For prospective students

The main purpose of doctoral education at the Aalto Doctoral Programme in Arts, Design and Architecture is to teach the doctoral candidate to create new knowledge via scientific and artistic methods and theories. During the research and studies you will learn what it takes to be a professional academic researcher.

If you consider applying for doctoral studies, you should deliberate at least these questions:

- Doctoral degree is a basic requirement for a career in academia. What are your career plans and do they demand a doctoral degree?
- What are your motives to apply for doctoral studies? To clarify your thoughts, read this essay of Purdue University.
- To make a doctoral dissertation takes at least 3-4 years, if you study full-time. Are you persevering enough?
- What kind of knowledge, skills and advantageous contacts you already possess to help you with your future studies? What would you still need to acquire?
- Are you willing to continually challenge yourself and your knowledge in order to learn more?
- Are you ready to put a strong effort on learning various communication skills, write scientific papers and make conference proceedings?
- Do you want to learn and develop new scientific knowledge also in those fields that you first did not even think about?
- Use Research Gate and Google Scholar to find out which research groups do active research on the topics which match your interest. Do they have open position(s) for new doctoral candidates or do you have your own funding, such as national funding?

Warning: active scientific research work can cause positive addiction. It is a proven fact that professional researchers work longer hours and retire later than the professionals in many other fields.

Doctoral education is often an apprentice in close collaboration with your thesis advisor(s) and supervising professor. If studying full-time, you will spend 3-4 years working intensively on research topic, and complete this with your intellectual piece of work, i.e., doctoral dissertation. Along the road, you will be involved with theory courses, seminars, group activities, teaching undergraduates, possibly building your artistic components and supportive tasks needed to make your department and research group able to operate.

Doctoral studies are not the only way to improve and maintain your knowledge:

- With the right to pursue non graduate studies you can improve your professional know-how and participate to the doctoral level courses at Aalto University.
- Doctoral level courses pursued after the Master’s degree can later be included to your doctoral studies.

Fees and costs

Aalto Doctoral Programme in Arts, Design and Architecture is free of tuition fees. Aalto University does not charge fees for enrollment to the University. Doctoral candidates are welcome to join the Aalto University Student Union. The membership of the Student Union is subject to an annual fee.

Aalto University does not offer scholarships to doctoral candidates. Most of our doctoral candidates fund their studies with individual grants and scholarships.

More information below under Funding and resources.

What does it take to become a doctoral candidate?

Research plan and studies

Doctoral studies are quite different from previous university studies. The doctoral degree comprises of studies and research that lead to a dissertation.

When you apply for doctoral studies, you need to present a research plan, which also needs to include a plan for completing the required studies of 60 ECTS. Normally approximately half of the 60 ECTS are completed with courses and the other half with independent studies. There are several possibilities for completing doctoral studies, which means that doctoral candidates need to prepared to independently investigate different possibilities.

Your research plan needs to present a new or different focus on the topic, it needs to be well-defined and realistic to pull through, and it needs to demonstrate your knowledge of the research area.

Supervising professor and research topic
• One of the professors of the School need to act as your supervising professor. In addition one or more advisors can be assigned for you. Advisors can be from within the School or external.
• Your research topic needs to fit the field of your supervising professor. This will be easier if your research is linked to one of the research groups or projects within the School.
• Only a part of the School’s professors may act as supervising professors for doctoral studies. You may be in contact with a potential supervising professor or the Head of research at the Department to find out whether or not the Department has a suitable supervising professor in the field of your research topic.
• Professors keep getting a vast amount of contacts, so please prepare your message with care and send it early on, preferably a few months before the application period.
• Professors are especially interested in your research topic and how realistic it is to pull through. Don’t include several pages of attachments or very long descriptions in your first email – be brief and on point.
• Heads of Research at the Departments: Contact persons at departments
• Supervising professors in each research field: Research fields and supervising professors
• Key research areas at Aalto University: www.aalto.fi/research-art
• You can find more information on the research groups and projects on the websites of the departments: www.aalto.fi/school-of-arts-design-and-architecture/departments

Funding and resources
Assess your resources realistically: how will you fund your studies and how much time do you have for them?

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Full-time doctoral studies take approximately 4 years and you need to actively and independently pursue funding for that period. The Departments at the School of Arts, Design and Architecture can provide funding only for a part of their doctoral candidates and often only for a limited time. You need to search funding sources and even apply for funding already before the start of your studies. You may apply for funding both for your living expenses during the doctoral studies as well as for realizing the artistic components that possibly are included in your research plan. Funding is offered by e.g. different type of foundations, see more under Financing your studies.

Salaried doctoral candidate positions are applied for separately from the admission process. When salaried doctoral candidate positions are open, they are advertised on Aalto University webpage https://www.aalto.fi/careers. Any questions regarding the advertised salaried positions must be directed to the professors and HR personnel only, not admission services.

If you are not able to secure funding for full time doctoral studies or plan to complete your studies alongside with your work career, consider how you will manage your time, how to secure your livelihood and how much personal resources you have at the moment. If you cannot permanently reside in the Helsinki Region during your doctoral studies, think about how can you participate in the obligatory courses, seminars and events for doctoral candidates. Large part of doctoral studies are independent but the courses offered mostly require physical attendance.

The courses offered for doctoral candidates support and develop your skills as a researcher and the seminars connect you with the academic community. Doctoral candidates have the chance to take forward scientific and artistic pursuits and create new advances. Find your place and reach for it!