

Doctoral Regulations of the Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin
including
First Ordinance on the Amendment of the Doctoral Regulations for the Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin

Disclaimer: Please note that only the German versions of these documents are legally binding. This translation is intended for the convenience of the non-German-reading public and is for information purposes only.

Preamble

On the basis of Section 14.1.2 of Freie Universität Berlin's supplemental rules and regulations (*Teilgrundordnung [Erprobungsmodell]*) from October 27, 1998, published in *FU-Mitteilungen* 24/1998 (the official bulletin of Freie Universität Berlin), and in conjunction with Section 70.5 of the Berlin Higher Education Act (*Berliner Hochschulgesetz – BerlHG*) from July 26, 2011 (GVBl. p. 378), last amended on July 11, 2023 (GVBl. p. 260), the Extended Department Council (*Erweiterte Fachbereichsrat*) of the Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin issued the following Doctoral Regulations of the Department of Earth Sciences on February 14, 2024.¹ Furthermore, the Extended Department Council of the Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin issued the First Ordinance on the Amendment of the Doctoral Regulations for the Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin on November 27, 2024 (*FU-Mitteilungen* 1/2026), which has also been integrated into this text.²

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¹The Executive Board of Freie Universität Berlin approved these regulations on April 16, 2024.

² The ordinance on the amendment of these regulations was approved by the Executive Board of Freie Universität Berlin on November 3, 2025.

Section 19 Revocation of the Doctoral Title

Section 20 Entry into Force, Lapse of Prior Regulations, and Transitional Regulations

Section 1 The Doctoral Title and Its Significance

(1) The Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin awards the academic title of Doctor of Science (*Doktor der Naturwissenschaften*, *doctor rerum naturalium*, abbreviated as “Dr. rer. nat.”) or Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) on the basis of a doctorate that has been successfully completed according to the following provisions.

(2) Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated the ability to carry out original research or other advanced scholarship independently within one of the degree programs in subjects offered by the Department of Earth Sciences. The doctorate can be completed as part of a postgraduate or doctoral study program.

(3) To receive the title of Doctor of Science (Dr. rer. nat.), the candidate must fulfill the following requirements in their doctoral subject:

- submit a dissertation (see Section 7) and
- successfully defend their dissertation in a colloquium in their field (see Section 11).

To be awarded the title Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), students must additionally demonstrate that they have completed a doctoral degree program within the framework of the Dahlem Research School (DRS) or an equivalent program of study. This can be demonstrated through a certificate and transcript of records or equivalent documentation.

(4) An honorary doctoral title (*doctor rerum naturalium honoris causa*, abbreviated as “Dr. rer. nat. h.c.”) may be conferred for outstanding contributions to an academic field within the remit of the Department of Earth Sciences (see Section 18).

(5) Only one doctoral title as specified in Section 1.1. may be conferred per individual doctoral candidate by the Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin.

Section 2 Doctoral Board

(1) The Department Council shall appoint a doctoral board to oversee the doctoral procedure.

(2) The Department Council shall appoint the members of the doctoral board at the beginning of its respective term of office. The doctoral board consists of three university professors whose main employment is with the university and two members of academic staff who hold a doctoral degree, as well as two representatives elected by the doctoral candidates in the department. The doctoral candidate representatives are only involved in general matters related to the doctoral procedure. The Department Council appoints an alternate for each of the three groups of doctoral board members. The Department Council appoints one of the three university professors as chairperson of the doctoral board and shall also appoint a deputy chairperson.

(3) Meetings of the doctoral board may take place using remote audiovisual technology, provided data protection regulations are followed. Secret ballots may only be carried out if it is technologically feasible to implement them. The chairperson will make the decision as to

whether to use remote audiovisual technology at their own discretion.

(4) The doctoral board decides whether to approve or reject applications for admission to doctoral research, which includes the research proposal submitted as part of the application. The board may offer candidates an appropriate level of advice regarding their application. Doctoral board meetings are not open to the public.

(5) In individual cases, the doctoral board can authorize the transfer of certain decisions or powers to the chairperson of the board; however, this authorization may be revoked at any time.

(6) The doctoral board must submit an annual report to the Department Council at the end of each academic year. It provides information to the dean's office within the scope of responsibilities defined in Section 15.3.2 of the supplemental rules and regulations of Freie Universität Berlin from October 27, 1998 (*FU-Mitteilungen* 24/1998).

(7) Where decisions are to be made regarding fundamental procedural questions, the chairperson of the doctoral board is to inform the Executive Board's Office of the General Counsel via the dean of the department.

Section 3 Admission Requirements

(1) To be eligible for doctoral research, the applicant must have successfully obtained a master's degree in a subject closely related to their proposed doctoral field by completing a master's examination within the scope of the German Basic Law. The master's degree and first university degree together must amount to at least 300 credit points, or the applicant must hold an equivalent higher education degree for which a minimum grade of "good" ("gut") was awarded. Where the previous qualifications were obtained at an institution outside of Germany, the candidate must have been awarded the best possible overall grade according to the relevant grading system. The doctoral board shall make the final decision regarding exceptions.

(2) If the applicant cannot demonstrate that they meet these conditions, the doctoral board may admit the applicant to the doctoral degree program on the condition that the applicant produces certificates of completion by a fixed deadline, the acquisition of which is usually required for the desired doctoral degree program as specified in Section 3.1 or which serve to document the applicant's supplemental knowledge required for the intended doctorate.

(3) If the higher education certificate was obtained through successful completion of a bachelor's degree in a subject closely related to their proposed doctoral degree program at a university or similar institution of higher education within the scope of the German Basic Law, but the applicant has not completed a master's degree program, the applicant is required to demonstrate their suitability for a doctoral degree program. In addition, the following requirements must be met:

- a) Bachelor's degree certificate with the final grade of "very good" ("sehr gut")
- b) Two expert opinions provided by university professors responsible for subjects closely related to the proposed doctoral degree program at a university or similar institution of higher education. These expert opinions must evaluate the applicant's potential for carrying out independent academic work and document the successful completion of up to three oral aptitude tests (each approximately 30 minutes in length) in the field of study and areas related to the proposed doctoral degree program. The chairperson of the doctoral board shall appoint the individuals who administer the aptitude tests.

The requirement to complete an aptitude test may be waived as an exception in justified cases. In this case, the applicant is granted admission on the condition that they supplement their existing number of credit points to achieve a total of 300 credit points; the applicant usually

has twenty-four months in which to meet this condition. Should the applicant fail to submit evidence that they have met this condition, the doctoral board will decide whether or not to revoke the applicant's admission to the doctoral degree program.

(4) A "higher education degree" as specified in Section 3.1 may pertain to an equivalent degree in a subject closely related to the proposed doctoral degree program that was successfully completed at an institution of higher education outside the scope of the German Basic Law. In case of any doubt as to the equivalence of the foreign higher education certificate, a Statement of Comparability must be obtained from the *Zentralstelle für ausländisches Bildungswesen* (Central Office for Foreign Education – ZAB) at the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany. If the degree is deemed equivalent, Sections 3.1 and 3.2 shall apply accordingly. In the event that no Statement of Comparability is obtained from the ZAB, the chairperson of the doctoral board shall evaluate the applicant's grade and its equivalence with the requirements set out in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 in agreement with the chairperson of the relevant examination board (*Prüfungsausschuss*). If an equivalence cannot be determined, the doctoral board is to assess whether equivalence may be achieved through the fulfillment of the conditions set out in Section 3.2 above.

(5) All applicants are required to submit documentation to the doctoral board that they have attended a seminar or another scheduled activity related to good research practice one year following admission to the doctoral degree program at the latest. This deadline can be extended once by a period of twelve months upon request. If the applicant fails to submit this documentation, the doctoral board makes the final decision whether or not to revoke their admission to the doctoral degree program.

Section 4 Admission Procedure

(1) Applications for admission to the doctoral degree program are generally to be submitted before beginning any experimental or theoretical work related to the doctoral research project and must be addressed to the chairperson of the doctoral board via the examination office of the Department of Earth Sciences accompanied by the following documentation:

- a) Documents as required under Section 3, especially proof of academic achievements and certificates.
- b) A tabular curriculum vitae (CV) that highlights the applicant's activities and experience in the particular field of doctoral study.
- c) A written declaration stating whether the applicant has already previously applied for admission to doctoral study at an earlier date, or whether the applicant is currently pursuing (or has pursued) a doctorate at another university or department, including full information regarding the outcome of the process, where applicable.
- d) A written declaration stating the applicant acknowledges the applicable doctoral degree regulations.
- e) If doctoral work is to be completed in German, proof of proficiency in German for applicants whose first language is not German and whose qualifying degree was obtained at a non-German university or equivalent institution of higher education. Proof of proficiency should take the form of a *Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang* (DSH) certificate permitting them to study at a German university or an equivalent qualification meeting the German language requirements for non-German applicants set out in Freie Universität Berlin's relevant regulation (*Ordnung für die Deutsche Sprachprüfung*).
- f) If doctoral work is to be completed in English, proof of proficiency in English at the level

required for this purpose. The doctoral board, in agreement with the supervisor appointed under the conditions specified in Section 6.2, makes the final decision about what form this proof of proficiency must take, as well as whether the applicant actually has sufficient proficiency in English.

- g) A signed written declaration stating that the applicant commits to adhere to Freie Universität Berlin's rules on good research practice.
- (2) The application for admission should also include a work and time schedule for the doctoral project. The work and time schedule must have been approved by at least one professor from the Department of Earth Sciences whose main employment is with the university. The subject of the doctoral project must deal with clearly defined research areas in the Department of Earth Sciences, for which there are established degree programs. The area or areas must be represented in teaching and research by at least one professor. Where possible, the applicant should propose a supervisor for their doctoral project who represents the field of study in accordance with this provision (Section 4.2) and who is prepared to take on the role of supervisor.
- (3) The applicant may also present a finished doctoral dissertation in a field of study in accordance with Section 4.2. This is only possible if the dissertation has not already been submitted as part of another doctoral procedure.
- (4) Generally, the decision on admission to the doctoral degree program is made by the doctoral board within one month. The formal notification of admission is provided in writing. The rejection of an application must be accompanied by the reasons for this decision in writing.
- (5) The application for doctoral study shall be rejected if
- a) The requirements set out in Section 3 are not met.
 - b) The documents set out in Sections 4.1 are not included in the application.
 - c) The applicant has already successfully completed a doctorate in the same research field or area.
 - d) The applicant is concurrently pursuing another doctoral degree in the same research subject or area.

If the doctoral board finds that the department to which the applicant has applied is not suitable for their proposed topic, the application may be rejected on the basis of Section 4.2 above.

Section 5 Enrolling as a Doctoral Student

- (1) In accordance with Freie Universität Berlin's Statutes of Academic Affairs (*Satzung für Studienangelegenheiten*), doctoral candidates who are not already members of Freie Universität Berlin through employment with the university or enrollment in a degree program are required to enroll as doctoral students at Freie Universität Berlin.
- (2) If they do not enroll as students by the deadline stated in their doctoral study admission letter or, if applicable, by the end of the formal extension period, the admission to doctoral study will be revoked. Applicants are permitted to reapply for admission to doctoral study in cases where their original admission is revoked on the above grounds.

Section 6 Supervision of Doctoral Research Project, Standard Time to Degree

- (1) By admitting the applicant to the doctoral degree program, the Department of Earth Sciences formally assumes the responsibility of ensuring that the dissertation project will be supervised and the submitted dissertation will be evaluated.

- (2) The following persons are generally permitted to supervise a dissertation:
- a) University professors,
 - b) Leaders of junior research teams,
 - c) Academic staff members with the right to teach (*Venia Legendi*) in a discipline covered by the Department of Earth Sciences,

provided that these individuals are members of the Department of Earth Sciences. Upon request, the following individuals may also supervise a dissertation:

- d) members of the Department of Earth Sciences who can demonstrate their eligibility for an appointment as a university professor in accordance with Section 100 of the Berlin Higher Education Act (*Berliner Hochschulgesetz*, BerlHG) through an invitation to an interview for a W2 or W3 grade professorship.

Where a justified case for their appointment can be made, a professor from another university, working together with a professor from the Department of Earth Sciences, may also be requested as a supervisor. Additional university professors or researchers holding a doctoral title may be involved in the supervision of the doctoral project, even when they are not members of the Department of Earth Sciences. Their inclusion requires the agreement of the other individuals involved.

- (3) The topic of the doctoral project may be selected freely, provided it is in accordance with Section 4.2. and has met with approval from the supervisor. The doctoral research project should typically be able to be completed within four years (standard time to degree).

- (4) Doctoral candidates are members of the university at which they are admitted for doctoral study. Applicants receive prompt confirmation of this in written or electronic form. The date of this confirmation shall be considered the date upon which the candidate begins their doctoral degree program. Doctoral candidates who are not already members of Freie Universität Berlin through employment with the university or enrollment in a degree program are required to enroll in their doctoral program as students.

- (5) If a doctoral candidate exceeds the standard time for completion of the doctoral degree as stipulated in Section 6.3 by more than one year, they must present the academic affairs office with an official document from their supervisor that provides details on the candidate's progress with the dissertation as well as an estimate of the time still required to complete it. If the doctoral candidate does not present this document within three months of having received the request to do so and cannot provide valid reasons for this delay, their admission to doctoral study will be revoked. If the doctoral candidate was already enrolled as a student, they will also be removed from the register of students.

- (6) The Department of Earth Sciences assumes responsibility for the doctoral candidate's academic supervision and advising. To this purpose, supervisors who have agreed to supervise a doctoral research project conclude a written supervision agreement with the doctoral candidate. By concluding the supervision agreement, the supervisor makes a commitment to the doctoral candidate and the doctoral board to supervise the doctoral research project for a period of typically four years. If the supervisor or doctoral candidate needs to terminate the supervisory relationship during the course of the project for justified reasons, they must immediately inform the chair of the doctoral board and explain the reason(s) why. Even if the supervisor ceases to be a member of Freie Universität Berlin, they retain the right to supervise a dissertation that was already started prior to this change in status for another three years. During this time they are allowed to continue to act as a member of the doctoral committee.

- (7) In individual, justified cases, researchers involved in partnership agreements or contracts with Freie Universität Berlin can be granted the right to participate in the doctoral procedure (as a supervisor, reviewer, examiner) pending the Department of Earth Sciences' approval of their participation in a defined role. The researchers named in such agreements

and contracts then have the rights and duties equivalent to those of a professor whose main employment is not with the university within their specific approved role in the doctoral procedure.

Section 7 Dissertation

- (1) The dissertation is a written work by the doctoral candidate in the research field of Earth sciences as defined in Section 4.2.3 and must constitute a significant contribution to scientific knowledge.
- (2) A dissertation may be submitted as either
 - a) a monograph consisting of either
 - aa) an unpublished manuscript,
 - or ab) a partially published manuscript, in which the previously published sections are clearly indicated, or
 - b) a cumulative manuscript that consists of at least three thematically connected individual pieces (publications), of which at least two have already been published by the time the dissertation is submitted and at least one other article has been submitted for publication. Individual papers must be published in scientific journals that follow a review process and that are either ISI-listed at the time of publication or that demonstrably use a double-blind peer review process. Generally speaking, the doctoral candidate should be named as the sole first author of at least two of the publications; as far as the third publication is concerned, they can be named as first or second coauthor having made significant contributions to the research article. Taken as a whole, the three articles must be considered equivalent to a monograph dissertation in terms of the scientific achievement they represent.
- (3) The dissertation must provide a full and complete depiction of the research project and its findings.
 - a) The structure of the dissertation as determined by the choice of the option under Section 7.2.a must adhere to the relevant scientific and academic standards of a monograph with a full bibliography as well as a summary of the dissertation in German and English.
 - b) The structure of the dissertation as determined by the choice of the option under Section 7.2.b must include a cohesive framing text with a comprehensive introduction, an overview of the research methods, a synopsis of the findings, an outlook on future developments, as well as a summary in German and English. The dissertation must also be submitted with a digital attachment containing relevant research data or, alternatively, information on a publicly accessible data archive. The full individual publications are then embedded in the framing text as chapters along with an extra chapter on research literature prepared for print publication. The synthesis lends added value to the dissertation, making it more than just the sum of the individual publications. At the end of the framing text comes a bibliography that lists the works cited in that section of the dissertation; the bibliographies for the individual publications can either be included separately with the specific publication or as part of a comprehensive bibliography together with the works cited in the framing text at the end of the dissertation.
- (4) The dissertation can be the result of research conducted in cooperation with a third party. In this case, the doctoral candidate's individual contributions must be clearly identifiable, and it must be possible to evaluate them as such. The doctoral candidate must provide details on the portions of research with third parties for which they were responsible, from the planning

phase to implementation to reporting/publishing the findings.

(5) The dissertation must be written in either German or English.

(6) The doctoral candidate must state all resources used and assistance received and declare that they are solely responsible for the dissertation. All forms of automated content creation (in particular, large language models, AI-generated texts and images, chatbots, etc.) are considered inadmissible resources unless there is an explicit agreement to this effect between the supervisor and the doctoral candidate; in these cases, the use must be documented in an appropriate manner. The dissertation may not have been submitted as part of a prior doctoral study program. If uncertainties arise, then the doctoral candidate's academic work from prior doctoral study (Section 4.1.c) must be presented for comparison.

The title page of the dissertation must include: the name of the author; a statement that the dissertation has been submitted at the Department of Earth Sciences, Freie Universität Berlin; the year of submission; and an additional front matter page for the names of the supervisors. The dissertation must also include brief summaries of the results in German and English. A short CV of the doctoral candidate should also be included (pending the candidate's consent).

(7) Three printed and bound copies of the dissertation must be submitted. One copy goes to the department's examinations office. In addition, an electronic version of the dissertation must be submitted in a file format that prevents editing or other changes and that can be accessed independently of specific platforms or software.

Section 8 Examiners' Reports

(1) The doctoral board appoints the examiners as soon as the dissertation has been submitted.

(2) The doctoral board appoints the examiners as examiners for the dissertation in agreement with the doctoral candidate, taking into considering the following:

- a) If the dissertation contains only previously unpublished material (as described under Section 7.2.aa), the doctoral supervisor may not serve as an examiner due to quality assurance reasons.
- b) If the dissertation is a cumulative thesis (as described under Section 7.2.b) or a monograph containing sections that have been published elsewhere (as described in Section 7.2.ab), the doctoral supervisor may serve as an examiner. Any coauthors of publications that figure prominently in the dissertation may not serve as examiners.

The examiners must be either:

- professors,
- junior research group leaders,
- academic staff members with the right to teach (*Venia Legendi*) in a discipline covered by the Department of Earth Sciences. In addition, a request may be submitted to allow an examiner who is a member of the Department of Earth Sciences and who can demonstrate their eligibility for an appointment as a professor in accordance with Section 100 of the Berlin Higher Education Act (*Berliner Hochschulgesetz*, BerlHG) through an invitation to an interview for a W2 or W3 grade professorship. Proof of this eligibility must be submitted with the request.

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At least one of the two examiners must be a university professor. If there are significant methodological or other pertinent aspects of the dissertation related to a research field covered by another department at Freie Universität Berlin, one of the additional examiners should be a professor from this other department as per Section

9. Examiners from outside the field of Earth sciences are permitted in individual cases. The provisions of Section 6.6 still apply. For examiners who are not members of the Department of Earth Sciences, the doctoral candidate submits the CV of said examiner. The CV must make clear that the examiner meets the qualifications stipulated in Section 8.2.b.

(3) Evaluations are to be completed independently of one another and submitted within six weeks of being requested. The members of the doctoral board and the doctoral committee must treat the evaluations confidentially. The doctoral candidate may read the examiners' evaluations with the consent of the examiners.

(4) The evaluations should take into account the following aspects:

- Originality, current relevance, contribution to the advancement of science
- Clarity of hypotheses and research questions
- Justification of methods
- Critical discussion of the results in the context of relevant scientific literature
- Organization and structure of the work
- Quality of images, diagrams, and tables
- Linguistic and stylistic aspects

The evaluation should also assess how clearly the scientific connection between the individual sections is presented in cumulative dissertations (Section 7.2.b) or in a monograph (Section 7.2.a). It should additionally consider how much the doctoral candidate contributed to sections that were coauthored.

To help the examiners with the evaluation process, the doctoral board will prepare an assessment questionnaire/rubric for the examiners to use.

(5) In their overall evaluation, the examiners must reach a consensus and recommend that the dissertation be accepted, awarding it a grade in accordance with Section 12.1; reject the dissertation completely; or return it to the doctoral candidate to remedy certain shortcomings before they present it for evaluation once more. If an examiner finds faults with the dissertation that must be remedied and these changes can be made within an appropriate time frame, they must include them in their evaluation and explain them in precise terms. In these cases the examiner may recommend revisions to the dissertation and should give some indication of how to approach them. The doctorate will be graded as failed if the required corrections are not submitted by the deadline set by the doctoral board due to reasons within the doctoral candidate's control. The chairperson of the doctoral board must send a written notification and statement detailing the reasons why the doctoral candidate did not pass.

(6) If the dissertation is returned for revisions, three new bound copies of the revised version must be submitted to the examinations office. This then serves as the basis for fulfilling the requirements stipulated in Section 13 regarding the delivery of the manuscript.

(7) If the examiners' evaluations do not make their recommendations and grading clear, the doctoral board shall return them to be amended.

(8) If the results of the evaluations differ to the extent that one recommends rejecting the doctoral thesis and the other recommends accepting it, the doctoral board will appoint an additional examiner. This examiner may not be a member of Freie Universität, nor otherwise figure significantly in the research included in the dissertation, for example, as a coauthor of publications.

(9) A dissertation receives the grade "summa cum laude" when both examiners conclude it merits "summa cum laude" and the doctoral committee also concludes that the oral defense merits "summa cum laude." If only one examiner awards the dissertation the grade "summa

cum laude,” the doctoral board can appoint an additional examiner at the request of the doctoral committee. This examiner may not be a member of Freie Universität, nor otherwise figure significantly in the research included in the dissertation, for example, as a coauthor of publications. A dissertation can only receive the grade “summa cum laude” when at least two examiners conclude it merits “summa cum laude” and the doctoral committee also concludes that the oral defense merits “summa cum laude.”

(10) Once the evaluations have been completed and the dissertation accepted, the dissertation and the examiners’ evaluations with their recommended grades must be submitted to the Department of Earth Sciences examinations office and made available for perusal. All members of the departmental council, professors and postdoctoral members of the university, as well as the gender equality officer of the Department of Earth Sciences have the right to review the dissertation and the recommended grades during this time. They may also submit their own statement, which must be added to the doctoral candidate’s official file. The doctoral office shall inform these groups of the period in which the dissertation may be perused.

Section 9

Doctoral Committee

(1) The doctoral board appoints the members of the doctoral committee for the doctoral procedure in question as soon as the dissertation has been submitted. The doctoral board appoints one member of the committee to act as chair and another as deputy chair. Neither person may be a supervisor of the doctoral project. The chair and deputy chair must be members of the Department of Earth Sciences. The chair and deputy chair must be either university professors (primary employment), junior research group leaders, or academic staff members with the right to teach (*Venia Legendi*), working in a discipline covered by the Department of Earth Sciences. Individuals from disciplines outside of Earth sciences can act as members of the doctoral committee in accordance with Section 8.2.

(2) The doctoral committee usually consists of the examiners and at least three other members. At least two members of the doctoral committee must be members of the Department of Earth Sciences. At least half of the members of the doctoral committee must be professors (primary employment) and at least two of them must be professors at the Department of Earth Sciences. [At least one of the professorial members of the doctoral committee may not be a member of the same institute as the doctoral candidate. At least one of the members of the doctoral committee must be a postdoctoral researcher in one of the scientific fields covered by the Department of Earth Sciences.](#) The doctoral committee should not contain more than one professor who has been released or retired from their position. The provisions of Section 6.6 still apply.

(3) If the dissertation addresses research questions that relate to multiple academic areas as described in Section 4.2.3, then these areas and potentially other academic departments must be adequately taken into account when appointing members to the doctoral committee. This might entail deviating from the provisions in Section 9.1.

(4) The tasks of the doctoral committee are:

- a) To accept, reject, or return the dissertation to the candidate for revision based on the examiners’ reports and any position statements submitted as outlined in Section 8.4 above
- b) To schedule and conduct the oral defense
- c) To evaluate and grade the dissertation and oral defense
- d) To establish a final overall assessment/grade as per Section 12
- e) To communicate the conditions that must be met before the dissertation can be published (if necessary)

(5) The meetings of the doctoral committee shall not be open to the public. Its rulings are to be treated as confidential.

(6) Resolutions passed by the doctoral committee must be passed by majority vote. All votes on the assessment of a candidate's achievements shall be cast openly; abstentions are not permitted.

Section 10

Decisions on Accepting and Grading the Dissertation, Scheduling the Oral Defense

(1) After the viewing period for perusal of the dissertation has ended, the doctoral committee decides whether to accept the dissertation, reject it, or insist on revisions; if they decide to accept it, they will determine a date for the oral defense.

(2) If the dissertation is rejected, the doctoral committee will declare that the doctorate has not been passed, stating the reasons in a concluding report. In this case, the doctoral committee does not set a date for the oral defense. The chair of the doctoral committee informs the doctoral candidate in writing of the decision and the reasons for this decision.

(3) The chair of the doctoral committee issues the invitation to the oral defense in agreement with the doctoral candidate. The period of time between the submission of the final examiner's report and the oral defense should be at least two weeks and at most three months. The oral defense generally takes place during the lecture period while classes are in session. The oral defense is open to members of the university, unless otherwise specified by the doctoral candidate, who may restrict attendance.

(4) If the dissertation has been returned to the candidate for revisions, the oral defense may not be scheduled until the revised dissertation has been submitted and evaluated, and the viewing period as defined under Section 8.6 has elapsed.

(5) If the doctoral candidate refuses to complete an oral defense, they are deemed to have failed their doctorate. The chair of the doctoral board must inform the doctoral candidate in writing of the decision and the reasons for this decision.

Section 11

Oral Defense

(1) The oral defense is intended to demonstrate the doctoral candidate's ability to verbally present and discuss scientific problems. The oral defense may be held in German or English. The oral defense may also take place using audiovisual technology, provided data protection regulations are followed and the doctoral candidate agrees to this. The chair of the committee decides at their discretion whether or not audiovisual technology can be used.

(2) The oral defense begins with a thirty-minute presentation in which the doctoral candidate presents the findings of their dissertation and elaborates on the significance of these findings within the relevant field of research. Following the presentation, the doctoral candidate defends the dissertation against criticism and answers questions posed by the members of the doctoral committee. These questions should be aimed at situating the dissertation and the issues it raises within a wider academic and scientific context. Following this portion, the chair of the doctoral committee may allow members of the audience to ask questions regarding the subject of the oral defense. The portion of the oral defense that is open to members of the university lasts forty-five to sixty minutes. Afterward the doctoral committee and the doctoral candidate can meet in private for up to forty-five minutes for further discussion; the doctoral committee decides whether this additional private discussion is necessary.

(3) The chair of the doctoral commission is responsible for organizing the academic discussion and the order and admissibility of questions. The chair may decide in agreement with the doctoral candidate to exclude members of the public from the oral defense if deemed necessary in order to properly conduct the defense.

(4) Minutes must be kept on the oral defense. The members of the doctoral committee appoint one of its members to act as secretary and take minutes. The minutes shall constitute an official part of the doctoral file.

The minutes must contain the following details:

- Date, time, and place of the oral defense
- A list of the members of the doctoral committee who were present
- Grade awarded for the dissertation
- Notes on the discussion (bullet points are sufficient)
- Grade awarded for the oral defense as per Section 12.1
- Overall assessment/grade as per Section 12
- Any particular incidents or occurrences of note

The minutes must be signed by the secretary and the chair of the doctoral committee.

(5) If the doctoral candidate fails to appear at the oral defense, they will receive a failing grade for the defense. The doctoral candidate must be informed in writing of this result and the reasons for it. The doctoral candidate has the opportunity to re-attempt the oral defense, but only once.

Section 12

Examiners' Decision on the Oral Defense and Final Grade

(1) Following the oral defense, the doctoral committee will meet in private to evaluate it and determine the grade. When grading the oral defense, the candidate's performance in the discussion is weighted more heavily than their presentation. The oral defense is graded on a pass/fail basis.

(2) If the oral defense is graded "pass," the doctoral committee then determines the final overall grade. Successful completion of the doctorate requires that both the dissertation and oral defense are graded "pass" at the very least. The final overall grade in this case is then either "with honors (summa cum laude)" or "pass." The chair of the doctoral committee informs the doctoral candidate of the individual grades for the dissertation and the oral defense, as well as the overall final grade. The grade "with honors (summa cum laude)" may only be awarded as the final overall grade if at least two of the examiners' evaluations deemed the dissertation worthy of this grade and the candidate's performance in the oral defense also merits such distinction. After the doctoral procedure is completed, it must still be treated confidentially. The new graduate (or the former doctoral candidate as the case may be) may request access to their doctoral file over the course of the twelve months following completion of the doctoral procedure.

(3) If the oral defense is graded "fail," the chair of the doctoral committee must inform the doctoral candidate in writing within two weeks' time and include the reasons for this grade. If the candidate fails the oral defense, they may repeat it at the earliest three months, but no later than six months after the defense.

(4) If the candidate also fails the second attempt, the doctoral committee will declare the doctorate as "definitively failed" and provide the reasons for this decision. The chair of the doctoral committee must inform the doctoral candidate of the decision and the accompanying reasons within two weeks.

(5) If the dissertation and oral defense are both given passing grades, the doctoral candidate will receive a certificate with the title of the dissertation and the additional information of the final grade as either “pass” or “with honors.” This certificate does not confer the authority to use the doctoral title.

Section 13 Publishing the Dissertation and Required Copies

(1) The dissertation shall be made available and accessible to an academic audience through reproduction and distribution. Conditions set by the doctoral committee that must be met prior to publication must be made available in an appropriate format to the doctoral candidate immediately following the oral defense and the candidate must attend to them. If revisions or changes are deemed necessary, the doctoral candidate must obtain approval to publish the new revised version of the manuscript from the chair of the doctoral board, who consults with the candidate’s supervisor. As mentioned just above, the dissertation must be made accessible, which the doctoral candidate can do by providing the university library with one of the following free of charge (in addition to the required copies stipulated in Section 7.6):

- a) Twenty copies as a printed or photoprinted book for distribution
- b) Five copies if a commercial publisher is handling distribution through book trade marketing, provided that a minimum print run of 150 copies is confirmed and the verso of the title page includes a statement identifying the work as a dissertation, along with the location where it was submitted
- c) One digital version as a PDF file, plus three bound copies

In the case of a) above, the university library is required to keep an appropriate number of any exchange copies that exceed the required number of copies for a period of four years. In the case of b) above, it must clearly be indicated that the work is a dissertation, along with the location where it was submitted. In cases a) and c) above, the doctoral candidate grants Freie Universität Berlin the right to print and distribute additional copies of their dissertation. In all three cases, a summary (abstract) of the dissertation should also be submitted for publication purposes. The abstract needs to be approved by the primary supervisor and must not exceed one page in length.

The publication of the dissertation and the submission of the required copies (as set out above under Section 13.1) must take place within twelve months from the date of the oral defense. The doctoral candidate may request an extension of up to an additional twelve months. The request must be approved by the doctoral board.

Section 14 Doctoral Certificate

(1) A certificate for the doctorate will be issued in German. Upon request a translation of the certificate in English can be issued.

(2) The certificate must contain the following details:

- a) The name of Freie Universität Berlin and the Department of Earth Sciences
- b) The doctoral candidate’s name, date of birth, and town/city of birth
- c) The title awarded: either “Doktor/Doktorin der Naturwissenschaften” (*doctor rerum naturalium*, abbreviated as “Dr. rer. Nat.”) or “Doctor of Philosophy” (abbreviated as “Ph.D.”)
- d) The title of the dissertation
- e) The date of the oral defense; this date serves as the official date on which the candidate

received their doctorate

- f) The final overall grade of the doctorate
 - g) The names of the examiners
 - h) The name and signature of the dean
 - i) The official seal of Freie Universität Berlin
- (3) If it becomes known before the doctoral candidate receives the certificate that
- a) The doctoral candidate is aa) unworthy of receiving the doctoral title ab) was dishonest regarding significant requirements needed to earn the doctoral title, or
 - b) an error was made in assessing whether or not significant requirements for the award of the doctoral title have been met, unrelated to any concerns listed under 14.3a above, then the doctoral certificate will not be issued (unless the doctoral board comes to a different decision) and, in the case of a doctorate as described here in Sections 1 to 14, the overall final grade will be recorded as “fail.”

(4) The doctoral certificate is issued within four weeks after the requirement to submit copies of the dissertation has been fulfilled in accordance with Section 14.1 and 14.3. The doctoral certificate confers upon the recipient the title of either “Doktor/Doktorin der Naturwissenschaften” (*doctor rerum naturalium*, abbreviated as “Dr. rer. Nat.”) or “Doctor of Philosophy” (abbreviated as “Ph.D.”). The actual delivery of the doctoral certificate must be documented and kept on file.

Section 15 Appeals Process

A doctoral candidate may appeal the grade assigned to their doctoral work once the doctoral procedure has been completed. The appeal should be directed to the doctoral board. The same rules and regulations apply here as they do with appeals concerning examinations.

Section 16 Retracting the Doctoral Procedure Request, Terminating the Procedure, Readmission to the Doctoral Procedure

(1) The doctoral board may comply with a doctoral candidate’s request to withdraw their admission to the doctoral procedure, provided that the dissertation has not yet been submitted. In this case, any steps in the procedure that have been completed up to that point shall be treated as not belonging to this doctoral procedure.

(2) After a period of six years have passed since the candidate was admitted to the doctoral procedure, the doctoral board may decide to terminate the procedure. In order to do so, they need the written consent and a statement from the candidate’s supervisor after a hearing with the candidate has taken place. The chair of the doctoral board issues the written notification to terminate the procedure, which must include the reasons for this decision. If the procedure is terminated in this way, the candidate may still reapply for admission to the doctoral program.

(3) If a candidate does not pass their doctorate, they may apply for admission to a new doctoral procedure, whereby the new dissertation may only be submitted after one year following the date of the candidate’s new admission.

Section 17 Joint Doctoral Study Programs with Institutions Outside of Germany

(1) Doctoral study programs may be conducted together with universities or other equivalent institutions outside of Germany if:

- a) The applicant fulfills the requirements for admission to doctoral study within the Department of Earth Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin as outlined in these regulations.
 - b) The universities or other equivalent institutions outside of Germany have the right to award doctorates under their governing national legislation and the degree that they award is recognized as equivalent to a doctorate within the scope of the German Higher Education Framework Act.
- (2) The implementation of joint doctoral study programs must be arranged between the participating departments, faculties, or equivalent offices, whether this is on a case-by-case basis or in general. These agreements shall apply alongside the provisions of these regulations. The equivalence of the requirements and procedures related to the regulations in this document must be guaranteed.

Section 18 Honorary Doctorates

The Department Council can award the honorary title of “Doktor/Doktorin der Naturwissenschaften ‘ehrenhalber’” (*doctor rerum naturalium honoris causa*, abbreviated as “Dr. rer. nat. h. c.”) upon request from the dean of the Department of Earth Sciences or from at least three professors from the department. The title is awarded for outstanding scientific accomplishments in the natural sciences that are significant to one of the research areas covered by the department as described in Section 4.2.3 above. In order to assess these accomplishments, a doctoral committee as per Section 9 shall be appointed by the doctoral board. The doctoral committee then submits its recommendation, which is based on three external reviewers’ reports, to the Department Council. The Department Council’s decision requires a majority vote from its members who already hold a doctoral title.

Section 19 Revocation of the Doctoral Title

The doctoral title as described in Section 1 above may be revoked in accordance with the applicable legal provisions and regulations.

Section 20 Entry into Force, Lapse of Prior Regulations, and Transitional Regulations

(1) These regulations enter into force on the day following their publication in *FU-Mitteilungen* (the official bulletin of Freie Universität Berlin). With their publication, the Doctoral Regulations for the Department of Earth Sciences from October 24, 2007 (*FU-Mitteilungen* 74/2007), amended on July 11, 2012 (*FU-Mitteilungen* 69/2012) shall lapse.

(2) Doctoral candidates who have already been admitted to the doctoral program under the previous doctoral regulations at the time these new regulations enter into force may still complete their doctorate according to the former regulations, as long as they do so within a period of three years from the date that these new regulations enter into force.