

University of Siegen / SME Graduate School - Sustainable Managing Entrepreneurs

Presentation

University of Siegen / SME Graduate School - Sustainable Managing Entrepreneurs / All in all since 2016 (start of the Program) 20 students joined the program in their Masters phase. 2 of them dropped due to qualification reasons, 2 left for personal reasons (but are still associate members). Thus there are 16 students right now, only four of them did not start their Ph.D. phase yet, as they are still in their masters. But one of the 3 will join already in may 2020. The others will finish their studies in summer.

The program is suitable for two types of applicants: a) academically committed MA students of the faculty at Siegen University who are in the first or second semester of their Master's degree and who have already achieved almost most of the credit points and who have an average grade of 1.5 or better at the time of application but who have not yet completed the full Master's degree program; or b) students making their initial application to one of the Master's programs. These applicants must have completed their Bachelor's degree with the ECTS grade of A or be in the top 10 percent of the degree cohort at their home university. Furthermore the students have to enrol in a masters program of the faculty. If the students are accepted in the SME Graduate School, all classes are mandatory.

The program is based on physical activities. Those are led/arranged by the supervisors (two Post-Docs) of the program.

Local program of the university of Siegen. For students who are accepted into the programme, participation in the events is free of charge. As described, students are employees of the University of Siegen.

Description

The program is designed for students who wish to investigate, in- depth and from different perspectives, the backbone of most economies, and to draw international comparisons of small and medium-sized enterprises, start-ups and family businesses. They will be prepared for a successful, research-oriented career. The SME Fast-Track consists of two stages: 1) the "Master's stage", which takes between

two and four semesters at the most; and 2) the "Ph.D. stage", which is usually two to three years. A Master's degree must be earned parallel to the doctorate, on the basis of the examination regulations for the Master's degree courses. Two selection procedures are held, one before the "Master's stage" and the second before finally entering the "Ph.D. stage". Candidates for whom the evaluation procedure, and thus the final selection for the "Ph.D. stage", has not been successfully completed will remain in the Master's degree program, culminating in the award of a regular Master's degree. Those who advance to the Ph.D. stage must successfully complete the Master's degree as well before entering the Ph.D. stage.

The students study their regular Master's program. During this time they maintain close contact to their selected Ph.D. supervisor's group, working with their advisor in her or his research group as a student research assistant with a contract of 5 – 8 hours per week. After finishing their masters program and entering the "Doctorate phase", the Ph.D. candidates work in their supervisor's department on a 50- percent contract. The students attend working group meetings as well as the Fast-Track SME Graduate School meetings and classes. The regular meetings are lead by the supervisors of the program. Guest lecturers are often invited for the methodological workshops lead by guest lecturers, which take place at non-regular intervals (e.g. Prof. Dr. Simon Parker, Prof. Dr. Roy Thurik, Prof. Dr. Rui Baptista; Prof. Dr. David Audreitsch).

Admission to doctoral studies is not contingent on a Master's degree but is strongly related not only to the grades of the Master's program but also to the evaluation of the work experience in the supervisory group and in the research project. In the doctorate studies, the Fast-Track candidate can draw on previous work and in so doing can either complete the Ph.D. thesis faster or treat the topic in greater depth. Nevertheless, to earn a contract as Ph.D. student, the applicant must successfully complete the Master's degree, but can attend classes, etc., beforehand.

In the "Doctorate phase", the Ph.D. candidates work in their supervisor's department on a 50- percent contract (TVL-13), if they have successfully completed the Master's Degree and the evaluation by the committee. Fast-Track Ph.D.s must attend SME Graduate School Meetings and earn 20 credit points in the Ph.D. SME Program in addition to the regular 20 Ph.D. points and the Master's-track credits.

Results – impact

The program started in summer 2016, so no student has finished the Ph.D. yet. However some are close to finishing it within only 3 years of doctoral phase. At irregular intervals, data on publications, additional scholarships, participation in other grant programmes and student conferences are collected. Students benefit from early-on research orientation (Fast-track as beneficial strategy to obtain a PhD).

Due to the regular meetings the students know each other so they can support one another. They have a network of other Ph.D. students and also get in touch with scientists from all over the world. Synergy arising from the collaboration of researchers from different chairs. And also research collaborations can develop between students but also beyond the borders of the university. In addition, the fast-track character and the limited time (3 years in Ph.D. phase) give the students an incentive to start with the dissertation as soon as possible and finish it within that time. The language of the program is English, thus students also get prepared in terms of scientific language.

Through the employment as a research assistant and student assistant the university gains capable employees which stay relatively long-term.

Transferability – improvement

The initiative is transferable if the university has an option for funding (to pay the wages of the students and also of the coordinator).

In a nutshell, the graduate school should be modelled as a mini Max-Planck institute. Measures to enable transferability could be:

1. Set up a similar Infrastructure
2. Assignment of a responsible person, who takes care of the organization of the courses but also the interests of the students

3. Teaching staff should actively promote the opportunity to participate and maybe approach individual students about it.
4. Increase collaboration among different professors/chairs
3. Avoiding too distant fields
4. Active role of supervisors (formal lectures/moderation/feedback/colloquium), so not to overburden postdocs etc.
5. Networking with other universities/ graduate school

Measures to enable transferability could be to set up a similar infrastructure and assign a responsible person who would take care of the organization of the courses but also the interests of the students. Measures to improve the initiative could include adjusting the criteria of the final grade for the BA degree, as it might be a reason why the program is not well received by students, and active promotion by the teaching staff by contacting students individually.

Further information

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