



Thesis Submission & Defence at the UoC*

*in the time of COVID-19

Most importantly, make sure to visit the [homepage of the Doctoral Office at the University of Cologne \(UoC\)](#). You will find current information (Go to >News) and the most recent procedure to submit and defend your thesis (Go to >Doctoral procedure>Doctoral thesis and defense) there. Please also use the latest versions of all relevant documents which you can find on this homepage (Go to >Forms/Guidelines).

Old versus new doctoral regulations

Doctoral student who have been admitted as doctoral students at the UoC before March 12th 2020 can choose to graduate according to the old doctoral regulations as long as they defend their thesis before March 12th 2023. All other students graduate according to the new doctoral regulations which have been released on March 12th 2020 and which you can find on the [homepage of the Doctoral Office at the UoC](#) (Go to >Doctoral degree regulations). The differences are summarised in the table below. Passages in this document that refer to the old doctoral regulations are in grey.

| Old (2006) Doctoral Degree Regulations | New (2020) Doctoral Degree Regulations |
|--|--|
| Enrolment for two semesters | Continuous enrolment until defence |
| German and international students have different entry points in the enrolment process | Student (German & international) enrolment process starts with submitting the <i>Application for Admission as a Doctoral Student</i> to the Dean's Office |
| Enrolment in diverse subjects, such as <i>Genetics</i> and <i>Botany</i> | Enrolment in more general subjects, typically <i>Biology</i> or, in very rare cases, <i>Computational Biology</i> |
| Publications can only be used in a cumulative thesis | Publications can always be integrated as chapters in a thesis; must be placed into context |
| Cumulative thesis only upon request and with ≥ 3 publications (major contributions) of the doctoral student | By definition, cumulative thesis with ≥ 3 publications (major contributions) of the doctoral student |
| Thesis must include an English abstract and a German <i>Zusammenfassung</i> | Thesis must include an English abstract or a German <i>Zusammenfassung</i> |
| Direct supervisor is very commonly also examiner of the thesis and defence | Direct supervisor can be an examiner of the thesis and defence |
| Up to 3 examiners for the thesis and defence | If sensible, > 3 examiners can be nominated |
| Awarded title: Dr. sc. ed. / Dr. rer. nat. | Awarded title: Dr. rer. nat. / Ph.D. |
| Title is only awarded after publication of the thesis | Upon request, title can be awarded before publication of the thesis |
| A <i>Bescheid</i> (notification) is issued after the defence, an <i>Urkunde</i> (certificate) is issued after publication of the thesis (both in German) | A <i>Zeugnis</i> (testimonial) is issued after the defence, an <i>Urkunde</i> (certificate) is issued after publication of the thesis (both in German and English) |

Assemble an examination board (well before thesis submission)

Typically, your defence examination board consists of four people: two reviewers, one chair and one assessor (*Beisitzer*). A third, external, reviewer must be nominated if the conventional reviewers have proposed your thesis for a distinction (*summa cum laude*). The regulations for the examination board are summarised below. Please discuss the examination board with the [MPIPZ PhD Office](#) and the [Doctoral Office at the UoC](#) as soon as possible and at least several weeks before you submit your thesis.

Reviewer 1 & 2: the reviewers read and evaluate your thesis and your defence. The first reviewer is typically your official supervisor at the UoC. Note that not all group leaders can officially supervise students at the UoC. In addition to all UoC professors, that can officially supervise students from their and other groups, G. Coupland, R. Mercier, J. Parker, P. Schulze-Lefert, M. Tsiantis, can officially supervise students from their and other groups and A. Hancock, A. Hay, K. Schneeberger can officially supervise students from their groups.

According to the old doctoral regulations, the second reviewer can be anyone who is eligible to officially supervise students at the UoC (see above) or a professor at a German university/research institution. Importantly, one of the reviewers must be a full professor of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the UoC. Thus, if your first reviewer is, for instance, an MPIPZ group leader, your second reviewer must come from the UoC. Commonly, the second reviewer is a professor from the UoC's Institute for Plant Sciences and you can find a list [here](#). Depending on your project, other UoC professors from the MN Faculty can make more sense, though.

According to the new doctoral regulations, the second reviewer can be anyone who is either (1) eligible to officially supervise students at the UoC (see above), (2) a professor at a German university/research institution or (3) a professor (or equivalent) at any international university/research institution. Importantly, one of the reviewers must be a full professor of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the UoC. Thus, if your first reviewer is, for instance, an MPIPZ group leader, your second reviewer must come from the UoC. Commonly, the second reviewer is a professor from the UoC's Institute for Plant Sciences and you can find a list [here](#). Depending on your project, other UoC professors from the MN Faculty can make more sense, though. The second reviewer should not have cooperated or published with the doctoral student and must be from a different group than the doctoral student and the first reviewer.

Chair: the chair does not evaluate your thesis. It is still recommendable to send him or her a copy of your thesis so that the chair has the chance to familiarise him or herself with your work. The chair introduces you and the defence procedure at the beginning of your defence. The chair can ask questions during your defence and will, jointly with the reviewers, evaluate your defence. The chair must be a professor of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the UoC.

According to the old doctoral regulations, the chair must be from a different sub-subject than the official UoC supervisor of the student. I.e. if your official supervisor, and typically first reviewer, is from Botany, the chair cannot be from Botany. Here is a list of common official UoC supervisors and their sub-subjects:

| Official UoC supervisor | Sub-subject |
|--|-------------|
| Professors from the UoC's Institute for Plant Sciences | Botany |
| George Coupland | Genetics |
| Paul Schulze-Lefert | Genetics |
| Miltos Tsiantis | Botany |
| Jane Parker | Genetics |
| Angela Hancock | Botany |
| Angela Hay | Botany |
| Korbinian Schneeberger | Genetics |

According to the new doctoral regulations, the chair must be from a different subject than the official UoC supervisor. Please note that sub-subjects, such as Botany and Genetics, do not exist in the new doctoral regulations. Subjects are, for instance, Biology, Computational Biology and Biochemistry. Typically, your official UoC supervisor will be from Biology and you would then need a chair from any other subject. Alternatively, the chair can be from the same subject but another institute. If your official UoC supervisor is, for instance, an MPIPZ group leader, any professor from the UoC's Institute for Plant Sciences would be a suitable chair.

Assessor (Beisitzer): this can be anyone with a PhD in a related subject. The assessor takes down the minutes during your defence. He or she does neither evaluate your thesis nor your defence. The chair can allow the assessor to ask questions during your defence.

Schedule your defence (well before thesis submission)

At the UoC, your examination period is linked to the submission date of your thesis. It is thus important to make sure that your examination board is able to attend your defence and you should accordingly schedule

it well before you submit your thesis. You can find the deadlines for thesis submission and the corresponding examination periods on the [homepage of the Doctoral Office at the UoC](#) (Go to >Deadlines and dates). A physical defence typically takes place at the UoC and you can find details on room reservations [here](#). You should aim for the Biocenter's lecture hall (*Hörsaal* 0.024, code: 304/EG/0.024) and can contact [Thomas Lubjuhn](#) if you have any questions. The full address is:

Lecture Hall of the Cologne Biocenter, Zülpicher Str. 47b, 50674 Köln, room 0.024, ground floor

Please note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the defence should take place online and that the doctoral student remains responsible for planning the defence.

Once you have booked a room or arranged the online meeting, text your examination board to confirm date and place of your defence. You can now fill in the *Terminbogen* (*Form for scheduling the thesis defense*) which you need to submit at a later stage (see below) and which you can find [here](#).

Prepare thesis submission (at least two weeks before thesis submission)

Please make sure to update all relevant information in your [Docfile](#) account before you contact the Doctoral Office at the UoC. Remember that a number of documents must be deposited in Docfile in order to be admitted to the examination process:

- University entrance qualification / high school leaving certificate
- Certificates and diplomas of the degrees (Bachelor and Master; English or German)
- If possible, certificate of study progress i.e. transcripts of record; English or German
- Curriculum Vitae with photograph

While you should have uploaded these documents before, you must now additionally upload a proof of registration as a doctoral student at the UoC. [According to the new doctoral regulations](#), doctoral students must be continuously registered at the UoC. [According to the old doctoral regulations](#), doctoral students must have been registered for at least two semesters. Note: a complete list of documents that ultimately need to be uploaded to Docfile is available on the last page of the *Application for admission to doctoral examinations* (see below).

Once you have updated your Docfile record, prepare the *Application for admission to doctoral examinations* which you can find [here](#). Upload this file to Docfile and send it to the [Doctoral Office at the UoC](#) by email or post.

Additionally, prepare the *Declaration for admission to the doctoral examinations* which you can find [here](#). Please note that different versions exist for the new and old doctoral regulations. Please also note that one part of this declaration (new doctoral regulations: "Hiermit versichere ich...", old doctoral regulations: "Ich versichere...") must be included in the doctoral thesis and must be signed in the thesis.

Thesis format

The format of a thesis is only loosely regulated at the UoC. The thesis must include:

- A title page (which you can find [here](#))
- A table of contents
- A list of abbreviations
- A summary (new doctoral regulations: English, old doctoral regulations: English and German)
- An introduction that starts with a bigger picture and quickly narrows down to the specific background which is relevant for the thesis. The introduction should end with a statement of the thesis aims
- A material and method section that refers to standard protocols where possible. Deviations from standard protocols must be carefully described
- A results section that can be written in chapters. The section should include own results while results of others must be clearly marked as such and should be described in the preface(s)/acknowledgement. Depending on the doctoral regulations, publications can be integrated into the thesis and the details are described below
- A concluding discussion

- A bibliography
- A *Declaration* (see above)
- (Optional: an appendix)

The thesis format should be discussed with the Thesis Advisory Committee and the supervisor. This is particularly important if you want to integrate publications from your doctorate in the thesis. According to the new doctoral regulations, any number of publications (research articles and reviews) can be integrated into your thesis as long as they have been the result of your doctoral research. They can be included as individual chapters and a conclusive text needs to accompany each chapter that describes the relevance of the integrated publication for the thesis. For all integrated multi-author publications, this text must make clear how exactly the doctoral student contributed to the research in, and writing of, a publication. A thesis with less than three integrated publications (not including reviews) is deemed monography. A thesis with three or more integrated publications (not including reviews) is deemed cumulative thesis.

According to the old doctoral regulations, you can only integrate your publications if you plan to submit a cumulative thesis. To do so, you need to apply for a cumulative thesis four month before submission and must have at least three accepted publications by the time of submission: 1 first author or shared first authorship in a peer-reviewed journal that must be published or accepted when you apply for the cumulative thesis (i.e. four months before submission), 1 first author or shared first authorship in a peer-reviewed journal that must be accepted or submitted when you apply for the cumulative thesis, 1 further authorship (major contribution by the doctoral student) in a peer-reviewed journal that must at least be ready for submission when you apply for the cumulative thesis.

To get a better idea of how a thesis looks like, you can search the [Kölner UniversitätsPublikationsServer \(KUPS\)](#) and use, for instance, the name of your official UoC supervisor as search query.

In general, reviewers appreciate a thesis that:

- is well written, in clear and correct language
- provides relevant information about the scientific field/topic
- is well structured in a logical way: scientific question, experimental approach, description of experiments and results, concluding statement, next set of experiments...
- is illustrated with clear figures. All necessary information is available in the figure legends
- discusses the results in the context of the scientific question and the field of research
- provides correct references and clear statements of what are own results, figures, written sections and which are taken or provided from or by others

Thesis submission

Deposit the final version of your thesis as well as the signed *Declaration for admission to the doctoral examinations* (see above) as PDF files in Docfile. Additionally, send the final version of your thesis as a PDF document to your reviewers, the chair (see above) and the [Doctoral Office at the UoC](#). Send the signed *Declaration for admission to the doctoral examination* as a PDF file to the [Doctoral Office at the UoC](#) as well.

Thesis evaluation

Your reviewers typically have about five weeks to evaluate your thesis and the deadline for the submission of reviews can be found on the [homepage of the Doctoral Office at the UoC](#) (Go to >Deadlines and dates).

Prepare thesis defence

Assuming that you have already scheduled your defence (see above) and that you have informed your examination board accordingly, you need to send the *Terminbogen (Form for scheduling the thesis defense)*, which you can find [here](#) to the [Doctoral Office at the UoC](#) at least one week before the examination period starts—not before your defence takes place! Please remember that you, your first reviewer and your chair need to sign this form and prepare it sufficiently well in advance.

Thesis defence and what comes after

The defence is open to all members of the university but only the examination board is allowed to address questions to the doctoral student. The chair introduces the thesis procedure as well as the doctoral student before the student gives a presentation of 20 minutes. Make sure to stay on time! The examination board then addresses questions to the student that cover the content of the presentation, the thesis but can also touch on more general topic of the doctoral student's subject, e.g. Biology. The thesis defence must take at least one hour and must not exceed one-and-a-half hours.

After the discussion, the examination board evaluates the thesis in a private session and then informs the doctoral student about their assessment. The details are superficially summarised below.

Once you have successfully defended your thesis (C-O-N-G-R-A-T-S-!), the chair informs the Doctoral Office at the UoC using a documentation form which is available [here](#).

Evaluation of the thesis and defence

The thesis and the defence can be evaluated using these grades:

- 0 = with distinction (*summa cum laude*)*
- 1 = very good (*magna cum laude*)
- 2 = good (*cum laude*)
- 3 = sufficient (*rite*)
- 4 = insufficient (*insufficiens*)**

All grades can be modified in incremental steps, e.g. 0.7, 1.3, 1.5, 1.7, 2.0, 2.3... The grade for the thesis and for the defence is the average (first decimal) of the individual grades of all examiners. The doctorate grade is a weighted average (first decimal) of the thesis (counts twice) and the defence grade and is summarised as:

- With distinction (*summa cum laude*) for a weighted average of 0.0*
- Very good (*magna cum laude*) for a weighted averaged between 0.1 and 1.4
- Good (*cum laude*) for a weighted average between 1.5 and 2.4
- Sufficient (*rite*) for a weighted average between 2.5 and 3.4
- Insufficient (*insufficiens*) for a weighted average between 3.5 and 4.0**

*A distinction (*summa cum laude*) can only be awarded if all reviewers (including the external reviewer for the thesis, see above) agree on an average grade of 0.0 for the thesis and the defence.

**If one of the reviewers considers the thesis insufficient, the doctoral degree commission of the UoC will involve another reviewer. If at least half, e.g. two out of three, reviewers agree that the thesis is insufficient, they propose that the thesis cannot be accepted. The doctoral degree commission of the UoC must approve this decision and inform the doctoral student accordingly. A defence is considered a fail if either at least half of all reviewers consider the defence insufficient or if the average grade for the defence is ≥ 3.5 . The doctoral student can repeat the defence within six months but only once. If the reviewers then conclude that the doctoral student failed to defend the thesis, the doctorate is terminated.

Publication of the thesis

After you successfully defended your thesis, you must publish your thesis within exactly one year. Please make sure to visit the [homepage of the Kölner UniversitätsPublikationsServer](#) (KUPS) where you can find news and relevant details on the publication process.

According to the old doctoral regulations, the reviewers must sign a form that proposes necessary revisions before publication and approves publication of the thesis. You can find this form (*Revisionsschein und Zustimmung zur Veröffentlichung*) [here](#). Once the thesis is published, you will receive your certificate (*Urkunde*), see below.

According to the new doctoral regulations, two separate forms for necessary revisions (*Revisionsschein*) and for the approval of publication (*Zustimmung zur Veröffentlichung*) exist. You can find both forms [here](#). Once the *Revisionsschein* has been completed and submitted to the [Doctoral Office at the UoC](#), a *Zeugnis*

(testimonial) can be issued. The certificate (*Urkunde*) can only be issued after publication of the thesis, see below.

On the aforementioned forms, you can choose the way in which you want to publish your thesis. There are two popular ways:

Publication in electronic form will make your full thesis available online immediately after you complete the submission to KUPS. In addition, you need to print four copies of the thesis and submit these to the UoC Library.

Publication in non-electronic form will only make the summary (must then be in English and German) of your thesis available online. You will need to print 20 copies of the thesis and submit these to the UoC Library.

Make sure that the published version of the thesis contains a title page (see above) that states the place where the thesis was printed (typically *Köln*) and the publication year (find an example of a title page below).

Put the Final Title of Your Thesis Here

Inaugural-Dissertation

zur

Erlangung des Doktorgrades

der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät

der Universität zu Köln

vorgelegt von

First name Last name

aus Place of birth

Place of printing, Publication month Publication year*

*only in the final published version

Functional characterisation of a plant protein

Inaugural-Dissertation

zur

Erlangung des Doktorgrades

der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät

der Universität zu Köln

vorgelegt von

John Doe

aus Kingston, Jamaica

Köln, Juni 2020

Once you have submitted all necessary to the UoC Library (typically: the electronic version of your thesis or alternatively the thesis summary, an *Authors's Agreement* available on the KUPS homepage and the printed copies of your thesis), the library provides a receipt that you must pass on to the Doctoral Office at the UoC. In addition to the library copies mentioned above, you need to submit one printed copy of the final thesis to the Doctoral Office at the UoC and provide them with an electronic copy of the final thesis version.

According to the old doctoral regulations, the doctoral degree can only be awarded once you have published your thesis and informed the Doctoral Office at the UoC accordingly. They then prepare an *Urkunde* (certificate), typically within two weeks after being notified about the publication of your thesis. If you need a document before, you can request a *Bescheid* (notification) from the Doctoral Office at the UoC once you have successfully defended your thesis. This notification summarises your success but does not yet allow you to carry your title. The *Urkunde* and *Bescheid* are in German.

According to the new doctoral regulations, a *Zeugnis* (testimonial) is issued after the defence. The *Zeugnis* summarises your success but does not yet allow you to carry your title. In justified cases, you can, however, request that you are already allowed to carry your title even before you publish your thesis. An *Urkunde* (certificate), that always allows you to carry your title, is issued after publication of your thesis. Both, the *Zeugnis* and the *Urkunde*, are in English.