



PhD program in Education in Contemporary Society (ESC)

Brochure for International and Exchange PHD Students



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University of Milano-Bicocca

Welcome to [University of Milano-Bicocca](#), one of Italy's most established and forward-thinking public universities. Located in the Bicocca district in the northern area of Milan, the university emerged from the redevelopment of a former industrial zone once home to major manufacturing companies. Over time, this area has been transformed into a distinguished academic and scientific centre, representing one of the most significant urban regeneration projects in Italy.

Since its foundation, the University of Milano-Bicocca has steadily built a strong academic reputation, combining solid disciplinary traditions with an openness to innovation and international collaboration. Today, it stands as a mature institution rooted in the cultural and economic life of Milan, while continuing to look toward the future with ambition and responsibility.

With 28 buildings spread across Milan, Monza, the Maldives, and Uganda, the University of Milano-Bicocca offers a diverse and international academic environment. The main campus buildings are located in the northeast of Milan, close to the Greco Pirelli railway station, ensuring excellent transport connections and easy access to the city centre and surrounding regions.

Our history

In the late 1980s, the academic bodies of the University of Milan set out a program designed to obtain new premises to use for innovative research activities in strategic sectors and extend the teaching offering to fields of discipline that were absent from the local public institutions. Through the 1991-93 three-year plan announced by Minister Ruberti, the Ministry of Universities and Scientific Research unveiled plans to split universities with over 40,000 alumni in order to better organise its multi-year development plans and bring about decongestion. The University of Milan – which was identified as one of the large universities in need of decongesting – was authorised to set up additional university hubs in the local urban area. Hence, in September 1993, the Municipality of Milan ruled that the Bicocca area would be the location of the new University of Milan hub.

In 1998, the premises of the old Pirelli factory were turned into a state-of-the-art complex encompassing modern research laboratories, expansive study areas and communal areas for students. On June the 10th of the same year, the second University of Milan was established by Ministerial Decree. A subsequent decree of 9 July 1998 appointed the Steering Committee, which would remain in place until the constitution of an Academic Senate and Board of Directors. A third Ministerial Decree on 12 March 1999 changed the name of the university to the University of Milano-Bicocca and altered the composition of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee remained in place until 30 October 1999, enacting the functions of the Academic Senate and Board of Directors. In the space of a year and a half, it was able to fulfil all requirements set out by the decree that established the university, as well as organising elections for the position of Rector and the Board of Directors. On 1 November 1999, the current Academic Bodies were introduced. On 12 October 2000, elections were announced for the Integrated Academic Senate, which engaged in detailed discussions before producing the university Statute, which was approved by Rectoral Decree 06243 on 11 June 2003 and published in the Official Gazette on 2 July 2003.



The University in Numbers

Number of students: ca. 40.000

Number of international students: ca.2.200

Number of Departments: 14

Number of degrees: 84 (among bachelor's degree, masters' degree, single-cycle degree)

Employment rate – 87.3% for Master's degree and 84.6% for Bachelor's degree one year after graduation – 92.3% for Master's degree five years after graduation (latest Almalaurea data from 2025).





Department of Human Sciences for Education “Riccardo Massa”

The [Department of Human Sciences for Education “Riccardo Massa”](#) (DISUF) was established in 1999 by Riccardo Massa, a distinguished educator and philosopher of education. From its inception, the Department has been characterized by its multidisciplinary approach.

Education and training, in their many forms, constitute one of the core focus of the Department’s research, teaching, and third mission activities. These complex phenomena require a multidisciplinary lens to ensure a nuanced understanding that avoids oversimplification. This approach integrates different disciplines, scientific traditions, and epistemological perspectives. This complexity is reflected in the diverse research areas within the Department, spanning traditional “educational sciences” – including pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, and sociology – as well as anthropology, geography, history, Italian literature, linguistics, Arabic and Oriental languages, organizational studies, and select artistic disciplines. Here the human sciences critically engage with educational and formative phenomena, exploring their cultural, social, historical, pedagogical, material, organizational, and expressive dimensions from multiple angles.

The aim is to foster not only a multidisciplinary context but also an interdisciplinary one, as highlighted by the Excellence project 2023–2027 of the Department. The Department’s long-term goal is to enhance and support dialogue among disciplines, constructing a knowledge base “for” education and training. This knowledge serves both the professional profiles developed through the Department’s academic programs and the broader community, offering critically aware research and sophisticated tools for intervention across various sectors, including schools, the third sector (e.g., associations, educational, social, and healthcare services), and businesses, at both national and international levels.





PhD Program in Education in the Contemporary Society

The PhD Program in [Education in Contemporary Society \(ECS\)](#) is dedicated to investigating the major educational challenges arising from the profound transformations of contemporary society. Drawing on multiple convergent disciplines and methodological approaches, the program aims to train highly qualified researchers with expertise in professional development, educational, teaching, and learning processes. Doctoral candidates are prepared to interpret social, cultural, and institutional change and to respond with theoretically, empirically, and epistemologically grounded research.

Over the course of **three years**, PhD students develop an individual research project in the fields of education, psychology, philosophy, or interdisciplinary studies, under the guidance of a faculty tutor and one or more supervisors with national and international expertise. While the research project is individual, the program strongly encourages collaboration and active participation in research groups, fostering the development of a scientific profile embedded within a broader academic community. The ECS program has a marked international orientation: candidates are required to undertake study or research periods abroad, present their work at international conferences, and may benefit from co-tutoring arrangements and exchanges through the university's global partnerships.

The educational pathway combines rigorous disciplinary preparation with interdisciplinary and transversal training. Curricular courses, mainly concentrated in the first year, address pedagogical, methodological, psychological, and philosophical issues in educational research, with particular attention to the challenges of contemporary society. A wide range of qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and experimental research methodologies is covered, ensuring strong theoretical depth and high methodological competence. Teaching is interactive and participatory and is complemented by seminars and training activities on topics such as literature reviews, open science, scientific writing, and publishing, as well as interdisciplinary courses offered by the Doctoral School. Doctoral students participate in regular monitoring meetings, annual research review events, formative evaluations, and initiatives such as Internationalisation Days, while also engaging actively in the cultural and scientific life of the department.

The program promotes increasing autonomy in designing, implementing, and disseminating research, encouraging doctoral candidates to publish, present at conferences, and participate in international seasonal schools. Cooperation agreements with schools, social and health services, public and private institutions, and businesses facilitate applied research, enhancing the societal impact of research outcomes and supporting integration into international and intersectoral networks. Graduates of the program are equipped not only for academic careers but also for highly qualified roles in public and private organisations, including schools, health services, research and training institutions, social enterprises, and international cooperation agencies. Their advanced theoretical and methodological competences enable them to design, evaluate, and supervise educational processes; coordinate socio-educational services; develop training and guidance programs; design digital learning environments and innovative educational settings; and contribute to applied research, consultancy, and project management, including the preparation and evaluation of research funding proposals.



Research at DISUF

The Department believes that active participation in its research activities is essential for developing research skills and strengthening an academic career. Indeed, as a PhD candidate, you will have the opportunity to take part in the vibrant scientific life of the department: you can join research groups, explore a variety of research topics within our laboratories, and collaborate closely with professors, researchers, postdoctoral fellows, and fellow doctoral students.

Our community is highly active and strongly committed to advancing research. Faculty members publish extensively and around 80% of these publications appear in Q1 and Q2 journals. Members of the Department also participate widely in national and international conferences, contributing to an ongoing exchange of ideas and perspectives.

The Department is also very active in attracting research funding, submitting around twenty project proposals each year and securing grants that can reach up to €1.5 million. This dynamic environment creates many opportunities for doctoral candidates to engage in ambitious research projects and become part of an active and collaborative academic community.

Research Areas

Research at the Department is characterized by a strongly interdisciplinary approach, bringing together scholars from different fields within the humanities and social sciences to investigate educational, cultural, and social phenomena from multiple perspectives.

To reflect the diversity of expertise within the Department, research activities are organized into several thematic areas. These areas foster collaboration among professors, researchers, and doctoral candidates, and provide a stimulating environment for developing innovative research projects. The main research areas include:

- Pedagogical Studies.
- Psychological Studies.
- Philosophical Studies.
- Historical Studies.
- Anthropological Studies.
- Linguistic and Literary Studies.
- Socio-Organizational Studies.
- Geographical Studies.
- Artistic and Cultural Studies.

Across these areas, the Department promotes research that addresses contemporary challenges such as digital transformation, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and lifelong learning, encouraging doctoral candidates to contribute actively to interdisciplinary projects and international collaborations.

Research Laboratories

The Department of Human Sciences for Education “Riccardo Massa” (DISUF) hosts several research laboratories and research hubs dedicated to advancing educational, pedagogical, psychological, and philosophical inquiry. These laboratories represent dynamic spaces for experimentation, empirical research,



and methodological innovation, where doctoral students and researchers engage in both theoretical reflection and field-based investigation.

The DISUF laboratories promote interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration, supporting research projects that address the educational challenges of contemporary society. They provide opportunities for data collection, qualitative and quantitative analysis, participatory and action-research approaches, and the development of innovative educational practices. Through partnerships with schools, social services, cultural institutions, and community organisations, the laboratories also foster applied research and knowledge exchange, strengthening the societal impact of academic work. For doctoral students, participation in laboratory activities offers valuable opportunities to develop specialised research skills, work within established research teams, and contribute actively to national and international research projects.

For a full list of Research Laboratories and further information on the specific activities of each one, please visit the following page: [Research Laboratories and Hubs | Dipartimento di Scienze Umane per la Formazione "Riccardo Massa"](#)

Center for Educational Changes and Potentials in the Digital Transition

CAPTED (Center for Educational Changes and Potentials in the Digital Transition) is a departmental research center of the Department of Human Sciences for Education "Riccardo Massa". The center was established within the Department's Excellence Project 2023–2027, which focuses on the educational and sociocultural transformations generated by the digital transition. The mission of CAPTED is to investigate how digital technologies are reshaping individual and collective life from educational, cultural, and social perspectives. CAPTED promotes interdisciplinary collaboration among scholars from different fields and encourages dialogue between research, education, and society.

Its activities include research projects, seminars, visiting scholars, and collaborations with schools, educational services, and third-sector organizations. The center also offers a stimulating environment for doctoral candidates and early-career researchers, who can participate in research initiatives, seminars, and collaborative projects addressing the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation in contemporary societies.

CAPTED actively involves ESC PhD candidates, fostering their international networks, enhancing their engagement with research on the digital transition and digital knowledge, and strengthening the interdisciplinary dimension of their work.

For more information please visit the official page: [CAPTED Departmental Research Center | Dipartimento di Scienze Umane per la Formazione "Riccardo Massa"](#)





Admission

Admission to the PhD Program requires a Master's degree (Laurea Magistrale or equivalent) in any field within the human and social sciences. As part of the selection process, candidates must submit an original research proposal addressing a topic of clear educational relevance, demonstrating theoretical awareness and methodological coherence. Shortlisted applicants are then required to attend an oral interview, during which the quality and feasibility of the proposed project are assessed, together with the candidate's motivation, research aptitude, and proficiency in the English language.

For more information regarding the admission criteria please visit <https://en.unimib.it/study/doctoral-research-phd-programmes/applying-doctorate>

Fees are set every year by the Board of Directors, for more information please visit [Fees | Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca](#)

During your PhD

During the PhD, candidates embark on a structured and enriching academic journey designed to support their growth as independent researchers and active members of the international scientific community. The program combines advanced training, financial support, and strong international opportunities, ensuring that doctoral students can fully dedicate themselves to research while developing the skills, networks, and experiences necessary for their future academic and professional careers.

For more information about the life as a PhD Student in Milano-Bicocca please read the "Autopresentazioni dei progetti di ricerca degli studenti di ESC" section at [Dottorato in Educazione nella Società Contemporanea \(ESC\) | Dipartimento di Scienze Umane per la Formazione "Riccardo Massa"](#)

PhD Teaching Activities

PhD teaching activities are structured into two components: curricular courses organised within the ESC program and interdisciplinary courses offered by the PhD School and shared by all doctoral programs.

The ESC curricular courses, delivered mainly during the first year and taught in English and Italian, are organised into four modules: pedagogical, methodological, psychological, and philosophical issues in educational research. They address key theoretical and methodological models in the humanities and social sciences, with a focus on the educational challenges of contemporary society. Ethical and gender perspectives are integrated across all modules. Courses are taught by members of the Doctoral Committee and may include contributions from distinguished Italian and international scholars. Attendance is compulsory and teaching is interactive, participatory, and based on innovative methodologies, enabling students to build strong research foundations before engaging in fieldwork and mobility activities.

The program is enriched by seminars and additional training activities on cross-cutting topics such as literature reviews, open science, and scientific writing and publishing, alongside interdisciplinary courses that foster linguistic, technological, and soft skills, while promoting dialogue among doctoral students from different fields. Interdisciplinary courses are recorded after final assessment and do not need to be included in the study plan in advance. Participation in courses requires attendance of at least 70% of scheduled hours, with delivery modes defined by each instructor.



Beyond formal coursework, doctoral students are expected to take part actively in the academic life of the department through regular meetings with tutors and supervisors, monitoring and evaluation activities, and engagement in peer exchange initiatives. The program fosters a strong research community and promotes increasing autonomy in designing, conducting, and disseminating research. Doctoral candidates are encouraged and supported in presenting at national and international conferences, publishing their work, and participating in seasonal schools, strengthening their integration into international research networks.

PhD teaching board: [Education in the Contemporary Society | Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca](#)

Scholarship and Funds

Each year, the University offers a number of funded positions to qualified candidates. These positions may be directly funded by the university, in which case the candidate has the freedom to propose and pursue a research project of their own choosing. Alternatively, some positions are sponsored by external organizations or agencies that commission specific research projects, requiring candidates to work within the defined scope and objectives set by these entities.

In addition, all PhD students, whether they are scholarship holders or not, are allocated an annual research budget to support research activities in Italy and abroad. The funds may be used to cover expenses related to research missions, conference, seminar or school registration fees, thesis preparation costs, invitations to external speakers, the purchase of consumables and services.

Once accepted all PhD candidate are required to pay an enrolment fee. For more information please visit [fees](#) and [scholarship](#).

Period abroad

The program places strong emphasis on internationalisation. Doctoral students have the opportunity to undertake training and research periods at foreign universities or research institutes for a minimum of 3 months and up to 18 months overall. During study or research stays abroad lasting more than 30 consecutive days, the amount of the doctoral scholarship is increased by 50%, providing additional financial support for international mobility. The program also promotes joint supervision of doctoral theses (cotutelle), which allows candidates to obtain two Doctorate qualifications, each officially recognised in the two countries involved in the agreement.

The program also promotes joint supervision of doctoral theses ([cotutelle](#)), allowing candidates to carry out their doctoral research under the supervision of two universities in different countries and to obtain a double doctoral degree officially recognised in both institutions involved in the agreement.





Student Services

The University of Milano-Bicocca offers different opportunities: Student Services are designed to support doctoral candidates throughout their academic journey, ensuring an inclusive, well-equipped, and stimulating university experience. From accommodation and library resources to sports facilities, laboratories, language support, and dedicated inclusion services, the University provides a wide range of opportunities aimed at promoting wellbeing, academic success, and full participation in campus life.

For more information please visit: [Experience Bicocca | Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca](#)

Housing

The University of Milano-Bicocca offers [accommodation](#) in university residences at reduced rates for PhD students who meet specific merit and income requirements, or at full rate subject to availability. The main residences include U12 (Via Vizzola), U42 (Via Forni), U62 (Cinisello Balsamo), and U92 (Via Gustavo Modena). Accommodation typically consists of single rooms arranged in shared apartments with common kitchen and bathroom facilities.

In addition to the DSU residences, the University collaborates with La Cordata, a social cooperative founded in 1989 that operates across the Milan metropolitan area to address housing and social support needs. La Cordata designs and manages integrated residential solutions, including social housing projects and temporary accommodation for short-, medium-, and long-term stays, combining housing services with psycho-pedagogical and social support. Through the [“Abitare Bicocca Città \(ABC\)”](#) service, developed in partnership with the University, students are supported in accessing quality housing solutions at regulated costs, in line with local agreements, while also promoting awareness of contractual regulations and the social value of rent moderation within the local community.



Library

The University Library ([Biblioteca di Ateneo](#)) at the University of Milano-Bicocca is a key resource for study and research, offering extensive collections of books, journals, electronic resources, and databases to support doctoral work and academic inquiry. Through the Prometeo catalogue, students can search and access a wide range of print and digital materials, many of which are directly available on open shelves or remotely via university credentials, including e-books, e-journals, and discipline-specific databases. The Library provides numerous quiet study spaces with hundreds of seats across its locations, and students can reserve individual carrels or consultation areas through dedicated apps and platforms. In addition, it provides a specific training course on literature review methodologies, aimed in particular at first-year doctoral students, guiding them in developing systematic, rigorous, and well-structured reviews of the scientific literature as a foundation for their research projects. Lastly, the Library organises cultural and social events open to the wider community, promoting dialogue between the University and the local area and contributing to the cultural life of the neighbourhood.

CUS Sport

The [CUS Bicocca](#) is the University Sports Centre dedicated to promoting and organising sport for students and staff of the University of Milano-Bicocca. It is part of CUS Milano, the historic university sports association that coordinates sporting activities across Milan's universities and focuses not only on competitive sport but also on sport as an educational, formative, and social opportunity within university life.

CUS Bicocca offers a wide range of opportunities to practice sport at various levels - from recreational activities to inter-university competitions and federated championships. Students can join university teams in disciplines such as football, volleyball, basketball, tennis, chess and more, participate in tournaments like the CUS leagues and Milan University championships, or take part in training courses and sport events open to the entire Bicocca community.

Sporting facilities associated with CUS Bicocca include the Bicocca Stadium, which features fields for soccer, rugby and athletics; the PalaBicocca indoor arena for team sports; and Bicocca Fitness, a gym on campus for cardio and strength training. These facilities are easily accessible and offer students opportunities to stay active, improve wellbeing, and make new social connections outside the classroom.

Cultural and Commercial Discounts

The University of Milano-Bicocca establishes annual cultural and commercial agreements with public and private institutions to provide benefits to its academic community, including students. Cultural agreements open to students offer discounted or reduced admission to museums, theatres, cinemas, exhibitions, and cultural events, encouraging participation in the cultural life of Milan and beyond. Commercial agreements available to students include special rates and discounts on services and products such as bookstores, technology, transport, leisure activities, and other affiliated businesses.

To see the current cultural and commercial agreements please visit [Convenzioni attive | Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca](#)



Language Support

The University of Milano-Bicocca recognises the importance of [foreign languages](#) for the entire academic community. The International Promotion and Communication Office (IPC) organises a wide range of activities in collaboration with the university's foreign language committee. International students at the University of Milano-Bicocca have the opportunity to attend Italian as a Second Language (L2) courses designed to support their academic integration and everyday life in Italy. In addition, the University provides access to Rosetta Stone, an advanced online language-learning platform available to students, lecturers, and technical-administrative staff. The platform offers courses from beginner (A1) to advanced (C1) levels and includes an initial placement test to assess each user's language proficiency.

Wellbeing

The University of Milano-Bicocca places strong emphasis on wellbeing and the protection of dignity within the academic community. The Confidential Counsellor (Consigliera di Fiducia), an institutional figure established under the University Code for the protection of dignity and organisational wellbeing, provides free and confidential advice to students and staff who experience sexual or moral harassment or workplace bullying (mobbing). The Counsellor supports individuals in complete confidentiality and, with the consent of the person concerned, may activate informal or formal procedures aimed at addressing the situation and preventing its recurrence.

The University also draws attention to the national anti-violence and anti-stalking helpline 1522, a free public service promoted by the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, available 24/7 to provide support to victims of violence and stalking. In addition, the University offers a Psychological Counselling Service dedicated to students who feel the need for personal support in moments of difficulty that may affect their academic progress or personal development. The service provides a short cycle of individual sessions with qualified psychotherapists and clinical psychologists, including specialists in late adolescence and young adulthood. Group sessions and shared reflection pathways are also periodically organised, offering further opportunities for support and personal growth within a safe and professional environment.



General Information

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[How to reach us](#): Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo 1, Milano, 20126

