

Strategic Plan of the Graduate Center (GraZ) for Researchers in Qualification Phases

Mission

The Graduate Center (GraZ) was established on January 1, 2024, as part of the restructuring of academic continuing education at Europa-Universität Flensburg. On November 7, 2023, the Executive Board of Europa-Universität Flensburg approved the statutes of the Graduate Center and defined its constitutive goals and tasks.

In founding the Graduate Center, the university seeks to provide sustainable support for researchers in qualification phases and to consolidate its diverse support programs and resources for this target group, thereby creating the ideal conditions and an optimal setting for the training of highly qualified researchers in qualification phases. Building on previous support approaches and recommendations for various groups in qualification phases, the strategic goal of the Graduate Center is to strengthen the existing support functions across all of the university's disciplines and departments and to expand its interdisciplinary qualification offerings for further education and career advancement, both within and beyond academic research.

Mission

The Graduate Center positions itself as an institutionally independent and, at the university level, comprehensive cross-disciplinary academic support service and contact point that offers researchers in qualification phases with targeted resources and program offerings to support their research and to advance their professional skills and career development. In this, the Graduate Center aligns itself with the core values of Europa-Universität Flensburg. Its guiding principles are research-oriented, international, sustainable, and engaged. They encompass the fundamental values of justice, diversity, sustainability, and overcoming boundaries, which are also reflected in the main topic areas of the university's flagship research centers – namely educational research, European studies, and transformation and sustainability research. Europa-Universität Flensburg views supporting researchers in qualification phases and fostering their career development as core responsibilities that significantly contribute to its own growth and shaping impact on society and the economy. In recent years, the university has expanded and strengthened its internationalization approach and intensified and extended its strategic partnerships and international collaborations. The appreciation of diverse perspectives is central to EUF's self-identity, shaping its research and influencing its approaches to nurturing the career development researchers in qualification phases. Consequently, research and knowledge transfer at the university are characterized by intercultural and internationally comparative perspectives, wide-ranging collaboration across and between disciplines, and the close integration of theory and practice. As cross-cutting responsibilities, gender equality and diversity receive special attention. The guiding principles underpinning the university's overarching strategy for its funding and

support programs for researchers in qualification phases are gender equality and equal opportunities, both of which must be upheld in all of the university's support initiatives.

Europa-Universität Flensburg also recently developed a comprehensive, university-wide support program with targeted qualification pathways for researchers in these phases, which restructures existing doctoral and early-career support initiatives and introduces new resources and program offerings. On November 25, 2015, the Senate adopted the *Orientierungsrahmen zur Förderung des wissenschaftlichen Nachwuchses vor und nach der Promotion und akademischer Karrierewege neben der Professur* ("Guiding Framework for Advancing Doctoral and Early-Career Researchers and for Supporting Alternative Non-Professorial Academic Career Paths"). All of the university's research funding and support offerings for researchers in qualification phases are bundled in the program areas "FPFF – Flensburg Program for Research Support" and "FQ-WiN – Program for the Support and Qualification of Doctoral and Early-Career Researchers." These program areas integrate the resources, programs and initiatives of various university units, including those affiliated with the committees for research, scholarships, and doctoral affairs, the EUF Office for Research, the university research centers, and the Equal Opportunity Office, among others.

Building on the university's defined guidelines and core values and its support strategies and recommendations for the various groups of researchers in qualification phases, the strategic objective of the Graduate Center (GraZ) is to strengthen existing support and qualification programs across all EUF disciplines and institutes by increasing visibility (orientation function), and to expand the university's interdisciplinary qualification offerings for career advancement within and beyond academic research in order to successfully prepare researchers in qualification phases for demanding roles in academia, business, and society (support function).

Target Groups of the Graduate Center (GraZ)

The Graduate Center's target groups include all researchers in qualification phases, particularly doctoral, postdoctoral, and habilitating researchers, as well as junior professors who are pursuing careers in research and teaching or in fields related to or outside academia.

Goals and Tasks

Goals

The goal of the Graduate Center (GraZ) is to create supportive and enabling conditions that allow researchers in qualification phases to strengthen their interdisciplinary skills so that they can develop as independent scholars and have an impact within and outside academia. GraZ aims to serve the interests of researchers while leveraging the university's expertise, focusing on topics identified as relevant and beneficial for individual careers. Certain criteria and core components – interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, a focus on academic orientation, and research support – cut across all resources and program offerings, tailored to each qualification phase. GraZ strives to provide all researchers in qualification phases with equal access to its resources and program offerings in a

pluralistic and egalitarian manner, and to create suitable diversity-sensitive, intercultural, and international qualification opportunities. This approach aims to further strengthen the internationalization strategy of Europa-Universität Flensburg and to meet the needs of international researchers in qualification phases as equivalently as possible.

Starting Points for Task Determination

In recent years, Europa-Universität Flensburg has established various programs and successful measures to support researchers in qualification phases in various units and institutes (including ZeBUSS, ICES, frzph, JZF, KURS, NEC, and ZNES; the research, doctoral affairs, and scholarship committees; and the International Center, the Equal Opportunity Office, DokNet, and the new CREST Research Center). Continuing education programs and other resources for researchers in qualification phases are provided at both central and decentralized levels, with all efforts focused on creating optimal conditions for scholars to conduct independent research and on supporting their academic profile development in different research fields. Notable contributions to this effort have come from the university's research centers and the Qualification Program for Doctoral and Early-Career Researchers (QP), which was developed by the *Zentrum für Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung (ZWW)* in cooperation with the university's flagship research centers and the EUF Office for Research, and implemented by the ZWW until early 2024.

To better consolidate and increase the visibility of the available resources and program offerings across all EUF institutions and units that work to support doctoral and early-career researchers, and to create additional offerings tailored to the requirements and challenges of researchers in specific qualification phases, the Graduate Center (GraZ) was established on January 1, 2024. Its goal is to develop concrete, need-based qualification resources and programs tailored to each target group, and to further develop the university's support for researchers in qualification phases in line with strategic research support amidst changing conditions, while improving the visibility of existing resources and program offerings. The Qualification Program for Doctoral and Early-Career Researchers (QP), previously organized by the ZWW, will now be run by the Graduate Center. It will be qualitatively improved and given a clearer structure, as needed. A graduate center at a research-strong university with above-average increases in third-party funding in recent years and a fundamental internationalization approach represents an established institutional standard that can support new strategies and requirements. Therefore, the Graduate Center holds both structural and individual significance and provides benefits in the area of qualification and networking for researchers in qualification phases, serving as a relevant research infrastructure for scholars at Europa-Universität Flensburg.

Tasks

The regulatory provisions of the Graduate Center (GraZ) are anchored and specified in its statutes, particularly with regard to its tasks and responsibilities.

- **Visibility:** Making visible all resources and program offers of relevance to researchers in qualification phases at Europa-Universität Flensburg, consolidating all such resources and offers, and providing information on all cross-disciplinary qualification resources and program offers at Europa-Universität Flensburg
- **Design and Implementation:** Designing and implementing an interdisciplinary training program to develop and expand qualification- and career-relevant interdisciplinary skills that complement the subject-specific qualification of faculties and disciplines, as well as the qualification offers of other units that support doctoral and early-career researchers and the flagship research centers
- **Promotion of Interdisciplinary Communication and Networking:** Promoting interdisciplinary communication and networking in research and qualification through information, consultation, and networking
- **Quality Assurance:** Implementing measures to ensure the quality of the center's own resources, program offerings, and services

Structure of Qualification Areas

Based on the various support approaches developed at Europa-Universität Flensburg for different groups of researchers in various qualification phases, we have outlined the following structure for the qualification areas. Ideally, it will provide information about the topics and content of the Graduate Center's qualification resources and program offerings. Taking into consideration individual career goals, specific thematic focuses are applied to optimally support researchers in qualification phases while addressing the various needs that arise during each individual qualification phase. This structure is subject to critical review at least every three years, to ensure continuous development of the overall system, as well as to adapt to the changing needs for academic qualification and research profile development at the university while also considering national and international recommendations for qualification measures across different career phases.

In all qualification phases, the development of subject-specific competencies, supported by the subject-specific environment in the faculties and disciplines, is the primary element of academic career and profile development. The Graduate Center's cross-disciplinary qualification resources and programs complement profile development by strengthening and promoting cross-disciplinary skills and abilities that correspond with problems and challenges of various qualification phases (establishing one's own research field, defining a profile in research and teaching, and developing one's own research area). However, they are not tied to a specific set of requirements for any given qualification phase; instead, due to individual qualification trajectories and the complexity of needs as well as individual situational qualification requirements, they provide supplementary and in-depth support for different challenges that arise during career phases, transitions, and the planning of further career steps.

- **Research, Writing, Publishing:** This qualification area includes programs and resources necessary for conducting and completing academic qualification projects. Example topics include

social research methods, academic writing, good research practice, research data management, forms of academic presentation, traditional and new publication formats, and time and knowledge management.

- **Third-Party Funding Application and Academic Communication:** This qualification area includes resources and programs that support the development and expansion of independent research activities and expand knowledge and skills in the areas of academic communication and knowledge transfer, to enable researchers in qualification phases to engage in dialogue and communicate sensitively with an awareness of diversity in interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, non-academic, and international contexts. Example topics include applying for and obtaining external funding, the basics of project management and external funding management, academic communication and transformation, as well as international integration, communication, and knowledge transfer to industry, politics, and society.
- **Career and Profile Development:** The qualification offerings in this area raise awareness of the challenges and requirements of both academic and non-academic career paths and support academic profile development. Example topics include academic profile building, presentation and public image, leadership skills, application training, career planning, and career development.

Funding

The Graduate Center's qualification resources and programs are financed through central resources and are free of charge for researchers in qualification phases.

Organizational Structure

The Graduate Center is led by a full-time managing director and falls under the responsibility of the Vice President for Research and Knowledge Transfer.

Quality Assurance

All of the Graduate Center's qualification offerings are given by specialist instructors and are continuously evaluated to ensure their outstanding quality. A needs assessment is conducted every two years, in order to tailor current and future resources and course offerings to the needs of specific target groups. Additionally, the alignment of offerings with needs is regularly communicated with the research centers and coordinated with the faculties, DokNet, and other stakeholders involved in the support of researchers in qualification phases.

Quality Criteria

- Continuous evaluation of qualification resources and program offerings through online questionnaires
- Exploration of the possibility of incorporating external evaluation perspectives

- Research on qualification providers, resources and program offerings, and strategic networking based on the content concept
- Quality criteria for selecting instructors
- Internal event organization within the framework of qualification programs
- Costs of qualification resources and program offerings