



University Admission Practices – Germany

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Relevant country background

Education in Germany is only partially regulated at the national level through federal law (Hochschulrahmengesetz, HRG). Most issues of education are determined by the 16 German states (Bundesländer). Thus, each state has its own law that complements the federal rules (e.g. Berliner Hochschulgesetz (Berl HG) or Bayerisches Hochschulgesetz (BayHSchG)).

Universities are publicly funded, with a small segment of private universities. Until 2005, the HRG contained a prohibition on tuition fees for public universities. In June 2005, the German constitutional court (BVerfG) declared this ban to be an unconstitutional intervention into the legislative powers of the German states. Following this decision, some states have introduced a tuition fee for their universities (around 500 EUR per semester). Almost all of these states have abolished or plan to abolish tuition fees again, mainly on the grounds that there is a widespread belief that higher education should be free of charge in order to attract students from poorer families. For the winter term 2012/2013, only Bavaria and Lower Saxony currently plan to charge tuition fees for their public universities.

As envisioned in the Bologna process, most subjects offered by German universities have been switched to the Bachelor/Master system. Students receive a Bachelor's degree after 3 to 4 years of study. Getting a Master's degree usually takes another 1 to 2 years. Exceptions are subjects that qualify graduates for jobs that are either directly provided by the state (e.g. teachers, judges) or are subject to tight state regulation (e.g. doctors, pharmacists, dentists, lawyers). In these subjects students still have to pass a state examination (Staatsexamen) and the duration of studies is typically longer than for other subjects.

For the majority of subjects, universities can decide upon their own enrolment policy and selection criteria, with the final grade from high school (Abitur) as the main criterion. However, there is a central clearinghouse at the national level that currently allocates all available seats at public universities in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and pharmacy.

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According to the HRG, the centralized clearinghouse should be employed for all subjects where the total number of applicants is expected to exceed the total number of available seats in the German public university system, but the universities can select students themselves even in these subjects if specific admissions criteria need to be applied. The clearinghouse has been publicly criticized both by the universities and the students. Students criticized the mere existence of hurdles to higher education. Universities on the other hand claimed that a centralized match would interfere with their efforts to create distinctive profiles since it did not allow them to “choose” their students themselves.

In 2011, around 13 000 seats were allocated through the clearinghouse (a), and around 500 000 seats were allocated through the decentralized market (b).

Summary box

Organization of higher education	Mostly public universities; small number of private universities
Stated objectives of admissions policy	<p>a) Significant part of capacity reserved for excellent students (20%) and students with long waiting times (20%) (priority based part of the procedure); remaining places (60% + empty seats from first two quotas) allocated on basis of universities ‘ preferences (two-sided part of the procedure). The two parts are administered sequentially in the aforementioned order.</p> <p>b) Admissions policy chosen by universities within the rules set by the state.</p>
Who’s in charge of admissions?	<p>a) Clearinghouse.</p> <p>b) Universities themselves (decentralized procedure).</p>
Admissions system in place since	<p>a) Clearinghouse exists since 1972, several changes in admissions system.</p> <p>b) Each university sets its own admission threshold in the decentralized system (within the legal framework).</p>
Available capacity	Capacity is determined for each subject as the number of students a university has to admit per professor (see <i>Kapazitätsverordnung KapVO</i>).
Timing of enrolment	<p>a) Clearinghouse sets uniform date for applications.</p> <p>Admission letters for the priority based part of the matching procedure are sent about two months before the semester starts ; admission letters for the two-sided part are sent out about one month later.</p> <p>b) Depending on subject and university, students can either only apply in the summer for the fall term or additionally in the spring for the summer term. Exact dates are determined by universities with lots of variation, but there are recent attempts by universities to harmonize dates in order to avoid serious congestion problems (not all seats filled when the term starts).</p>
Information available to students prior to	a) All relevant data from past years (e.g. grades necessary to be admitted to each university in the different parts of the procedure,

enrolment period	length of waiting time necessary to be considered under the waiting time quota, tie breaking criteria applied etc.). Boston mechanism for the two quotas is explained in detail, university-proposing Gale-Shapley for the two-sided part is not explained. Advice on strategic issues is provided. b) Varies widely between universities, no centralized source of information.
Restrictions on preference expression	a) Applicants apply directly to the central clearing house. Applicants can apply for a place in only one of the subjects offered in the centralized match. Applicants are allowed to submit one rank order list containing at most six universities for each part of the procedure. There is no consistency requirement for these lists. b) No restrictions concerning number of subjects and universities
Matching procedure	a) Boston mechanism for the priority based part. The remaining seats are allocated among remaining applicants using the university-proposing Gale-Shapley mechanism. b) Applications and admissions at the level of the universities
Priorities and quotas	a) Quota for students with excellent grades from high school (20% of seats) and quota for students with the longest waiting times (20% of seats). The remaining 60% are allocated according to applicants' and universities' preferences. b) Universities set up their own rules (<i>Zulassungsordnung</i>).
Tie-breaking	a) Several tie-breaking rules such as handicaps, parents living close by etc., lottery. b) Left to decide by each individual university.

Description of current practices

The clearinghouse allocates all seats in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine at public universities in Germany. In the winter term 2010/2011, there were around 56 000 applicants for 13 000 places in the four subjects.

The admissions procedure is sequential and consists of a priority-based part where a fraction of total capacity is allocated among special applicants on the basis of their preferences and exogenous admission criteria, and a two-sided part in which the remaining seats are allocated among remaining applicants on the basis of applicants' and universities' preferences.

In the priority-based part, 20% of places are reserved for applicants with very good average grades from high-school and 20% for applicants who have "waited" a long time since finishing high-school (where this waiting time can be used for an apprenticeship for example). In order to determine who is eligible to obtain one of the seats reserved for applicants with very good average grades, all applicants are first ordered with respect to their average grades from best to worst. Applicants are then selected one at a time according to this ordering until the number of selected applicants equals the 20 % of total

capacity that is available in the priority based part. The assignment of these selected students (called top-grade students in the following) to the universities is determined by the Boston mechanism on basis of reported preferences (as well as average grades and social criteria to break ties). An analogous procedure is employed for students with the longest waiting times.

In the two-sided part, which is conducted about one month after the priority-based part, all remaining places are allocated among the remaining applicants on the basis of the applicants' preferences and criteria chosen by the universities. The assignment is generated by applying the university-proposing deferred acceptance algorithm.

Importantly, applicants can submit separate and potentially completely different preference lists for each part of the procedure.

Recent policy change

Admissions procedures used by the clearinghouse have often been revised. Since the establishment of the clearinghouse in 1972, it has been reformed several times. In particular, the number of places in the two-sided part, and thus the influence of universities' preferences on the match outcome, has increased significantly over the years. Also, in 2008 the clearinghouse was renamed from ZVS to *Stiftung für Hochschulstart*, and it was turned into a foundation.

The subjects for which seats are allocated by the clearinghouse have changed, too. While the number of subjects increased constantly after the creation of the clearinghouse due to the generation of the baby boomers, starting in 2000 the number of subjects has been reduced significantly. This is in part due to lower numbers of applicants, but also to the universities' decisions to select students themselves for the newly created BA and MA, e.g. in biology and psychology. The decision whether a certain subject should be included in the central clearinghouse or left to the decentralized market is taken by the *Stiftung für Hochschulstart*, which consists of representatives of each state and the universities.

Perceived issues

The decentralized market suffers from congestion and a large number of seats remaining unfilled by the start of the semester as a consequence. There are attempts to establish a clearinghouse or platform for all subjects that universities can (but do not have to) employ to fill their seats. In 2011, the new platform could not be launched due to software programming problems. The planned rules of operation for this platform have not been made available to the public.

The admissions procedure employed by the central clearinghouse for medicine and related subjects is not strategy-proof and is particularly demanding for the excellent students in terms of strategic behavior. The quota for top-grade students can be a trap for these students (and leads to unstable matchings) if the top-grade students report their preferences truthfully (see Braun et al. 2010 as well as Westkamp, 2011).

Existing data

The clearinghouse collects the data it uses, but this dataset is not public. It has in part been made available to Braun et al. (2010) for their study.

Legal texts

Federal law : Hochschulrahmengesetz <http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/hrg/>

Hochschulgesetze of the states (e.g. Berl HG for Berlin)

<http://gesetze.berlin.de/default.aspx?words=BerlHG&btsearch.x=42&filter>

Admission rules (*Hochschulzulassungsverordnung* and *Berliner Hochschulzulassungsgesetz*) for subjects with selective admissions <http://www.berlin.de/sen/wissenschaft-und-forschung/rechtsvorschriften/>

Determination of capacities (*Kapazitätsverordnung KapVO*) <http://www.schure.de/22220/kapvo.htm>

Other resources and references

Braun, Sebastian, Nadja Dwenger and Dorothea Kübler (2010), Telling the Truth May Not Pay Off: An Empirical Study of Centralised University Admissions in Germany, *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy*, Vol. 10: Iss. 1 (Advances), Article 22.

Westkamp, Alexander (2011), An analysis of the German university admissions system, mimeo, University of Bonn.

Information about the matching procedure provided by the clearinghouse (*Stiftung Hochschulstart*) can be found at <http://www.hochschulstart.de>

MiP Country Profiles downloadable from matching-in-practice.eu

MiP Country Profile 1. Cantillon, Estelle (2011), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).

MiP Country Profile 2. Kübler, Dorothea (2011), [University admission practices – Germany](#).

MiP Country Profile 3. Irving, Rob (2011), [Matching practices for entry-labor markets – Scotland](#).

MiP Country Profile 4. Kiselgof, Sofya (2011), [Matching practices for universities – Ukraine](#).

MiP Country Profile 5. Biró, Péter (2011), [University admission practices – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 6. Biró, Péter (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Hungary](#).

MiP Country Profile 7. Chen, Li (2012), [University admission practices – UK](#).

MiP Country Profile 8. Chen, Li (2012), [University admission practices – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 9 Cantillon, Estelle and Koen Declercq (2012), [University admission practices – Belgium](#).

MiP Country Profile 10. Chen, Li (2012), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 11. Chen, Li (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Ireland](#).

MiP Country Profile 12. Manlove, David (2012), [Matching practices for primary and secondary schools – Scotland](#).

MiP Country Profile 13. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 14. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 15. Merlino, Luca Paolo and Antonio Nicoló (2012), [University admissions practices – Italy](#).

MiP Country Profile 16 Hiller, Victor and Olivier Tercieux (2013), [Matching practices in secondary schools – France](#).

MiP Country Profile 17 Calsamiglia, Caterina (2014), [Matching Practices for elementary and secondary Schools – Spain](#).

MiP Country Profile 18 Lauri, Triin, Kaire Põder, and André Veski (2014), [Matching practices for elementary schools – Estonia](#).

MiP Country Profile 19. Salonen, Mikko A.A. (2014), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Finland](#).

MiP Country Profile 20 Terrier, Camille (2014), [Matching practices for secondary public school teachers – France](#).

MiP Country Profile 21 Basteck, Christian, Katharina Huesmann, and Heinrich Nax (2015), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Germany](#)

MiP Country Profile 22 Cantillon, Estelle (2015), [Matching practices for secondary schools – Belgium \(French-speaking region\)](#).