

M20 PhD Scholarship Program Announcement: 2023 Call for Proposals

When to apply?

This year's M20 Call for Proposals opens on 1 May 2023. This announcement includes information on the M20 grants for PhD scholarships, the application procedure, and the topics that have been selected by the Schools. The deadline for applications is 28 June 2023 at 12pm. It is not possible to submit a proposal before 1 May, or after 28 June.

Background

The M20 Program was launched in 2022 to fund PhD scholarships at the University of Groningen's four new Schools for interdisciplinary research. The program advances the university's interdisciplinary research program by funding ten new PhD positions each year over the coming decades. Funding for this program was provided exclusively by a private donor and is managed by the Ubbo Emmius Foundation. Following the 2022 pilot round that funded four PhD projects, the 2023 round offers ten PhD scholarships to be divided among the four Schools:

- Wubbo Ockels School for Energy and Climate
- Jantina Tammes School for Digital Society, Technology, and Artificial Intelligence
- Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health
- Rudolph Agricola School for Sustainable Development

More information on the Schools' areas of expertise and objectives can be found on [this page](#).

M20 PhD Scholarships

One M20 PhD scholarship consists of a lump sum of €290.000 to cover the full cost of one PhD position, including personnel and material expenses and a bench fee. The total budget for the 2023 round is €2.900.000 for ten PhD Scholarship positions.

Who can apply?

Each application needs to address one of the Schools' challenges as outlined in the list of topics included in this announcement. Due to the terms and conditions of the donation that funds the M20 Program, projects on the study of religion are excluded.

Each application requires a minimum of two supervisors who are UG staff members from different faculties. One of the supervisors should possess *ius promovendus*. In addition, a ReMa-student can be a co-applicant for an approved PhD proposal from the respective program. In these situations, the ReMa-student must also be the candidate for the corresponding PhD position.

Application Procedure

Phase 1: Submission

Applications need to be submitted via <http://www.application-portal.uef.nl> which will be available from 1 May 2023 through 28 June 2023.

Phase 2: Eligibility Check

After the deadline 28 June 2023, submitted proposals are screened for eligibility on two hard criteria:

- The application must have two supervisors from two different faculties
- The proposal must address one of the topics selected by the Schools

Applicants will receive the outcome of the eligibility check via email no later than 28 July 2023. The outcome will be sent to the email address provided in the application.

Phase 3: Review Process

The applications are reviewed by the M20 selection committee, chaired by professor Petra Rudolf, and including representatives from all four Schools. Each proposal is assessed by members of the selection committee based on the following criteria:

- Quality of the research proposal
- Originality of the research question
- Feasibility of the proposed project
- Relevance to the Schools' topics, objectives and long-term impact

Phase 4: Final Selection

In August, the M20 selection committee will make its decision and award a total of 10 proposals with a PhD scholarship. All applicants will receive an email in the final week of September to confirm whether their proposal has been awarded. Other than the information provided in this final round of email notifications, no written feedback can be given to individual applicants.

Contact

This call for proposals is subject to the terms and conditions of the Ubbo Emmius Foundation available on uef.nl/grants

- Regulation for Grant Allocation
- General conditions for Grants

For more information, please contact us via: grants@uef.nl

Annex: Selected topics from the University of Groningen's Schools

Overview

Wubbo Ockels School for Energy and Climate

- I. Hydrogen Economy
- II. Climate Adaptation

Jantina Tammes School for Digital Society, Technology, and Artificial Intelligence

- I. Ethical Aspects of AI, digitalization and technology
- II. AI and Language

Aletta Jacobs School of Public Health

- I. Planetary Health
- II. Women and Health
- III. Shifting Care Responsibilities: Balance between cure and prevention in the regional domain
- IV. Mental Health
 - a. Mental health problems in childhood and adolescence in a changing society
 - b. Work-life Conflict and Mental Health Problems
- V. Healthy Cities

Rudolph Agricola School for Sustainable Development

- I. Democracy and Governance: "Rebuilding trust between citizens and their elected representatives"
- II. Risk, Crises and Resilience: "Preparedness and prevention of cascading disasters"
- III. Development and Security: "Global crises and illicit trade patterns"

Full list of topics

Ockels I: Hydrogen Economy

Hydrogen Economy: Green hydrogen is a promising means to cope with the challenges posed by the transition to renewable energy sources. The use of green hydrogen calls for a redefinition of the standards on energy security and reliability of supply, redesigning of the energy value chain, addressing emerging societal issues, development of new economic and business models as well as re-arrangements on the existing grid infrastructure. This research field offers a fruitful ground for interdisciplinary research involving, but not limited to, engineering, law, economics, psychology, sociology, business and economics and spatial sciences. Ph.D. projects should be focusing on a combination of technical challenges, legal/governance challenges, business/economic challenges, societal acceptability challenges and spatial configuration of hydrogen facilities (at least two challenges).

Ockels II: Climate Adaptation

The climate is changing and this affects both humans and nature. Climate adaptation is simultaneously a technological, ecological, social-cultural and political challenge. This requires the adoption of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. In addition to engineering and ecological perspectives, perspectives from the social sciences need to be explicitly integrated with existing and future material and technological solutions, to allow adaptation solutions to be inclusive, bankable, socially just, acceptable and attractive – enhancing local and regional spatial qualities. This included focusing on social innovation, addressing adaptation goals while also including societal stakeholders in processes of co-creation, and study issues ranging from behavioral change, governance, regulations, spatial and institutional design, blockchain technology and economic business cases. These interdisciplinary aspects can represent the specific added value of Groningen research in the international climate adaptation debate. Ph.D. projects should be focusing on a combination of ecological challenges, technical challenges, legal/governance challenges, business/economic challenges, societal acceptability challenges and spatial configuration of climate adaptation (at least two challenges).

Tammes I: Ethical Aspects of AI, digitalization and technology

While AI and digital technologies in general provide enormous opportunities for improving efficiencies and quality of life, there is growing concern on the societal dangers like bias and exclusion that may arise at the same time. In the future, machines might be fully equipped with their own judgement system; consequently, things could turn for the worse if the system miscalculates or is flawed. There is the urgent need to study the ethical aspects of AI, the digitalization process and digitalization technology. A multi-disciplinary approach has to be taken to examine how technological development, e.g. optimizing logistics and detecting fraud, should not jeopardize equality and dignity. We encourage researchers from different faculties to jointly investigate well-known or subtle ethical issues in this context, and propose methodologies, principles or implementations to safeguard the ethical standard in AI, digitalization and technology.

Tammes II: AI and Language

Human languages are notoriously complex and some consider that language is the cornerstone of human intelligence. Recently AI has made impressive progresses, showing that algorithms, especially those making smart use of machine learning models, can learn the rules and patterns of human language and can answer our queries in a smooth interactive way. This theme accommodates different multidisciplinary angles to look into how AI and language may affect each other and the potential impact on how human communicate in different contexts, e.g. chatbot for virtual assistants in educational, health or business contexts. Both theoretical exploration and applicational endeavors are welcome. The technical questions, may include but are not limited to voice-activated command technologies, foundation models, and fast learning algorithms; likewise, application questions include, the impact of AI on human communication, enhanced user experience and emerging application areas.

Aletta I: Planetary Health

Planetary health is a research field and a social movement which promotes the collaboration between humans and the planet they inhabit. It focuses on the human activities which damage the health of the planet, e.g. via air pollution or use of pesticides

and fertilisers; and the planet's reaction to it, which in turns challenges human health, i.e. through climate change. Planetary health is also concerned with the inequitable distribution of the resources and the consequences of climate change globally, making the most responsible for climate change, the least affected. Proposals may address the topic of planetary health from different disciplinary perspectives, or on the interface of various disciplines. Examples of topics include, but are not limited to the risks of rising sea levels, zoonotic spillovers and antimicrobial resistance, the sharing of data relevant for planetary health, and the effects of climate change on social justice.

Aletta II: Women and Health

According to the World Health Organization, the health of women and girls is of particular concern because they are often disadvantaged by discrimination rooted in sociocultural factors. For example, women and girls face increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. They also face many challenges concerning their reproductive health, including a lack of access to contraceptives, unsafe abortions, and obstetric violence. In the health sciences, sex and gender differences are still undervalued in research and teaching. For example, over the past years numerous drugs have been withdrawn from the market because of life-threatening health effects for women. Recent research also shows that GP consultations seem to have a gender bias with earlier and easier referrals for male patients. The M20 UEF invites applicants to submit projects that tackle women's health, including gender biases in health and in health research. Since sex and gender differences are deeply rooted in society as well as in the history and philosophy of the medical sciences, we are not only looking for projects that approach this problem from the health sciences. Scholars from the humanities and social sciences are also encouraged to apply.

Aletta III: Shifting Care Responsibilities: Balance between cure and prevention in the regional domain

With the arrival of the new Dutch Integral Care Agreement, a stronger focus on regional healthcare delivery becomes reality. At the same time, demand for care is expected to grow in the coming years, and the availability of medical professionals is unlikely to keep up. Moreover, it seems likely that citizens will become increasingly responsible for their own health, which links with increased importance of prevention. In this dynamic environment, local cure and care providers and related stakeholders need to find new ways to manage regional care, cure and prevention. In addition, there is a need to collaborate and co-create with citizens in order to ensure future service availability. The complexity of this question underlines the need of a multi-disciplinary perspective, as mono-perspective solutions are unlikely to cover all important aspects. In this theme, novel solutions in the domains of e-health, care coordination, shifting responsibilities, value driven care, and data-usage, are envisioned to play a role in finding a balance between prevention and care and cure delivery.

Aletta IV: Mental Health

Two tracks have been identified within the theme of mental health for this year's round.

Iva: Mental health problems in childhood and adolescence in a changing society

Most mental health problems have their start in childhood and adolescence. These include problems with aggression, depression or anxiety as well as neurodevelopmental problems such as ADHD, autism, learning disabilities and early psychotic experiences. Mental health

problems in childhood and adolescence often have long-lasting adverse health, social and economic consequences across the lifespan. Children and adolescents with mental health problems and their parents often face stigma and social exclusion which may, in turn, evoke self-stigma and low self-esteem. Preventing mental health problems, reducing their severity and promoting wellbeing are especially important during this period of development. Major changes in society (e.g., pandemics, climate change, digitalization, inflation) may make youth who are already at risk of developing mental health problems extra vulnerable. For example, the digital revolution requires on the one hand that youth and their parents have adequate digital literacy, i.e., have the skills to live and learn in a digital society; at the same time, digital technologies introduce risks, such as cyberbullying, exposure to fake content, and social distancing. Also, pandemics and climate change may make some youth and young adults excessively worried, hopeless and sad about the future while parents or peers cannot take away these real threats. As a final example, inflation and increasing costs in daily living may make it impossible for some children and adolescents to participate in sports or other leisure time activities and reduce chances in (higher) education leading to anger, loneliness and inequality. These problems are complex. We welcome innovative, multidisciplinary, PhD research proposals focused on any aspect(s) of societal change in relation to child and adolescent mental health problems that have the potential to yield new insights and/or that may (ultimately) contribute to solutions.

IVb: Work-life Conflict and Mental Health Problems

Mental health problems in the working population are increasing. Employees more often experience decreased job and life satisfaction, may feel exhausted and may develop serious mental health problems. This causes a lot of personal suffering and puts the sustainability of their company's economic interests at risk. Working mothers with competing demands of caring for the family and paid work are a well-known risk group. Although less often studied, this also holds for fathers with these responsibilities. Furthermore, the pressure of an increasingly demanding work culture has been identified as a driver of work-life conflict and mental health problems. This change in the work culture is due in part to the intensification of work, which results in "work overload" and contributes to an increase in working time demands, such as evening work and weekend work. Work contact during leisure time is facilitated by "constant availability" due to work-related use of mobile information and communication technology. It can be easy to "normalize" working long hours or being always available, especially if colleagues do the same thing, through which positive work engagement may lead to compulsory workaholism. High working time demands might increase partner dissatisfaction and partner's mental health problems and when experienced by both partners, a poor work-life balance may also impair family wellbeing as a whole. These problems are complex. We welcome innovative, multidisciplinary, PhD research proposals focused on any aspects of work-life conflict that have the potential to yield new insights into the problem and/or that may (ultimately) contribute to solutions.

Aletta V: Healthy Cities

The city environment is an important determinant of urban population health. The World Health Organisation launched a programme 'health in all policies' approach in which non-medical interventions are central. The role of architectural and other urban interventions can play a key role in pursuing health-related policies and create a balance between medical and non-medical approaches. However, no comprehensive instruments have been developed so far to tackle the challenges of this synergy. The scale which

has been recognised as the most promising for pursuing healthy cities policies, is the neighbourhood. Therefore, for this theme, we welcome proposals which explore, on an interdisciplinary level, how the city environment, and neighbourhoods in particular, can contribute to population health. We are looking for interventions that foster a health-supportive environment and a good quality of life.

Agricola I: Democracy and Governance: “Rebuilding trust between citizens and their elected representatives”

The Covid-19 pandemic created a series of shocks in our societies. Disinformation regarding the vaccines was widely spread, conspiracy theories were shared and sometimes even embraced by politicians, and the role of non-elected experts in the decision-making process (to introduce lockdowns, for instance) was questioned by a sizeable part of the population. These issues all have an impact on political trust. In some countries, governments have attempted to bridge the gap between citizens and politicians by organizing or even institutionalizing new modes of participatory and/or deliberative democratic tools. The impact that such initiatives may have on political trust is yet to be fully investigated. This PhD theme focuses on the issue of political trust and the initiatives taken to bridge the gap between citizens and politicians. Comparative approaches are strongly encouraged. While trust should be at the core of the project, proposals should also have a clear tie with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals 10 (Reducing income and other inequalities) and 16 (Inclusive societies, strong institutions, and equal access to justice).

Agricola II: Risk, Crises and Resilience: “Preparedness and prevention of cascading disasters”

The climate emergency and the systemic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic point to a new reality in which understanding and reducing disaster risk in a world of uncertainty is fundamental to achieving genuinely sustainable development. Cascading disasters (also called complex, compound and multiple), like the Tohoku earthquake and Fukushima nuclear plant failure, are extreme events in which cascading effects increase in progression over time and generate unexpected secondary events, often threatening the fabric of society. Interdisciplinary research (sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, computer science, earth sciences) is needed in order to explore the antecedents (individual and collective) and consequences of cascading disasters. We welcome PhD proposals that focus on the multiple dimensions of cascading disasters, aim to investigate the micro-macro mechanisms involved in preparedness and prevention of cascading disasters, and have a practice-oriented focus.

Agricola III: Development and Security: “Global crises and illicit trade patterns”

The world has experienced a number of dramatic shocks that have severely impacted international trade, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Responses across the globe reveal a decreased focus on trade liberalization and a tendency to prioritize strategic autonomy, often through the (re-) introduction of protective measures like sanctions. These unprecedented attempts to regulate international trade have created opportunities for illicit trade practices to thrive. We welcome PhD proposals that investigate the changing nature of illicit trade that emerged from these recent crises. We are interested in both theoretical and empirically-driven interdisciplinary approaches to studying the phenomena of illicit trade, including the smuggling and trafficking of goods

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and money, the actors, norms, and regulations that underpin these activities, and the responses to them, such as enforcement, alternative measures, regulation, and legalization. PhD proposals could explore new forms of illicit trade, the norms and rules of the international trade regime, the role of emerging technologies in sustaining and countering illicit trade practices, as well as their consequences for security, safety, and sustainability.

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