

Pursuing a doctorate at the KU: What you need to know

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In this handout, you will find all information you need about pursuing a doctorate at the KU. It is intended to help you become familiar with the most important topics and terms for the doctoral phase and to give you the opportunity to look them up whenever necessary.

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General Information on the doctorate

The doctorate as an independent research achievement

A "*Promotion*" (doctorate) refers to the conferral of a doctoral degree by a university or an equivalent institution of higher education. As part of the doctorate, doctoral candidates demonstrate their ability to conduct independent academic research by writing a doctoral thesis. A doctoral thesis is an independent piece of research and makes a significant contribution to the advancement of scientific knowledge in the respective discipline.

The academic and administrative environment at the KU

The KU offers all researchers in their qualification phase ideal conditions for professional and personal development at every stage of their careers. A doctorate is carried out in close collaboration with at least one supervisor. The formal procedure is handled by the respective faculty and the doctoral committee established there. In addition, the Academic Careers Team provides support across all subject areas with its wide range of services during the qualification phase, such as advising on career development or on the planning and implementation of qualification projects. In addition, there is the central workshop program designed to strengthen disciplinary and interdisciplinary skills, as well as information and networking events (e.g., the centrally organized Young Researchers' Day).

Monographic thesis

In many disciplines, theses are written as monographs – self-authored books on a clearly defined topic.

Cumulative thesis

A cumulative thesis consists of multiple shorter independent publications that have already been published in academic journals, or that have been accepted or are scheduled for publication in academic journals. These individual publications are preceded in the thesis by a synopsis that outlines the overarching research program of the thesis project.

Academic supervision and support

Supervisor of a doctoral project

Every doctoral project requires academic supervision, which can be provided either by a single supervisor or by a supervisory team (see section 10 of the KU Framework Regulations for Doctoral Studies). By agreeing to serve as a supervisor, the supervisor commits to providing the doctoral candidate with academic guidance and support in the preparation of the doctoral thesis. As a rule, professors, junior professors, and private, college, or university lecturers at the university where the doctoral program is offered are available to serve as supervisors. As part of a collaborative doctorate, professors with doctoral degrees from universities of applied sciences (HAW) may also be involved in supervising the doctoral thesis. Regardless of the supervision arrangement, it is highly recommended to sign a written Supervision Agreement when starting the doctoral project.

Selecting a supervisor

For your doctoral project, it is important that your supervisor is an expert in the field in which you wish to pursue your doctorate. In addition to subject-related compatibility, interpersonal factors must of course also be taken into account for the successful completion of a doctoral degree.

Responsibilities of doctoral candidates

The primary responsibility of a doctoral candidate is to complete their doctoral thesis promptly and thoroughly, in accordance with the rules of good scientific practice. In order to achieve this, the doctoral candidate is expected to demonstrate very good self-organization skills, motivation, and perseverance. If you also work as a research associate in addition, maintaining a good balance between research, teaching, and administrative duties is especially important. You can explore the various topics in more depth when making use of the offerings of the central workshop program (e.g. time management and self-management) or address them during an individual consultation session.

Responsibilities and duties of the supervisor

By agreeing to supervise a doctoral project, the supervisor guarantees that you will receive regular professional guidance. As part of this consultation sessions, your supervisor will help you, for example, in narrowing down your research topic, refining your research question, and determining your methodological approach – thereby ensuring the quality of your academic work. In addition, you will discuss other important topics related to your academic career with your supervisor, such as publication opportunities, participation in academic conferences, securing external funding, gaining teaching experience, etc.

Cotutelle/binational doctorates

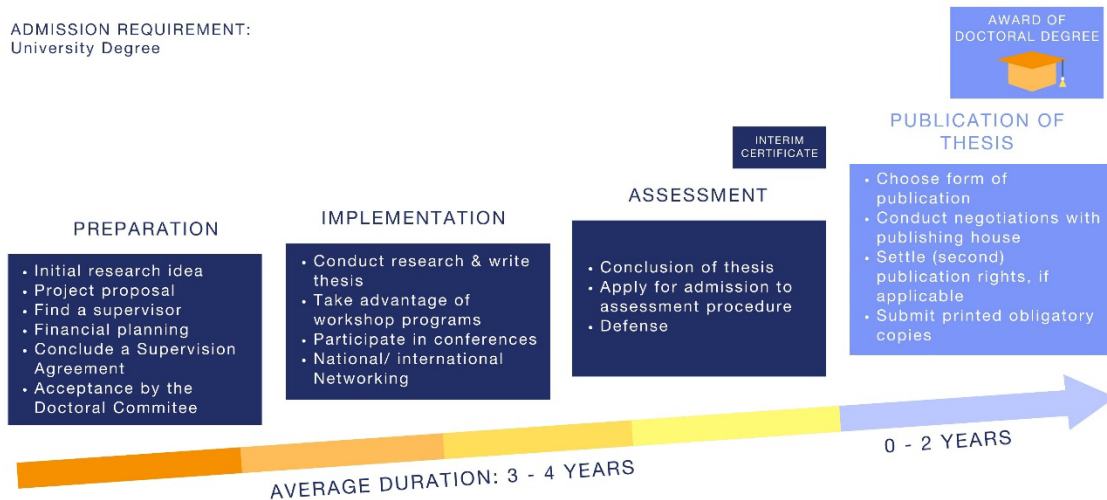
In a cotutelle or binational doctorate, you earn a doctoral degree jointly awarded by two universities in different countries. A binational doctorate therefore means that you will be supervised at the KU and at another international university on the same doctoral thesis and will earn your doctorate through an integrated doctoral program at both institutions.

The binational doctorate is governed by an individual agreement between the participating universities. Therefore, for each binational doctorate, an individual Cooperation Agreement will be concluded between the KU and the partner university of your choice.

Cooperative doctorate

The KU's *Fachhochschule* faculties (universities of applied sciences) offer the opportunity to earn a doctoral degree through a cooperative doctorate. In this case, the doctoral project is supervised jointly and equally by both a supervisor from the relevant *Fachhochschule* faculty and a supervisor from the partner university or – within the KU – a faculty authorized to grant doctoral degrees. Since universities of applied sciences generally do not have the authority to grant doctoral degrees, the doctoral degree is awarded by the partner university. The research and the work in the context of the doctorate will be carried out at the *Fachhochschule* faculty; the supervisor at the (university of applied sciences faculty) typically serves as a reviewer in the doctoral project. The requirements for the doctoral degree are set forth in the doctoral regulations of the partner university; therefore, the rules and guidelines of the partner university – or, within the KU – the faculty authorized to grant doctoral degrees shall apply. If necessary, additional courses may need to be taken before admission to the doctoral program.

Process for obtaining a doctoral degree



Financing and financial planning

The following options are generally available for financing a doctoral degree: a position as research associate leading to a doctoral degree, a project position funded by third-party grants, a doctoral fellowship, a doctoral degree funded by a company, a doctoral loan, financial support from private sources, or pursuing a doctorate alongside a profession.

In addition to covering one's own living expenses, there are usually also costs associated with the research itself (including access to databases, copying or digitalization costs, research trips, etc.). As part of the overall project planning, you should also consider the financial requirements associated with your specific research and discuss them with your supervisor.

Doctoral Supervision Agreement

The written Supervision Agreement, which is discussed and finalized between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor at the beginning of the doctoral project, establishes a shared understanding of the collaboration during the doctoral phase. This agreement is intended to specify the rights and obligations of both parties, outline a timeline for the doctoral project, and provide for regular advisory meetings. In doing so, the individual needs and circumstances of doctoral candidates must be taken into account.

The template for the Supervision Agreement is available for download at the following link:

https://www.ku.de/fileadmin/1908/Nachwuchsfoerderung/Promotion/20250512_Anlage_zur_Rahmenpromotionsordnung_2024_Formular.docx

Research proposal (Exposé)

The research proposal provides an overview of the planned research project and serves as the basis for the doctoral process. In addition to formulating the central research question, the document also provides an overview of the methods to be used, the data set, a timeline and work schedule, a preliminary outline, and an initial bibliography. In addition, we recommend developing a financial plan for carrying out the research project at the same time.

Acceptance by the doctoral committee

Once the doctoral candidate and the supervisor have signed the Supervision Agreement, the first formal step in any doctoral program is acceptance by a faculty's doctoral committee. Once you have been accepted by a faculty's doctoral committee, you are legally considered a doctoral candidate at the KU. You will need a number of documents for acceptance by the doctoral committee. You can find the relevant information on the respective faculty's website.

THF: <https://www.ku.de/thf/forschung/promotion>

PPF: <https://www.ku.de/ppf/forschung/promotion>

SLF: <https://www.ku.de/slf/forschung/promotion>

GGF: <https://www.ku.de/ggf/forschung/promotion>

WFI: <https://www.ku.de/wfi/forschung/promotion>

Your contact persons throughout this process are the dean's offices or the faculty managers of the respective faculty.

Doctoral committee

The doctoral committee of the respective faculty plays a key role in the implementation of the doctoral project. It is the body that decides whether a doctoral candidate will be accepted to pursue a doctorate at the KU. It is further responsible for ensuring that the entire doctoral process can be completed in accordance with the rules established by the KU. If, for example, the supervisor withdraws from the doctorate (for whatever reason), it is the responsibility of the doctoral committee of the respective faculty, in consultation with you, to find a suitable replacement supervisor and to continue the doctorate.

Enrollment

As soon as official confirmation is received from the faculty regarding acceptance as a doctoral candidate at the faculty, enrollment as a doctoral student at the KU is the next step. Under the Bavarian Higher Education Innovation Act (BayHIG), enrollment in a doctorate has been limited to an initial period of eight semesters since January 1, 2023, even though the actual doctoral work may and is permitted to take longer. After the initial period, the doctoral project may be extended upon request. This is important in order to continue to have access to the KU's infrastructure. After eight semesters, you will be automatically removed from the University's enrollment records as a doctoral candidate; however, your existing legal status as a doctoral candidate at the faculty remains unaffected.

Please contact akademische-karrieren@ku.de or the Student Office if you wish to extend your doctoral studies. Enrollment is effected by the KU Student Office.

Access to KU infrastructure and services

From the time you enroll until you de-register, you have official access to the KU's facilities and services. This refers, for example, to computer center licenses, library cards, and the services offered by the Academic Careers Team.

Acceptance as a doctoral candidate

You must apply for being accepted to pursue a doctorate to the respective doctoral committee. As a rule, additional documents must also be submitted along with this application. You can find information on this in the doctoral program regulations or on the websites of the respective faculties.

Evaluation

After your doctoral thesis has been accepted, the doctoral committee typically solicits two reviews of the thesis and, once the public review period has ended, decides whether to definitively accept or reject the doctoral thesis.

Oral examination (defense)

If your doctoral thesis has been accepted for the doctorate, the doctoral committee will set a date for the oral examination. The defense primarily consists of a presentation by you and a discussion with the reviewers and the members of the examination committee, during which you will answer questions about your research. Following the oral exam, the examination committee will decide on the grade for your work.

Publication of the doctoral thesis

In order to fully complete the doctoral process and receive the doctoral certificate, you must provide proof that the doctoral thesis has been published in its entirety. This can be done in both digital and printed form. In the case of cumulative theses consisting of several independent publications, some of which may have already been published, the submitted doctoral thesis, including a synopsis that places the individual publications in a contextual framework, must be published. The goal is to ensure that the overall contribution of the doctoral thesis becomes clear. The time required and any costs associated with publication should not be underestimated. For example, a decision must be made as to whether the thesis will be published by a publishing house or electronically on KU.Opus; if necessary, negotiations with publishers must be conducted or rights for secondary publication must be clarified. In addition, printed legal deposit copies must be submitted to the Library. Take advantage of the University Library's services to ensure the smoothest possible publication process. More information is available at:

<https://www.ku.de/bibliothek/forschen-und-publizieren/publikationsberatung>

Support services

Academic Careers Team

Guided by the core principles of excellence, internationality, and individuality, the Academic Careers Team supports researchers in the early stages of their careers (doctoral candidates and postdocs) in developing their professional skills. They organize the central workshop program to strengthen individual skills, create a framework for networking within the KU through the annual Young Researchers' Day, and provide doctoral candidates and postdocs with important information via newsletters and mailing lists. As part of individual counseling services, you also have the opportunity to discuss specific topics in the context of your personal circumstances. In addition, the team supports structural development at the KU with a focus on early-career researchers, for example, in the design of qualification processes.

<https://www.ku.de/forschung/akademische-karrieren/ueberfachliche-angebote>

Central workshop program

As part of the central workshop program, the Academic Careers Team offers all doctoral candidates and postdocs opportunities to further develop their individual skill sets and to acquire and deepen important research-oriented and interdisciplinary skills. In addition, employees have the opportunity to participate in programs offered by the HR Development and Professional Training department, as well as those offered by the Women and Equal Opportunity Officer.

<https://www.ku.de/forschung/akademische-karrieren/workshop-programm>

Qualification and career development

A doctorate adds another milestone to your professional resume. The Academic Careers Team supports you in developing your skills during your qualification phase. For each academic year, we put together a workshop program featuring research- and career-oriented offerings. You can find the full range of continuing education programs offered by the KU – including those in the areas of university teaching and careers outside academia – on the continuing education portal at the following link.

<https://weiterbildung.ku.de/>

Challenging life situations (e.g. psychological stress and conflicts)

Ideally, there is a trusting, fair, constructive, and productive working relationship between doctoral candidates and their supervisors. However, just as in any long-term partnership, tensions can arise – often as a result of miscommunication. Such tensions can strain a productive and mutually satisfying collaboration. To prevent such situations from escalating, both parties should address tensions and problems openly as early as possible and work together in finding a solution. In such cases as well, doctoral candidates and postdocs are warmly invited to take advantage of the confidential and independent counseling services offered by the Academic Careers Team.

<https://www.ku.de/forschung/akademische-karrieren/ansprechpersonen>

Statutes, regulations – Legal documents

Three legal documents are of fundamental importance for you as a doctoral candidate at the KU. The General Doctoral Regulations, the Faculty Doctoral Regulations of the respective faculty, and the Regulations for Ensuring Good Scientific Practice. You can find the currently valid version on the Legal Department's website.

<https://www.ku.de/die-ku/organisation/verwaltung/recht/rechtsvorschriften/forschung-und-wissenschaftlicher-nachwuchs>

General Doctoral Regulations

The General Doctoral Regulations comprise the set of rules governing how individual doctoral programs are conducted at the KU across all faculties.

Faculty Doctoral Regulations

The doctoral regulations of the individual faculties specify the provisions of the general doctoral regulations. They can define more specific rules for certain subject areas. That is why it is advisable to be thoroughly familiar with both documents.

Regulations for Ensuring Good Scientific Practice

Even early-career researchers are already responsible for ensuring that the fundamental values and standards of scientific work are reflected in their actions. The most important aspects in this regard are set forth in the Regulations for Ensuring Good Scientific Practice. You can find relevant continuing education courses on this topic in the central workshop program of the Academic Careers Team and in the program of the Department of University Didactics.