

PH.D. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM “UNCERTAINTY”

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS 2026

We live in times of global uncertainty – this is the tenor of many current debates. As individuals, groups and societies, we are increasingly confronted with events and developments leaving us with insufficient or uncertain grounds on which to base our decisions and actions. In situations and contexts of uncertainty, the future seems unpredictable, and alternatives or probabilities of occurrence are open.

The Ph.D. scholarship program “Uncertainty” by the ZEIT STIFTUNG BUCERIUS responds to these current diagnoses of the times. The foundation calls for research proposals from the Humanities, Social Sciences, Economics and Law that shed light on this urgent and complex topic.

There are many reasons why perceived certainties about the course of social, economic or political developments are losing their power of orientation (or have already lost it). Whether it is the consequences of climate change, the Russian war against Ukraine, political polarization and erosion of democratic institutions, the current inflation, societal transformations, the yet unknown effects of technological innovations or the challenges of global health crises: Uncertainty has become a defining characteristic of our time.

Where the grounds for assessment, decision and action are in question, a need for orientation emerges. This need goes deep. As a strong feeling, uncertainty has a considerable impact on individuals and entire societies in almost all areas of life. It affects different social systems at once (economy, politics, law, culture, family etc.), which is why interdisciplinary exchange, as envisioned in the Ph.D. program, is essential. Any concept of uncertainty must therefore also allow for analytical openness and development.

Discussing uncertainty requires taking new perspectives and seeing it both in connection to and separate from other forms of openness. So far, science has defined uncertainty by multiple approaches, e.g., historical, spatial and cultural ambiguity, riskiness or unpredictability. They are part of a cluster of concepts, also comprising ignorance, volatility, indeterminacy, complexity, resilience or preparedness. While uncertainty borders on them in many ways, it can also be distinguished: In decision-making situations, “risk” may refer to known possible, potentially calculable alternatives and “uncertainty” may refer to known, but no longer calculable alternatives – the even more pervasive “uncertainty” that inspired the program is one where neither alternatives nor probabilities are known anymore.

APPLICATION

You can apply [here](#).

Deadline: 20 July 2026

We invite applications from Ph.D. students worldwide from the Humanities, Social Sciences, Economics and Law who are studying various facets of uncertainty. Both empirical research based on extensive fieldwork as well as projects centered on historical and theoretical reflection are eligible for support. Innovative and challenging research questions as well as comparative approaches are highly welcome. Projects can be interdisciplinary, yet also rooted in a specific discipline.

Being an international program expecting scientific exchange and collaboration, English will be the language used throughout the course of the program. Application documents can be submitted in German or English.

Ph.D. projects may address, but are not limited to questions as shown here:

- Decision-making rules and scenario-based understanding and control of processes considered unpredictable
- Modeling and measurement of uncertainty
- Chaos as a fundamental gradient of our age
- Contrast of the pursuit of certainty with experiences of disintegration
- Increasing informality in work conditions, platform economy and the domination of supply chains designed to weather uncertainties
- Democratic-theoretical perspectives on political reactions to a social need for determinacy
- Legal regulations and methods for dealing with an unknown future, e.g. technologies with global reach and unforeseeable development
- Openness and resilience of legal and political institutions regarding increasingly uncertain democratic values
- Moral indeterminacy and legal norms for dealing with morally indetermined matters
- Interdependency of uncertainty, economic growth and economic stability
- Ethics in science communication (communication of uncertainty)
- The impact of climate and epidemiological events on our notion of uncertainty
- Temporality of uncertainty, e.g. as part as a historiography of temporal concepts
- Uncertainty and social inequality, e.g. North-South divide and the organization of societies related to narratives of stability in contrast to those of inequality
- Relation of diversity (of race, class, gender, sexual identities, ancestry etc.) to experiences of uncertainty and to juridical or economic realms
- Uncertainty related to experiences of migration
- Shared uncertainty in communities and collectives; uncertainty and legal pluralism
- Experiences of populations at risk in dealing with uncertain living conditions
- Uncertainty in scientific knowledge production and its ethical and political implications, e.g. with regard to scholars at risk

SCHOLARSHIPS

The program “Uncertainty” provides scholarships for different stages of Ph.D. research. Additionally, the program promotes ideas, interdisciplinary exchange, mutual learning and networking through workshops and yearly Ph.D. conferences. The program combines decentral and presence-based formats and is anchored at the Bucerius Law School (Hamburg, Germany), a private university founded by the ZEIT STIFTUNG BUCERIUS.

START UP SCHOLARSHIPS

For advanced master’s students and Ph.D. students in an early stage of project formulation

Duration: 6 months

Monthly living stipend of € 1.400,00

Dissertation proposal development workshop

PH.D. SCHOLARSHIPS

For Ph.D. students enrolled in Ph.D. programs or admitted to an individual Ph.D. scheme

Duration: one to three years

Monthly living stipend of € 1.600,00

Yearly students’ conference in Hamburg, Germany

DISSERTATION COMPLETION SCHOLARSHIP

For advanced Ph.D. students

Duration: one year

Monthly living stipend of € 1.600,00

Yearly students’ conference in Hamburg, Germany

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