Department of International Economics

FAQs on the PhD in International Economics

Who can apply?

Admissions are decided on the basis of individual files. Most candidates hold a Master's degree in economics with high marks. We consider both candidates from our own MIS programme in economics, as well as candidates from outside universities with a top reputation.

What does it prepare you for?

The PhD programme trains you to undertake innovative research in international economics. Our graduates have secured positions in prominent policy institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the research departments of central banks. While our training is focused on policy application, many graduates have secured positions in academia.

How is the programme structured?

The programme consists of classes (in English) and the research dissertation.

The dissertation is the central element of the programme. You will choose a Professor to be your academic supervisor in the first semester.

You will take classes in the first year of the program. The assessment to continue in the thesis writing stage comes in two steps. In the first step, you will submit a research proposal by May in the first year, which along with your grades will be the basis for being allowed to proceed. The second step consists of a developed dissertation proposal, known by its French acronym MPT. Your will submit the MPT by January in your second year, followed by a defense in front of your advisor and another professor. The MPT describes your research plan and you will be expected to have clearly identified your research question, show a good grasp of the related literature, as well as have a clear plan for the methods and data you intend to use.

The Ph.D. dissertation usually takes the form of three chapters written under the direction of your supervisor, each of which is suitable as an independent paper. We allow for co-authorship of chapters, but expect you to demonstrate the ability to undertake research on your own with at least one solo-authored paper. Students usually have one chapter ready by the beginning of their fourth year, which they use as their job market paper to secure employment.

Can I follow classes outside the Institute?

Yes. You can take classes in other institutions as auditors, subject to approval by your supervisor.

You can also apply for the Gerzensee doctoral programme in economics administered by the Gerzensee training center of the Swiss National Bank.

Is financial support available?

Yes. Financial support takes the form of four-year packages (two-year scholarship, followed by two-year teaching assistantships) administered by the Institute. Another support source is research assistantships (usually administered by Professors using external funding). You can apply for support for when applying to the Institute. Note that students who do not receive four-year packages are not eligible for obtaining teaching assistantships in subsequent years.

What is the work atmosphere like?

Very collegial and stimulating. Each year we admit a small number of PhD students (typically between 6 and 10). This allows for close contact between students and faculty members. The economics section fully recognizes that PhD students will become colleagues in a short time and we value the contribution of the students in the life of the economics section.

There is also a cooperative atmosphere among students. PhD students elect a representative who is in regular contact with the faculty and the administration and attends most departmental meetings.

What are the opportunities to learn about and present research?

Several. We hold a research seminar where outside speakers come every week to present papers that are either recently completed or in progress. This seminar series attracts prominent researchers and gives students an exposure to the current research topics in international and development economics. The economics departments of the Universities of Geneva and Lausanne are also a short distance away and offer seminar series.

In addition to the seminar series, the section hosts a weekly workshop known as the BBL (Brown Bag Lunch) where PhD students present work in progress. This is a very useful opportunity to learn what your fellow students are doing and receive feedback on your own research.

We also hold a “PhD day” once a semester. Each PhD student gives a 10-minute overview of her/his current research and obtains feedback from other students and faculty members.

The economics section also encourages students to present their work at economics conferences and submit it to journals, and offers a contribution towards the expenses this involves.

What do our PhDs go on to do?

The Institute is well known for preparing students to work in international organisations, central banks and national administrations, and some graduates choose to pursue academic careers. The combination of advanced knowledge of up-to-date theories and methodologies and our emphasis on real-life uses of economics is highly appreciated by employers like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the OECD and many other policy-oriented institutions where alumni develop highly successful careers.

How to apply?

Admission is organised at the Institute level. Interested students are kindly asked to follow the General Admission Procedure to the Institute's programmes. In addition to the general admission conditions, the Economics department requires applicants to the PhD programmes to take the GRE test (school code: 2258; department code: 1901).