PhD at the Geneva Graduate Institute

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why choose the Geneva Graduate Institute for your PhD?

Joining the Geneva Graduate Institute means choosing a globally recognised programme at the intersection of academic excellence and international policymaking. Located in Geneva, a major hub for international affairs and global governance, the Institute offers an exceptional environment where research excellence is closely connected to international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and policy actors, enabling work with real-world relevance and global impact. The broad diversity of the student body and of faculty further contributes to making the learning experience unique.

Doctoral candidates benefit from close academic supervision from internationally renowned faculty, excellent research resources, and an academic community that combines disciplinary excellence with interdisciplinary engagement and relevance. The programme combines rigorous training with progressive autonomy, preparing students for careers in academia, international organisations, public policy, or the private sector. From advanced coursework to strong methodological training and tailored academic guidance, each stage of the PhD is designed to support the development of original, high-impact research.

Students also benefit from access to career services and from engagement in the vibrant intellectual life of the Institute, nurtured both by academic departments and a broad, interconnected network of research centres that encourage collaboration across disciplines and issues. If they wish, doctoral students can also have access to pedagogic or research assistantship opportunities. They can get support to present their work at conferences and guidance for publication. Students are fully integrated into an active scholarly community that encourages collaboration, exchange, and intellectual growth.

A comprehensive support package — including reduced tuition fees, a contribution towards living and study costs, guaranteed access to subsidised and fully-equipped student housing close to the Campus, and a wide range of services and resources — helps create the conditions for a stable and enriching doctoral experience.

The PhD at the Geneva Graduate Institute is a transformative journey, equipping you with the skills, networks, and experience needed for a global career in academia and beyond.

What makes the Geneva Graduate Institute PhD unique?

The PhD at the Geneva Graduate Institute offers a rigorous and selective doctoral experience combining academic excellence, strong disciplinary training, and a focus on transferable skills. Designed for small cohorts (6–8 students intake per year per department — hence around 30 students per cohort), the programme ensures close supervision by internationally recognised faculty and fosters a supportive, intellectually stimulating environment.

Its flexible curriculum promotes both disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary engagement through co-supervision, cross-departmental training, and active participation in seminars and research centres. Doctoral candidates develop a wide range of skills, including analytical thinking, research design, project management, academic writing, and communication. This

prepares them for careers in academia as well as in international organisations, public administrations, NGOs, and the private sector worldwide.

Research at the Institute is structured through interdisciplinary clusters addressing major global challenges, including diplomacy and global governance, sustainability and environment, peace and security, technology and AI, global health, gender, finance, trade, environment and sustainability, democracy, development, and international economic relations. This dynamic ecosystem is grounded in the Institute's core principles of excellence, independence, critical thinking, diversity, and engagement, which shape both research and teaching. The result is the production of innovative and forward-looking scholarship with impact across academia, policy, and society.

The PhD programme at the Institute is a course of study leading to the award of a doctoral degree. Doctoral candidates are enrolled as students, they go through one year of courses and then pursue advanced research under faculty supervision. The programme combines complete academic independence with structured support. In parallel, they benefit from four years of financial support, including significantly reduced tuition fees, a baseline scholarship (CHF 20,000 per year), access to subsidis ed housing, as well as opportunities for pedagogic and research assistantship contracts. While students may participate in teaching or research activities, the programme itself is academic in nature and does not constitute employment.

At the admission stage, doctoral candidates submit a proposed research topic, and the depar tment identifies a faculty member who is interested in the project and willing to supervise it. O nce enrolled, doctoral candidates may further discuss and refine their research project with th eir prospective supervisor and, if necessary, request a change of supervisor. Doctoral candid ates retain ownership of their research and the resulting thesis.

Located in Geneva, the Institute offers exceptional exposure to a unique international ecosystem, creating opportunities to engage with leading organisations, policy actors, and global debates.

What defines the academic structure of the PhD at the Geneva Graduate Institute?

The PhD programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute offers a rigorous, research-intensive doctoral course of study in one of five disciplines : anthropology and sociology, economics, international law, international history and politics, or international relations/political science. Designed for students committed to advanced academic inquiry, the programme combines a strong disciplinary foundation with a structured and flexible curriculum, close supervision, a stimulating intellectual environment, and access to transdisciplinary discussions. Doctoral candidates are supported in developing original, high-impact research while building the analytical, conceptual, and writing skills essential for academic and professional success.

The programme is structured over four years, combining high-level training with progressive autonomy. The first year focuses on advanced coursework and methods training. At the end of the first year, students undergo a formal evaluation to assess their readiness for independent research. In the second year, they develop and defend a preliminary thesis proposal under close faculty supervision. The final two years are dedicated to independent research, fieldwork, and thesis writing, culminating in the defence of a doctoral dissertation that meets the highest international standards.

What distinguishes the academic environment?

The PhD programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute offers an outstanding academic environment combining intellectual excellence, close mentorship, and direct exposure to

global debates. Doctoral students work with internationally recognised faculty who are both leading scholars and active participants in global policy discussions, ensuring rigorous supervision and personalised guidance.

This is complemented by a dynamic research culture, where students regularly participate in seminars, workshops, and presentations, fostering critical thinking, analytical skills, and intellectual engagement and confidence. A highly international and collaborative community further enhances exchange and interdisciplinary dialogue among peers.

Students also engage with the Institute's research centres, gaining exposure to cutting-edge, policy-relevant research and expanding their professional networks. Altogether, this rich academic ecosystem prepares PhD candidates for careers as academics and researchers, policy experts, and global professionals in all sectors.

What are the PhD Admission Requirements at the Geneva Graduate Institute?

To apply to the PhD programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute, candidates must hold a master's degree (or equivalent) in a relevant discipline and demonstrate proficiency in English, as the programme is conducted primarily in English.

A central element of the application is the research proposal, which must present a clear, original, and feasible doctoral project. Particular attention is given to its quality, as it demonstrates the candidate's ability to formulate strong research questions, engage critically with academic literature, and apply appropriate methodologies. The proposal is a key criterion in the selection process and must align with the Institute's areas of expertise and available supervision.

Applicants must also submit strong letters of recommendation from professors or academic supervisors, assessing their research potential, intellectual maturity, and readiness for doctoral studies. Relevant professional experience — such as work in international organisations, NGOs, public institutions, or research projects — can further strengthen an application by showing the ability to connect academic research with real-world policy challenges.

How Competitive is the Geneva Graduate Institute PhD?

The Geneva Graduate Institute PhD programme is highly selective and competitive, with an admission rate of between 6 to 8%. The Institute receives around 600 applications each year. This constitutes a steep increase from four years ago, before the transformation of the programme, when the number of applications was around 300.

Applications are evaluated through a rigorous and holistic selection process, considering academic excellence, the quality of the research proposal, strong references, and alignment with the Institute's research areas and faculty expertise.

The programme intentionally maintains small cohorts (typically 6–8 PhD students intake per year per department), ensuring close supervision, personalised mentoring, and strong integration into the academic community**.**

This high level of selectivity enables the Institute to attract outstanding candidates from around the world and fosters a stimulating and interactive research environment. Successful applicants typically combine academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, originality, and a strong commitment to research. They come from all regions of the world. Once at the Institute, they develop the skills and expertise needed to pursue careers in academia,

international organisations, public policy, and a wide range of other professional fields.

How does PhD supervision work at the Institute?

PhD supervision at the Geneva Graduate Institute is based on close mentorship, academic rigor, and clear expectations, ensuring continuous support throughout the doctoral journey. Each student is guided by a primary supervisor who provides regular feedback, holds meetings, and supports the development of the research project from proposal to final thesis. Supervision is closely linked to key milestones, including the first-year evaluation, the defence of the thesis proposal, and the final submission.

The Institute also offers strong flexibility to support interdisciplinary research. Doctoral candidates may benefit from co-supervision by a professor from another department, pursue a minor in a complementary discipline, or involve an external co-supervisor to gain additional expertise and international perspectives. These opportunities enable students to broaden their analytical approach, enrich their research, and strengthen their academic networks.

Supervision is framed by clear PhD Supervision Guidelines, which define roles, expectations, and processes such as meeting frequency, feedback, and progress monitoring. This structured yet flexible model ensures a transparent and supportive environment, enabling students to complete a high-quality and impactful PhD.

What academic and research resources are available?

The Geneva Graduate Institute provides an outstanding research infrastructure that fully supports high-level doctoral work and enables students to conduct research at the highest international standards.

At the heart of this environment is the Institute's library, widely recognised as one of the most specialised research libraries in Europe in the fields of international affairs from the perspectives of the different departments. The library offers access to extensive print and digital collections, including leading academic journals, rare materials, and major international databases. Designed to accommodate a wide range of research practices, the library provides both quiet study areas and collaborative workspaces, fostering an environment that is conducive to concentration, exchange, and intellectual productivity.

Beyond its physical collections, the Institute ensures that doctoral students benefit from state-of-the-art digital and technological resources. Students have access to specialised research software, advanced data analysis tools, and secure digital environments adapted to the needs of contemporary research. Whether conducting qualitative fieldwork, large-scale quantitative analysis, or interdisciplinary research, PhD candidates are equipped with the technical tools necessary to meet the evolving standards of academic research.

This combination of world-class library resources and advanced IT infrastructure allows doctoral students to engage in ambitious, innovative, and methodologically rigorous research. It also ensures that they are fully prepared to operate in increasingly data-driven and technologically sophisticated academic and professional environments.

What support do PhD students receive?

PhD students at the Geneva Graduate Institute benefit from comprehensive and personalised support throughout their doctoral journey.

The Direction of Studies provides individual advising, closely monitors progress, offers tailored support, including study accommodations for students with specific needs, and delivers structured guidance at key milestones such as first-year evaluations, thesis proposal defence, and final submission. This ensures that students progress with clarity, consistency, and strong academic supervision.

In parallel, the Research Office supports doctoral candidates in identifying and securing funding opportunities at both national and international levels. It provides hands-on guidance in grant writing, proposal development, and funding strategies.

Additional training is available through CUSO doctoral programmes and the Institute's Library, covering research methods, academic writing, data management, open access publishing, and emerging topics such as artificial intelligence in research.

Career development is fully integrated into the PhD experience. Through dedicated Career Services, students benefit from individual coaching, career workshops, and tailored guidance for both academic and non-academic pathways. They receive support in preparing application materials, developing effective job search strategies, and navigating competitive international job markets.

Additionally, academic events, conferences, and training opportunities with recognised experts help students build professional networks and gain visibility in their fields. Altogether, this holistic support system enables PhD candidates to develop strong academic profiles while preparing for diverse and competitive global careers.

What financial support is available?

While the PhD programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute is not fully funded, it offers substantial, structured, and predictable financial support, ensuring that doctoral students can pursue their research in stable conditions over the duration of their studies.

PhD candidates admitted with a scholarship from the Geneva Graduate Institute benefit from a guaranteed scholarship of CHF 20,000 per year for four years. In addition, they benefit from a significant reduction in tuition fees and have access to guaranteed subsidised housing. This provides a reliable financial foundation and reflects the Institute's commitment to strongly supporting doctoral research. The Institute offers 30 scholarship packages every year with a four year commitment (in general 6 scholarships per department).

Additionally, starting in Year 3, doctoral students may apply for pedagogical or research assistantship contracts, allowing them to both improve their financial situation and gain valuable professional experience. Contracts are part-time. Pedagogical Assistantships typically correspond to a 15-hour workload per week and come with a compensation in the form of a salary of CHF 23'105, which is in addition to the scholarship. Research assistant positions, on the other hand, provide opportunities to participate in externally funded research projects led by faculty members or research centres, offering both financial compensation and direct involvement in cutting-edge research.

Importantly, the Institute also welcomes doctoral candidates who are supported by external or third-party funding, such as scholarships from foundations or governments. These candidates are fully integrated into the doctoral programme and benefit from the same academic environment and institutional support.

Doctoral candidates may also apply for the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships, a highly competitive funding scheme awarded by the Swiss Confederation to support outstanding international researchers. These prestigious scholarships provide financial

support for doctoral or postdoctoral research carried out at Swiss universities, while also fostering academic mobility and international collaboration.

Overall, the funding model is designed to combine guaranteed baseline support, complementary funding opportunities, and professional experience, ensuring that PhD students can develop their research while building a strong foundation for their future career over the course of the doctoral studies.

What are the tuition fees?

Tuition fees for PhD students at the Geneva Graduate Institute are significantly reduced and highly competitive in comparison with leading international institutions, reflecting a strong institutional commitment to supporting doctoral research.

They amount to CHF 3,000 during the first year, when students benefit from structured coursework and advanced doctoral seminars, and CHF 1,000 per year during the subsequent years**,** when they focus primarily on independent research and thesis writing.

These reduced fees should be understood in relation to the Institute's standard tuition rates, which are CHF 5,000 per year for students residing in Switzerland at the time of admission and CHF 8,000 per year for those residing abroad.

Over the duration of the PhD, the tuition fees reduction represents a substantial financial advantage, with total savings of CHF 14,000 for students residing in Switzerland and CHF 26,000 for other students.

What professional opportunities are available during the PhD?

The PhD programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute is designed not only as a rigorous research degree, but also as a comprehensive platform for professional development, preparing students for careers in academia, international organisations, NGOs, think tanks, public policy, or private sector.

Pedagogical assistantship opportunities offer PhD students valuable hands-on experience in university teaching. They come with pedagogical training, helping students develop teaching skills, inclusive practices, and familiarity with innovative tools — particularly valuable for academic careers. Pedagogical Assistantships typically correspond to a 15-hour workload per week.

Research Assistantships offer PhD students the opportunity to work on funded projects led by faculty or research centres, often in collaboration with international partners. These roles develop key skills in research design, data analysis, project management, and interdisciplinary collaboration, while providing insight into how large-scale research projects are structured and funded. Contracts may vary depending on the project, ranging from longer-term positions covering a significant part of the PhD to shorter-term mandates linked to specific tasks. Research Assistantship can also vary from part-time to, in some cases, full-time contracts.

These experiences significantly strengthen students' profiles on the job market. They demonstrate the ability to teach, conduct high-level research, collaborate in international environments, and manage complex projects — skills that are highly valued both within academia and across a wide range of professional sectors.

PhD students at the Geneva Graduate Institute may engage in external employment, provided it complies with Swiss regulations and the Institute's financial aid policies, hence ensuring that professional activities remain compatible with doctoral research. In line with institutional regulations, doctoral students may undertake complementary paid activities alongside their scholarship within a 25% annualised activity rate during the first two years (excluding July and August, when full-time work is permitted), and up to 50% thereafter. This allows students to gain valuable experience without compromising their academic progress, particularly within Geneva's unique ecosystem of international organisations, NGOs, and policy institutions.

Doctoral students also benefit from strong career support through dedicated services that share job opportunities, and provide personalised guidance on applications, interviews, and networking.

In addition, the Institute's global alumnae·i network offers valuable connections, mentorship, and career opportunities across sectors including but not limited to academia, international organisations, NGOs, national administrations, and the private sector.

What about housing and living conditions?

The Geneva Graduate Institute offers access to subsidised high-quality student housing through its two modern residences, Picciotto and Grand Morillon. PhD students benefit from student preferential rates. Furthermore, PhD students have priority access — all students wishing to benefit from Institute housing are given priority, making it easier to settle in Geneva's competitive housing market.

The residences provide fully furnished accommodation, and all services are included in the monthly rent — electricity and heat, internet, access to laundry facilities, regular cleaning services and shared facilities, including study spaces and fitness areas. Conveniently located near the Institute and well connected to public transport, they offer a comfortable and practical living environment.

Beyond convenience, these residences foster a vibrant community, bringing together students from diverse backgrounds and cultures and contributing to a rich, collaborative doctoral experience.

In this context, the Institute's housing offer is not only a logistical solution, but a key component of the overall student experience, combining convenience, quality of life, and integration into a global academic community.

Is additional financial support available if needed?

The Geneva Graduate Institute places strong emphasis on ensuring that doctoral students can pursue their research in stable and supportive conditions. Recognising that unforeseen financial or personal challenges may arise during a PhD, the Institute provides access to dedicated emergency support mechanisms if necessary. Doctoral students facing temporary difficulties can apply for targeted assistance. Applications are reviewed with care and discretion to ensure a fair and tailored response.

This support reflects the Institute's broader commitment to student well-being, inclusivity, and academic success, ensuring that unexpected challenges do not compromise the completion of doctoral studies.

Are conferences supported during the PhD?

The Geneva Graduate Institute actively encourages doctoral students to engage with the international academic community, recognising that participation in conferences and research networks is a key component of a successful PhD and future academic career.

To support this engagement, departments offer targeted and partial financial support for conference participation and research travel, primarily intended for advanced PhD students who can present mature research. This support enables them to attend leading international conferences, present their work, and engage with scholars in their field.

These opportunities allow doctoral candidates to receive expert feedback, strengthen their research, and increase their visibility within international academic circles. Participation in conferences also plays a key role in building professional networks and fostering future collaborations, both in academia and beyond.

How are research activities and dissemination supported?

PhD students benefit from a rich calendar of academic events organised within the Institute's departments and research centres, including workshops, seminars, and international conferences. These events provide valuable opportunities to engage with leading scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, and to participate in cutting-edge debates.

Doctoral candidates are also encouraged to actively disseminate and valorise their research. They may contribute to the Institute's communication channels, increasing the visibility of their work to broader audiences. Opportunities to publish — both independently and jointly with faculty members, particularly in article-based thesis formats — allow students to build a strong academic profile early in their careers.

Importantly, completed PhD theses are made available in open access and are actively showcased on the Institute's website, ensuring wide dissemination and long-term visibility of doctoral research. PhD students may request a three-year embargo before publication or opt for restricted access, particularly when the dissertation contains sensitive, proprietary, confidential, or otherwise restricted data that cannot be made publicly available immediately. In some cases, departmental funding or partner foundations may also support research stays or fieldwork abroad, reinforcing the global dimension of doctoral research.

While competitive, these opportunities are designed to help doctoral students engage in academic debates, disseminate their work, build international networks, and position themselves for successful academic and professional careers.

Is international mobility possible during the PhD programme?

International mobility is an integral and encouraged component of the doctoral experience. PhD students may undertake research stays, academic exchanges, or visiting fellowships at universities and research centres abroad, allowing them to access specific resources, engage with different academic environments, and strengthen their research through international collaboration.

The Institute benefits from a broad network of partner institutions worldwide, which facilitates such exchanges. Within this framework, doctoral students can spend one or two semesters abroad while remaining enrolled at the Institute and continuing to pay their tuition fees in Geneva, making mobility both academically enriching and administratively manageable.

Some funding opportunities are available to support these experiences. For instance, the Gallatin Scholarship allows selected PhD students to spend one or two semesters in the

United States as visiting fellows. While funding is competitive, these opportunities can provide valuable support for students wishing to develop an international dimension to their research.

What skills and competencies do PhD students develop during the programme?

Throughout the PhD programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute, doctoral students develop a broad set of advanced and transferable skills valued in academia, policy, and professional environments. They acquire strong research competencies, including the ability to design rigorous methodologies, conduct qualitative and quantitative analysis, handle complex data, and produce evidence-based arguments.

The programme also strengthens analytical thinking, academic writing, and communication skills, enabling students to engage with complex theories, publish high-quality research, and present their work to diverse audiences. Through teaching and research assistantships, they gain pedagogical experience, as well as project management, teamwork, and interdisciplinary collaboration skills. In addition, doctoral training enhances grant writing, networking, and professional development through participation in conferences and academic events.

Overall, the PhD fosters independence, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities, equipping graduates with the expertise and skills needed for competitive careers in academia, international organisations, and beyond.

What is the overall satisfaction rate of the Geneva Graduate Institute PhD programme?

The Geneva Graduate Institute PhD programme demonstrates a high level of student satisfaction, based on a recent survey conducted among all doctoral graduates from 2023 to 2025.

According to the results, 89% of graduates would recommend the Institute, reflecting strong overall endorsement of the PhD experience. In addition, 81% of respondents report being satisfied with their doctoral programme, with 37% rating it as excellent. These figures highlight both the quality of academic training and the overall doctoral experience.

Satisfaction with the broader institutional environment is even higher, with 91% of graduates expressing satisfaction with the services offered by the Institute, including academic support, research resources, and student services.

Overall, these results confirm that the PhD at the Geneva Graduate Institute offers a high-quality, supportive, and rewarding doctoral experience, preparing graduates for successful international careers.

What is the size of PhD cohorts and what are the advantages?

PhD cohorts at the Geneva Graduate Institute are intentionally small, typically an intake of 6 to 8 students per department each year. This selective structure ensures close supervision, regular interaction with faculty, and highly personalised mentoring throughout the doctoral journey.

Small cohorts also foster a strong sense of academic community, encouraging collaboration, intellectual exchange, and detailed feedback among peers. This supportive environment enhances critical thinking and mutual learning.

Finally, this model facilitates strong integration into departments and research centres, giving students direct access to faculty, academic events, and research opportunities, and contributing to a high-quality and stimulating doctoral experience.

What is the average duration of the PhD at the Geneva Graduate Institute?

The PhD programme at the Geneva Graduate Institute is designed to be completed within a standard duration of four years, following a structured progression from coursework to independent research and thesis writing.

Students may request an extension of one or two additional semesters, depending on their academic progress. These extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis to ensure the completion of a high-quality thesis. There is no guarantee of financing for these periods of extension.

Overall, the programme is designed to support students in completing their PhD within a realistic timeframe, while offering flexibility and continued support to ensure successful outcomes.

What is the PhD completion rate?

Completion rates in doctoral programmes are difficult to measure precisely, as some students may leave for professional or personal reasons before finishing. However, the rate of academic failure at the Institute is very low, reflecting its selective admissions process, close supervision, and strong institutional support.

What career opportunities are available after completing a PhD at the Institute?

As a result of this comprehensive training, PhD graduates from the Geneva Graduate Institute access a wide range of high-level and international career opportunities across academic, policy, and professional sectors.

A significant number pursue academic careers, securing postdoctoral positions and faculty appointments in leading universities and research institutions worldwide, where they contribute to cutting-edge research and teaching in their respective fields. Others transition into influential roles within major international organisations, including the United Nations system, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group, as well as international NGOs, think tanks, and government institutions. In these environments, they contribute to policy analysis, programme design, and evidence-based decision-making on global challenges such as development, governance, environment, gender, migration, or international security.

Graduates are also increasingly present in the private sector where their ability to combine rigorous analysis with a deep understanding of global issues is highly valued.

Altogether, the PhD programme not only trains students to become leading researchers but also prepares them to assume influential roles in academia, international organisations, public policy, and the private sector**,** where they can contribute meaningfully to addressing the world’s most pressing challenges.