

**“Fusion Models” in the Making – Academic and Writing Support for PhD Students
in the Humanities in US-American and German Universities
Or: Why we might need some more fast food in the university system**

Abstract: With growing complaints about the length of doctoral studies and their lack of compatibility with the labor market since the 1990s, the structure of doctoral studies in Germany was modified to some extent. In the humanities, these changes are also reflected in structures of writing support, which this contribution focuses on as a starting point to explore the broader context of the more general changes. In the Anglo-Saxon world there is a vivid culture and exchange related to the topic of academic writing and support structures for PhD students. With few exceptions, German academia generally does not consider writing support as an institutionalized part of university structures. In this contribution, we argue that this lack of writing infrastructure is rooted in the German university tradition and the idea of the “solitary dissertation” and the dyadic supervision structure, which differs from US-American perceptions of academic work. Yet, this antagonism has changed in the last two decades and some support structures for PhD students have found their way into the German academic system in the form of new concepts and models. Supported by culinary metaphors and a standardized website analysis this contribution examines how and to which extent new structures were implemented, which models they are based on and in how far the idea of the “solitary dissertation” is impacted and altered by these structures.

Keywords: *PhD support, academic writing, writing centers, transfer USA-Germany, graduate schools*

Zusammenfassung: Mit den seit den 1990er Jahren zunehmenden Klagen über die Dauer der Promotion und deren mangelnde Arbeitsmarktkompatibilität hat sich die Struktur der Promotion in Deutschland in gewissem Umfang verändert. In den Geisteswissenschaften spiegeln sich diese Veränderungen auch in den Strukturen der Schreibförderung wider, auf die sich dieser Beitrag konzentriert, um den weiteren Kontext dieser allgemeinen Veränderungen zu erkunden. In der angelsächsischen Welt gibt es eine rege Austauschkultur zum Thema wissenschaftliches Schreiben und Betreuungsstrukturen für Promovierende. Mit wenigen Ausnahmen wird in der deutschen Wissenschaft die Schreibunterstützung im Allgemeinen nicht als institutionalisierter Teil der Hochschulstrukturen betrachtet. In diesem Beitrag wird argumentiert, dass dieser Mangel an Schreibinfrastrukturen in der deutschen Universitätstradition und der Idee der „in Einsamkeit verfassten Dissertation“ und der dyadischen Betreuungsstruktur verwurzelt ist, die sich von US-amerikanischen Vorstellungen über akademisches Arbeiten unterscheidet. Dieser Gegensatz hat sich jedoch in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten geändert und einige Unterstützungsstrukturen für Doktorand:innen haben in Form neuer Konzepte und Modelle Eingang in das deutsche Hochschulsystem gefunden. Gestützt auf kulinarische Metaphern und eine standardisierte Webseiten-Analyse wird in diesem Beitrag untersucht, wie und in welchem Umfang neue Strukturen installiert wurden, auf welchen Modellen sie beruhen und inwieweit die Idee der „in Einsamkeit verfassten Dissertation“ durch diese Strukturen beeinflusst und verändert wird.

Schlüsselwörter: *Promotionsunterstützung, wissenschaftliches Schreiben, Schreibzentren, Transfer USA-Deutschland, Graduiertenschulen*

1. Initial Reflections – Crafting your essay like a hamburger

We will start this text with a personal account of one of the authors and with a somewhat far-fetched comparison: the resemblance of an academic paper to a hamburger. The first time I was introduced to an institutionalized form of writing support was during a study abroad stay at a small liberal arts college in the USA. I had entered the center to learn more about academic writing in the US-American context and because the classes I took required many written assignments that varied in length and style.

To my surprise, the writing tutor I met for one of my appointments likened the structure of an essay to the layers of a hamburger and drew an image of the different parts – the top part of the bun, the lettuce, the tomato, the patty, and the bottom part of the bun. The bun forms the introduction and conclusion while the lettuce, tomato and patty (or any other things you like on your hamburger) comprise the main body of the paper, they explained. Each of the three parts of the main body makes a specific point and consists of a topic sentence, the support for the argument, and a concluding sentence. And there you have it – a straightforward formula to an essay that you can hand in for your reflection assignment.

I was surprised – shouldn't there be more to academic writing than following this simple structure, and did it have to be a hamburger? When writing mirrors eating, do I feel academic satiety? From the writing experience I had previously acquired in the German university system, I had internalized the perception that writing needed to be complex; it was considered good style to use fancy words and complex sentence structures to make the writer sound more educated and well-versed in the topic they are writing about. And here, in US-American academia, it was possible to whittle down such a difficult task to a straightforward recipe. And of course, passive structures, one of the staples of German academic writing, were considered bad style, and, on the contrary, don't make the writer sound educated. What I had also learned when writing German academic papers was that your writing style and command of academic vocabulary were scrutinized when you asked readers to comment on the written piece – so I internalized to better not show earlier versions to my classmates or even professors, as they might consider the style poor or the piece lacking academic reflection. Until you deemed the text you were working on to be almost finished, you worked on it on your own and only showed very advanced versions to your critics. In metaphorical terms, writing, like cooking, was more highly valued when the process was pursued in an undisturbed and private manner until the product reached the stage of perfection, and you as the writer felt confident enough to share the piece with somebody. Only then would you ask for an external opinion. Opinion here being less an atmosphere of supportive encouragement and more a muddled expression of light recognition mixed with plain-spoken honesty. Thus, working with tutors in writing centers who looked at early stages of your work was a very unusual experience for me. Back then, I was a bit intimidated by the opportunity that somebody was willing to read early versions of a text I would not have shown to German readers. When I think of it now, it was in this moment that my experience with academic writing from a German context clashed with the perception of scholarly writing in US-American academia. I thought that writing was something you just had to know how to do and that you worked on your texts on your own until you felt confident enough to share them. Writing felt like a laborious and solitary process. The

writing center introduced me to a new perception of writing – a craft that can be acquired with certain tools and that you can work on and perfect over time. This felt more like following a recipe that broke writing an academic essay down into manageable parts, making the where and how to start seem more straightforward, ultimately lowering the stakes and apprehension that went along with writing. Reflecting on these experiences now, I realize that I learned about one of the major differences between German and US-American academia first-hand, which might turn out to be the most central one when it comes to the academic stage of writing a PhD in the humanities. You could say that century-long regional traditions of academic culture still cast long shadows onto current socialization processes in academia, and writing *either* can be taught *or* should be learned on your own, but as this contribution will show, this duality has become more and more blurred in the past decades.

2. Doctoral Studies and Academic Writing in German and US-American Contexts

We decided to start this article with a personal reflection of some specific aspects related to PhD (writing) support structures in the USA and Germany. Here, we mainly focus on PhD programs in the humanities and liberal arts, as writing support plays a more significant role in these academic branches than in the STEM fields. Moreover, the educational science structures that our article draws on empirically are mostly situated in the arts and humanities. Still, even within this empirical package, there are sub-disciplinary characteristics and methodological orientations that also influence the role of support structures and the status of academic writing, respectively. A quantitative-oriented educational researcher might place less emphasis on writing support than a scholar focusing on qualitative research. This is why all empirical results have limited significance for the entire field of educational science and even more so for the entire field of humanities. Nevertheless, writing, writing support, and their analysis are significant to varying degrees. Support structures for PhD students usually consist of different components (such as how to navigate administrative matters, supervision structures, workshops on specific theoretical and methodological approaches or support related to balancing a PhD program and taking care of your family and relatives and your own mental health), but we will stay within the scope of academic writing support to highlight a key element of successfully completing a PhD, and use this as an entry point to reflect on the broader support structures and their changes that occurred over the last 30 years. In the main body of the article, we will move beyond personal experience and look into general and writing support structures, discuss their foundations and concepts and contrast the differing results and impressions we aggregated. Academic writing is perceived and handled quite differently, although a transfer of support structures from the leading US-American contexts to Germany

(among other academic systems) has occurred, creating more structured doctoral programs in German universities. As Delamont, Atkinson and Parry point out doctoral research represents a significant step in academic socialization and “is the key passage through which young academics gain entry to the academy” (Delamont, Atkinson & Perry, 2000, p. 2). To gain this access, doctoral candidates need to acquire and expand their writing skills to successfully convey their research and knowledge.¹

Completing a doctoral degree is an enormously complex task (for the history of the academic degree see Jamme & Schröder, 2011; Schwinges, 2007) that requires a variety of competencies and activities (for an overview of these activities and suggestions on how to cluster them, see Carell et al., 2011). The “academic socialization” (Schneijderberg, 2018) into these activities can be understood as a task performed by the doctoral student, the professor (in the role of the supervisor), and the university (Herzog, 2009, p. 14). However, all three entities are situated in a cultural continuum in which established modes of initiation into institutions and traditions have been aggregated. In German-speaking universities, the individual doctorate and the image of the dissertation in “solitude and freedom” (“Einsamkeit und Freiheit”, Schelsky, 1963) dominated for many years as an identity-forming cliché, which influenced the way “academic socialization” was conceptualized and institutionally organized. Schelsky (1963) and others have noted that socialization specific to academics and PhD candidates moved away from a life in “solitude and freedom” that Schelsky declared as the founding idea of the reorganization of reform universities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. What followed chronologically according to him was an academic life as a form of “bonding and cooperation”, which aimed at “innovation and creativity”. In this new image, creativity denotes the scholar’s ability to produce research and knowledge in the context of collaborative research, which is typical of the STEM fields (Schelsky, 1963, pp. 252–253). Although Schelsky’s diagnosis, which was politically directed against an expansion of student numbers achieved by an opening up of universities to broader societal groups, is set in a specific historical time, we can still observe continuities of his assessment inscribed in structures that concretely affect PhD candidates to this day: Academic writing is mostly still conducted in a solitary fashion, although collaborative research has contributed to new writing experiences. Support structures have been implemented, but are sometimes difficult to assess and mostly depend on the individual’s willingness and efforts. In this prevailing image of “solitude and freedom”, PhD candidates acquired the necessary competencies in a non-formalized

¹ In fact, they do not only need training in specific types of (academic) writing, but rather in diverse writing skills, ranging from producing different text types to being able to switch between different writing phases. In the following, we will use the umbrella term “academic writing” to include creative writing skills. However, for the purpose of this contribution we exclude writing support and resources targeted at undergraduate students as this distinction matters for our research question.

process and found their own path to uncovering the results of their research. One leaves the student alone and trusts in the independently running process in the sense of a maturation, almost like some dishes are based on the fact that the ingredients, such as the cabbage for sauerkraut, have undergone independent refinement processes. The little formalized support that actually existed in Schelsky's own time was primarily linked to professional and methodological dimensions, whereas role-finding and the organization of professional and private life around the doctorate were individualized tasks.

For this case study, we argue that although the discourse on the significance of (writing) support for PhD students has gained momentum in the last decades – a development that was influenced in large part by US-American academic models – the image of the doctoral thesis as a solitary and individual task remains dominant and is thus still reflected in the resources and perspectives offered by (writing) support institutions. Our aim is not to analyze discursively if and how a transfer occurred (Bosbach, 2009; Schneijderberg, 2018) or present a traditional comparison. Neither will we look at specific writing contents or exercises (Bammer, 2015; Nerad, 2004) nor will we propose a transfer of distinct features or role models of PhD support structures (Boud, 2009). Instead, we will try to map and reflect upon the results of transfer processes that have already occurred.

To shed light onto the reception processes, we will first briefly describe the characteristics of PhD programs for the German and US-American case, initially presenting the structures in the USA before looking at the changes and transitions in academic socialization in German universities.² As an empirical basis, we conducted a *standardized website analysis* (Korff & Roman, 2013) of 51 German universities that we selected based on their classification and their annual output of PhD graduates.³ All comprehensive universities with more than 1,000 successful PhDs graduates in 2020 were included (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021). We examined which support structures are offered, how they are organized, financed and promoted, and if and how academic writing is featured among them. On this basis we then discuss which image of an ideal doctoral candidate is conveyed in the resources and websites of the different universities. This research design circumvents the difficult and at times ambiguous data situation when it comes to the overall number of successfully completed dissertations or the drop-out rates in PhD programs. As far as we know there is a lack of detailed

² For a more current overview of different models of academic writing and its instruction see Gruber (2010). A classic reference here is Galtung (1981) who introduces and discusses different writing styles ascribed to specific intellectual styles (teutonic, saxon, nipponic, gallic). For the term "socialization" with regard to doctoral supervision see Schneijderberg (2018).

³ See also Banscherus & Pickert (2013) for a proposal on how to analyze and assess the accessibility and representation of institutional support structures based on their web presence.

numbers in these areas. Furthermore, due to methodological constraints this contribution does not strive for an international comparison between Germany and the USA regarding the completion rates of PhD programs. Also, although the differences between disciplines pertaining to completion rates (see e.g., Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021b, p. 11; U.S. Department of Education, 2020) could be an indicator for the quality of (structured) PhD programs – in which, as we would argue, support structures play a significant role – the overall effects are highly debatable and would require a more solid empirical basis.

3. US-American Models – Support Structures and Resources

PhD programs in the USA have a different structure than most of their counterparts in Europe (see e.g., McMaster & Murphy, 2016; Murphy & Thaiss, 2020). Before joining a PhD program, candidates need to take the hurdle of applying to one of the approximately 1,500 universities in the USA that offer PhD programs. In 2018-2019, a total of 187,568 doctoral degrees were conferred (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The selection processes of graduate programs are highly competitive and usually require specific scores on the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) (Nerad, 2004, p. 85). Once accepted, the question of funding becomes increasingly pertinent, as students in doctoral programs are faced with tuition fees that are unmatched in European academic contexts. In turn, PhD students gain a comprehensive educational experience since they can conduct independent research on the one hand, and are required to participate in courses geared towards broadening their field of study on the other hand. Many of these graduate programs offer courses or structures that focus on academic writing.⁴ What is more, in most universities doctoral programs include a mandatory teaching element, which gives PhD students the opportunity to teach undergraduate courses and gain experience in teaching and grading.⁵ These characteristics form a structured PhD program that is set up to guide the candidates through the process of completing a PhD thesis. This guidance aspect is furthered by a strong bond between the doctoral candidates and their supervisors as well as their PhD committees and university, who all have a fixed and codified role with respect to the PhD student.

⁴ There is a plethora of research literature on academic writing and writing centers. Some starting points, among others, are the following works: Girsensohn (2017); Mackiewicz (2018); Mackiewicz & Thompson (2018).

⁵ As far as we could tell none of the structures we looked at below involved mandatory teaching. As it is an important factor in academic PhD programs we still thought it necessary to mention it. Of course, there are advanced PhD candidates who teach classes at German universities, but this is not necessarily coupled with the PhD education. Thus, “research and teaching” are surprisingly structurally separated within academic socialization.

Further, many of the universities in the USA maintain graduate schools that accommodate specialized PhD programs. These graduate schools focus on specific research areas, provide curricular studies and courses, organize academic social life, and set up counseling and support structures.

All in all, we can observe that there is an institutional structure to support PhD students, we find activities that connect students with each other, and there are multiple advisors supporting the student. Moreover, we can find a structured PhD curriculum as well as support structures targeted at supervisors. Since the 1990s, elements of this model have been gradually introduced to European and specifically German universities to form clusters of PhD programs that encompass specific current research topics.

4. PhD and Writing Support at German Universities – Traditions and Trajectories

Since the 1980s, a process of differentiation of PhD studies at German universities has set in, which expanded the norm of the individual doctorate to include graduate schools and other formats and gave rise to the second main type of doctoral studies, the “structured PhD program”, which is characterized by complementary formats and support, and was inspired by the US-American model of graduate schools and graduate centers (see e.g., Berning & Falk, 2005; Nünning & Sommer, 2007; for the interrelations between the two models and the persistence of the “master-disciple” relationship see Schneijderberg, 2018, pp. 309–310; for support structures for supervisors see Bosbach, 2009, see here also forms of “‘multiple’ supervision” in the US-American case, p. 59).⁶ In the German research literature, studies on doctoral programs, support for PhD students, and doctoral supervision are increasingly extended to both the “individual” and “structured doctorate” and all intermediate or transitional structures between these antipodes. However, although considered, recorded, and characterized, the proposed support structures are primarily addressed and observed in a general manner, without going into detail about individual content and support for specific parts and tasks of completing a PhD (Korff & Roman, 2013; Schneijderberg, 2018; Wergen, 2009; Wergen, 2011).⁷ Often statistics on PhD programs and graduation rates are aggregated while interviews conducted with PhD students and/or their supervisors that replicate the dyadic structure continue to be less focused on in the research literature. In this contribution, we will specifically examine writing support structures as parts of the

⁶ We use this binary categorization and intentionally exclude PhD programs that are part of third-party funded graduate schools as well as so-called “cotutelle-PhD structures”. It would be of course interesting to look into those as well, but as important and prevalent as these third-party funded structures are in the German university context, they are from our understanding and due to their funding still additions and competing options to the “standard PhD” procedures and the standards embedded therein.

⁷ On the transformations of the breadth of the doctoral landscape through structured formats, and with a focus on the educational sciences, see also Fiedler & Schedel (2009).

general institutional structures targeted at doctoral candidates and will focus on if and how writing is viewed as an institutional and not only an individual undertaking. We will also question if PhD writing tasks are treated separately or as part of the standard within the universities' institutional writing support structures (Girgensohn & Liebetanz, 2010, pp. 194–195; Girgensohn, 2018).

The subject area of academic writing in the context of doctoral studies is addressed extensively, almost always mentioned, but rarely discussed in detail in this context. It is therefore difficult to assess the extent to which new forms of doctoral support are actually established and whether and to what extent these go beyond the aspects of “solitude and freedom” – which would also implicate individual and/or dyadic (in the sense of supervisor and PhD candidate) responsibilities. When assessing the structures, we will look into how these incorporate US-American models and to what extent they go beyond giving individual advice or providing counseling structures and rather deal with institutional standards of writing support. Moreover, we are interested in how the specific writing task of the doctorate is dealt with (on the specificity of this task see Girgensohn & Liebetanz, 2010, p. 179; Günauer et al., 2012; Rauschner, 2012).⁸ As mentioned before, in the USA in particular, the stronger involvement of university structures in PhD programs is a key aspect, so the question is, can we make a similar case for German universities?⁹

5. Empirical Findings on PhD and Writing Support Structures in German Universities – Terms, Concepts, Curriculum

5.1. Data Basis and Methodological Approach

It is difficult to find a specific overview regarding what exactly is offered for PhD students in German universities that goes beyond empirically aggregated student numbers. As an approximation, we decided to bring together empirical data by conducting a *standardized website analysis* based on Korff and Roman's approach (2013, pp. 42–44). As a first criterion we only considered universities located in Germany that

⁸ In general, the academic writing needed within the PhD process differs from academic writing in the context of undergraduate studies, e.g., regarding the thematic and temporal scope, the social-academic involvement of the dissertation work, the higher pressure during the process, the social embeddedness of writing, the professional dimension of writing, related to career issues, material issues (what material, what scope), and limitation issues (where to end, how long to supervise).

⁹ Furthermore, it could be interesting to examine which concrete formats of writing education are institutionalized, who is responsible for them, and which notions of writing responsibility are inscribed. In sum, forms of “self-help”, forms of improving the “mentoring” aspect, “group education opportunities”, the provision of “externalized writing spaces”, and peer formats can be found in the research literature, e.g., in Mertlitsch & Struger (2007), Girgensohn & Liebetanz (2010), Herzog (2009), Schneijderberg (2018), Korff & Roman (2013). Again, a look at studies shows that primarily optimization and advice to writers are laid out as an orientation for PhD candidates.

offer PhD programs and thus are granted the right to award doctorates. We then reduced the sample by focusing on universities with more than 1,000 completed PhDs in 2020 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021) as only these – our preliminary assumption – have the necessary funds to create support structures for graduate students. We secondly developed an explorative analytical frame based on our previous knowledge to identify possible support structures in general and specifically for academic writing, and specified the characteristics and type of these structures. We first analyzed all websites, noting our respective analytical results, before in a second step all notes and entries were re-evaluated by the second author, switching after each one of us had analyzed half of the sample. This way, we made sure that both of us examined the websites, allowing for a thorough analysis and discussion of certain classification decisions.

As we are first and foremost interested in support structures for academic writing for PhD candidates, we narrowed down our analytical categories. First, we investigated if there were any support structures at all on the central university level and if they included writing centers or at least offered academic writing courses on the PhD level. We looked at the central university structure, the level of the faculty in the German sense of the term (“Fakultät”), and the departmental level. If we found such structures, we noted where exactly they were situated (general, department, faculty), how they were financed (university budget, third-party funds, funded by participants) and if external support structures were mentioned. We then focused in more detail on the specific writing support structures that were offered, asking which kinds of formats were featured and whom these formats addressed. We further examined if any of these support structures were obligatory, by which we aimed to answer the question whether a stronger and “commitment-based” relation between doctoral students and the faculty is encouraged or already in place. Finally, from these results we aimed to uncover which type of role-expectations are prevalent in the university in general. We looked at academic writing on the doctoral level and discussed whether it is framed and supported as an individual endeavor and whether or not the PhD process is supported by university structures or substructures, and if academic writing is understood as something that can be acquired and supported, so to speak made “easily digestible”, and if not, which barriers stand in the way to less sophisticated “eating habits”. Following these results, we discussed if and how structural changes were inspired by the US-American role model.

5.2. Results and Highlighted Analytical Findings

Regarding support structures, nearly if not all universities offered such structures targeted at the dissertation process by at least providing a web presence with a summary of information on (administrative) procedures before, during, and after the

PhD program.¹⁰ It seems that the universities followed the expectation of gathering all the information in an overarching organizational structure, covering all PhD resources in so-called “graduate centers”.¹¹ Secondly, in widely differing depth all universities addressed the fact that completing a PhD is (no longer) a process between two persons, but instead they expressed an understanding that support structures represent a key element for facilitating successful PhDs. How they reflected the parallel existence between individual and structured doctorates differed even more, though there were hardly any universities that did not touch on the addition of structured dissertation support. Further, the majority of universities featured some type of graduate school,¹² in most cases as a central structure, in many cases also in the form of graduate schools funded through specific research grants or under the auspices of the “Excellence Initiative” as a separate structure for specific academic fields.¹³ This dual structure is both necessary and complex. Since third-party funds are necessarily limited to a certain amount and time – and often oriented towards specific research fields – a permanent basic structure must be provided additionally. This leads either to duplication of support or gaps in services. The larger universities (e.g., Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Freie Universität Berlin) try to counter this problem by feeding the resources of the third-party funded graduate schools into the structure of the central graduate school. This, however, creates a distance to the scholars and emerging researchers. The contents of the externally funded programs follow different schedules and goals, and address a different cohort than the central structure would require. At the same time, it can be understood as an attempt to reduce costs and produce synergies. Some universities offer specific “writing centers” (Universität Tübingen, Universität Bayreuth, Universität Bielefeld to name a few) and “welcome centers” (e.g., Universität Konstanz, Universität Regensburg, Universität Potsdam) – structures that address specific challenges of the PhD process or particular groups (e.g., international students) within the PhD cohort. Nearly all universities addressed the point of potential ethical or individual conflicts that might arise during the PhD phase and therefore reference ombuds-positions that are offered within their structure. The majority of universities as well refer to their counseling structures, which often involve counseling throughout the

¹⁰ Here information on third-party funded graduate schools was also included.

¹¹ In our sample we found different terms for these structures. Some are called “Graduierenzentren”, “Graduierenakademien”, “Research Academies”, and so on. In some cases, specific names were used that alluded to the university or region, or referenced specifics of the institutional concept or self-concept of the structure. From our impressions it is not possible to use the terms as the basis for a definite classification.

¹² Their denomination in German differs as well quite a bit and varies between “graduate schools”, “Graduierenschulen”, “Graduiererkollegs”, etc. Although they basically entail the same underlying concept of a structured PhD program oriented at certain academic disciplines, they are called slightly differently depending on the university.

¹³ The name of these structures varies, some have English, some university-related names. The names of the offered qualification measures as well as the type of their financing can differ as well: Some are completely, some partly, and some are not at all financed by the university.

PhD process. Ombuds-structures and counseling structures differ widely when it comes to staff, how much specific attention is directed towards PhD students, and how much attention is devoted to career-specific questions. Further, most universities had information and support available that dealt with so-called supervision agreements (“Betreuungsvereinbarungen”).

On a very formal and general level we propose to summarize these broad constellations under three distinct aspects. The newly structured support for PhD students consists of: information, qualification, and non-specialized support. This third area can be understood as a provision of specific PhD process support structures that include counseling, supervision support structures, and ombuds offices.¹⁴ The majority of universities saw the need to aggregate and combine all general information on the PhD process, and offer information on the process itself, the supervision constellation, and further university structures. They integrated this information into their graduate school structures and included it in their (overarching) consultation services for faculty, staff, and students. Not all but many institutions further included qualifying structures, which added knowledge, competencies or certificates that in turn included writing center structures in the cases with further differentiated resources.

What our analysis found to be less common are structures that are meant to allow for peer or other networking structures. There are exceptions that have more elaborate networking offers, but they are not as common as the aforementioned three aspects.¹⁵ Usually, networking opportunities remain on the level of regular meetings in the form of a “Stammtisch” (informal group meeting that takes place regularly). Another element that often involves offers on writing are award structures dedicated to early career researchers. Support structures that especially address female researchers form a further offer (e.g., at Universität Potsdam, Universität Frankfurt am Main, Universität Bochum, Universität Bielefeld). Connected to this, but not entirely similar, are support structures that generally asked for a mentor. For example, at the Technische Universität München (TUM) having a mentor was even mandatory. As mentioned before teaching opportunities or teaching supervision were – as far as we can assess from our research design – not offered.

Beyond the more general impressions discussed above we also raised the question concerning who exactly is addressed by the support structures. Though in some cases there were qualifying measures on counseling and in some universities mentorship

¹⁴ Some universities also offered qualification structures addressing the supervising professors, some integrated this type of career support into the support structures for postdoctoral faculty.

¹⁵ Networking structures denote programs and services that allow for the networking of PhD students. In the Bavarian universities, at Universität Bremen, and at universities in North-Rhine Westphalia we also identified regional support structures, meaning structures that connected the support structures and students between different universities.

programs, in most cases the PhD students were personally addressed and all measures started with them. Nearly all structures are understood as measures that support the individual PhD journey and only in rare cases the supervisors were explicitly addressed.¹⁶ The exception being the TUM, where a PhD curriculum and a mentor are explicitly made mandatory and the requirements ask for a supervision committee that consists of exactly three people. This obligation might occur in reduced form at more universities, but only at TUM is it made very explicit and interestingly the USA as a source of inspiration is highlighted. Moreover, there are other universities which have some basic requirements in place: The Universität Stuttgart asks their PhD students to publish contributions based on their research during their doctoral studies. In some cases, there are semi-mandatory structures in place, in which PhD students do not have to attend such courses, but it is advised and the incentive is increased by offering participants a certificate. Some universities feature two models of PhD programs, the faculty PhD and the structured doctorate. As part of the latter the student is required to complete a specifically structured program. Universität Kassel, for example, has set up such a structured program that compliments and at the same time competes with the formerly “normal” case of the individual PhD, offering a specific certificate upon completion. Still, the majority of universities with a structured program offers them in the form of voluntary PhD qualification structures.

When looking at the financial aspects we can conclude that the majority of universities provides the funds for the overarching general structure. Some of the universities that also offer a qualification program specifically geared towards PhD students employ their own staff (Universität Stuttgart, Universität Tübingen, Universität Bayreuth, Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Technische Universität Berlin, Universität Hamburg, Universität Kassel, Universität Bielefeld, to name a few) – with the number of positions significantly varying –, some employ their other academic staff (Universität Hamburg, Universität Bremen) and some hire external staff members (Universität Potsdam). Since their program mostly addresses incoming international students, Universität Heidelberg has a co-financing structure supported by the DAAD. As discussed before, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Freie Universität Berlin use their graduate schools as a superstructure that aggregates the qualification programs of all their third-party-funded graduate schools. On a higher level, affiliations between universities such as the Berlin University Alliance (BUA) or the Universitätsallianz Ruhr (UAR) also offer support

¹⁶ In the German-speaking academic context, PhD supervisors are usually referred to as “PhD parents” (“Doktoerltern”), in most cases doctoral candidates have a PhD “mother” or “father” (“Doktormutter” or “Doktorfather”). This person is their main supervisor and provides guidance for the duration of the candidate’s PhD journey. Ideally, the relationship and support structures between PhD parent and doctoral candidate are tightly knit, however, in practice the relationship might not be as close as the system and name might suggest.

structures targeted at early career researchers. Nonetheless, the question remains how the information flow and the contact to the PhD students is achieved and maintained. Only TUM has a structure in place that centrally registers and addresses newly enrolled PhD students, TU Darmstadt has a welcome structure but most universities do not register new PhD students and therefore cannot easily reach out to them, but instead rely on the communication structures of the subordinate units and the PhD supervisors.

When we now look in more detail at the writing structures we can observe that writing courses are often included in the PhD program structures offered by the graduate schools, or in the case of Stuttgart, Tübingen, and Bielefeld by the writing schools/writing centers.¹⁷ At Universität Bremen the language center offers special courses and counseling on English academic writing for PhD students. In other universities this resource is integrated into the courses offered by the graduate centers, though at Universität Bremen this is highlighted as a part of the support structures for PhD students. Some universities specifically address English or German academic writing, some explicitly address international students (only). The specific content of these writing structures is difficult to categorize, we would therefore propose a distinction along different lines: There are course offers addressing specific text types (exposé, introduction, journal articles, essays, etc.), the aforementioned specific academic language (English, German), and courses that address certain parts of the PhD process (beginning, writing phase, end, defense etc.). Then there are problem-specific offers, writing counseling as an offer (groups and individual counseling services), net- and co-working opportunities, contact and process support as well as retreat and workshop offers (writing weeks etc.). Some universities have specific writing guidelines (e.g., the diversity-oriented writing approach at Universität Tübingen) and the level of differentiation varies between the writing structures as well as the way they are integrated into the PhD programs.

When looking beyond this broad area, which can be interpreted as an overall acceptance of the supporting task of the university, the similarities dwindle very quickly. Some cases would profit from more detailed analysis, e.g., the cases of TUM, Universität Bremen, Universität Hamburg, and Universität Bielefeld. While TUM specifically situates itself within a broader (US-American oriented) reform movement seeking to install structured PhDs, their program is indeed very distinguished and elaborate, the Hamburg case with its clever usage of university staff is very interesting especially for the field of educational science while Universität Bremen offers a very distinguished (writing) counseling and networking structure.¹⁸ Bielefeld represents an interesting case as the

¹⁷ The writing center in Tübingen explicitly addresses PhD students but also master's students.

¹⁸ At Universität Hamburg the department for educational studies has its own graduate school, a feature which we did not find in any of the other examined cases.

writing center situated here is one of the forerunners of academic writing support structures and the staff is very engaged in further developing and disseminating writing support, including some creative third mission attempts (see e.g., Lahm, Meyhöfer, Neumann, 2021). Universität Stuttgart and Universität Tübingen as well would be extremely interesting to analyze further due to their writing center structures, as these offer very elaborate writing courses and innovative formats. When we understand the PhD as a complex process that should involve more people all these universities could be relevant cases regarding attempts at implementing formats on a structural level. One might also add the universities in Erlangen-Nürnberg and Stuttgart as well as TUM since they feature specific support structures for the supervisors.

What is also striking is that the majority of the more centrally-oriented programs are financed by the universities themselves. Kassel and Würzburg are exciting cases, because here the dyad is very clearly separated and two models stand in parallel. Further interesting cases are those with mandatory requirements like TUM (with its very specific mentoring program) and Universität Stuttgart (with its publication obligation), because these go furthest into the direction of a mandatory structured graduation the way it is conceptually imagined in the USA. One could also argue for certain similarities exhibited by the so-called reform universities that were founded in the 1960s and 1970s as they feature a wider array of support structures than many of their counterparts, especially when it comes to academic writing and the support of female researchers. There is a varying intensity of networking between headquarters and subunits and we noticed different levels of involvement of the subunits as well as a varying intensity of the efforts made by the headquarters. All in all, these cases could serve as examples that stand for more elaborately structured PhD programs which indeed could challenge the still prevalent notion of the doctorate as an individual endeavor formed in the dyadic master-pupil structure.

6. Discussion and Outlook

Moving on to the “bottom bun” of this text, to us the most striking feature was the unanimity with which the structured PhD is accepted as the new orientation point – at least as represented on the universities’ websites. Thus, we would argue that the fusion between the established German and the Anglo-Saxon model (heavily inspired by the US-American model) has been taking place, and we can detect manifestations of this fusion in the public image universities want to convey. Although not yet standardized on the level of specific elements and content within these elements, the consensus at least comprises the expectation that information on PhD programs, qualifications acquired during the PhD, and accompanying support structures form essential elements and are

made visible to the public. Of course, the images represented on the institutions' websites do not necessarily lead to the inference that the structures have been completely implemented and that PhD programs have been significantly altered – we would assume that, e.g., the relationship between PhD student and supervisor has largely remained dyadic – but the first steps towards a change in the underlying structures can be discerned, be it in the form of supervision agreements (“Betreuungsvereinbarung”), an emphasis on structured programs encouraged by graduate schools or the increasing amount of support structures, among which writing support has been our main focus. Our analysis of university websites obviously has its limits, especially since the institutions' web presence remains a significant component of the image they want to convey to the public and to prospective staff, faculty, and (PhD) students. To delve deeper into the success of institutionalized support structures our analysis could be followed up by conducting interviews with current and former PhD students. To gain an overview of the PhD student cohort, it would be highly interesting to conduct a survey regarding the experiences as well as struggles that PhD candidates report when describing their PhD program.

Our observations could be discussed along the lines of sociological frameworks according to at least three tracks: One could observe (1) historical developments that have led to an opening of the higher education system to students who do not have an academic family background – a development that has been discussed for German higher education since the so-called educational expansion (“Bildungsexpansion”) that gained momentum in the 1960s. This development stayed intact and accelerated over the next decades, turning PhD programs into another field of the “Verschulung” of society (a process of implementing characteristics typically assigned to schools and schooling in educational programs that take place outside of school). The extension of support structures for PhD students could also be interpreted as a result of the (2) growing pressure on universities to remain relevant in the ever-expanding higher education field, which has become even more competitive due to incentives such as the “excellence initiative”. What is more, (3) in the last decades universities have acquired the status of organizational actors that need to act strategically and are held accountable for, e.g., their graduation rates (Krücken & Meier, 2006). This in turn could help to explain the institutions' interest in supporting PhD students throughout their doctorate.

It is hard to decide which interpretation mattered the most in this process, probably all three influenced the general trend towards a weakened but persisting focus on the dyadic bond between supervisor and PhD candidate and a stronger management perspective on university research, which can also be observed with respect to other shifts within the higher education landscape. One could as well interpret the observed trends as a confirmation of Schelsky's prediction of a time of “bonding and

cooperation” – and thereby stress his causal assumptions of STEM superiority and the “Americanization” of university structures, but based on our data these interpretations would be built on shaky grounds. As our data consists mostly of homepage content and allows insights into the cultural self-presentation of universities, we would argue that there is – to a certain extent – a lack of recognizable and specific images of support of professors and professional qualification processes for PhD students. We would connect this to a blank space that remains about questions of the meaning of university qualifications and the relevance and function of universities. This, in turn, can be linked to a general tendency towards weakened structures of meaning and difficulties to create useful shared assumptions and points of orientation. Highlighted by a certain uniformity in the communicated support structures, what seems to be lacking to us are specific images and ideas about what constitutes the newly emerging common ground. Structured PhD programs, as well as “bonding and cooperation” are affirmations of entanglements, but they are hardly descriptive or specific about the self-understanding of their social function. There is no overarching meaningful narrative about what exactly a PhD program entails. Of course, there cannot be just one narrative. As an example, one might wish for the post-patriarchy or queer university to facilitate discussions about what might constitute the university and what its specific function could be. Maybe, by following Schelsky, one misses an idea about the mode of scientific work, which is precise and distinct, and that there are hardly any such functional understandings of structural support structures would be a surprising finding. The inclusive mass university seems to lack an idea of what type of researchers it aims to socialize its emerging researchers into becoming.

A model transfer alone cannot bridge this lack of potential meaning as the transferred model is, of course, only an aggregated imagination of what is actually happening in the USA, which is much more complex than the form of support discussed and implemented at German universities. A closer look could be gained by implementing “micro transfers” aiming to alter particular structures and working styles that could be transferred from specific universities in the USA to specific universities in Germany. The gap related to the role of the university pertaining to support structures could also be approached by transferring cultural meaning and orientations from the respective social surroundings, and one could interpret some findings in this direction. A few universities labeled their emerging structures with keywords that hint at their location, thereby stipulating local specificities by establishing a particular local name – or in line with the Universität Tübingen’s writing – one could set a political aim as the funding idea of the structure: This “diversity-oriented writing center” offers a broader term indicating a specific understanding of writing center, which is – on an abstract level – concrete and thereby

different from other writing support structures. Through this, the center contributes to an image of what a university could look like today.

Writing support structures and the general support structures could be a starting point to re-think what universities have to offer to society in general, staying with our culinary metaphors in the sense of meals, but also invite to think about their work from the perspective of the menu, and maybe even the whole interior design of the restaurant. Writing support, and more specifically PhD support, understood as a process that aligns with the production of fast food, comprises knowledge on frying and seasoning with the aim to have a fast produced, replicable and easily digestible product is – as we would argue – still somewhat removed from culinary practices in German universities. Still, the times of traditional regional university ideals, the so to speak “sauerkraut times”, which rely on long and undisturbed fermenting processes that involve the creation of unique tastes but were prone to turn sour when left unattended or not specifically cared for for too long, are not to everybody’s liking (anymore). The result of course has to be understood as some type of fusion kitchen, that consist of “fusion models” of PhD (writing) support – in other words a very specific sauerkraut burger which integrates the specific regional culinary tradition (the individual agency as part of the PhD structure) into the newly embraced idea of the structured programs that add to the tradition. These individual PhD journeys embedded in collective structures again might not be to everybody’s taste, but the different regional burger concepts and unique fast food options still take a bit longer to cook and might even be a bit more expensive than the ready-made PhD program, but offer an interesting constellation of institutional developments. In turn, this allows for further research questions and comparisons and interesting “food reviews”. Seeing the different chefs and their recipes for writing support underlines this interesting touch of modern “PhD cooking”. This cookbook already contains some delicious chapters featuring the formation of different addressees, different language foci as well as various institutional structures and faculty constellations, new writing expertise, new teaching subjects, new expert positions, new modes and models for writing support, and different counseling approaches. It will be interesting to see what research universities and university alliances, which have yet to choose their fixed menu and create their own permanent support structures, are cooking for their large and very diverse student populations. As critics we hope for more elaborate recipes – maybe the creation of a Michelin guide on PhD support could support this honorable endeavor.

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