

How to Find a German PhD Supervisor or Research Partner

In order to be successful with your application for research funding/PhD studies, you will need proof of contact with a German professor. If you are not yet in touch with a German research partner/supervisor, you might find it difficult to get in touch. Germany has altogether more than three hundred institutions of higher education. So how do you find the proverbial needle in the haystack?

This leaflet is meant to give you some guidelines. However, make sure you also study carefully the general information on doctoral studies in Germany on the DAAD website:

www.daad.de/deutschland/studium/promotion/04669.en.html

1. International Postgraduate Programmes

If you are a potential PhD candidate or recent PostDoc, you may first want to find out if you can do your research within the framework of an **International Postgraduate Programme (IPP)**. These programmes are university graduate training programmes established at a centre of scientific excellence in a specific field. This ensures that your course meets the highest academic standards. The students work on their thesis within the framework of a coherent and often interdisciplinary research programme; they participate in an accompanying study programme organised by the faculty members and to some extent by the students themselves.

All IPP participants have regular contact with the university teachers responsible for their programme and are given the opportunity to engage in collaborative intensive research. Cross-faculty courses and colloquia offer forums for interdisciplinary dialogue. German and international doctoral candidates participating in the IPP jointly attend courses from the accompanying curriculum. Teaching includes visiting lectures given by foreign academics and scientists. These are frequently delivered in English. The doctoral thesis may be written in English, while the viva may be held in English.

The structured format of your postgraduate studies provides an extra plus. As an IPP participant, you are not a lone combatant in the jungle of scientific research; rather, you can be sure that your university will provide the intensive guidance-counselling expected of a top-class institution. Universities offering International Postgraduate Programmes take on firmly-defined institutional responsibility for their students. Clear regulations governing performance controls, graduation processes and fixed deadlines mean your path to a doctorate becomes a calculable factor. And if you completed your previous studies abroad, no problem: IPPs operate flexible admissions procedures for holders of international degrees.

A list of recommended IPPs can be found on the DAAD website:

www.daad.de/ipp/en.

More information on structured doctoral programmes offered by research institutions affiliated with universities in Germany is available at:

www.daad.de/deutschland/studium/promotion/04672.en.html

Make sure you visit these sites and study the information given thoroughly!

2. Individual Research Projects

If you do not intend to follow a structured doctoral programme, but to take a German doctorate in the traditional "Master-Apprentice Model", you will need to find a German professor to take you on as his or her research student. While finding a PhD supervisor or research partner in Germany can sometimes be tricky, there are several ways of identifying a potential partner which you could explore. You will need to invest a little time, but your efforts are likely to be worthwhile. Please consider the following options:

1. Do you know any lecturers or colleagues within your field, who are already in touch with German academics or who will attend an international conference soon? If so, ask them to help you establish contact. A brief introduction or a short letter of recommendation can often go a long way towards facilitating communication.

2. Visit the website <http://www.daad.de/deutschland/studium/idp/04709.en.html>, which is a database of international degree programmes offered by German universities. Use this database to identify (Bachelor, Master) courses closely related to your area of research. Then approach the programme coordinators via email with a short research proposal and ask them whether they can suggest a potential PhD supervisor you could contact.

3. To find university departments in your area of interest, go to the web site: <http://www.higher-education-compass.de>. This is the website of the association of rectors and presidents of all German universities and universities of applied sciences. In the section "Doctorates", you can find various search engines, where you can key in your area of research in order to get a list of the existing programmes. Through links you can then go right into the web sites of the universities. Many universities and departments have bilingual web sites, but in cases some command of German can be required. You should then look for a lecturer or a professor who does research in an area close to yours. If you have found somebody whose work looks interesting to you, feel free to contact him/her by e-mail. Most successful research cooperations began with a personal contact!

4. If you feel you have exhausted your own possibilities, but you have still not found a suitable supervisor, please contact the DAAD Information Centre in Accra (email: daadghana@web.de; <http://ic.daad.de/accra>). Information Centre Staff will then try to help you establish contact with German academics.

3. Approaching German professors via e-mail

While there are no hard and fast rules as to how to write a successful email, here are some guidelines you may find useful when first making contact with a German professor.

- ? Make sure your email does not contain any grammatical/orthographical mistakes or typos. This includes minor issues such as capital letters or punctuation. Keep in mind that you want to convince the German professor that you are capable of producing academic work of the highest standards.
- ? Avoid impersonal letters ("Dear Sir/Madam"). Research has shown that you are more likely to receive a reply, if your mail is geared towards a specific receiver.
- ? Do not approach the professor for funding in your first mail. At this stage you only want to establish contact and to find out whether there is general interest in your topic.
- ? Avoid religious phrases (such as "May God bless you" or "I pray..."), as religion is generally considered as a private issue in Germany and is not normally made reference to in official documents or business letters.
- ? Attach a concise description of the kind of research you would like to undertake, but also show that you are open to discuss your project and to make alterations. You may also want to attach a brief cv so that the professor can get a more comprehensive picture of the person you are (your academic and professional background, age, skills etc.)