
Doctorates in the D-GESS

Information sheet

As at: 25 February 2013

This information sheet is intended for the professors and doctoral students in the D-GESS (Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences).¹ It is based on experience built up since the introduction of the Regulations for Doctoral Studies on 1 October 2005. It was last revised in September 2011.

If you cannot find the information you need in this document or in the overarching regulatory principles, please consult the Head of Department before sending a request/application to the Rectorate.

Regulatory principles: Doctorates in the D-GESS are regulated by (in order of priority):

- ❖ [Ordinance on Doctoral Studies ETH Zurich](#) (Version: 1 July 2008);
- ❖ [Detailed requirements for doctorates in the D-GESS](#) (Version: 8 January 2009);
- ❖ Interpretation and practice in the D-GESS, as laid down in this information sheet.

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¹ As is standard practice at ETH, job titles apply to both genders.

1. Doctorates in the D-GESS

In the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences (GESS), both candidates with an MA and those with an MSc in a natural or engineering science can take a doctorate in one of the subjects covered by the GESS.

2. Admission

2.1 Registration and formal examination by the Rectorate

The first step is to make contact with your preferred supervisor for your thesis. You must have written authorisation from your doctoral supervisor before you can register with the Doctoral Administration Office at the Rectorate. The Rectorate checks your documentation against formal criteria (completeness of the papers you are submitting, compliance with the requirements stated in the Ordinance on Doctoral Studies). If this is successful, the Rectorate forwards the registration to the Head of Department.

2.1.1 Switching to ETH during the doctoral thesis

It should be noted that doctoral students who have already started their thesis but who are currently matriculated as a doctoral student at a different university can also change to ETH – provided that the remaining time is sufficient for all ETH requirements to be met (registration deadlines, meeting any additional conditions, research plan, gaining twelve credits, defending the thesis within ETH's normal timeframe for this purpose, etc.).

Important: Doctoral students who are still matriculated at another university cannot matriculate at ETH Zurich. Before applying to ETH you must therefore withdraw from the other university.

2.1.2 External doctorates

External doctorates (by candidates who are working on their doctoral thesis outside of ETH but who will take their doctorate at ETH) must obtain authorisation from the Department Conference. The Doctoral Committee (and before that the departmental core areas) checks these applications and makes a recommendation to the Department Conference. The Doctoral Committee believes that external doctoral students should complete at least 30-50% of their work at ETH or in the vicinity of ETH – this is also required in order for the twelve credits to be gained and the additional conditions met.

2.2 Qualitative examination by the Doctoral Committee of the D-GESS

The makeup of the Doctoral Committee is the same as the Departmental Committee. It is made up of the Head of Department and his deputy, and a representative from each of the core areas unless these are already represented by the above persons. The Doctoral Committee is elected by the D-GESS Department Conference.

The Doctoral Committee decides whether the standard of the candidate's qualifications meets the requirements of the D-GESS. His final marks must be within the range which would have allowed the candidate to take a doctorate at his original university (where his MA or MSc was obtained).

For candidates with an MA or an MSc in natural or engineering sciences from a different university, the Doctoral Committee may define additional conditions. Candidates who have gained a qualification from outside ETH equivalent to a Master degree from the D-GESS are generally exempted from any additional conditions. The Doctoral Committee will clarify the equivalence of qualifications at the request of the supervisor for the doctoral thesis.

2.3 Additional conditions

Any additional conditions are defined in discussions between the supervisor for the doctoral thesis and the Doctoral Committee. The aim is to make the additional conditions meaningful – it is pri-

marily a question of supplementing existing qualifications with a view to meeting the demands of the subject-specific doctorate.

The supervisor and the doctoral student submit proposals for the additional requirements. The final decision is made by the Doctoral Committee and the Prorector. Each case is examined individually. There are no set universal conditions, e.g. a certain number of credits. Generally it is a question of attending a number of courses and/or summer schools, or taking a written or oral examination based on a clearly defined subject area.

Once a candidate's previous achievements (primarily qualifications) have been approved by the Doctoral Committee and any additional conditions have been defined, the candidate's provisional admission to the doctorate is recommended to the Rectorate. A deadline is set on a case-by-case basis for the further admission requirements to be met, which should generally be no longer than one year. This deadline may only be extended in well-justified exceptional cases and the extension must be approved by the Rectorate.

The record of achievement for the additional conditions must be in the form of marks awarded. In the case of an examination, the examiners are normally the thesis supervisor and another professor from the D-GESS. The examinations may not be marked exclusively by the thesis supervisor. Any credits which are gained in order to satisfy the additional conditions do not count towards the twelve credits that are required for the doctoral course.

The Doctoral Administration Office has produced a [form](#) (german only) for notifying the rectorate of the additional conditions fulfilled by the candidate.

2.4 Research plan

The research plan for the thesis must be sent to the department's Doctoral Committee with the appropriate form within twelve months of the registration.² It must contain a summary of one page which gives an overview of the most important features of the research plan and places the project in a broader scientific context. It should be written in clear, non-technical language and broadly comprehensible to a wide audience.

The research plan can only be submitted once the admission requirements have been met. The Doctoral Committee assesses the research plan and the documentation showing compliance with the additional conditions. If the outcome is positive, the committee recommends that the candidate be definitively admitted to take a doctorate.

Then the candidate is admitted definitively.

The Doctoral Committee has decided that research plans should primarily be assessed by the relevant section of the department. Provided that the professors in the departmental sub-division are in general agreement on a positive decision, the Doctoral Committee then mainly checks the formal aspects, before making its recommendation to the Rectorate.

If there is no general agreement, the committee also checks the content of the research plan before making a recommendation. Research plans which are rejected by the section must be presented to the Doctoral Committee if the candidate requests this.

2.5 Co-examiner

At the request of the thesis supervisor, the Doctoral Committee appoints at least one co-examiner. This can be at the same time as it makes the recommendation for definitive admission but must be within two years of provisional admission. The co-examiner will subsequently be a member of the Examination Committee. However, all the members of the Examination Committee do not have to be identified at this early stage. On the other hand, it may be useful to appoint a co-examiner who will advise and support the doctoral student.

² It is essential that the research plan is submitted, otherwise the doctoral student cannot be definitively admitted to take the doctorate and will later be refused permission to take the doctoral examination. The obligation is on the student to provide it, not on the committee to request it!
Responsibility lies with the doctoral student, the thesis supervisor and the Doctoral Committee.

3. Doctoral studies

3.1 Credit requirements

Exactly which work will count towards the twelve credits that have to be gained during doctoral studies must be agreed between the doctoral student and his thesis supervisor, preferably in the first six months. The Doctoral Committee only becomes involved in this issue in the event of disagreement. One credit equates approximately to the work required for one ETH course lasting one semester of one hour a week.

The following terms apply:

1. At least four credits should be gained by attending regular courses at ETH Zurich.
2. Candidates who are not taking their doctorate in their original discipline must, depending on their previous field of study (social sciences/humanities or natural sciences/engineering), gain at least two credits by attending courses from the complementary discipline.
3. One credit can be gained per conference for seminar papers or poster presentations given at non-ETH scientific conferences. Up to a maximum of two credits towards doctoral studies can be gained in this category.
4. Attending summer schools and other continuing education programmes of a scientific nature can count for up to six credits towards doctoral studies. As a general rule of thumb, one-third of a credit can be accrued for each day of the course.
5. Actively participating (e.g. by giving presentations, assessing presentations) in seminars and colloquia within the professorship can count for up to 0.5 credits per semester and up to two credits altogether.
6. Actively helping with ETH courses (e.g. taking the lead in exercises/tutorials) can count for one credit per course and up to two credits altogether.
7. Up to two credits can be gained by attending language courses.
8. A maximum of half a credit per semester can be gained by being a member of one or more ETHZ committees. No more than two credits can be gained in this way.
9. Work undertaken in order to meet any additional conditions imposed under the ETH Ordinance on Doctoral Studies cannot be counted towards doctoral studies.
10. Work undertaken as part of the BA and MA or BSc and MSc courses cannot be counted towards doctoral studies.

Courses taken at the University of Zurich are deemed to be courses taken outside ETH Zurich. There is no specific list of ETH courses for doctoral studies.

3.2 Crediting of courses completed previously or externally

In order to gain credits for courses, summer schools, etc. that are not part of ETH's regular offering – and this is mainly important for candidates who switch to ETH relatively late on – detailed documents, certificates, letters from course leaders, etc. must be provided showing exactly the standard of the courses and how much work they entailed.

3.3 Time spent abroad

Doctoral theses written entirely or partly outside ETH Zurich must be approved by the Department Conference. There are special forms for this (see the Doctoral Administration website). In terms of content, this condition is probably less relevant to the D-GESS than other ETH departments – it is primarily a question of ensuring that other universities in Switzerland or elsewhere do not have any legal claim over the intellectual property of the doctoral student – but we must respect this formality. Time spent abroad on the doctoral thesis must be discussed with the thesis supervisor and specified in the research plan.

In the case of time spent at other universities or similar institutions, the doctoral supervisor and student must ensure (e.g. by obtaining written confirmation) that the other institution offers proper working conditions and is not making any claim to the intellectual property resulting from the doctoral thesis. Other conditions can be found in the regulatory principles (www.ethz.ch/doctorate/index_EN).

4. Doctoral examination and publication

You can find the **procedure for registering for the doctoral examination** on the website www.ethz.ch/doctorate/index_EN.

4.1 Deadlines

The thesis must be defended (at ETH this is called the doctoral examination) within 6 years of matriculation. Applications for exemptions are considered by the Rector.

4.2 Cumulative doctoral thesis

The doctoral thesis may be a monograph or consist of various separate papers for specialist journals. In the latter case, the thesis should comprise, in addition to three or four papers, an introduction and a conclusion, to set the papers in context and link them together. Papers with co-authors are permitted, but the candidate's own scientific contribution must be indicated and clearly apparent. However, the doctoral student should generally have written at least one or two papers alone. Ideally, one or two papers should already have appeared in a specialist journal as part of an anonymous peer review process. Papers which have already been accepted or published can be submitted.

4.3 Examination Committee

The Examination Committee consists of the Head of Department, the thesis supervisor and at least one co-examiner. If the Head of Department is the examiner, or is unable to attend, his deputy or a member of the Doctoral Committee chairs the committee. It is recommended that there is more than one co-examiner, especially if the first co-examiner has helped to supervise the doctoral thesis. If the first co-examiner is dependent in some way on the supervisor of the thesis (e.g. is a member of his working group), an independent second co-examiner must be appointed.

The Doctoral Committee welcomes the involvement of foreign co-examiners where this helps ensure that doctoral theses are examined independently and to a high quality in accordance with international standards. Co-examiners who are neither professors within the meaning of Article 1 of the ETH Ordinance on Teaching Staff or SNSF-sponsored professors at ETHZ must be approved by the Department Conference. The names of confirmed co-examiners must be given to the Prorector for the doctorate as soon as possible (Section 8 of the implementation provisions for the Ordinance on Doctoral Studies). ETH pays co-examiners from outside the ETH Domain a flat-rate fee of CHF 400.00. The relevant professorship must pay any travel and ancillary expenses (at least one co-examiner must attend the defence of the thesis in person). Defence of the thesis by video conference must be approved by the Rector (only possible in very well-justified exceptional cases; the argument that it saves money is not sufficient).

4.4 Preparing the doctoral examination

The doctoral student registers for the examination with the Rectorate, using the appropriate [form](#); confirmation of ETCS credits gained must be enclosed. The thesis must be submitted to the Rectorate at least twelve days before the examination. The Rectorate then forwards the thesis to the GESS Study Administration Office. The record of achievement for the necessary credits must be confirmed with stamp and signature by the supervisor of the dissertation on the respective form.

The doctoral student is responsible for agreeing the date with the members of the Examination Committee and the department coordinator, and for booking the room. He must pass all the details on to the GESS Study Administration Office, which writes the invitation to the doctoral examination and sends it to all members of the Department Conference.

4.5 Doctoral examination

See also the «Information sheet on preparation and procedure for the doctoral examination».

4.5.1 Procedure for the examination

By order of the Department Conference, the defence of the thesis (doctoral examination) takes place in public.

The doctoral examination lasts 90 minutes. It is made up of:

- 30 minutes for presentation of the thesis and the main findings from the candidate's research
- 45-60 minutes for questions from the examiners
- any questions from the audience

Then the Examination Committee discusses the thesis in private. The result is then given to the candidate immediately.

4.5.2 Assessment and additional requirements

The doctoral examination is regarded as having been passed if the written thesis and the oral examination are both assessed as satisfactory.

Additional requirements may be formulated for the written thesis:

- a. Slight changes are discussed between the candidate and the examiner and/or co-examiner(s) and are incorporated in the version of the thesis to be published with no further examination. In this case the doctoral examination is regarded as having been passed and an application is made to the next Department Conference for the thesis to be approved.
- b. More significant changes must be defined by the Examination Committee and implemented by the candidate within a certain period. The thesis must then be resubmitted to the Examination Committee or the supervisor for checking before a final decision is made on whether the thesis is to be accepted or rejected. The Examination Committee does not have to meet again; it is sufficient for members of the committee to send written reports to the Chairman.
- c. If the deficiencies are substantial in scale and/or relate to key parts of the thesis, it is to be rejected as unsatisfactory. In this case, the doctoral examination has to be repeated.

4.5.3 Application to the Department Conference and the Study Conference

If the doctoral examination is passed, the committee applies to the next Department Conference for the awarding of the doctorate to be approved. If the Department Conference concurs, it then submits an application for the awarding of a doctorate to the Study Conference.

The failure of a doctoral examination must also be reported to the Department Conference.

4.5.4 Publication requirements

The publication requirements for theses are regulated by the Ordinance on Doctoral Studies and the Rector's implementation provisions.

4.5.5 Title

The title of all doctorates awarded by ETH (regardless of the subject area) is Dr. sc ETH (in full: Doctor of Science). No mark or honours are awarded.