

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. In total Germany has more than three hundred institutions of higher education and, in addition, hundreds of research institutes. 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/promotion/phd/en/.

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 academic 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. The doctoral thesis may be written in English and the viva is also held in English.

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 is available at: www.research-in-germany.org/phd-structural.

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/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:

- 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.
- Visit the website <https://www.daad.de/deutschland/studienangebote/international-programmes/en/>, 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.

- To find university departments in your area of interest, go to the website: <https://www.hochschulkompass.de/en/doctoral-studies.html>. This is the website of the German Rectors' Conference. In the section "Doctorates" you can find a search engine, where you can key in your area of research to obtain a list of the existing programmes. Through links you can then go to the websites of the universities. Many universities and departments have bilingual web sites, but in cases some command of German may 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 co-operations begin with a personal contact!
- A comprehensive search of the German research landscape can also be conducted with a new online database called Research Explorer: http://www.research-explorer.de/research_explorer.en.html?. This very useful resource allows you to identify university as well as non-university research institutes working in your area of interest.
- If you feel you have exhausted your own possibilities, but you have still not found a suitable supervisor, please contact your nearest DAAD office or the nearest DAAD lecturer of German language and literature for further help.

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 e-mail does not contain any grammatical or typing mistakes. This includes minor errors 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 standard.
- 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 person. Never ever send an e-mail to more than one person!
- Keep in mind that being informal and using casual phrases are mostly not appreciated in first contacts.
- Explain to the professor your reason for contacting him/her. The reason should be matching research areas (name them!) and not a general phrase like "I know you are a renowned professor".
- Attach a concise description of the kind of research you would like to undertake (cf. our leaflet: "How to write a research proposal"), 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.)
- 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.
- Do not feel discouraged if some of your emails remain unanswered. Please understand that many professors are extremely busy and will only get back to you if they are seriously interested in your research proposal and can offer adequate supervision.

Good Luck!