

# Doctoral degree guide of the University of Tübingen's Faculty of Catholic Theology for doctoral students and supervisors

(As of winter semester 24/25)

The University of Tübingen's Faculty of Catholic Theology welcomes all prospective doctoral students!

The faculty hopes that this guide will give you and all those who are interested in taking a theological doctorate a basic introduction to the faculty's doctoral degree regulations. It introduces central institutes which you will encounter on your studies, as well as relevant bodies which can provide further information.

The guide can also be helpful for supervisors and provide information above and beyond what is covered in the doctoral degree regulations.

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## Goal and requirements of a doctorate

Doctorates in Catholic Theology are intended to qualify academics who already have an initial degree in theology to undertake independent research work. The title of doctor is awarded on the basis of an independently written doctoral thesis and an oral examination; over the course of writing the thesis, doctoral students take accompanying studies.

This guide introduces the basic structure of the doctoral studies. It is based on the current [doctoral degree regulations](#) of the Faculty of Catholic Theology dated December 13, 2021. The guide does not replace the doctoral degree regulations; their rules apply exclusively to the actual process. Therefore it is essential for you to familiarize yourself with these doctoral degree regulations at the start of your doctoral studies.

The doctoral degree regulations set out requirements for acceptance as a doctoral student (Section 3 PromO 2021). This includes, in particular, a completed full-time degree in Catholic Theology (Diplom, Magister/Magistrae theologiae) or comparable degree program. The faculty will examine the equivalence of other academic degrees, in particular foreign degrees. It may also be necessary to take supplementary studies over and above the accompanying studies for the doctorate in order to achieve equivalence. Good German language skills and adequate skills in the ancient languages Latin, (Biblical) Greek and Hebrew are also expected.

In principle, anyone who fulfills the above requirements or who is willing if necessary to take supplementary studies may commence doctoral studies. The doctoral thesis is written on one of the theological subjects that are taught at the faculty. The accompanying studies and the oral examination incorporate several of these subjects, so that in the end it is possible to graduate as a doctor of theology.

A doctorate firstly demands a concept for a suitable topic, and the willingness of a supervisor who can advise you on the topic, then guide and support you through the process of developing the idea and realizing it. You will usually find this supervisor by making personal contact. The faculty's website has information about the theological subjects, its professors and other teachers, and about the topics and activities of the [departments](#) and institutes. The departments' websites can also offer you initial guidance on whether your topic fits in a specific subject, and give helpful advice. When accepted as a doctoral student you will be assigned at least one other supervisor. You are permitted to contribute to the selection of supervisors and planning the supervision agreement, especially since the supervisors will usually also be the assessors of your doctoral thesis. The final decision is the responsibility of the doctoral studies committee (see [Stages of doctoral studies](#)).

A doctoral project demands the willingness and ability to work independently and in a disciplined way, to undertake creative research and reliably manage yourself and your time. This includes networking in your area of research, with the support of your supervisor, e.g. through conferences, travel and making contact with relevant researchers in your specialist field. Doctoral students must comply with the [DFG Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice](#) at every stage of the research process. You can also find helpful information in the [Reader zum wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten im Studium an der Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät Tübingen](#).

## Stages of doctoral studies

There are four stages to doctoral studies:

### ➤ **Making a clear plan and registering for a doctorate**

In order to commence doctoral studies, you must be accepted as a doctoral student by the faculty. This requires you to submit a formal application accompanied by the relevant documents to the doctoral studies committee (Section 4 PromO 2021). You should only submit this application once you have been able to discuss the topic of the doctoral thesis thoroughly with a supervisor and confirmed they are willing to provide further support.

The documents you have to submit include the supervision agreement. The faculty has a form for this, which you can complete with the supervisor of your choice. This agreement is presented to the dean of studies for review. If the requirements for studying for a doctorate are not (yet) fully met, the chair of the doctoral studies committee may, following examination of the documents and at the suggestion of the dean of studies, require you to take supplementary studies. The supervision agreement is thus part of the documents for the application to study as a doctoral student.

The doctoral degree regulations stipulate a series of assessments if the applicant has not yet completed an initial full-time degree in theology before applying to study as a doctoral student. The doctoral studies committee is always responsible for conducting these assessments and for confirmation of the results. Therefore the application to study as a doctoral student must – in consultation with the supervisor – be directed to this body; please address your application to the dean, as he is the chair of the doctoral studies committee.

The status of doctoral student is granted for a limited time, usually five years (Section 4 [9] PromO 2021). If you need more time to finish your doctoral thesis, then in consultation with your supervisor you should send a request (setting out reasons) for extension of the period for the doctorate to the doctoral studies committee.

If you are admitted as a doctoral student it is expected that you enroll as a doctoral candidate at the University of Tübingen. You are only permitted to use all the research infrastructure of the university in full, and in particular the data services of the University Library, once you have enrolled. Proof of

enrollment is especially useful as official identification if you need to conduct external research for your project.

Once you have been admitted, your doctoral studies consist of another three stages which are also regulated on an individual basis in the doctoral degree regulations:

### ➤ **Qualification stage**

The qualification stage (Sections 5 and 6 PromO 2021) is largely dedicated to writing the doctoral thesis (Section 8 PromO 2021). Producing this academic paper will take up most of your time on the doctorate. During this qualification stage, regular contact with your supervisors and participation in their advanced seminars and doctoral colloquiums is essential.

It is also essential that you complete the required accompanying studies (Section 5 PromO 2021). This will not demand a lot of time and should not delay the production of your doctoral thesis. The accompanying studies are intended to advance your doctoral project in conversation with all theology-related subject areas (biblical, historic, systematic, practical theology).

It may also be necessary to take supplementary studies (Section 6 PromO 2021) during the qualification stage; this will be stipulated in your supervision agreement depending on the requirements for studying. The doctoral degree regulations require a range of coursework for these supplementary studies. We recommend that you agree this coursework with the professors/teachers of the relevant subjects well in advance.

The doctoral studies committee is also responsible for all amendments to the supervision agreement in the qualification stage; requests for this should be sent to the dean.

### ➤ **Examination stage**

Once your doctoral thesis has been completed you should apply to be admitted to the doctoral qualification process as described (i.e. formalities and documents) in the doctoral degree regulations (Section 7 PromO 2021).

In variation of what is required in the doctoral degree regulations, the doctoral studies committee decided at its meeting on July 28, 2023, that only three printed and bound copies of the doctoral thesis have to be submitted to the dean's office.

Completion of a doctoral thesis often results in time pressure. Therefore you should allow a certain amount of time in advance to compile the necessary documents. This is especially relevant to the Certificate of Good Conduct from the police (must not be older than six months on the date of submission) and the certificate from your own church's ordinary (usually the bishop of the diocese where you currently reside, or for priests the ordinary of the diocese where you are incardinated).

If you have submitted the printed and bound doctoral thesis accompanied by all necessary documents, the doctoral studies committee will commence the doctoral qualification process. Two rapporteurs assess the paper within four months; if necessary, a third report will be obtained (Section 11 PromO 2021). The doctoral thesis and the reports will be submitted to the doctoral studies committee for consultation and a decision. The doctoral studies committee decides on acceptance and grading of the paper on the basis of reviewing the doctoral thesis itself, the reports, and their votes (Sections 12 and 13 PromO 2021).

An assessment process like this takes time; assessors often only have the necessary time during lecture-free weeks. Please make plans for your financial support during this examination stage well in advance.

If the doctoral thesis is accepted and graded by the doctoral studies committee (Sections 11-13 PromO 2021), then the oral examination will take place at a date agreed with the examiners. Please note this date may be arranged at very short notice. There are two parts to this examination: a dissertation defense (*defensio*) of the doctoral thesis, i.e. arguing (in concise form) on the topic and dealing with objections raised in the reports, and a disputation (*disputatio*) on a subject agreed in advance with the examiners (Section 14 PromO 2021).

It is advisable to clarify the precise contents of the oral examination with the examiners well in advance. Then the assessment stage can be used for intensive preparation for the examination.

The oral examination is open to the faculty. It is essential to agree the time and place of the examination and who is on the examination committee well in advance with the dean's office.

The doctoral studies committee will decide on the final grade, which comprises the mathematical total of the assessment of the doctoral thesis (triple weighted) and the oral examination (single weighted), at its meeting following the oral examination.

### ➤ **Publication**

The doctoral qualification process is only completed after publication of the results of your research (Section 19 PromO 2021). You may publish your doctoral thesis in the standard form of a book and select a suitable publisher and – where relevant – appropriate series for this. Alternatively, the Tübingen University Library enables [online publication](#).

Diverging from the wording of the doctoral degree regulations, the doctoral studies committee has decided that if released by a publishing house, submission of four copies of the doctoral thesis to the dean's office will suffice; the dean's office sends sample copies to the University Library and the library of the Faculty of Catholic Theology.

As a result of the duty to publish, the doctoral degree certificate will only be presented after the publication process has been completed. This degree certificate must be presented before you are permitted to use the title 'Dr. theol.'.

The doctoral degree certificate is usually presented at a small celebration; the university also holds an annual ceremony for all holders of doctorates. In urgent cases (e.g. on account of ongoing job applications, etc.) the doctoral degree certificate may simply be mailed.

## Institutes offering support

### ➤ **Dean's Office**

You can obtain support with the formal and administrative details of your doctoral qualification process or if you have any questions at the faculty dean's office. The deanery assistant, Dr Stefanie Gulde-Karmann, can help with your concerns face-to-face or in the case of simpler issues [by email](#).

Please also submit your documents to the Dean's Office – to Dr Gulde-Karmann or the secretary Ms Karin Zaiser. Your complete documents should be submitted no later than two weeks before the next meeting of the doctoral studies committee, so that your application can be placed on the agenda. After the meetings at which your case is discussed, you will be automatically informed by the dean's office about the status of your process and/or advice on decisions, or requests to submit additional documents.

## ➤ Doctoral students

Doctoral students at the Catholic Faculty of Theology have formed a [doctoral students' association \(Konvent\)](#). This enables doctoral students to support one another. The association also represents the interests and concerns of the doctoral students to the faculty board.

## ➤ University

Formal rules about doctoral studies and support for the doctoral work is provided not only at faculty level but also by the university ([for doctoral students](#)). This includes e.g. the obligation to enroll, international students acquiring and showing proof of the necessary language skills (see below), the possibility of using the research infrastructure of the university and faculty libraries and access to online services via a university email address, which will be provided by the [IT Center](#). All this will considerably simplify your day-to-day work as a researcher.

## International doctoral students

The University of Tübingen offers all links and information needed by international doctoral students and researchers in German and English [on its website](#):

- about enrollment,
- about finding initial accommodation,
- about obtaining a visa and other requirements for staying in Germany,
- about the requirements for acquiring German language skills (entry),
- and information about scholarship organizations and doctoral networks.

Under an agreement between the faculty and the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, priests from abroad who want to take a doctorate at the faculty should first make contact with the diocese. This is the responsibility of [Hauptabteilung V 'Pastorales Personal'](#). Your contact is diocesan speaker [Francis Mathew Kottarathil](#).

When priests from abroad apply to take a doctorate, Hauptabteilung V 'Pastorales Personal' advises on support for learning German, maintenance, where relevant pastoral work in the diocese, and accommodation/housing.

Consultation with a supervisor is not a substitute or replacement for these arrangements with the diocese.

## Financing your doctoral studies

You should discuss financing your doctoral studies with your supervisors right at the start. We recommend planning your financial arrangements and putting them in place for the entire duration of the doctoral studies process, to avoid having to drop out for economic reasons.

The following may help with financing a doctorate:

- jobs as a research assistant or as a student research assistant at a faculty chair/department or other institute at the university;
- doctoral positions within research institutes (collaborative research centers, research training groups, research groups), that are funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) or other third-party donor, and/or relevant grants/awards;
- scholarships from ecclesiastical, state or political foundations (Cusanuswerk, Studienstiftung [German Academic Scholarship Foundation], Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Friedrich Ebert

Foundation, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, Heinrich Böll Foundation), especially if they already funded the undergraduate studies, and

- support programs from numerous smaller foundations or grants for people in specific situations.

In order to plan sound funding for your doctorate it is advisable to cooperate closely with your supervisor.

Welcome to the faculty and good luck with your project!

The Dean