

# How to Assure Quality in New-Style Doctoral Studies?

Case Study: University of Vienna

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## Synopsis

- University of Vienna
  - general background
  - facts and figures
  - weaknesses
- Implementation of change
  - general frame
  - quality assurance measures
  - next steps

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## General background

- The University of Vienna is among European universities with the **longest tradition** in research and teaching and it is the **largest German-speaking** University.
- The University of Vienna offers a **wide range of fields of study**: Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, Economics and Statistics, Natural Studies, Law Studies, Informatics, Theology.
- There is **free access** to all cycles!

### Legal frame

- **Autonomy in staffing issues**, no central (ministry) allocation of staff positions;
- **Financial autonomy** combined with guaranteed funding and global budgets;
- **Organizational freedom** with respect to internal structure.

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## General background – facts and figures

### Some numbers:

- more than **85.000 students** enrolled
- about **3,300 scientists (FTE)**, ¼ third party funded
- **1,800 administration staff**
- students & scientists from **130 nations**

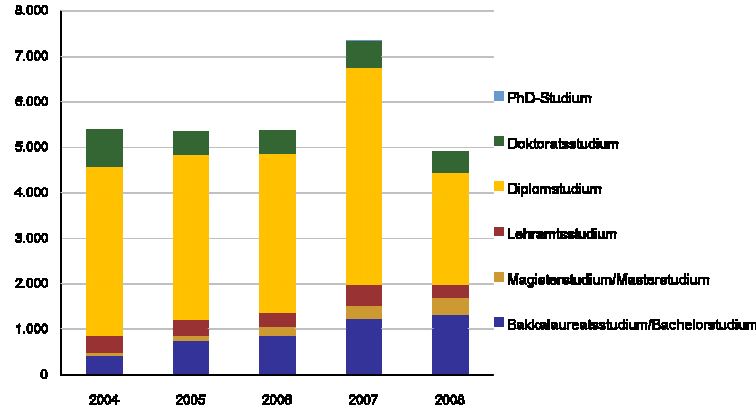
### In 2008

- Bachelor degrees: 1321
- Diploma and Master degrees: 2837
- Doctorates and PhD degrees: 481

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General background – facts and figures

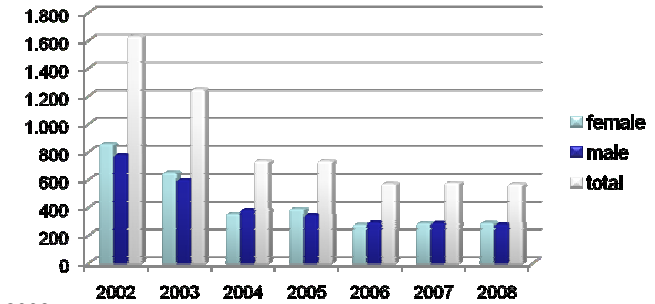
Degrees awarded



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General background – facts and figures

Doctoral degrees awarded



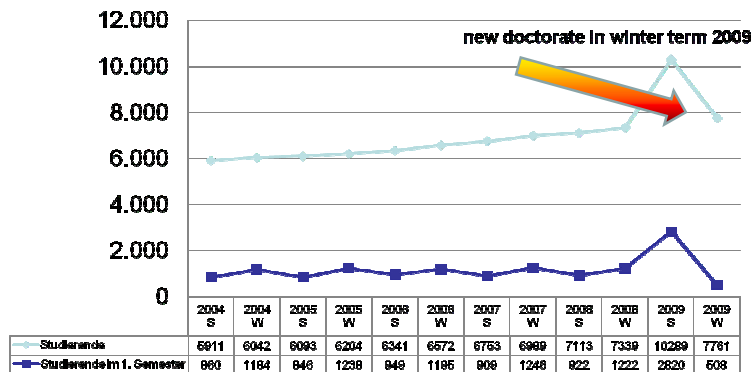
in 2008:

- a total of 481 awarded
- average age: 34 years
- average time to degree: 9 semesters

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General background – facts and figures

Doctoral candidates



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General background – facts and figures

Country	Doctoral Degrees Ø2004-6	Doctoral Degrees per million inhabitants	Percentage doc.vs. total degrees	Citations per million inhabitants (1997-2006)
GER	24.459	297	11%	0,088
AUT	2.276	280	10,1%	0,096
FIN	1.387	267	5,6%	0,167
NL	2.850	177	2,7%	0,162
CH	3,020	414	10,1%	0,289

Research output is relatively low with respect to „doctors produced“

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## General background – Weaknesses

- The university is not allowed to select candidates based on quality criteria.
- Lack of financial support: only 10% of doctoral students are employed by the University, large numbers of part time students.
- Doctoral candidates are rather loosely connected to their supervisors and the scientific community.
- No clear picture of what being a doctoral student means: doctoral candidates often see the PhD as standard prolongation of their study time.
- Training through research as core element is not recognized as such.
- There is no given structure to push students (and supervisors) through (and out of) the system.

## Implementation of quality assurance measures for doctoral studies

Common understanding

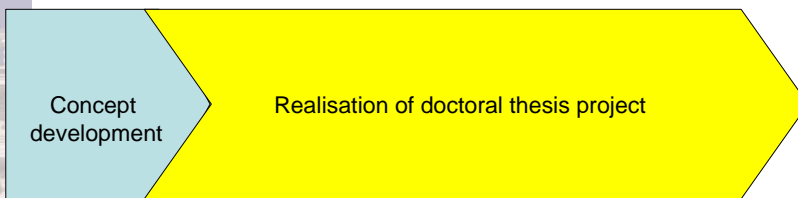
Doctoral programs need to be construed in such a way as to better correspond to the individual needs of the doctoral candidate with regard to his/her research project.

The core element of doctoral study is the (individual) dissertation project, i.e. training through research.

Nevertheless structure is needed such as structured interactions between supervisors and supervised, transparent rules and well defined rights and duties for all actors involved.

## General Frame for doctoral Studies

0-12 months



Submission of Exposé / Presentation of doctoral Project → Doctoral Thesis Agreement → Public defence

## Quality assurance measures

Structuring the dissertation process: starting phase

- Doctoral candidates have to submit a research proposal within the first 12 months.
- Clear guidelines are published with respect to quality and content expected for these research proposals.
- Doctoral candidates are obliged to present their research projects in front of the faculty together with their supervisors.

## Quality assurance measures

### Structuring the dissertation process: collective responsibility

- Specific directors of the study programs were appointed to organize the new doctoral programs and ensure their quality.
  - responsible for admission of (none-regular) students
  - annual progress reports must be submitted to them
  - proposes the members for the defence board
- Graduate committees were established
  - advisory function for supervisors, doctoral candidates and directors of the study programs,
  - acceptance of the thesis proposals

## Quality assurance measures

### Structuring the dissertation process: supervision contracts

- Arrangements for supervision and assessment are based on a contractual framework of shared responsibilities between doctoral candidates, supervisors and the University.
- Supervisors and supervised have to agree on (realistic) working plans, attendances of lectures or conferences or participation in workshops communication rules, in particular the frequency of feedback meetings.
- Great flexibility according to the dissertation project's need.
- The contract is finalized and signed after the candidate's (successful) presentation of his/her research project.

## Quality assurance measures

### Structuring the dissertation process: annual reports

- Annual reports have to be submitted to study programme directors.
- Supervision contracts will be adopted annually to the dissertation projects progress and requirements.
- Working plans, attendances of lectures or conferences etc will be updated.
- Thinking progressively about the career time after the thesis.

## Quality assurance measures

### Structuring the dissertation process: final assessment

- A public defense will be mandatory for all PhD candidates.
- It was clarified that being a candidate's supervisor is incompatible with being the same candidate's referee in the final defense.

## Quality assurance measures

### Structuring the dissertation process: central support unit

- Additional workshops, courses and seminars dealing with topics such as scientific writing, project management, etc. are offered and will thus contribute to the transferable skills development of doctoral candidates.
- Supervision a institutional responsibility: complementary to supervision provided by the faculty.
- Raising awareness of being a doctoral student: "Under their own management".
- Support group of doctoral students.

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## Quality assurance measures

### Critical success factors

- Legal frame
- Common effort of Rectorate and Senate
- Implementation process is supported by an advisory board consisting of well recognized researchers and members from the Senate and the Rectorate.
- International orientation
- Establishing best practice models since 2005

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## Quality assurance measures

### Future challenges

- Handbook for doctoral students
- Guidelines on appropriate supervisory behaviour
- Recognition of proper supervision.
- Improving the monitoring of doctoral students' progress
- Training for supervisors.
- Raising departmental responsibilities.

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## Thank you for your attention!



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