

Land und Leute



Hochschulen

Germany has a long tradition of higher education. The oldest university is the University of Heidelberg, founded in 1386. Germany has 372 institutions of higher learning (**Hochschulen**), of which 102 are universities (**Universitäten**). Responsibility for higher education is shared by the states and the federal government. The best-known type of institution is the **Universität**, which is both a research and teaching institution. Universities are, with very few exceptions, the only institutions that can confer a doctoral degree.



In der Vorlesung über „Technische Mechanik“ an der Ruhr-Universität Bochum.

Approximately 25% of German students attend a Fachhochschule.

Colleges that specialize in preparing students for careers in art or music are called **Kunsthochschulen** and **Musikhochschulen** respectively. A newer type of institution of higher learning is the **Fachhochschule**, which specializes in fields of study (**Studiengänge**) that are more oriented toward a specific career in fields such as business or engineering. Although 96% of German students attend state-supported institutions, private schools are becoming more common in Germany. In 2007 there were 69 private colleges.

However, Germany's institutions of higher learning are undergoing fundamental changes. With the goal of creating a common system of higher education, 46 European countries

have agreed to restructure their university systems by 2010. This change should insure that degrees are recognized in all signatory countries and guarantee greater mobility within Europe. The new academic degrees (**Abschlüsse**) will sound familiar to English speakers. Traditional courses of study will be replaced with bachelor's and master's degrees (**Bachelor- und Masterstudiengänge**). To earn a degree, students will complete a prescribed number of credits (**Leistungspunkte**) and modules in the new European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

At the beginning of the semester, students choose classes according to type and subject matter. A **Vorlesung** is a lecture with little discussion and no exams. An **Übung** is a course that often has daily assignments, discussion, and a test (**Klausur**) at the end. In a **Seminar**, students write papers and discuss the material. They have to write term papers (**Seminararbeiten**) as well.

After successful completion of a **Seminar** or **Übung**, students receive a certificate (**Schein**), which includes a grade. A minimum number of **Scheine** is necessary before the student may take the intermediate qualifying exam (**Zwischenprüfung**), which is usually taken after four to six semesters at the university. More **Scheine** are required before a student can write a master's thesis (**Magisterarbeit**) or take examinations for the degree.



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Finanzen und Studienplätze

Around two million students are enrolled in Germany's institutions of higher learning. This number represents about one-third of the country's young people. Although this number is lower than in some industrialized countries, many careers that require a college education in other countries do not in Germany. In general, any student who has successfully completed the final comprehensive examination for secondary education (**Abitur**) can be admitted to university study. One recent change is that, in addition to a national system of placement (**Numerus clausus**), some universities now review their own applications. Applicants from other countries must demonstrate that they have attained the academic competence that would enable them to enroll in a university in their home country and that they have a good command of German.

Until recently there was no tuition (**Studiengebühren**) at public universities. However, most states have begun to charge tuition to some or all students, depending on the amount of time students have been at the university. Naturally, this controversial move has been opposed by many students. The typical tuition, when it is applied, is 500 euros per semester in Germany. In Austria, tuition was mandated in 2001 and is under 400 euros per semester for members of the European Union and around 730 euros per semester for others.

Most financial aid for students is intended to cover living expenses. The **Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz (BAföG)** provides aid in a combination of grants and no-interest loans. Many students supplement this aid with a commercial student loan (**Studien- or Studentenkredit**). In addition, most students work part-time (**jobben**) either during the semester or during vacation (**Semesterferien**). Students may earn up to 325 euros almost tax-free through regular employment.



Jobben als Kellner im Studentencafé in Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg.

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Schule, Hochschule, Klasse, Student

Many words used in English to talk about university studies are not equivalent to the German words that appear to be cognates. In the German-speaking countries a greater distinction is made in words referring to education before college or university and post-secondary education.

- *school*: In German **(die) Schule** refers to an elementary or secondary school. When talking about post-secondary education, German speakers use **(die) Universität** or **(die) Hochschule**. The equivalent of *What school do you go to?* is **An welcher Uni studierst du?**
- *high school*: A German equivalent of the U.S. or Canadian *high school* is **(die) Oberschule**, **(die) höhere Schule**, or **(das) Gymnasium**. A **Hochschule** is a post-secondary school such as a university.
- *student*: In German, **Studentin/Student** refers to someone at a post-secondary institution (i.e., at a **Universität** or **Hochschule**). The word **(die) Schülerin/(der) Schüler** is used for young people in elementary and secondary schools.



Schüler und Schülerinnen in der ersten Klasse.
(München)

- *class*: The English word *class* refers to an instructional period or a group of students. The German word **(die) Klasse** refers only to a group of students (e.g., **meine Klasse** = *my class, my classmates*) or a specific grade (e.g., **die zweite Klasse** = *the second grade*). In a **Schule** the word for *class* meaning *instructional period* is **Stunde** (e.g., **die Deutschstunde** = *the German class*). At the university level in German-speaking countries there are several types of classes—**Vorlesung**, **Übung**, and **Seminar** (see *Land und Leute: Hochschulen*, p. 144). A very general word for a class is **Kurs**. To ask the question *How many students are in your German class?* a German might say: **Wie viele Kursteilnehmer gibt es in Ihrem Deutschkurs?**



Das Schulsystem in Deutschland

At the age of six all children go to a **Grundschule** (primary school, grades 1–4). After that they attend either a **Hauptschule**, **Realschule**, or **Gymnasium**, depending on their ability and the job or career they hope to have.

Schuljahr				
13			Universitäten und wissenschaftliche Hochschulen	
12	Berufsausbildung in Betrieb und Berufsschule			
11				
10				
9				
8				
7	Hauptschule	Realschule	Gymnasium	Gesamtschule
6				
5				
4	Grundschule			
3				
2				
1				
	Kindergarten			

Das deutsche Schulsystem.

Young people preparing to work in the trades or industry (e.g., as a baker or car mechanic) may attend a **Hauptschule** (grades 5–9 or 5–10). After obtaining their certificate (**Hauptschulabschluss**), they enter an apprenticeship program, which includes 3–4 days per week of work training at a business and 8–12 hours per week of study at a vocational school (**Berufsschule**) until at least the age of 18. Approximately one-third of the young people follow this path.

The 30% wanting a job in business, industry, public service, or the health field (e.g., as a bank clerk or nurse) attend a **Realschule** (grades 5–10). The certificate (**Mittlere Reife**) from a **Realschule** is a

prerequisite for mid-level positions and permits the students to attend specialized schools (**Berufsfachschule** or **Fachoberschule**). Students who leave the **Gymnasium** after grade 10 also obtain a **Mittlere Reife**.

Young people planning to go to a university or a **Fachhochschule** (see page 144) attend all grades of a **Gymnasium** (grades 5–12). The certificate of general higher education entrance qualification (**Zeugnis der allgemeinen Hochschulreife**), which is the diploma from a **Gymnasium**, is granted on the basis of grades in courses and the passing of a comprehensive exam (**Abitur**).

In some areas, another type of school, the **Gesamtschule** (*comprehensive school*), offers secondary instruction for grades 5–10, and in some states the **Gesamtschule** extends to the thirteenth year. Courses are of several types (A, B, C), which have different demands. Only students that take the most demanding course (A) will be able to take the **Abitur**, the entrance requirement for the university.

The school day goes from early morning to noon (**Halbtagschule**). There is currently much discussion about instituting a full-day school (**Ganztagschule**), but at this point the system has not changed.

Work experience may also qualify a person for study at the university.