools; meta-disciplinary skills training & Graduate Academy
Heidelberg University‘s big 4

For an overview on all structured doctoral programmes go to:  
https://www.graduateacademy.uni-heidelberg.de/promovieren/promotionsprogramme.html
How do I know I am ready to graduate?

SIGNS YOU’RE READY TO GRADUATE

WHEN A FORM LETTER CALLS YOU “DOCTOR” AND YOU DON’T REACT.

Dear Dr.

Huh.

We write to inform you that the...

WHEN YOUR PROF. ASKS YOU TO TAKE ON ANOTHER PROJECT AND YOU SAY “NO.”

Allison, can you-

No!

WHEN YOU START WINNING ARGUMENTS WITH YOUR P.I.

See?

Mmm, yes, you’re right.

WHEN THE YOUNGER STUDENTS ARE GENUINELY SURPRISED TO SEE YOU IN THE LAB.

Oh. Hey.

You’re here.

What?

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM
What is expected from me after the PhD?
What is a PhD good for?

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
...

DO N’T QUIT!
## Entering the labor market with a PhD

**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?

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 elefant...

... communication is key!
Avoid the fly 🐝 turning into a big white elefant…

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!
What is a PhD?
your comfort zone

Where the magic happens

Adapted from https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CRvORSqUEAAbE5t.jpg
Get in touch – stay in touch!

There is always space for YOUR ideas:

To PhD or not to PhD?

– if this is the question, please, do not hesitate to take an appointment!

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