



# DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN GERMANY

## OVERVIEW OF PROCEDURES

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# OVERVIEW

1. Doctoral Education in German
  - Models and specialties
2. Pursuing a Doctorate at the University of Bremen
  - Access, procedure, numbers
3. Challenges of Doctoral Education



# THE TRADITIONAL GERMAN MODEL

- “master – apprentice” model
- supervisor = first reviewer = first examiner at defense
  - usually first point of contact
- faculties are main governing bodies
- doctoral candidates typically do not have student status, but regarded as young researchers
  - no registration, no tuition fees, no courses
  - funding: university position/third-party-funded position/stipend/none
  - no official end of programme
- high flexibility (but potentially low transparency)

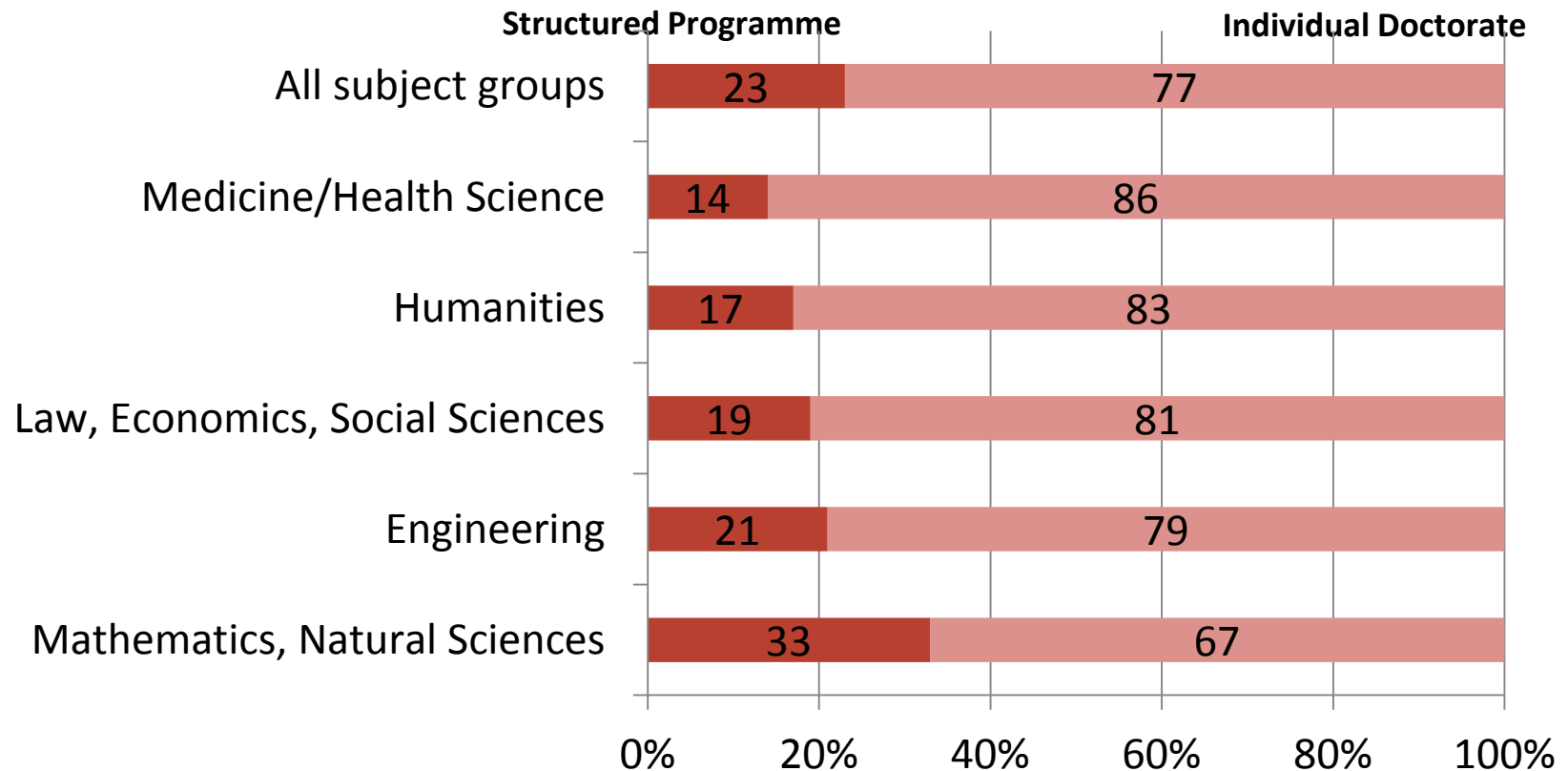
# WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN GERMANY?

- different doctoral degrees depending on subject field and location of the Doctoral Examination Board: Dr. med., ing., rer. nat., rer. soc., iur., phil., Ph.D.
  - different regulations within one university
- reviewer, grader, supervisor often identical
  - strong dependency on “Doktorvater/-mutter” as employer, boss, grader, mentor, supervisor
- well-established grading system: summa cum laude, magna cum laude, cum laude, rite
  - but: different scales in different subject fields
  - summa cum laude: sometimes third grader required

## STRUCTURED DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

- German Research Foundation (DFG) introduced Research Training Groups in the early 1990s
- last decade: Graduate Schools (DFG – Excellence Initiative, International Max Planck Research Schools, Helmholtz Graduate Schools)
- transparent and competitive admission procedure
- standard duration: 3-4 years
- qualification program: state of the art, research methods, transferable skills
- more formalised supervision: supervision agreement, progress reports, thesis committees

# INDIVIDUAL DOCTORATES VS. STRUCTURED DOCTORAL PROGRAMS



► Data Source: Federal Statistical Office of Germany, Promovierende in Deutschland 2014/2015

## PURSUING A DOCTORATE IN GERMANY

- admission criteria: usually (equivalent of) 2-year research Master
  - must be officially recognised
  - fast-track programs (PhD after Bachelor) available in some disciplines
- typically no formal teaching, no credit system
  - often research colloquia within research groups
  - optional courses offered by central institutions (e.g. BYRD at Bremen)

## PURSUING A DOCTORATE IN GERMANY

- requirements regulated by doctoral regulations of respective department(s)
  - language of thesis
  - publication type (monograph / cumulative, no. of publications)
  - requirements for viva
  - composition of examination board (typically 2 supervisors, 2 additional graders, 2 non-grading members)
  - defense as well as rigorosum
  - degree title conferred
  - quality assessment (external evaluation sometimes required)
- many differences between doctoral regulations, even at one university



# QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF DOCTORAL STUDIES

- intermediate evaluation and monitoring
  - implemented in structured doctoral programmes
  - otherwise dependent on supervisor's approach (sometimes combined with yearly evaluation of work as research assistant)
- evaluation of thesis typically not regulated, i.e. in the hands of the evaluators
  - some efforts, e.g. obligatory supervision agreement (often non-binding)
  - U Bremen: Award for excellent doctoral supervision (from 2019)
  - doctoral programmes often more strongly regulated

## STATISTICS ON DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN GERMANY

- Higher Education Statistics: ~4.5 years from enrollment to viva
- no reliable statistics
  - doctoral candidates not always enrolled
  - in theory allowed to continue PhD project for decades
  - financing typically for three years (3.5 - 4 in some doctoral programs)
- but: from 2018, universities have to report statistics on their doctoral candidates to the federal states' Statistical Offices

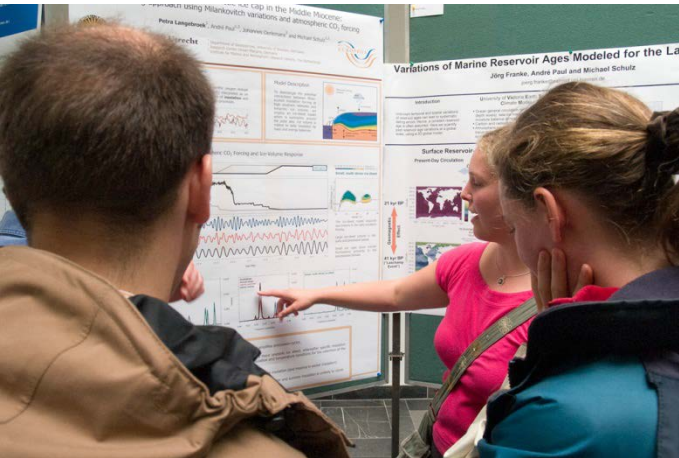
# PURSING A DOCTORATE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BREMEN: GETTING STARTED

- Individual doctorate
  - Applying for an open position as a research assistant
  - Finding a supervisor and securing funding elsewhere, e.g. through scholarships or non-academic jobs (external doctoral candidates; includes dual doctorates)
- Structured program
  - Applying for a position in a graduate program
- Cotutelle
  - contract template available from legal office
  - changes have to be in line with doctoral regulations and accepted by legal office
  - candidate has to be accepted by doctoral commission before entering into a cotutelle



## STRUCTURED PROGRAMMES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BREMEN

- 2 Graduate Schools: BIGSSS, GLOMAR (Excellence Initiative)
- 5 DFG Research Training Groups
- 2 co-operations with non-university research institutions
- several programs funded by foundations, industry, EU, DAAD,



# ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

- Two ways of “registering”:
  - Applying for acceptance as a doctoral candidate (obligatory)
  - Immatriculation as a doctoral student (voluntary)



## ACCEPTANCE BY A DOCTORAL COMMISSION

- obligatory
- prerequisite: higher education qualification recognized in Germany.
- all documents required are stated in the doctoral regulation (“Promotionsordnung”) of the respective faculty
  - 12 doctoral regulations
  - different criteria, but typically require an exposé (up to 20 pages), CV, and a letter confirming supervision
  - acceptance usually valid for 5 years
- upon acceptance, doctoral candidates have access to university services, e.g. funding initiatives, workshops

# IMMATRICULATION AS A DOCTORAL STUDENT

- voluntary
  - enrollment is initially possible for two terms (one year), given that a professor has agreed to supervise
  - after acceptance, enrollment can be renewed each semester
- no tuition fees, only administrative fee (including price of semester ticket)
- enrolling as a doctoral student is necessary to take advantage of social benefits available to enrolled students and to use university facilities and equipment
  - receipt of info mails
  - access to counselling services, workshops
  - covered by university's accident insurance
  - semester ticket; student prices at cafeterias, language center
  - student ID → reduced prices at cinemas, theaters etc.

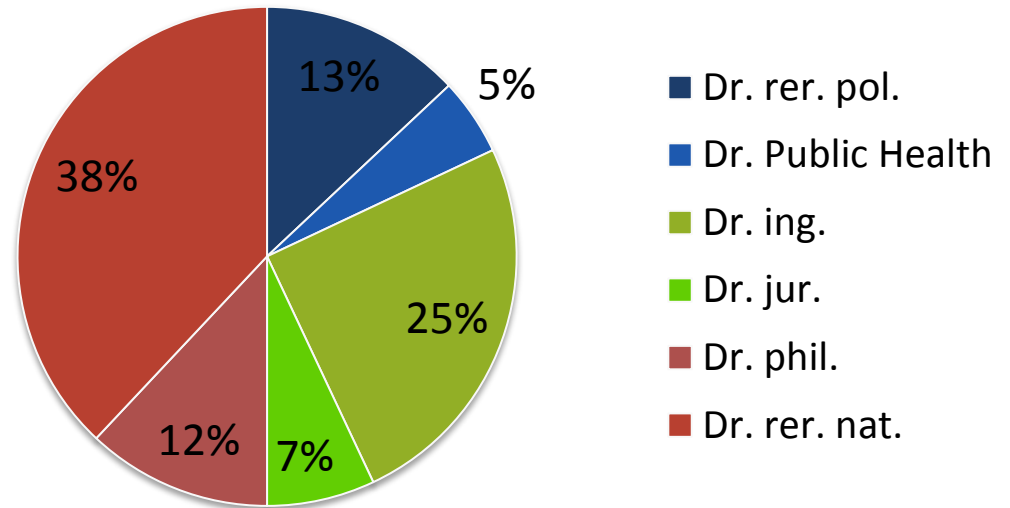
## NEXT STEPS

- writing the dissertation
  - monograph
  - cumulative dissertation
- being accepted for „Promotion“ (completion of doctoral studies) by the doctoral commission
- evaluation of thesis
- defense
- publication and award of title



## DOCTORAL AWARDS 2017

- 317 in total
- 143 (45.1%) females
- 90 (28.4%) internationals
- average age: 34.4 years



# CHALLENGES OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION

- contractual situation: doctoral students (scholarships) vs. research assistants (contracts)
  - contracts sometimes run out before dissertation is completed
- staff development and training
  - for research, teaching?
  - for non-academic careers?
- role definition unclear: supervisor, reviewer, grader, committee member
  - dependence
  - but: supervisor knows the details of the process and can include this in their evaluation
- grading system differs: pass/fail vs. grades
- slow transformation process towards graduate programmes – standardisation necessary?
- joint doctoral education difficult: joint / double degrees
- mutual acceptance of doctoral degrees difficult

# THANK YOU!

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**UBremen**  
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Early Career Researcher  
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Universität Bremen  
2018





## POINTS OF CONTACT

- UBRA Welcome Center
  - Social aspects
- Bremen Early Career Researcher Development
  - Academic issues, professional development, networking