



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

AREA
FORMAZIONE E DOTTORATO

PHD PROGRAMME TABLE

Call for applications for the admission to the PhD programmes (42nd cycle) - A.Y. 2026/2027
Second round

Sections "Available Positions and Scholarships" and "Research Fields" integrated on 27/05/2026

PROGRAMME'S NAME	PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, COGNITION AND SEMIOTICS (PSCS)
DURATION	3 years
PROGRAMME START DATE	01/11/2026 (DD/MM/YYYY)
LANGUAGES	Italian, English
COORDINATOR	Prof. Luisa Lugli (l.lugli@unibo.it)
CURRICULA	1. Philosophy and Science Studies 2. Semiotics 3. Cognitive Science
PhD POSITIONS	8
ADMISSION PROCEDURE	Qualifications and research proposal evaluation Oral examination

Available Positions and Scholarships

Pos. n.	Financial Support	Description	Positions linked to a specific research topic
1	PhD Scholarship	Totally funded by the University of Bologna general budget	
2	PhD Scholarship	Totally funded by the University of Bologna general budget	
3	PhD Scholarship	Totally funded by the University of Bologna general budget	
4	PhD Scholarship	Funded by the University of Bologna general budget and by the Dept. of Philosophy	
5	PhD Scholarship	Funded by the Dept. of Philosophy with funds made available by the ERC project Synergy MOSAIC CUP J53C23004070006 (prof. Matteo Martelli)	Occult sciences in the Byzantine and Syriac traditions
6	PhD Scholarship	Funded by the Dept. of Philosophy in partnership with Fondazione Fossoli	The democratic agency of sites of memory and their impact on the public sphere: the case of the Fondazione Fossoli
7	PhD Scholarship	Funded by Consorzio Interuniversitario Nazionale per l'Informatica - CINI	Neuro-symbolic AI for Pragmatic Representation and Reasoning in Natural Language
8	PhD Scholarship	Funded by the University of Bologna general budget and by the Dept. of Philosophy	Contemporary semiotics

The yearly gross amount of the scholarships awarded for the PhD Programme in “Philosophy, science, cognition and semiotics” is €16,982.64.

All winners of PhD positions must fulfil the study and research obligations decided by the Academic Board, as well as the obligations set out in the relevant regulations, in the call for applications, in the funding schemes and in any agreements relating to specific positions.

Admission Exams

	DATE AND TIME	RESULTS
Qualifications and research proposal evaluation	Applicants’ participation is not required	Available from 03/07/2026
Oral examination	Date: starting from 08/07/2026 – 9.00 a.m. CEST Place: In presence, Sala Rossa, Via Azzo Gardino 23, Bologna. Remotely, using Microsoft Teams	Available from 20/07/2026

The results of the qualifications and research proposal evaluation, as well as the oral examination detailed schedule, shall be available on the webpage [Studenti Online](#) (select “requests in progress” > “see detail” and open the .pdf file at the bottom of the page). No personal written communication will be sent to applicants concerning the examinations results.

During the oral examination, applicants may express their interest in one or more PhD positions linked to specific research topics.

Required and Supporting Documents to be attached to the application

Only documents in Italian or English will be considered valid and will be assessed by the Admission Board. Identity documents and diplomas/degree certificates issued in a language other than Italian or English must be accompanied by an official translation. The translation must be carried out by an authorized body or by the awarding university. Only qualifications obtained in the last 5 years will be taken into account, with the exception of university degrees. The Admission Board will assess the relevance of the supporting documents to the PhD programme.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS	
Identity document	Valid identity document with photo (i.e. identity card, passport)
Curriculum Vitae	No specific CV format is required
Degrees	Documents attesting the awarding of the first and second cycle degrees, the exams taken and the marks obtained (see Art. 3 of the Call for Applications)
Research proposal	Multi-annual research proposal, with special emphasis on the activities to be completed during the first-year course. The proposal must meet the following requirements: - it cannot exceed 20,000 characters, including spaces and formula possibly used. This figure does not include: the title of proposal, the outline, references and images (such as graphs, diagrams, tables, etc. - if present); - it must include: the state of the art; description of the proposal; expected results; articulation of the proposal and implementation times; references. We recommend that, on the title page, should the candidate wish to do so, they state the title of the curriculum and/or the topic-specific position to which the project relates. In accordance with the University's policy on the ethical and responsible use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in teaching and research activities, candidates must explicitly state whether they have used Generative Artificial Intelligence systems in the production of the research proposal attached to their application form, specifying which tools were used and for which parts of the document. During the oral examination, the Admission Board will assess the candidate's full mastery of the content included in the document and their ability to justify the methodological and scientific choices made in the project.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS	
Reference letter/s	No more than 2 reference letters signed by Italian and international academics and professionals in the research field, which do not form part of the Admission Board, attesting the suitability of the applicant and his/her interest in the scientific research. Letters shall be uploaded following the procedure detailed in the Call for Applications (Art. 3.2).
Personal statement	This must include the reasons prompting the applicant to attend the PhD Programme and those relevant experiences and research interests , that make the applicant suitable for the specific PhD Programme (3,000 characters maximum, including spaces).
Publications	Lists of publications (i.e. monographs, articles on scientific journals), minor publications and abstracts.
Other documents	- Postgraduate vocational training programmes and/or specialisation programmes relevant to the PhD Programme main research topics - Teaching and tutorship activity carried out at academic level - Research activity of any kind - whether basic, applied, translational, etc. - carried out in any capacity, including when covered by research grants, and as a staff member of research projects - Documents attesting the applicant's foreign languages proficiency - Periods of study abroad, completed by applicants outside their countries of origin (e.g. Erasmus programme or other similar mobility programmes) - Other qualifications attesting the suitability of the applicants (scholarships, prizes, etc.)

Evaluation criteria*

Scores will be expressed in points out of 100.

1. Qualifications and research proposal evaluation

Minimum score for admission to the oral examination: 30 points, Maximum score: 50 points

Qualifications evaluation	Second cycle (Master's) degrees final mark. Graduands shall be evaluated according to the Weighted Average Mark (WAM)	10 points max
	Publications	5 points max
	Other evaluable documents	5 points max
Research proposal evaluation	Scientific value and ground-breaking nature of the proposal	14 points max
	Structure of the proposal	8 points max
	Proposal feasibility	8 points max

2. Oral examination

Minimum score for eligibility: 30 points, Maximum score 50 points

English language proficiency	10 points max
Research proposal presentation	10 points max
Theoretic and methodological knowledge of the PhD programme's main research topics and of the research topics linked to the available PhD positions, suitability of the applicant for scientific research	10 points max

Oral examination aims to assess the suitability of the applicant for scientific research as well as the general knowledge of the PhD programme's main research topics and of the research topics linked to the available PhD positions. **During the oral examination, the applicants's English language proficiency shall be assessed.**

The oral examination is carried out in Italian or English.

* Possible further evaluation criteria will be available on the [University website](#), selecting the relevant PhD Programme > "More information".

Research Fields

Pos. 5 - PhD position with a scholarship funded by the Dept. of Philosophy with funds made available by the ERC project Synergy MOSAIC CUP J53C23004070006 (prof. Matteo Martelli) – research topic "Occult sciences in the Byzantine and Syriac traditions"

The PhD will be carried out within the framework of the ERC Synergy Grant project MOSAIC: Mapping Occult Sciences across the Islamicate World. MOSAIC is the first major project to investigate Islamic and Eastern Christian sources on

the occult sciences across a broad linguistic continuum, including Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. The project aims to bring about a paradigm shift by disentangling the term “occult” in all its diversity and by testing a comprehensive definition capable of accounting for the specific epistemologies underlying its multifarious applications. Our approach will uncover new pathways of transmission and cross-pollination of occult-scientific writings across the Islamicate world and Byzantium, thereby restoring a vast textual and material record to historical memory.

Within MOSAIC, the present position will focus on one of the following research areas:

- (1) the role and classification of the occult sciences in the Syriac tradition;
- (2) prognostic manuals in the Byzantine and/or Syriac traditions (with a particular focus on unedited material);
- (3) geomancy in the Syriac and/or Byzantine traditions.

Pos. 6 - PhD position with a scholarship funded by the Dept. of Philosophy in partnership with Fondazione Fossoli – research topic “The democratic agency of sites of memory and their impact on the public sphere: the case of the Fondazione Fossoli”

This PhD research project is situated within a broader initiative promoted by the Fondazione Fossoli concerning the role and democratic agency that institutions devoted to memory practices and to the preservation and enhancement of memorial sites can exercise in contemporary society. In particular, the project focuses on the Fondazione Fossoli and the memorial sites under its care, including the Fossoli Camp and the Monument Museum to the Political and Racial Deportee of Carpi.

The project aims to investigate how a memorial institution can today operate as an agent of active memory capable of exerting an impact on contemporary democratic life, rather than merely functioning as a “guardian of memory” responsible for the static preservation of the past. Instead, the focus is on understanding how such institutions may act concretely and effectively within education, public institutions, and society at large.

Drawing on an interdisciplinary perspective grounded in semiotics, philosophy, and memory studies — while also engaging with history, sociology, digital humanities, and artificial intelligence — the research will examine both the impact and the sphere of influence of the cultural policies implemented by institutions such as the Fondazione Fossoli. Particular attention will be devoted both to the enhancement and public use of memorial sites, including visitors’ experiences and forms of engagement, and to the cultural, educational, and training initiatives promoted by the Foundation throughout its thirty-year history (<https://www.fondazionefossoli.org>).

The project is expected to engage critically with the concepts of transit, transition, and translation, understood as theoretical entry points for interrogating the role of the Fossoli Camp, both in relation to its historical function as a “camp” (namely, a prison camp, concentration camp, police and transit camp, forced labor collection center, and, in the postwar period, a reception center for “undesirable” refugees, as well as the site of Nomadelfia and later the Villaggio San Marco for Istrian-Dalmatian refugees) and as a complex discursive space in which memory, while firmly anchored in historical evidence, is continuously renegotiated and translated, not merely by fixing images of the past, but by shaping visions of the present and the future.

Starting from this specificity, the PhD project is expected to explore possible ways of evaluating and measuring the impact that an institution of this kind, through its multiple activities, exerts on contemporary public life. The project may also propose new initiatives and future perspectives, including through comparison with comparable national and international institutions.

Historically, the Fossoli Camp paradigmatically embodies the difficult legacy of the historical and juridical category of transit, understood as a form of suspension and exception (not only of law). From this perspective, the “memorial system” of the Fondazione Fossoli as a whole (including the Fossoli Camp, the Monument Museum to the Political and Racial Deportee, the nineteenth-century Synagogue of Carpi, and the Primo Levi Study and Documentation Center) constitutes a privileged observatory for reflecting on some of the contemporary forms of transit/transition/translation currently traversing European democracies, such as the crisis of rights, forced migration, the so-called “externalization of borders”, institutional violence, armed conflicts, forms of exclusion, and regimes of juridical suspension.

The project therefore aims to investigate the past, intervene critically in the present, and imagine future perspectives by combining different methodological approaches and perspectives on public engagement practices, education for democratic citizenship, and the enhancement and communication of memorial heritage.

Pos. 7 - PhD position with a scholarship funded by Consorzio Interuniversitario Nazionale per l’Informatica - CINI – research topic “Neuro-symbolic AI for Pragmatic Representation and Reasoning in Natural Language”

The increasing diffusion of artificial intelligence systems based on neural models (e.g., large language models) has highlighted significant limitations in handling the pragmatic dimension of language, including aspects such as communicative intentions, implicit meanings, context, and situated use. This research topic aims to investigate, from a theoretical and interdisciplinary perspective, the conditions for the possibility of a neuro-symbolic artificial intelligence approach to the representation and reasoning of pragmatics.

In particular, the project seeks to integrate neural models for natural language processing with symbolic representations grounded in ontologies and knowledge graphs, in light of major philosophical and cognitive models of pragmatics, such as speech act theory, conversational implicatures, and models of mind (e.g., Active Inference).

The aim is to contribute to the design and critical evaluation of hybrid architectures capable not only of processing language in formal terms, but also of making explicit the intentional and contextual structures that guide its use. In this perspective, the research will focus on the possibility of formalizing pragmatic context and agents' intentions, modeling forms of pragmatic inference such as implicatures and presuppositions and reflecting on the limits and epistemological implications of interpretability and reliability in artificial intelligence systems. Particular attention will also be devoted to the role of such models in enabling forms of human-machine interaction that are sensitive to the situated and social dimensions of language.

The research topic is developed within the framework of the ongoing collaboration between the unit of the National Interuniversity Consortium for Informatics (CINI) at the University of Bologna and the Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies of the National Research Council of Italy, established in the context of the project Fostering Open Science in Social Science Research (FOSSR).

Pos. 8 - PhD position with a scholarship funded by the University of Bologna general budget and by the Dept. of Philosophy – research topic “Contemporary semiotics”

The main aim of this position is to develop original and groundbreaking research in the fields of semiotics and philosophy of language, without restrictions regarding the research topic, while articulating innovative theoretical, methodological, and applied perspectives for the analysis of processes of signification and meaning-making. The proposed research should engage with contemporary cultural concerns, including, but not limited to, artificial intelligence, cultural memory, environmental crises, new technologies, cognition, ordinary and pathological modes of experience, among others, identifying their semiotic relevance and developing analytical methodologies capable of opening new approaches to these problems and fostering further developments within the discipline. Theoretical and methodological research aimed at advancing the concepts and methodologies of the field is also welcome, with particular attention to interpretative semiotics and post-Eco semiotics.

Candidates are free to propose their own object of study and are encouraged to develop a high-risk, high-benefit research project. Possible research directions may concern, by way

of example only: the relationships between psychopathology and artificial intelligence, including the use of language models as tools of mediation or intervention; the connections between cultural trauma, memory, and climate crisis; the intersections between infrastructures of knowledge and artificial intelligence systems; the interactions between psychopathological configurations of experience and environmental transformations; the role of language technologies in processes of construction, transformation, and regulation of meaning; and the relations between cultural semiotics and forms of creativity in contexts of crisis.