

Hints on preparing an application to prepare for a doctorate and the doctoral studies procedures in the TUD Architecture Department

Prologue: key facts in brief

Every proposed doctoral thesis to be submitted to FB 15 Architektur (Architecture Department 15) must first be approved by the department. A special body, the doctorate committee, makes these decisions. The Dean is chairman ex officio, other members are the four professors, an academic assistant (ideally with a doctorate), and two students. The process of acquiring a doctorate in FB 15 is not, as in other departments, linked to an individual tutor (doctorate supervisor), but falls within the responsibility of the department as a whole (cf. diploma). Hence the committee is obliged to accept only those proposals that seem to promise a successful conclusion. The basis for such a decision is an individual application from the candidate, which must be presented to the committee and endorsed by a professor in the department. This professor will usually also be the supervisor (first examiner) for the thesis. The committee holds regular meetings to make its decisions (usually 2-3 times per semester) to discuss whether applications should be accepted or rejected. Applications are to be submitted in writing before the dates of the meetings. The committee is able to accept an application if certain conditions are met, or also hold the application back until certain conditions (usually involving making the application more concrete, revising it or adding material to it) are fulfilled. Acceptance by the committee is needed before applications can be made for grants as a "doctoral candidate" or enrol as a student preparing for a doctorate.

Why a doctorate?

Doctoral studies are the classical form of postgraduate university study, accepted all over the world. All academic assistants engaged at the cost of the state and who on the basis of their contract are performing services that also enhance their own academic qualifications (so-called qualification posts) are required to use the period of their contract (usually 3 years with a maximum of two years for possible extension) to acquire this further individual qualification. The contract states that approx. 1/3 of their working time (!) is available for this purpose, and that for up to 50 % of their working time they should be required to perform services that are of use for their own academic qualification. In the case of state-funded qualification posts, the time limit on the employment is actually based on this possibility for further qualification (cf. § 77 HHG). This can be crucial in some cases in terms of whether an extension is granted for two years or not. The extension in fact depends not just on the agreement of the professor in charge, but equally on the position reached in relation to further qualifications after three years: if a doctorate has been started in these three years, and recognizable progress has been made, but without the work being completed, than the person concerned can insist that the question of continuing the work be examined and that a decision is made about it considering the interests of the person affected and the professor in charge, even if the professor in charge would prefer to re-advertise the post. It is therefore in the considered interests of each individual to make good use of his or her contract period.

You will find details about this in the principles for academic assistants who have not yet received their doctorates in the context of fixed-term employment conditions at the TUD under:

http://www.tu-darmstadt.de/pvw/dez_iii/infos/merk_wimi.tud

Of course a doctorate is not the only possible form of further qualification for architects. The principles listed above therefore explicitly also apply to "comparable qualifications specific to the subject", but so far they have not been defined unambiguously and also do not enjoy any general formal recognition beyond the department. As well as this, it is in the interests of the architecture department to encourage doctorates, as these are seen as a central indicator of the academic quality of every department. At the same time, the department must take care to accept only those applications that have a chance of success and realization.

3. Doctorates - who?

The essential requirement for a doctorate is a university qualification, in other words an Engineering Diploma (Dipl.-Ing; Technical University) or an MA (for humanities students), or equivalent foreign qualifications. As yet there are no hard and fast regulations for the new MA courses. The usual doctorate granted to architect is Doctor of Engineering (Dr.-Ing.)

Students who have graduated from Fachhochschulen (specialist colleges) can only be accepted for doctoral studies in exceptional cases or if they meet certain criteria; further detail is laid down in an addendum to the doctorate regulations (cf. 9 Appendix). Fundamentally, anyone holding a Dipl.-Ing. from a Technical University can apply to do a doctorate. This is independent of employment status, though also carries no financial advantages (grants etc.). Doctoral candidates can register as doctoral students at the TUD and then independently seek grants from other sources.

As well as the Dr.-Ing. (Architecture), the architecture department can also award a Dr. phil. in art history or classical archaeology. The procedure is the same.

Gaining a doctorate - how? The procedure

The basis of any doctorate is the preparation of a thesis, i.e. an independent, individual treatment of an academic question in written form. To do this, a subject has to be chosen, and a **concrete question formulated** on the basis of it. The subject can but does not have to be directly linked with the specialist research area of a section of the department. In any case, it must be an individual, verifiable accomplishment creating recognizable new perceptions that can be assessed academically (i.e. an answer to a question posed by the candidate to him- or herself that others also acknowledge as relevant). **So a subject that is "interesting in some way" is not enough: the formulation of the question, the interest accruing at the epistemological level and the line of approach must be clearly defined in advance** (cf. also the following catalogue of criteria). The project should be presented in the form of a written "application for acceptance as a doctoral candidate" to the committee mentioned above. The supervisor (not the candidate) presents the project to the committee and answers any questions arising. So he or she must be properly informed about both the subject and the applicant.

Once the proposed subject has been accepted by the committee, it is worked on individually (usually for approx. 2-3 years). The completed written version is submitted to the Dean's office, read by at least two assessors and proposed to the committee for acceptance as a doctoral thesis (or not); a third assessor can be co-opted if needed. And least one of these assessors must be a full professor in FB 15. He or she has usually supervised and supported the work while in preparation. The second assessor can, if there are good reasons for this, also come from a different faculty or university, be retired etc. The doctoral committee chooses the assessors, usually at the suggestion of or in agreement with the applicant. The assessors propose a grade in a written report. Then an examination board is formed, which includes three more professors from the Architecture Department as well as the assessors. The candidate presents a brief summary (approx. 30-45 mins.) of his or her work for discussion at a public colloquium and answers questions from the board who then agree on a final grade. But for the title Dr. Ing./phil. to be used the work must first be published (for further detail see regulations for doctorates).

The application to submit a doctoral theses: content criteria

The following catalogue of criteria was developed in the department and accepted by the doctoral committee as the basis for its decisions:

1. Formulating the question

The thematic field to be addressed by the demonstrably independent piece of academic work should effectively be focused on a central research question - and at the same time function as a connecting thread to which a whole variety of individual questions can relate back. Access and orientation are facilitated if the question is formulated precisely, and operationalized, at an early stage.

2. Material basis

Clarifying the materials and dimensions within which a subject is to be treated is an essential requirement for systematic research. The fields of reference for empirical research are to be stated. These will range from literary studies, design analyses, project procedures, expert interviews to structural research on a specific object and series of building science experiments.

3. Methodology

Closely linked with formulating the question and the material basis are viable statements about the methods required, which permit systematic studies on a tried-and-tested basis and also facilitate comparisons with the results or the course of other research.

4. State of research

Clarifying the aspects named in 1 to 3 already presupposes through knowledge of the current research landscape in related fields. A literature review with comments should provide full information about the most recent state of research and at the same time help to justify the required imposition of limits on the candidate's own question.

5. Epistemology

The literature review, justification of the research question and first working hypotheses should also be accompanied by naming the desired goals of the research and the anticipated epistemological gain.

The commission requests all future doctorate supervisors to have potential candidates prepare their applications in such a way that they can be assessed in terms of the above-mentioned criteria. It is also desirable that the proposed co-assessors should be identified as soon as possible, so that alternatives can be discussed at the first meeting if need be.

6. Applying for a doctorate: formal criteria

The application to be considered for a doctorate consists of

1. An informal application containing the most important information: author, subject, supervisor (an FB 15 professor), possibly a proposed second supervisor.

2. A short written treatment (approx. 5-10 pages) responding clearly and comprehensibly to the above-mentioned points in the catalogue of criteria. It will also contain the following sections:

- time and work plan
- literature review (presenting the current state of research)
- CV (only the most important details!)
- list of candidate's publications on the subject (where applicable)
- copy of diploma or MA certificate

Please submit 8 copies of these documents to the Dean's office at the latest 10 days before the next meeting of the committee. The dates are available from the Dean's office. Your documents will be passed to the committee members in advance, so that they will have enough time to assess them.

For practical and organizational questions please apply to

Dekanat des FB Architektur
Frau Juliane Hüge
Tel. 0 61 51 – 16 21 01
E-Mail: jhuge@architektur.tu-darmstadt.de

Available for consultation: Mon – Thurs, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

Tips from practice

- Applications to proceed with a doctorate often fail because they are formulated incomprehensibly, imprecisely and in unduly nebulous terms - never because they convey in simple language what the subject or the question is! The more clearly and comprehensibly the application is structured and the question is formulated the better. Please no pseudo-scholarly bombast of name-dropping, but lucid, understandable information, questions, statements and theses. The committee members (i.e. as a

rule people not working in your subject field!) are the individuals who have to be convinced, not the author him- or herself.

- Most projects are planned on too large, rather than too small a scale. A concrete, precisely formulated question that is open to expansion is more convincing than an unduly copious and unmanageable, woolly mass of subject matter.
- More important than a timetable that is accurate to the day but fictitious is information, as concrete as possible, about how the work is to proceed: what requirements of a technical, financial, organizational nature are to be met? How are the necessary data to be acquired (work in archives, experiments, interviews, field studies etc.)? Is this dependent on external factors that the candidate cannot influence him- or herself (co-operation with third parties, external authorities etc.)?
- Literature review: state all titles and internet resources you refer to precisely, and following direct academic procedure, but only those you really have consulted! Careful research into the existing literature is a requirement for acceptance; literature on the subject you have not considered that has already been published can be grounds for rejecting the application to proceed with a doctorate!
- If you look at some applications that have been previously accepted or rejected, you will see what it is all about! You will find a wide-ranging collection with the academic assistants' representative on the doctorate committee, Dr. Meinrad v. Engelberg (art history department) and in the Dean's office.
- Discuss your subject with your supervisor **before submitting your application** in such a way that he can give sound answers to questions from other committee members in the way that you would wish. He should have read, understood and approved your application beforehand, otherwise he cannot speak about your proposal convincingly!

7. Doctoral candidates' Historical Fundamentals colloquium

As it is possible to learn a great deal from the tips, problems and progress of others when writing a doctorate, regular exchanges are recommended in the form of informal colloquia embracing more than one specialism. Such working meetings are organized regularly (usually twice per semester) for work focusing on history of architecture, theoretical and/or sociological themes colleagues in the Department of History and Theory of Architecture, with specialist supervision from Prof. Dr-Ing Werner Durth (information from <http://www.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/gta/kolloquium/>). Anyone who feels at home here with his or her subject should please apply to the secretaries' office at the Department of History and Theory of Architecture (tel. 0 61 51 – 16 29 65, m-woelfle@gta.tu-darmstadt.de).

It would be desirable if similarly working groups were to emerge in the architecture department to deal with other fields (e.g. technology, construction).

9. Appendix: Doctorate regulations for the TUD here:

Special Rules for the Architecture Department

On § 1,1

The architecture department usually awards a "Doctor of Engineering". In exceptional cases, where the candidate has a degree other than the Engineering Diploma, a "Doctor philosophiae" can also be awarded.

For honorary doctorates a "Doctor philosophiae honoris causa" can be awarded instead of the "Doctor of Engineering honoris causa".

On § 7,7

The Department of Architecture admits graduates from specialist colleges and to doctorates directly if they have special qualifications. The doctoral committee decides, on the basis of an establishment of suitability procedure in which ability to produce academic work is proved, whether the candidate should be accepted for doctoral studies. Requirements for the procedure are these in particular:

- a very high degree from the specialist college and proven successful professionally related, practical work as an architect or
- academic publications in the relevant specialist press.

Another requirement for acceptance by the committee as a doctoral candidate is producing a proof of achievement (draft) on the level of a diploma thesis.

Independently of this, the doctorate committee impose conditions as part of the establishment of suitability procedure.

On 12,3

Members of the doctorate committee or the examinations commission can notify the Dean in writing that they waive the submission of examiners' reports to them, according to § 13, 3 clause 1. In such cases the Dean satisfies his or her duty with reference to § 12, 3, clause 1 by immediately informing these members in writing that the reports are available for inspection.

On § 27 para. 1

The Special Rules come into force on the day after they are published in the Technical University of Darmstadt's Supplement to the Statutes.

Darmstadt, 11.1. 2006

Dean of the Faculty of Architecture
Prof. Dipl-Ing. Julian Wékel