University of East London – Research Excellence PhD Studentships

The University of East London (UEL) invites applications from highly qualified and motivated students for a Research Excellence PhD Studentship starting in September 2024. The Research Excellence PhD Studentships are the premier postgraduate merit studentship at UEL and provide full tuition fees and a generous stipend.

Founded in 1898, we at the University of East London (UEL) are proud to change lives through education, research and knowledge exchange. Our 10-year strategy, Vision 2028 is to advance industry 5.0 careers-first education and provide a clear path to the jobs and opportunities of the future. We're committed to driving diversity in the 5.0 talent pipeline, working in partnership to promote talent wherever it is found and creating a balanced, inclusive, and green future.

UEL is an innovative academic community, delivering high-quality applied research that is impact-led, intellectually stimulating, socially relevant and for public good. UEL's research efforts are shaped by its location, East London, one of the most diverse regions in the UK undergoing rapid urban transformation that presents both challenges and opportunities for thinking and acting on the city's future. In addition, London is at the heart of a rich global landscape and UEL is entwined into this landscape through its research engagement with areas of central and local government, science, technology, education, health, and arts.

The Research Excellence PhD Studentships are central to the University's strategy to enhance the research volume, quality and impact and part of our investment in research people, culture and environment. At UEL, PhD researchers will be supported by a community of supervisors committed to their timely progress and development as professional researchers with publishable outputs. All postgraduate research students at the University of East London benefit from a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme designed specifically for PGRs to support them to develop academic and professional skills and an understanding of key doctoral milestones. The programme consists of three key strands:

Researcher-Ready: This strand of training focuses on helping PGRs navigate the doctoral journey while developing key skills in research design, research theory, ethics, and academic writing.

Empowering Researchers: This strand of the RDP focuses on peer-to-peer mentoring, ideas sharing, wellbeing, and community.

Pioneering Researchers: This strand of training focuses on employability skills, entrepreneurship, and knowledge exchange for academic, industry, alternative career paths.

The School of Arts and Creative Industries

The research will be hosted by UEL's School of Arts and Creative Industries (ACI).

Research students and staff in ACI are active in areas ranging from film studies to cultural theory, the performing arts, and art and design. Their research is embedded in our East London location and issues of diversity and marginalisation, cultural and social regeneration, social justice and community cohesion, are central themes. We aim to question and illuminate, and to engage students and the wider community as well as academic staff in the excitement of discovery and debate both in scholarly publications and creative practice research.

About the Studentship:

Proposed Project Title: Hyperhumanism, Technology and the Human Condition.

Project Summary: Hyperhumanism examines how technology can help us transform the human condition. Transhumanism requires us to become dependent on technology which subverts our ability to develop the skills for ourselves, in contrast, Hyperhumanism uses technology as a catalyst for developing our own innate human abilities.

Industry Partner: Vivo Barefoot, Netflix

Research Context: The researcher will propose a project that looks at the theoretical, practical and ethical implications of the development of hybrid technologies for perceptual, cognitive and creative transformation of the human experience. It will engage with the research of Carl Hayden Smith, and particularly his concept of 'Hyperhumanism', which reframes technology as a catalyst for developing our own innate human abilities.

The proposal should focus on one of many possible broad themes relating to technology and the human condition. All research, however, should address the concern

> **how can discoveries made at the research level be applied to the active development and use of digital technologies?**

Carl's research interests include Embodied Cognition, Spatial Literacy, Context Engineering, Umwelt Hacking, Natural Media, Sensory Augmentation, Extended Senses and Embodiment. Possible starting points for research questions include:

- How will the rise of immersive environments through Sensory Augmentation, Ontological Design, VR and XR change the human experience and what are the potential implications? How does this impact our imagination, both in terms of the creation and experience of imaginary worlds?

- What is the ethical role of volumetric capture studios in the construction of immersive environments, and what steps should be taken in the development and sustained use of said studios?

- How do wearable tech or other forms of hybrid immersive engagement change our experience of ourselves, our communities and the world around us?

- How do we use technology to change our senses, creating a more advanced human experience and what are the ethical implications of doing so?

- There has been an explosion of immersive technologies such as VR, AR and MR (Mixed Reality) that allow us to extend the possible realities we can reach. This provides us with a whole new toolkit for transforming the senses. What are the ethical implications of the development of technologies for metaprogramming and self-transformation? How can developers account for the subjective experience of transformation?

- There is a need for fresh human creativity in order for AI models to flourish, what kind of approaches can be developed to create an ethical and impactful collaboration between digital futures and human experience?

- Much of the technology being developed separates us from our natural environment. What is the role of natural media in relation to these technologies? How does natural media counter linear perspectives? How can these technologies bring greater attention to our environments, and the actors, human and non-human, with whom we inhabit them together?

Essential to the project, will be including the generation and tracking of "impact" as part of the developed methodology:

- How can the reach and significance of this type of work be demonstrated in a way that shows the change it has contributed to the world?

- How could other companies, artists or community groups, generate and track impact through this kind of work?

- What is the role of impact tracking, and how do current methods, possibly applied from other fields, serve or not serve the needs of this kind of work?

While your research methodology does not need to be developed as part of the proposal, you should indicate how you will develop your methodology in relation to your already existing research or practice.

Keywords

Community practice, cyberdelics, technology, immersive technology, AI,

Research Methods and Timeline

Year 1
- Desk-based research:
- survey/review literature
- Industry Partnership secured
- Development of methodological framework
- Ethics process and review

Year 2
- Continued fieldwork: gathering and analysing data on current impact-evaluation practices, e.g. workshops, interviews, focus groups, ethnographic observations;
- Continued desk-based research: practices of comparable companies;
- Workshops or practice based/research as dictated by your project.

Year 3/4
- Write up, including the development of practical, high-quality resources that can be used by stakeholders as a result of the research project.
- Expectation of 1 peer-reviewed publication, co-authored with a REF eligible employee

Some examples of relevant publications:

Smith, CH and M. Warner, 'Cyberdelics: Context engineering psychedelics for altered traits', Electronic Visualisation & the Arts, *Proceedings*. London, July 2022.

Funding

The studentship is for a period of three years including fees and an annual stipend of £20,622 (2023/2024), plus a training bursary of £2,000. The candidate will be expected to complete the full application and admissions process to start September 2024.

Additional Information

Find out more about the School of Arts and Creative Industries:
https://uel.ac.uk/about/our-schools/school-arts-creative-industries

The PhD Process:
https://uel.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/mphil-phd-school-arts-creative-industries

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Informal enquiries about the studentships should be addressed in the first instance to: ACIstudentships@uel.ac.uk

The closing date for applications is 1st July 2024. Shortlisting will take place by 8th July. Interviews will take place during the week commencing 15th July. If you are successful at interview and offered a studentship you will be directed to complete the UEL application process [further information is available at – School specific course page]

Criteria:

Evidence of sustained commitment to Drama, Theatre and Performance particularly in relation to community engagement and impact.

BA qualification or equivalent

A Masters degree, MRes or MA or equivalent

Aptitude and experience in primary research and/or action research.

Evidence of strong organizational ability.

Proposals:
Your application should include:
- 1-page proposal detailing the focus and conceptual framework you would like to use to contribute to the project as laid out in the advert, your potential theoretical and contextual literature(s).
- 1-page personal statement detailing the experience and skills you will bring to the project.
- Maximum 1-page CV.
- Please provide contact details for 2 referees, at least one of whom can attest to your relevant academic research potential or professional practice skills.