2024 call for PhD students
Selection process and application portal:
a guide for applicants
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1. Selection committee
The selection committee consist of the entire faculty of ISTA.

2. Overview of the evaluation and selection process

2.1 Online application tool
ISTA accepts applications only via its own online application platform available during the application period (Mid-October – January 8). Documents submitted via any other channels will not be considered.

The deadline to submit the application is January 8, 2024 (03:00 PM CET); referees have until January 14, 2024 (11:59PM CET) to submit their letters of recommendations.

The deadline to change the details of your referee is January 8, 2024 (03.00 PM CET). Requests received later will no longer be considered.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure all documents are received on time. Requests to submit documents late are not considered. ISTA will only process complete and submitted applications; all others will not be reviewed.

All documents need to be submitted in English, transcripts and documents in any other language than English need to be submitted in their original language. Applicants are asked to submit the following:
(a) contact information
(b) indicate the names of professor they wish to work with
(c) indicate their research interests
(d) upload a CV, statement of purpose, university transcripts and diplomas in their original language as well as in English
(e) information on the educational background
(f) background on the grading scheme of country
(g) information on internships and/or other relevant activities
(h) contact details of 3 referees willing to send letters of recommendations

Referees are contacted automatically via the platform and sent a unique link to the platform through which they are able to provide feedback about the applicant using a standardized questionnaire.

These letters are confidential and under no circumstances will we share them with applicants.

2.2 Completeness checks
After the deadline, the program management reviews all submitted applications on formal grounds. Applications that are started but not submitted are not considered. Applications that are missing the required documents or are missing the necessary number of reference letters are marked as incomplete and are no longer considered in the selection process.
2.3 Mode of evaluation:
The formal and first scientific evaluation is based on the application materials, with a meeting of the experts deciding on who is to be invited for interviews the second half of February. Results will be available shortly thereafter (late February).

The second scientific evaluation is conducted via interviews by 3-5 professors. Interviews may be done remotely or on-site. Results will be available after all interviews have formally concluded (mid to late March).

2.4 1st level evaluation: review of applications
All complete applications are forwarded to at least three different professors at ISTA, for scientific review and evaluation.

The assignment is based on these criteria in descending order:

(1) name of a professor listed by the applicant
(2) based on the research interests indicated in the application; every professor is matched with a predefined list of research fields; the research interests match, then the application is assigned to the professor
(3) spread of the work load among professors; if the applicant indicated only very general research interests, then the work load of each professor is taken into account as well. All experts have the opportunity to add one or more experts to the application if they deemed necessary.

A bundle of indicators is used to evaluate the candidate regarding the applicant’s preparedness, motivation, and potential. The following will be considered (in no particular order):

a. course performance overall, with a special focus on relevant field specific courses
b. reference letters provided by professors and scientists who have supervised the applicant in an academic setting. One letter from non-academic work environment is accepted, but letters from an academic background should be given priority; referees are asked to address analytical capabilities, technical proficiency, ability to work independently and motivation/commitment
c. statement of purpose past research experience and motivation for applying to this particular PhD program, is it a good academic fit, does the program contribute to the candidate’s future career plans, etc.
d. additional relevant skills (field specific) F.ex. demonstrated in internships and/or participation in research projects, participation in science Olympiads, programming languages, lab techniques, etc.
e. transferable skills F.ex. communication skills, experience with working in teams, previous motilities and international experiences, leadership experience as demonstrated in student organizations etc.
f. diversity F.ex. a woman in computer science/math/physics; an applicant who switched fields; etc.
2.5 2nd level of evaluation: interviews

Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed by ISTA professors (March). Interviews will either be conducted online OR onsite. Professors will decide whether to interview a candidate online or remotely. Professors will decide whether to interview a candidate online or remotely.

Online interviews will take place in the first half of March. Onsite interviews will take place either in the week of week Mar 18 OR Apr 1, 2024. In the case you are invited to onsite interviews we will cover the travel costs, provide you with an invitation letter should you need a visa, and on-site accommodation for the visit up to a maximum specified.

Shortlisted candidates will be assigned to 3-5 professors for interviews. Assignment is based on the professors you listed in your application and wishes of professors, and overall time constraints.

Candidates can request early interviews (f.ex. if under time pressure from another institution). In that case an online interview is the most likely interview mode.

Candidates who are designated for onsite interviews may request to switch to online interviews. However candidates who are designated for online interviews, will not be able to request to be interview onsite.

The final selection committee takes place in the week after the interviews and admission offer will go our shortly thereafter. The deadline to accept or decline an offer is April 30.
3. **Instructions – Overview and Timeline**

   The application portal will be available in the application period only (2nd half of October to January 8). To apply to the PhD program of ISTA you have to create an online account, which will allow you to track your application through its various stages.

   You do not need to complete the application process in one session. You can return to your account and save your application as often as you like, up until you are ready to submit.

   We recommend using a desktop computer; performance on mobile devices such as tablets and mobile phones cannot be guaranteed.

   Read the FAQs carefully.

**Step 1: Create an account**

Register online by entering your e-mail and choosing a password. Note that the field is case sensitive. You will receive an e-mail with a link to confirm and finalize the registration of your user account immediately.

**Step 2: Read the instructions**

Read the instructions carefully to make sure you complete all steps and upload all necessary documents. Consult the FAQs before sending an email.

**Step 3: Enter application data**

There are five parts to your application. Make sure that you click "Save" regularly before moving on to a different section.

**Step 4: Submit your application**

Ensure that your application is complete and correct before submitting. Once you have submitted your application, you will not be able to make further changes.

The submission deadline for applicants is January 8, 2024 03:00 PM CET. Referees need to submit their recommendations by January 14, 2024 11:59 PM CET. The deadline to change the details of your referee is January 8, 2024 noon 03:00 PM CET. These deadlines are firm and extensions are not granted. Beware of the time zone! ISTA will only process complete and submitted applications; all others will not be reviewed.

If your application is incomplete (e.g., sections left blank, documents and/or references missing, misspelled e-mail addresses of referees, and so on...), we will not contact you to inform you that it is incomplete.

If there is an urgent matter regarding your application submission that is not addressed in the instructions or FAQ, please contact our administrator at phd.admissions@ista.ac.at

Applicants should note ISTA cannot answer telephoned queries. Please note that we receive a large number of applications and a high volume of applicant inquiries as the deadline approaches. We aim at answering all written inquiries within 48 hours during standard office hours (Mon – Fri 9 AM – 5 PM CET), but may take longer during peak times. Requests submitted outside these times and on the weekend (Sat and Sun) will be answered on the next working day. Keep in mind that December 24-26, Dec 31, Jan 1 and Jan 6 are public holidays in Austria.
Results of the first round will be available around late February; offers will go out after interviews in late March. Deadline to accept or decline an offer is April 30. Start of the PhD program is September 15.
3.1 Personal data

Please enter data into all required fields. Required fields marked with an asterisk (*).

![Personal Data form]

Make sure that you follow the format when entering your data.

Mobile phone: +43123456; make sure to include the country code.

Date of birth (YYYY-MM-DD): 2000-10-26. Any other formats such as 2000-Oct-26 or 26.10.200- are not supported and will result in an error when trying to submit.

3.2 Education

Please enter data into all required fields. Required fields marked with an asterisk (*).

Please enter your degree information in this section, starting with your bachelor’s degree. The minimum formal entry requirement is a Bachelor degree. In case of admission, you will need to finish your 1st degree before September.

If the official title is different from Bachelor or Master please choose the best equivalent.

![Education form]
If you are still enrolled in your degree program and have not been awarded your bachelor's/master's yet, please enter the expected graduation date in the corresponding fields and indicate that the degree has not been awarded yet.

The form field "institution name" adheres to naming used in the Research Organization Registry (ROR). When entering the name of your institution, please use https://ror.org/search to identify the exact name of your institution, type it in the "institute name" field, and choose from the dropdown selection. If your institution is a college, choose the university it is affiliated with.

In case your institution is not listed in the ROR database, choose the most equivalent one and add a note in the additional information section.

By September 2024, what is the highest degree level you will have obtained?*

Indicating that you will have earned a Master degree will open up a second field dedicated to the Master program. You can add additional degree programs by answering the question: "Do you have any other degrees?" with "Yes".

If you are enrolled in a dual BS-MS program or a 5-year program finishing with a Master (or equivalent) degree, please use the same start and end dates for both the Bachelor and the Master program.

You can add additional degree programs by answering the question: “Do you have any other degrees?” with “Yes”. This will open up a new section, addressing the same questions as for the Bachelor and Master degrees.
Make sure that you follow the format when entering your data.

Degree start date requires the following format: YYYY-MM i.e. 2020-09. Any other formats such as 2020-Sep or Sept 2020 are not supported.

Highest/lowest possible passing grade requires the following format: 5.0

Enter at least one least one decimal place. Any other formats, letters or special characters such as 5, A, 5% etc. will not be supported. If your university uses the percentage system, indicate the percentage you obtained and which percentage is required to pass. Enter them in a number format only. If the grading uses letters, please use the numerical equivalent, either that given in your diploma/transcripts supplement or by direct transference. E.g. for a grading scale from A-F, with A being the best, then the numerical equivalent scale would be 1-6, with 1 being the best: enter 1.0 here.

### 3.3 Application Data

Choose up to three areas that represent your current research interests, starting with the most relevant one (in decreasing order of relevancy). You can either choose a broad area, such as “Biology” or “Computer Science”, or a more specific area, such as “Biology: Cell and Developmental Biology”. For more information on the research topics covered by our faculty, please consult: https://phd.ist.ac.at/all-research-groups/ (by subject area) or https://ist.ac.at/en/research/ (by group leader).

Your selection of areas is not binding. IST Austria offers a single interdisciplinary PhD program. Once admitted to the program, you can explore different areas of research.

Choose 3 research areas you are interested in doing your PhD in and rank them. We recommend using subfields to ensure the best match between your application and the professors working in that field of interest.

The list indicates research areas represented by professors currently at ISTA.

Review the group website of the research groups to understand which research field they are working in and identify the relevant subfields.

Keep in mind that you will need to find an academic home. If your primary interests are not listed here, then ISTA is not a good academic fit!
The following fields are available:

Biology: Biochemistry  
Biology: Biophysics  
Biology: Cell and Developmental Biology  
Biology: Evolutionary Biology  
Biology: Genetics and Genomics  
Biology: Quantitative Biology  
Biology: Structural Biology  
Biology: Systems Biology

Chemistry: Biochemistry  
Chemistry: Catalysis  
Chemistry: Electrochemistry  
Chemistry: Inorganic Chemistry  
Chemistry: Materials Chemistry  
Chemistry: Organic Chemistry  
Chemistry: Photochemistry  
Chemistry: Physical Chemistry  
Chemistry: Supramolecular Chemistry  
Chemistry: Theoretical Chemistry

Computer Science: Algorithms and Complexity Theory  
Computer Science: Cryptography and Security  
Computer Science: Formal Methods and Programming Languages  
Computer Science: Machine Learning & AI  
Computer Science: Scientific Computing and Computer Graphics  
Computer Science: Software, Distributed, and Embedded Systems

Data Science: Bioinformatics  
Data Science: Modeling  
Data Science: Numerical Simulation  
Data Science: Statistics  
Data Science: Topological Data Analysis

Mathematics: Algebra / Representation Theory  
Mathematics: Analysis and Differential Equations  
Mathematics: Discrete Mathematics  
Mathematics: Geometry / Topology  
Mathematics: Mathematical Biology  
Mathematics: Mathematical Physics  
Mathematics: Number Theory  
Mathematics: Probability Theory

Neuroscience: Biochemistry  
Neuroscience: Cellular Neuroscience  
Neuroscience: Computational/Theoretical Neuroscience  
Neuroscience: Developmental Neuroscience  
Neuroscience: Molecular Neuroscience  
Neuroscience: Structural Neuroscience  
Neuroscience: Systems Neuroscience  
Neuroscience: Translational Neuroscience

Physics: Atmosphere and Ocean Dynamics  
Physics: Astronomy & Astrophysics  
Physics: Extragalactic Astrophysics  
Physics: High Energy Astrophysics  
Physics: Stellar Physics  
Physics: Atomic, Molecular and Optical Physics  
Physics: Biophysics  
Physics: Complex Systems  
Physics: Condensed Matter Physics  
Physics: Computational Materials Science  
Physics: Fluid Dynamics / Turbulence  
Physics: Materials Science  
Physics: Mathematical Physics  
Physics: Nanotechnology  
Physics: Numerical Simulation  
Physics: Optical Imaging  
Physics: Quantum Physics  
Physics: Soft Matter  
Physics: Statistical Physics  
Physics: Superconductivity  
Physics: Ultrafast Optics

Please **name 3-5 professors** (in order of preference) whom you would like to interview with, should you be shortlisted for interviews. They should be in (or closest to) the area(s) of research you would like to
pursue if you were admitted to ISTA. Make sure you have reviewed their group website to understand if their research matches your interests. Do not choose random professors or choose PIs from random areas, just because this is an interdisciplinary program! In a well-crafted application, the research interests, chosen professors and statement of purpose are consistent and well argued.

Keep in mind that you will need to find an academic home. If your primary interests are not listed here, then ISTA is not a good academic fit!

For an overview of groups consult: https://ista.ac.at/en/research/ (or by group leader) or https://phd.ista.ac.at/all-research-groups/ (by subject area). Please note that some faculty that are not yet on campus may not be listed on the website.

Important note for 2024: Andrew Higginbotham and Bernd Bickel are leaving ISTA, and are therefore no longer listed in the portal.

3.4 Attachments

All documents must be submitted in English. All university diplomas and transcripts/scoresheets must be submitted in their original language and in English. An official translation is not required at this point.

All fields marked with an asterisk (*) are required fields. You will not be able to submit your application should you fail to upload a CV, a statement of purpose, and at least your Bachelor or equivalent degree transcripts (as available at the time of application).

Language tests such as TOEFL, IELTS etc. are not mandatory. Include them only, if you have them readily available. The program language is English throughout. Therefore, proficiency in written and oral English is expected and essential. If invited for interviews, we will evaluate your English skills in the interviews.

Please upload all relevant documents in English and as unencrypted, password-free PDF files. Other file formats such as .doc, .jpg, .png etc. are not supported. The maximum size per file is 39MB. If a document consists of more than one page (e.g. transcripts), please combine these pages into a single PDF document. Make sure that the files allow for document assembly.
Please upload university transcripts for any degree program you have attended and/or are currently enrolled in. If you have completed a degree, please upload the final transcript and diploma/certificate. If you have not completed your program yet, please use the transcripts/scoresheets that are currently available to you.

3.4.1 Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose is an important part of your application. It is the one document in the application, you have full control of. Therefore craft it carefully and customize it to the program you are applying to.

In the SoP, please share with us anything that prepares you for graduate-level research. For instance, you can describe your past research projects, motivation, skills, and background relevant to the research areas and groups you selected on the application form.

Please structure your Statement of Purpose by first addressing the general points above, and finish by addressing the following specific questions:

1. An important goal of the first year in the Graduate School is to find an academic home by affiliating with a research group. Taking into account that a successful affiliation does not depend only on your own preferences, you might consider multiple options. Based on your research interests and background, which group(s) would be relevant for you, in what order, and why? Please specify up to three research groups at ISTA.

2. During the first year in the Graduate School you need to complete three rotations in three research groups. Explain which groups you would choose and why. The Graduate School encourages students to consider one rotation outside of their field of expertise; should you decide to explore this option, which research group would you consider and why?

3.4.2 CV

The curriculum vitae, also known as a CV or vita, is a comprehensive statement of your educational background and research experience, including relevant extracurricular activities and skills. Ideally it is a one page document, but not longer than two.

Please note, with regard to the information provided in your CVs: We do not collect any special categories of personal data during the application process (in particular data revealing your racial or ethnic origin, political opinion, religious or philosophical beliefs or trade union membership, as well as health data or data on sex life or sexual orientation). If you nevertheless provide us with information that contains special categories of personal data, this constitutes your explicit consent pursuant to Art 9 (2) point (a) GDPR that we may process this data.

3.5 Internships, Awards, and Publications

In this section you can give us additional information that may strengthen your application e.g. about lab experience you might have or internships you have done. Please note that this is mostly voluntary information. Your application will be considered complete if the optional fields are left blank. All applications will be reviewed in the same rigorous manner.

Have you done an internship at ISTA:
ONLY answer this question with yes, if you have done an internship or summer internship (ISTern-ship) in the past. Answer “no” if you have not done an internship at ISTA, interested in doing one in the future, or are currently in the process of applying to do one in the future. Note that applying for an internship at ISTA is a separate process from applying to the PhD program.

3.6 Additional information
All fields marked with an asterisk (*) are required fields.
3.7 Referees

Enter the contact details of 3 referees. Make sure that the e-mail addresses are still valid, the spelling is correct, and that you there are 3 distinct email addresses (i.e. duplicate email addresses are not permitted). Institutional e-mail addresses are preferred.

1. Enter the details of referee
2. Click “add referee” to add fields for the next referee
3. Save the application form
4. Use the “contact referees” button to send the request immediately

Your referees will receive an e-mail directly from us with the subject "Request for Letter of Recommendation – ISTA" with a link to an online platform. The deadline for the referees to submit their letter is January 14, 2024 11:59PM CET. Be mindful of the time zone your referees are located in.

E-mails can get lost in personal or institutional spam folders or may be blocked by institutional firewalls. Therefore, make sure that your referees have approved receiving emails from the e-mail address phd.admissions@ista.ac.at before sending the request.

Enter all e-mail addresses manually: do not copy/paste them from a website as it may be encoded to protect it from spambots trying to extract addresses from websites. Again, double-check the spelling! We will not contact you should we receive bounce backs from e-mail addresses.

Save the application form, and make sure to click the “contact referees” button. Otherwise the request will only be sent only after you have submitted your application.

You can send a reminder to your referee once. Do not send a reminder minutes or hours after the first request. Allow your referee time to respond.

Once you have requested the reference letter, you will no longer be able to make any changes to the referee. If you need to update the contact details of one of your referees, you will need to contact phd.admissions@ista.ac.at and specify exactly which referee is affected and what fields need to be updated. The deadline to request changes is January 8, 2024 (03.00 PM CET). Requests received later will no longer be processed.
**Status referees**

You can log-in to the application and check the Referee Status page to see the status of each reference letter (created – requested – received).

**Created**

You have entered the referee and their e-mail address but have not requested the reference yet, i.e. the referee has not yet received an e-mail from us yet. If you do not explicitly request the letter, then the e-mail will be sent only after you have submitted your application.

**Requested**

The e-mail to the referee has been sent, but the referee has not answered the request yet.

**Reminded**

A reminder e-mail to the referee has been sent, but the referee has not answered the request yet.

**Received**

The letter of recommendation has been submitted and received. You will not receive a separate notification from us once letters have been submitted.

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### Referees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>First name</th>
<th>Last name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Fake</td>
<td>University of Caroucan</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>@ist.ac.at</td>
<td>created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Fake Jr</td>
<td>University of Tatoone</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>@ist.ac.at</td>
<td>submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr</td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Fake</td>
<td>University of Tatoone</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>@ist.ac.at</td>
<td>submitted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Choose your referees carefully:** they should be someone who has taught you or supervised your academic and/or research work and are therefore able to evaluate your academic and research performance. These can be professors, assistant professors, postdocs or equivalent positions.

We recommend including the principal investigator(s) who supervised your thesis work.

We require that letters of recommendation are coming from the referee directly. These letters are confidential and you will not have access to them. Uploading a letter of recommendation by yourself will lead to an automatic disqualification and your application will no longer be considered.

You can request the reference letters before submitting your application form. Make sure to click the **“Contact referees” button** to send the request to the referees immediately while still working on your application. This allows your referees to have more time to work on the reference letters.

You can send a **reminder** to your referee **once**! Use this functionality carefully and allow your referee time to respond the request.

If you need to **change the contact details of your referees** (typo in the e-mail address, substituting a referee with a new one), you will need to contact phd.admissions@ista.ac.at. The deadline to make changes is January 8, 2024 03.00 PM CET.

Requests will be answered within standard office hours (Mon-Fri 9AM-5PM CET; requests received on Sat and Sun will be answered on the next working day). Note the following public holidays: December 24-26, 31, January 1 and 6. **We will answer emails received outside office hours, on weekends (Sat, Sun) an on public holidays within the next working day(s) only.**
3.8 Submit application

Submit your application. If your application remains at the status “created” then it is NOT submitted will NOT be reviewed.

You can submit your application BEFORE all referees have submitted their letters of recommendations.

The tool will not allow you to submit your application in case you have not filled-in the required fields. Fields that require input from you will be listed and relevant fields will be highlighted.

3.9 Status referees

You can log-in to the application and check the Referee Status page to see the status of each reference letter (created – requested – received).

Created
You have entered the referee and their e-mail address but have not requested the reference yet, i.e. the referee has not yet received an e-mail from us yet. If you do not explicitly request the letter, then the e-mail will only be sent after you have submitted your application.

Requested
The e-mail to the referee has been sent, but the referee has not answered the request yet.

Reminded
A reminder e-mail to the referee has been sent, but the referee has not answered the request yet.

Received
The letter of recommendation has been submitted and received. You will not receive a separate notification from us once letters have been submitted.