

Phd Bursary Opportunities

Call for applications

International Research Collaboration in Digital inclusion and Social Innovation

Joint PhD study (full-time) between the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) and the University of Ghent (Belgium)

Background

The University of the Western Cape has a long-standing international partnership with the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and the University of Ghent (UGent). In pursuance of our common goals and academic agenda the three universities are entrenching their research collaboration within the broad thematic area of *digital inclusion and social innovation*. This is an exciting opportunity for Masters graduates to enroll for a PhD as part of an international research team. There are 4 full-time PhD bursaries, funded over three years, available for qualifying applicants.

Research focus

Economies, governments and societies across the globe are going digital. (OECD, 2021)

Although technological developments have prevailed in society for many years, the pace of change is accelerating. As a consequence, digital transformation is being catalyzed in new and often unexpected directions. These technological advances are fundamentally changing the way in which people live and work, participate in the economy and society and interact with government. Although the digital transformation is associated with multiple benefits, serious concerns regarding digital inequalities, well-being, jobs, skills, privacy and security continue to be prevalent across society at large.

This international, interdisciplinary and collaborative research partnership is aimed at deepening our understanding of a range of issues in relation to digital inclusion. The research activities focus on fundamental and applied research problems with the objective of contributing towards academic, policy and societal discourse thereby influencing societal change. This will build upon a foundation of existing research interest and activity involving established researchers and other PhD students from the three universities.

The 4 PhD bursaries will be awarded for study in the following 4 sub-themes :

Theme 1: UGent - UWC PhD track

Developing and testing the psychometric properties of a cross-national digital inequality scale

Theme 2: UGent - UWC track

The impact of financial stress and digital inequality on mental health

Theme 3: VUB - UWC PhD track

The role of Social Support to promote Digital Inclusion

Theme 4: VUB - UWC PhD track

A systemic ecosystems approach to enable digital inclusion

(More information on the partnership, research themes and researcher profiles can be obtained by clicking on this link. ([Read document for more information](#)))

The final selection and refinement of the research topics will be done in collaboration with the selected students and supervisors)

Participating entities:

- Bursaries are jointly sponsored by VUB (1 bursary), UGent (1 bursary) and UWC (2 bursaries).
- Participating academic and research partners
 - Department of Communication Studies (VUB, Brussel)
 - Department of Communication Science (University of Ghent)
 - Department of Information Systems (UWC)
 - CoLab for eInclusion and Social Innovation (UWC)
 - Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Nature and Conditions of the partnership bursaries:

- Depending on the thematic area the bursary-holders conduct their study in, the joint PhD degree will be awarded by either (a) UWC *and* VUB or (b) UWC *and* UGent
- All work will be undertaken with joint academic supervision involving UWC, VUB and UGent.
- Students will be located on the UWC campus.
- Students will register at both host institutions i.e. either VUB and UWC or UGent and UWC.
- Successful applicants will be awarded a total bursary of R360,000 (R10 000/month for 3 years). Where possible the University will also seek to supplement the bursary.
- During the course of the three years, students are required to spend a period of time at VUB or UGent
- Students will be expected to participate within a wider team that involves research activities and initiatives that complement the scope of their specific PhD.
- All bursary holders will enter into a formal agreement with UWC in relation to terms and conditions of the award.

Benefits of participating in this research partnership

- Joining an international research partnership consisting of established researchers and other international PhD students
- Participating in exciting inter-disciplinary applied and fundamental research (and projects) in both countries related to data, media and digital literacy, digital transformation, innovation, technology and society (to name a few perspectives).
- Joint Degree from two established universities.

Who should apply?

The programme is ideal for candidates who wish to obtain a better understanding of the nuances and complexities related to the relationship between technology and society. This joint degree offers the opportunity to pursue a career in academia, research institutions, NGOs, international organisations focused on the digital-related discourse, government

departments and organisations or watchdogs aimed at the equitable, fair, healthy and responsible application of technology for societal benefit and societal change.

Admission requirements:

- A minimum of a Master' degree in a field related to the area of the PhD. This might be in Information Systems (or a related IT discipline), the Social Sciences, Communication Studies, or Health Sciences
- A commitment to full-time study to complete the PhD over 3 years
- All shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview

How to apply:

Submit the following documentation to Dominique Goch (dgoch@uwc.ac.za) by **21 January 2022**:

- a. Detailed CV
- b. Copies of all prior degree certifications
- b. Cover letter indicating (i) the thematic area of interest (ii) a motivation of your interest in the study
- c. A short summary of up to 4 pages, to frame your understanding of the research theme, and how a prospective study would be conducted.

Enquiries

Please direct all inquiries to :

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