

Doing Your Doctorate in Giessen

International Office
- International Student Advisory Office -

Goethestrasse 58
35390 Giessen



Information on:

Living in Giessen
Enrollment and Administrative Issues
Getting in Touch with Peers
Supervision
The Formal Process
The Faculties
General Advice
Financing your Doctorate
JLU's International Office

JUSTUS-LIEBIG-



UNIVERSITÄT
GIESSEN

Contents

Welcome to JLU Giessen!	2
Living in Giessen.....	3
<i>The Town</i>	
<i>Cultural Life</i>	
<i>Surroundings</i>	
<i>Public Transport and the Semesterticket</i>	
<i>University Sports</i>	
Enrollment and Administrative Issues	5
<i>Renewing Your Enrollment</i>	
<i>Renewing Your Semester Ticket</i>	
<i>Extending Your Visa</i>	
<i>Changing your Enrollment Status</i>	
<i>Termination of Enrollment</i>	
Getting in Touch with Peers	7
<i>Email List</i>	
<i>Roundtables</i>	
<i>The Program by the International Office</i>	
<i>Lokal International</i>	
Supervision.....	9
<i>Your Supervisor</i>	
<i>Your Second Examiner</i>	
The Formal Process	11
<i>The Faculty Counts!</i>	
<i>1st Phase: Admission as a Doctoral Candidate</i>	
<i>Assembling Your Examination Committee</i>	
<i>2nd Phase: Beginning of Examination Process</i>	
<i>Handing in Your Dissertation</i>	
<i>Displaying Your Dissertation</i>	
<i>Defending Your Dissertation</i>	
<i>Publishing Your Dissertation</i>	
The Faculties.....	14
General Advice	16
<i>Prioritize Your Dissertation</i>	
<i>Don't Neglect Your Life</i>	
<i>Get Structured</i>	
<i>Write!</i>	
<i>Create Deadlines</i>	
<i>Plan Your Future</i>	
Financing Your Doctorate	18
<i>Finding Scholarships and Positions</i>	
<i>Abschlussförderung</i>	
JLU's International Office	19

Welcome to JLU Giessen!

Dear International Doctoral Student,

We are very glad that you decided to do your doctorate at Justus Liebig University Giessen. With this brochure we want to guide you through your studies at JLU. It provides useful information on life in Giessen, administrative issues, getting in touch with other doctoral students, dealing with your supervisor, ways of funding as well as some general advice.

The most important part of the brochure is the description of the formal process. You should be aware that the formally important parts of your doctorate happen between you and your faculty and that it is crucial to take the right steps at the right time.

To spare you from typing long internet addresses, some external links have been shortened using the shortener bit.ly. So whenever you read something starting with bit.ly, you can simply type it in the address line of your browser and it will be forwarded to the full address.

You can also access this brochure online (www.uni-giessen.de/cms/doingyourdr). For all questions regarding the first steps to be taken around your arrival in Germany, including application, enrollment, registration with the immigration authorities, and finding health insurance, please consult the *Checklist for International Doctoral Students* (www.uni-giessen.de/cms/drcheck).

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to get in touch with us!

Best regards,
Your International Office

Living in Giessen

The Town

The university town of Giessen benefits from its central location in Middle Hesse, only a 40-minute drive away from Frankfurt am Main and its international airport. Over 30,000 students in relation to a population of 75,000 inhabitants turn Giessen into the city with the highest ratio of students in all of Germany. Thus, it is very easy to find your way around, to meet other people, or to find cultural events tailored for students or young academics.

Cultural Life

There are some city magazines with websites giving information on upcoming cultural events. Here are a few:

Giessener Express: bit.ly/giessener-express

Frizz: bit.ly/frizz-giessen

Streifzug: bit.ly/streifzug-giessen

Surroundings

Giessen is located in the Lahn valley and surrounded by small towns, forests and fields. You can explore the immediate surroundings, such as the Bergwerkswald, the monastery Schiffenberg, the castles Gleiberg and Vetzberg, or the Dünsberg with hiking or biking trips in spring or summer. 30 kilometres up the river Lahn you can find Marburg, a student town with a picturesque city core and a castle. 15 kilometres downstream there is the town of Wetzlar, known for its cathedral.

65 kilometres to the south you find Frankfurt, one of Germany's biggest cities. Frankfurt is not only home to one of the world's most important financial centres and one of Europe's most frequented airports, it also offers a very vivid cultural life.

The ride in a regional train from Giessen to Frankfurt only takes 45 minutes and is free of charge for enrolled students.

Public Transport and the Semesterticket

You can easily travel through most of Giessen by bike or by foot. However, there is also a public transport system. Within Giessen there is the city bus system allowing you to travel throughout the town and its surroundings. To leave Giessen you can use regional trains leaving at the central railway station. Rides in public buses and regional trains in almost all of Hesse as well as streetcars and subways in Frankfurt are included in the semester ticket for enrolled JLU students. You can find all schedules on the websites of the Stadtwerke and the RMV:

bit.ly/giessen-buses

www.rmv.de

University Sports

JLU Giessen offers a variety of sports activities for its students. The program ranges from pilates to underwater rugby and from hiking to salsa. Some courses are free of charge, others include a small fee; all of them require registration at the beginning of the semester. Further information can be retrieved from the University Sports (Allgemeiner Hochschulsport) website (unfortunately in German only): www.uni-giessen.de/ahs



Enrollment and Administrative Issues

Renewing Your Enrollment

If you are enrolled as a student you have to renew your registration each semester. The main step is transferring the money for the enrollment fee, which amounts to approximately 250 € per semester and is to be paid in February for the summer semester and in July for the winter semester.

Make sure to transfer the money in time. If you are late you will receive a dunning letter and have to pay an additional fee of 30 €. If you miss the second deadline your enrollment will be cancelled and you will eventually lose your residence permit. You can find the exact sums and deadlines for each semester here:

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/semesterbeitrag

Renewing Your Semester Ticket

With your semester fee you also pay for the Semester Ticket allowing you to travel free of charge in almost all of Hesse. You can use all regional trains, public buses, subways, or streetcars/tram, but not the fast trains ICE/IC/EC. The ticket expires at the end of each semester and needs to be renewed. A few days after you transferred your semester fee you can go to the Studierendensekretariat and renew your Semester Ticket by inserting your Student ID in the printer.

When renewing your semester ticket you also receive the enrollment certificates you need for the immigration authorities and your health insurance.

Extending Your Visa

Moreover, you should keep in mind that your visa/residence permit does not automatically cover your whole time in Germany, but will expire at a given date and needs to be renewed. Typically, you'll be asked to provide a current enrollment certificate and proof of sufficient funding to the immigration authorities each year.

If you have any troubles with your visa, please do not ignore them or try to sit them out. It will not work and might end with you being forced to leave the country. Please come to our office hours instead, where we offer confidential counseling as soon as possible.

Changing Your Enrollment Status to 'Doctoral Student'

When you arrive in Germany you typically have to enroll as soon as possible in order to obtain a residence permit. At this point doctoral students are usually not yet accepted as doctoral candidates by their faculty. Thus, the university can only enroll you as a non-degree student (your enrollment certificate will say: "Abschluss im Ausland"). Once you are admitted as a doctoral candidate by the faculty (see below for details), please hand in a copy of the certificate of acceptance at the Studierendensekretariat. Then you will be enrolled as a Doctoral Student.

Termination of Enrollment

Once you have finished your doctoral studies, you can no longer be enrolled. Please do not forget to terminate your enrollment with the Studierendensekretariat.



Castle Rauschholzhausen is located outside Giessen and used for academic conferences and meetings. Pictures: Sabine Scheele, Koordinationsstelle Multimedia (KOMM)

Getting in Touch with Peers

Whatever trouble you have, whatever situation you are in, probably somebody else has been there before. And even if this is not the case, talking with peers and sharing experiences will help. Of course the easiest way is getting in touch with your fellow doctoral students from your institute, but there are also other ways.

Email List

We use a mailing list to announce events and other information to our international doctoral students. If you do not receive our emails, please contact us.

Roundtables

There are two monthly roundtables. *The Roundtable for International Doctoral Students* is coordinated by the International Office. It is specifically for international doctoral students and meets in the middle of each month at *Lokal International*. The meetings will be announced via the email list and on our website: www.uni-giessen.de/cms/drsocial

Moreover, there is the general *Doktorandenstammtisch*. It is open for all doctoral students at JLU and meets at the Bistro *Die Kate* towards the end of each month. Meetings are announced via the *Hinweise der JLU* Newsletter you receive with your university email account.

The Program by the International Office

In addition to the roundtables the International Office offers a diverse program for international students in general and for international doctoral students in particular. Among these events are excursions, day-trips, visits of cultural events, workshops, and trainings. There also is a Spouse- and Family Program for doctoral students who brought a partner or family. Current events can be found on our website: www.uni-giessen.de/cms/drsocial

Lokal International

Lokal International at Eichendorffring 111 is a meeting place for German and international students in Giessen. It is a cafeteria and a bar at once, offering drinks and snacks at low prices. They arrange regular events such as movie nights, games and quiz nights, or cooking evenings. Moreover the *Lokal* hosts evenings themed with certain countries, giving you the possibility to get to know other countries or make other students familiar with yours. For more information, please visit www.lokal-international.de or the *Lokal International* page on Facebook.



Supervision

Your Supervisor

Most doctoral students already have a supervisor when they come to Giessen. However, if you are in an organized program, you might still have to decide on one. When deciding, you should have in mind that your supervisor is the most important partner during your doctoral studies: He/she is the one who will have the most influence on your grade, he/she is the one who will (hopefully) give you the most advice on your project, and he/she might even be your employer. Most importantly you should of course think of your supervisor's research focus: Do you think his/her expertise and your research interests match? But since you will have to deal with him/her a lot, you should also ask yourself whether the two of you will get along with one another personally.

In general communication and politeness are important. If there is a problem you should not assume that your supervisor is bothering you on purpose. Typically he/she either does what he/she thinks is best for you or is simply too busy to think about it at all. Thus, if you do not feel treated adequately, you should openly tell him/her how you feel about it and tell him/her what you wish him/her to do or to avoid. However, while openness is good, you should not be demanding or even annoy your supervisor. Be aware: Professors are usually quite busy, you are probably not the only doctoral student, and you will have to deal with him/her for years.

It can be very helpful to agree on regular appointments. This does not only guarantee a certain amount of feedback, it also gives you deadlines as incentives to produce presentable results.

Your Second Examiner

At the end, dissertations are typically examined by two professors, one of which is your supervisor. There are – depending on the tradition in your subject and on your personal decisions – different ways of dealing with the second examiner. You can either

chose him shortly before finishing your dissertation or early on and make him a second supervisor. But even if you do not make this choice, you should not wait too long.

If your first supervisor is strong on one aspect of your topic but not so strong on another it might be a good move to pick a second supervisor with complementary skills. Other criteria for picking a second supervisor might be comfort (picking someone from Giessen who is around anyway), internationalization (picking someone from another university or another country you are particularly interested in), and last not least sympathy (picking someone you know you get along with).

No matter if you view your second examiner as a second supervisor or not, you should make sure to choose someone who gets along with your first supervisor personally and regarding your subject. If one likes what the other hates, you cannot satisfy both; if they use your thesis as a field to cultivate their personal rivalries, you are not helped either. Thus, it is best to consult with your supervisor.



The Formal Process

The Faculty Counts!

No matter whether you do your doctorate in an organized program or freely, no matter whether you decide to be enrolled or not: The formal process of your doctoral studies is determined by your faculty (Fachbereich) – *not* by the university administration, *not* by the international office, and *not* by the graduate centre. You can only become a doctoral candidate if the faculty accepts you; you will hand in your dissertation at the faculty, organize your defense with the faculty and finally receive your doctorate from the faculty.

The formal process is composed of two phases: the first phase is the time to do research and write your dissertation, the second phase comprises the examination process and most notably the defense of your thesis in front of the examination committee.

1st Phase: Admission as a Doctoral Candidate

The first phase is formally opened once the doctoral committee (Promotionsausschuss) of your faculty admits you as a doctoral candidate. It is important not to confuse this step with the enrollment as a (doctoral) student at the Studierendensekretariat or with the admission to a doctoral program of a graduate centre. These two optional steps usually take place first, but the admission as a doctoral candidate at your faculty is the one that counts. The doctoral committee will determine whether or not your degree is equivalent to German degrees and whether or not it meets the formal requirement of the faculty's doctorate regulations (Promotionsordnung). In some cases the committee might only admit candidates with additional requirements (e.g. additional coursework).

Even if you are admitted to a graduate center and are enrolled and have already started your research long before you apply for admission as a doctoral candidate, this step might bring some unpleasant surprises. Thus, you should not postpone it.

Reporting on the Progress of your Research

Some doctoral regulations demand you to hand in regular reports on the progress of your research to the doctoral committee via your supervisor.

Assembling Your Examination Committee

At the end you will have to defend your thesis in front of an examination committee, which will also grade your performance. The committee is composed of your supervisor, your second examiner, and – depending on the regulations of your faculty – two or more additional scholars. Typically it is your responsibility to assemble the committee. Although the defense is one of the last steps to your doctoral degree, you should not wait too long before getting in touch with your desired examiners. As soon as you can really see when your work on the dissertation will come to an end, you should start asking your preferred candidates. Again it might be wise to consult with your supervisor.

2nd Phase: Beginning of Examination Process

The second phase is formally opened when the doctoral committee approves your application for opening the examination process. When planning this step, you should be aware that the committee only meets a few times per semester. So do not expect your application to be processed the next day. Instead, ask the faculty (Dekanat/Prüfungsamt) when the committee meets and plan ahead!

Handing in Your Dissertation

In humanities and in social sciences you typically write one big thesis, in the natural sciences and psychology your dissertation typically consists of a number of papers published in journals. One way or the other, you will have to hand in the dissertation to



the faculty, together with the aforementioned application for opening of the examination process. The faculty will pass it on to your supervisor and your second examiner who will then read and grade it. It might take several months until the examiners are finished grading and you can continue with the next step.

Displaying Your Dissertation

The doctoral regulations demand the dissertation to be publicly displayed for some weeks before the defense, typically in the faculty's office. Theoretically other professors could read it and object to the grades your examiners gave.

Defending Your Dissertation

Not only do you have to assemble your examination committee, you also have to find a date acceptable to everyone. Again, you should not expect everybody to be available when you need them, but plan ahead and coordinate.

The exact arrangement of the defense varies from faculty to faculty. Typically you have to give a presentation on the main theses and results of your studies. Then the committee will challenge you and ask questions. In some faculties you have to prepare a second topic unrelated to your dissertation as well. Since defenses are public, it may be a good idea to attend someone else's defense before having your own.

Publishing Your Dissertation

Unless your dissertation is cumulative, e.g. a number of peer reviewed papers published in journals, you are required to publish it as a book. The rules vary from faculty to faculty: some accept e-books others require a publication with a publishing company and a certain number of printed copies. If this applies, you will not formally receive your degree until the date of the publication.

Again, it is important to plan ahead. The sooner you get in touch with a potential publisher the better your chances are.

The Faculties

The formalities differ from faculty to faculty; unfortunately similar steps at times have different names. All the doctoral regulations (Promotionsordnungen) can be found here:

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/mug/7/findex4.html

Here is how the two steps that open the 1st and 2nd phase are called and some other specifics:

Faculty 01 – Law

1st phase: Annahme als Doktorand/in

2nd phase: Eröffnung des Prüfungsverfahrens

Contact for applications and information:

www.recht.uni-giessen.de/wps/fb01/home/dekanat

Faculty 02 – Business Studies and Economics

1st phase: Annahme als Doktorand/in

2nd phase: Eröffnung des Prüfungsverfahrens.

Contact for applications and information:

wiwi.uni-giessen.de/home/Dekanat/csskontakt/

In this faculty students are required to do either additional coursework or an oral examination on two topics other than their dissertation.

Faculty 03 – Social and Cultural Sciences

1st phase: Annahme als Doktorand/in

2nd phase: Eröffnung des Prüfungsverfahrens.

Contact for applications and information:

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/fb03/kontakt/lageplan/

Faculties 04, 05, and 06 - Humanities

1st phase: Annahme als Doktorand/in

2nd phase: Zulassung zur Promotion

Contact for applications and information:

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/paemter/gwiss

If their dissertation has the character of natural



The faculties of the humanities, the social sciences, and psychology are gathered in the *Philosophikum*.
Picture: Sabine Scheele, Koordinationsstelle Multimedia (KOMM)

sciences, doctoral students of faculty 06 may also do their doctorate according to the doctoral regulations of the natural sciences.

[Faculties 07 and 08 – Natural Sciences](#)

1st phase: Annahme als Doktorand/in

2nd phase: Eröffnung des Prüfungsverfahrens.

Contact for applications and information:

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/fb08/pruefungsamt/promotion

[Faculty 09 – Agriculture, Environmental Studies and Home Economics](#)

1st phase: Annahme als Doktorand/in

2nd phase: Eröffnung des Prüfungsverfahrens.

Contact for applications and information:

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/fbz/fb09/studium/pruefung-promotion

If their dissertation has the character of natural sciences, doctoral students of faculty 09 may also do their doctorate according to the doctoral regulations of the natural sciences.

[Faculty 10 & 11 – Veterinary Medicine and Medicine](#)

Doctoral students of faculties 10 and 11 can choose between two kinds of doctorates. On the one hand they can take part in the research oriented *PhD Programme of the Faculties of Veterinary Medicine and Medicine*. Applications must be submitted online; the selection committee will only admit students with excellent results in their previous education. Further information:

www.med.uni-giessen.de/phd/

Alternatively they can also follow the Promotionssordnung like students in other faculties:

1st phase: Annahme als Doktorand/in

2nd phase: Eröffnung des Prüfungsverfahrens.

Contact for applications and information:

www.med.uni-giessen.de/dekanat/index.html

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/faculties/f10/deaneryselfadministration/deanery/deanery/

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/faculties/f10/deaneryselfadministration/deanery/deanery/

The *Zeughaus* in the center of Giessen is used by the faculties of geography and nutrition.

Picture: Sabine Scheele, Koordinationsstelle Multimedia (KOMM)

General Advice

Prioritize Your Dissertation

Your boss wants you to work some extra hours this week, your supervisor wants you to attend that presentation by a colleague, your fellow doctoral student asks you to proof-read his paper, a friend recommends reading this book, your roommate wants you to clean the kitchen, your bike needs to be fixed, and your partner wants to go to the movies with you? Fine, life consists of more than just your doctoral studies, but you have to make sure that you do not seek distractions. The dissertation is a long term project which can lead to the misperception that it is never urgent and can always be postponed to next week. Do not fall for this. Instead, learn how to prioritize the important long-term project over less important short-term issues.

Don't Neglect Your Life

Doctoral studies do take a lot of time and you will have to sacrifice much of your leisure for it. But do not make the mistake to give up everything else. A degree is not worth it. Not only will you feel better with some free time activities, you will also work more effectively if working is not all you do.

Get Structured

The key to a good work-life-balance and to successful work is structure. It is best to reserve certain days and hours for your doctoral studies. Give them the room they need, but do not let them colonize the rest of your life.



Write!

Many (doctoral) students tend to spend much time reading their material or generating data and thereby avoid working on their actual dissertation. Once they start writing they usually realize that they can only use a fraction of this data. While generating data is of course indispensable, do not fall into this trap. Instead, start writing drafts of papers and chapters early on to see how much (or little) material you really need.

Create Deadlines

One good strategy to force yourself to work in a way that bears results is creating deadlines and sticking to them. Of course deadlines will be more productive if they are not your personal secret but involve others waiting for your text (e.g. your supervisor, a colloquium).

Plan Your Future

Doctoral studies are very time-consuming, particularly to the end. However, you should not make the mistake of focusing on your current studies so much that you lose the bigger perspective. You should start planning your post-doctoral career as long as you have the security of a doctoral position.



The seasons in Giessen
Pictures: Sabine Scheele, Koordinationsstelle Multimedia (KOMM)

Financing your Doctorate

Finding Scholarships and Positions

The best time to find scholarships and doctoral positions is the beginning of or even before your doctoral studies.

Here is the DAAD-scholarship-database:

bit.ly/daad-in

Here is JLU's job market:

<http://www.uni-giessen.de/stellenmarkt/>

Abschlussförderung

Many students encounter the problem that they need funding towards the end of their dissertation. Mostly this happens because doctoral studies take longer than planned. In general it is really hard to find a donor for scholarships for the last few months of studies. So you should not rely on obtaining something like this, but you can check the DAAD-database:

bit.ly/daad-in

JLU's International Office

Learning German

As a doctoral student of JLU you can make use of the International Office's German language courses. Our evening courses are most interesting for doctoral students. They run for 90 minutes twice a week in the evening and cost 90 € for the summer semester or 100 € for the winter semester. Find all our offers on our homepage:

www.uni-giessen.de/cms/DaF

Central Consultation for International Doctoral Students

If you have any further questions regarding the topics of this flyer or your studies in Giessen in general, do not hesitate to get in touch with us. There is a consultant for international doctoral students, offering advice via email, phone, or in person during the office hours.

Come and visit us!

We are looking forward to meeting you!

Central Consultation for International Doctoral Students

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