

Joint PhD Call 2024
Strategic International Partnership
Universidad Central 'Marta Abreu' de las Villas
& Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Objectives of the call

- To strengthen the scientific collaboration between VUB and UCLV by means of joint research of mutual interest, through individual PhD-scholarships.
- To strengthen interdisciplinary research cooperation between VUB and UCLV.
- To promote interdisciplinary doctoral research.

Practicalities

Budget	<p>The call awards one to two scholarships from 6 to maximum 10 (consecutive) months. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monthly allowance of 1,900 EUR (including accommodation and insurance); • return plane ticket (economy); <p>extra costs (if justified e.g. indirect travel costs, transport costs in Belgium, max. 200 EUR)</p>
Admission to the PhD programme	<p>The candidate must have obtained official permission for enrolment in the PhD programme from the home university (UCLV). These documents are part of the candidate's application. When selected, the candidate must register at the VUB for all years until the defence.</p> <p>Institutional link</p> <p>Considering the aim of this programme, to strengthen institutional collaboration, the candidate must be registered as a PhD candidate at the UCLV.</p> <p>Language and proficiency</p> <p>The application must be written in English. The candidate should have successfully completed one of the following language proficiency tests, corresponding to the Common European Framework of Reference with minimum level B2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOEFL iBT with minimum level: 79; • IELTS with minimum level: academic module 6.5; • ITACE with minimum level: B2; • Cambridge Certificate of Advanced English (CAE), grade B; • Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE), grade C; • Graduated from an English-taught master's programme; • Interview by the VUB-supervisor confirming that the candidate has sufficient English language skills. <p>Promotors/supervisors</p> <p>The application should be supported by both the UCLV supervisor and the VUB supervisor. Both supervisors must provide a letter of acceptance.</p>

	The VUB and UCLV supervisors must be eligible to supervise PhD students in accordance with the relevant regulations of each university.
Required documents & application procedure	<p>The application consists of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A completed electronic application form (maximum 12 pages); 2. A copy of the diplomas obtained: university degree, equivalent to a Flemish master's degree (obtained after minimum 4 years of university study); 3. Transcripts of academic records (mark sheets) of all the academic years; 4. Confirmation from UCLV that the candidate is registered with the institution and eligible to enrol in the PhD programme; 5. Letter of recommendation and short CV (2-3 pages) from the UCLV supervisor; 6. Letter of recommendation and short CV (2-3 pages) of the supervisor at VUB supervisor; 7. A 2-page motivational letter from the PhD-student; 8. Proof of proficiency in the English language; 9. The PhD-student's CV; 10. If applicable, certificates from ethical commissions; 11. If applicable, certificates from biosafety commissions. <p>The application package must be submitted jointly by the VUB and UCLV supervisors via email.</p>
Launch of call	18 March 2024
Deadline submission	10 May 2024 (17:00 Brussels – 11:00 Santa Clara)
Grants available	Maximum 2 grants will be available for this call. Priority will be given to truly interdisciplinary propositions.
Submission via email	lucas.melgaco@vub.be and raciello@uclv.edu.cu

Selection criteria

Potential topics for interdisciplinary PhDs (other topics are also welcome, as long as they have a clear interdisciplinary approach):

- *Sciences and Engineering/ Humanities* AI & Law Experts from sciences and engineering can work with the counterparts from Law to look at how artificial intelligence and automated decision-making is used or can be used in a legal environment and what kind of consequences this entail on issues such as standards of proof, accountability, responsibility, effective over-sight, privacy and data protection, due process, fair trial and access to justice, remedies and effective redress.
- *Humanities/Computer Sciences* Social scientists in the domains of Criminology and urban studies together with computer scientists can work together in smart cities platforms and applications to foster the involvement of citizens in the governance and monitoring of nuisances and crimes.
- *Humanities/Computer Sciences* Computer scientists and data experts can work together with social scientists on the development of new methodologies such as data mining and social media analysis for the understanding of social phenomena.

- *Humanities/Engineering* Social scientists and engineers can work together on the development of new methodologies such as prediction and optimization for charging infrastructure for electric and autonomous vehicles.
- *Life Sciences/Humanities* research project on the interface of plant biotechnology and social sciences/law. Past, present and future collaborations with UCLV concern biotechnological approaches to improve various crops (bean, banana, medicinal plants, citrus). We would be interested in interdisciplinary research allowing new varieties to be introduced in the Cuban food production system. This may include: assessment of potential impact of new varieties and technologies; perception by farmers, producers, and the general public of new technologies; the legal frameworks governing new technologies, in particular genome editing in Cuba and in an international context.
- *Life Sciences/Humanities*: Crop identification (traditional varieties) and new varieties and geographic origin (GI) protection under international and bilateral treaties to support local communities (esp. in EU-Cuba relations). GI recognition provides a monopoly right for a local community to sell food products under a regional name thereby offering higher prices in exchange for maintaining certain standards and practices.
- *Life Sciences/Humanities* Intellectual Property Rights on seeds reviewing the need for innovation and commercial viability of research and innovation with the protection of heritage varieties and the human rights of farmers to harvest and reuse seeds.
- *Life Sciences/Humanities* Developing ecosystems in support of sustainable food production.
- *Sciences and Engineering/ Humanities* Computer science and AI to support sustainable development goals, contributing to smart water and smart energy. This connects to the recently founded FARI institute.
- *Life Sciences/Sciences and Engineering/ Humanities* Computer science, AI and sustainable food production to support sustainable development of sport sciences.

Selection criteria

The selection is a competitive process organised by the Steering Committee of the SIP UCLV and VUB (with final decision by the Raad voor Internationaal Beleid VUB) and based on the assessment of the quality of the proposal from an academic and organisational point of view.

The proposal should be **interdisciplinary** and have **developmental-relevance**: the objectives of the proposal should be consistent with the beneficiaries' requirements (Agenda 2030 & SDGs), Cuba's needs (see [country reference frameworks](#)), synergy and complementary opportunities, local ownership. For the developmental aspects, the Theory of Change can be used as a methodology (alternative methodologies are accepted). The proposal should strengthen the SIP UCLV VUB.

The selection is primarily based on the following criteria:

1. **Quality**: the proposal is **interdisciplinary** and is well-structured (content, form, innovative, creative, realistic, ...).
2. **Effectiveness**: the proposal's objectives are achievable, considering the planned activities and the connected deliverables/results.
3. **Efficiency**: "Value for money", how resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to deliverables/results; justified and reasonable budget.

4. **Impact:** Potential positive and negative effects of the planned activities, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended, for the applicant, the VUB and UCLV and especially their cooperation as well as for the wider society.
5. **Sustainability** The continuation of benefits and/or cooperation after the activities have been completed (institutional, technical, social, political and/or environmental sustainability)
6. **Relevance:** The contribution to capacity-building at the VUB and UCLV and strengthen the SIP UCLV VUB.

Selection procedure

Step 1: The coordinators of the SIP perform an eligibility check.

Step 2: All eligible applications are sent to the selection committee (SIP disciplinary project leaders).

Step 3: The selection committee select maximum 10 applications for an online interview.

Step 4: The selection committee selects and advises the RIB on the selection results.

Step 5: The RIB makes the final decision.

The following time-frame is set:

Date	Action	Responsible
14 February 2024	Call approved by Steering Committee	SIP Coordinators
18 March 2024	Call is launched via disciplinary project leaders	SIP Coordinators
10 May 2024 (17:00 Brussels – 11:00 Santa Clara)	Deadline for applications. Proposals must be submitted via email to both SIP coordinators lucas.melgaco@vub.be and raciello@uclv.edu.cu	VUB and UCLV supervisors
1 June 2024	Eligibility check by SIP Coordinators and pre-selection of the max 10 candidates for an online interview.	Coordinators and evaluation committee
End June 2024	Online interviews and suggestion of a ranking of the selected candidates to the RIB	Coordinators and evaluation committee
10 September 2024	Final approval by the RIB	RIB

Selection outcome

All applicants will receive an e-mail with the selection outcome at the latest 2 weeks after the RIB selection. Detailed feedback by the selection committee will be provided in that email.

Final report

A narrative report must be submitted one month after the end of the project. The reports must be sent electronically to lucas.melgaco@vub.be and raciello@uclv.edu.cu.