

Call for Expressions of Interest for Short-Term Research Internships at the University of Texas at Austin under the UT Austin Portugal Program

Year: 2024

(Version updated on June 20, 2024, to include a new evaluator for the area of Advanced Computing)

The present Call for Expressions of Interest (Eols) is launched according to Regulation no 913/2021¹ of the Portuguese Foundation of Science and Technology, I.P. (FCT), which sets out the rules and requirements for awarding financial assistance to individuals undertaking Knowledge and Technology Transfer Activities.

The Call is aimed at faculty, researchers, and Master's or PhD students affiliated with institutions in Portugal who wish to be considered for short-term research internships at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) in 2024.

The Eol submission period will run from **March 21, 2024, until ~~May 15, 2024~~ May 28 (23:59 UTC+1), 2024**, and the internships must take place during UT Austin Fall Semester 2024, i.e., **between September 15 and December 31, 2024**.

1. Context

The UT Austin Portugal Program is a partnership in Science and Technology between FCT and UT Austin, supported by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Higher Education in close collaboration with the Council of Rectors of the Portuguese Universities (CRUP).

Through the Management and Coordination Agreement "Acordo para a Gestão e Coordenação do Programa UT Austin Portugal 2024 | CoLab", signed between FCT and the Instituto de Engenharia de Sistemas e Computadores, Tecnologia e Ciência – INESC TEC, the latter is the Program's host organization in Portugal, being accountable for the overall management and implementation of the Program's activity plan, including of this Call for Eols.

2. Purpose of the Call

Through this Call, the Program will be selecting faculty, researchers, or Master's and PhD students affiliated with a Higher Education Institution, R&D center or an R&D-performing company established in Portugal and interested in spending a limited period at UT Austin to undertake R&D activities in one of the following areas of the Program:

- **Advanced Computing**, research work contributing to the advance or the use of high-performance computing, high-throughput computing or quantum computing. Of particular interest is the scalability of machine learning applications and the convergence with cloud computing.
- **Nanosciences and technologies**, with a particular focus on the discovery and development of innovative nanomaterials, with a range of unique properties suitable for applications in space, sensing, the internet of things, information technology and energy harvesting and storage, including quantum computing, medical diagnostics and therapy, efficient chemical and materials transformations.

¹ "Regulamento de Atribuição de Subsídios a Atividades de Transferência de Conhecimento e Tecnologia"

- **Space-Earth Interactions**, with a particular focus on complex systems engineering and science towards an integrative approach to space technologies, climate and clean energy, earth and ocean science in the Atlantic, together with emerging methods of data science.

Eols falling under the areas of Advanced Computing, Nanotechnologies and Space-Earth Interactions aiming to propose **work plans addressing Clean Energy-related topics will be deemed of strategic interest to this Call.**

3. Objectives and Duration of the Short-Term Research Internships at UT Austin

Applicants admitted to the scheme will benefit from an immersive experience in UT Austin's ecosystem to explore and develop institutional/faculty/departmental-level collaborations, engage in interdisciplinary and collaborative research with scientific peers and acquire and transfer new knowledge.

Internships must last from **two months (minimum) to three months (maximum)** and **not extend beyond December 31, 2024.**

4. Beneficiaries and Eligibility Rules

To be eligible for internships, **applicants must comply with the following criteria at the time of submission of their Eols and throughout their stay at UT Austin:**

- a) Hold Portuguese nationality or, in the case of non-Portuguese citizens, have permanent residence in Portugal;
- b) Hold a Master's or Doctoral degree or, if not, be enrolled in a Master's or Doctoral Program in Portugal;
- c) Be affiliated with a research institution, university or R&D-performing company established in Portugal.

Applicants who do not meet the required criteria for Eol submission and fail to submit any of the mandatory documents listed in the section **"Application Procedure and Deadline | Mandatory Documents"** of this announcement will be ruled ineligible. Their Eols will not be evaluated.

By the time the placements commence, **interns must also be allocated to the exchange under a scheme of exclusive dedication.** Nevertheless, the Program is not in a position to prevent the affiliation organization of an admitted candidate from providing them with financial assistance in addition to the allowance received through the Program.

It is the participants' sole responsibility to check and notify the UT Austin Portugal Program about potential conflicting issues concerning their full-time participation in the exchange and the receiving of other funds prior to signing a contract with the Program. The same holds true for any changes in the mandatory requirements for which the applicants were ruled eligible at Eol submission.

Candidates with fellowships funded directly or indirectly by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology must check directly with this entity, not the Program, whether they can receive additional funding under this mobility initiative.

Failure to comply with the eligibility rules may result in the non-allocation or cancellation of the financial assistance foreseen under this Call.

5. Identification of Hosts at UT Austin

Before EoI submission, **applicants must have identified at least one UT Austin faculty staff who could act as their scientific host during their stay at UT Austin.** Therefore, applicants are encouraged to proactively look for potential hosts at UT Austin and contact them in advance.

In the area of Advanced Computing, potential hosts can also be affiliated with the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC).

- UT Austin’s faculty directory can be found [here](#) – Academics tab
- TACC’s staff directory can be found [here](#)
- UT Austin Energy Institute’s people directory can be found [here](#)

The Program is also available to assist candidates in this search through one of the following contacts:

- **Marco Bravo** | UT Austin Portugal - UT Austin Office (bravo@austin.utexas.edu);
- **Andreia Passos** | UT Austin Portugal - PT Office (research@utaustinportugal.org).

6. Financial Support to Admitted Applicants – Program’s Office in Portugal

The support provided to admitted applicants will take the form of a **mobility allowance** for the duration of the exchange.

Additionally, regardless of their degree, **selected applicants will be reimbursed for health insurance they must take out for the period of their stay at UT Austin. Master’s and PhD students will also receive a travel allowance.**

Admitted applicants will be given the status of Visiting Researcher by INESC TEC and sign a contract with the latter that specifies, among other aspects, the components of such support:

- 1) Monthly allowance (for all admitted applicants):
 - For beneficiaries with a PhD degree: 2500 euros
 - For beneficiaries with a Master’s or Bachelor’s Degree: 1950 euros
- 2) One-off Travel allowance: 600 euros (only for Master’s and PhD students)
- 3) Health Insurance: up to 500 euros (for all admitted applicants)
- 4) Personal Accident Insurance, extendable to the USA during the mobility period, according to INESC TEC’s plan (for all admitted applicants).

This financial support may be used to cover travel and living expenses during the internship period. All reservations and payments to cover travel expenses (airplane ticket, train ticket, taxi, etc.), including VISA Fees charged by the U.S. Embassy in Portugal, and expenditures for meals and transportation during the participant’s stay in Austin will be made directly by the participant. There is no need for the presentation of receipts, and the participant will support all the expenses above the amount of the mobility allowance.

As for health insurance, admitted applicants will be reimbursed by the Program - through INESC TEC - according to predefined amounts after submitting the respective reimbursement form to the Program. Reimbursement claims submitted more than 30 days after the completion of the internship will not be accepted.

The total funding for this Call on the Portuguese side is **€ 90 000 (ninety thousand euros).**

7. Financial Support to Admitted Applicants – Program’s Office at UT Austin

Local Accommodation in Texas - In addition to the mobility allowance and health insurance granted through the Program’s office in Portugal, admitted candidates will be offered housing by UT Austin. The American counterpart will guarantee accommodation for the whole residency period, thereby providing participants with a safe and secure place to stay while in Austin. Participants opting for other accommodation options, such as private rental housing, will not be receiving additional funding, though.

SEVIS Fee - SEVIS stands for the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. It maintains current information on nonimmigrant students, exchange visitors, and their dependents (i.e., all those in F or J status). To travel to the USA and participate in the Program’s internships at UT Austin, admitted candidates will need to apply for a J-1 Scholar Visa at the US Embassy in Portugal. To this end, they will need to get a SEVIS Number, a unique identifier assigned by the US Government. UT Austin will cover the SEVIS fee.

(Kindly note that the SEVIS is different from VISA fees. The Program will not cover Visa fees).

8. Application Procedure and Deadline:

Mandatory Documents:

To apply for an internship, applicants must fill out this [online application form](#) with the following documents attached:

- **Detailed Curriculum Vitae.**
 - **Statement issued by the applicant’s primary affiliation institution/employer or funding entity** authorizing their extended leave if the Program selects them.
 - **One-page Motivation Letter** clearly outlining the applicant’s research goals and potential collaboration with UT Austin extending beyond the duration of the internship. Applicants should be clear about the potential impact of this exchange period on their careers.
 - **At least one Recommendation Letter up to a maximum of two.**
 - **Highest Degree Certificate².**
 - **Evidence of Portuguese Citizenship (or Proof of Permanent Residence in Portugal for Foreign Nationals only).**
 - **Proof of Enrollment in Master’s or PhD. Program in Portugal** (for applicants applying as Master’s or PhD Students).
9. **Proof of English Proficiency:** Candidates should be proficient in English. Although no proof of evidence will be required at the application stage, admitted candidates will be asked to attest to their proficiency for visa application. Refer to section 14. **Establishing English Proficiency for the J-1 Scholar Visa** of this Call to learn more about this requirement.

Deadline:

² For degrees earned from foreign Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), candidates will be required to present proof of degree recognition by a Portuguese HEI as laid out in Article no. 8 of Regulation no 913/2021.

Eols must be submitted no later than ~~May 15~~ **May 28 (23:59 UTC+1), 2024.**

10. Evaluation criteria, selection and notification process

The evaluation, selection and notification process will be implemented strictly according to Articles 11 and 12 of Regulation no 913/2021. Eligible Eols will be evaluated by a **panel of three experts per Scientific Area**. **Experts will look into the applicant's scientific curriculum, personal motivation and reference letter(s).**

List of Experts per Scientific Area:

Advanced Computing

- Ricardo Fonseca (ISCTE – IUL)
- Nuno Manuel Guimarães (ISCTE – IUL)
- Pedro Alberto (University of Coimbra)
- Miguel Nóbrega (University of Minho)

Space-Earth Interactions

- Vasco Mantas (University of Coimbra)
- Maria João Costa (University of Évora)
- Leonardo Azevedo (Instituto Superior Técnico)

Nanotechnologies

- Killian Lobato (University of Lisbon)
- Lorena Diéguez (International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory)
- Fátima Montemor (Instituto Superior Técnico)

During the evaluation process, the panel appointed per Scientific Area may need to interview applicants to clarify any information provided through the Eol. Applicants should be available to meet with the panel or a panel member.

Internships will be indicatively distributed as follows and depending on available funding:

- **Nanotechnologies: 4 placements;**
- **Advanced Computing: 3 placements;**
- **Space-Earth Interactions: 3 placements;**

Should an Area fail to fulfil its placements, the Program may consider transferring its resources to other Areas. Additionally, if the funding allocated to this Call is not exceeded, more vacancies can be granted beyond the total indicated in this announcement, regardless of the Area.

To be considered for funding, an Eol must achieve an overall qualifying score of 10. Only the Eols above this threshold will be ranked in descending order, according to their overall score and, thus, entitled to financial support, depending on the availability of funds by Area. Applicants are highly recommended to consult the evaluation criteria and scoring method used by the Program [here](#).

The evaluation process is expected to last approximately six weeks, with FCT being consulted on the final list of ranked candidates. After this consultation, the Program Leadership will notify applicants of their final score and whether they will receive financial support under this Call. Notification is sent by email with a delivery receipt notification.

11. Filing of complaints or appeals after notification of the decision

Under paragraph 9, Article 11 of Regulation no 913/2021, the period for preliminary hearings will be dismissed. Nevertheless, applicants have the right to lodge a complaint or an appeal by at the latest 15 working days after receiving the notification email. Complaints or appeals must be submitted in writing to the Program's Board of Directors (leadership@utaustinportugal.org).

12. Requirements for granting financial support

For the period of the internships, INESC TEC will confer upon admitted applicants the **status of External Researchers**, whereby they will be subject to INESC TEC's applicable internal policies. Additionally, before the commencement of their internships, they **will sign a Financial Assistance Contract with INESC TEC that complies with Article 13 of Regulations no 913/2021 and will entitle them to receive financial support as laid out in No. 6 of this Announcement.**

Contract signing and granting of financial support are dependent on admitted candidates providing proof that they still meet the eligibility requirements for which their EoIs were deemed eligible for the selection process. Additionally, they must submit a **statement issued by their primary affiliation institution/employer or funding entity authorizing their extended leave.**

Internships must take place during UT Austin Fall Semester 2024, i.e., between September 15 and December 31, 2024.

13. Financial Assistance Contract

The Financial Assistance Contract sets out the **rights and duties of admitted applicants, INESC TEC and designated supervisors** according to Articles 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 of Regulation no 913/2021.

Admitted applicants will sign it before the commencement of the internship at UT Austin to receive an up-front instalment. This instalment corresponds to 50% of the monthly allowance due according to their academic degree at EoI submission, plus a one-off travel allowance if they are still enrolled on a Master's or PhD Program.

INESC TEC will retain a final portion of the total amount granted until interns submit a two-page post-visit report at the end of the mobility scheme.

If admitted candidates fail to comply with any requirements established by this Call and Regulation no 913/2021, sanctions will be applied, according to Article 22 of the same regulation.

14. Work Plans in Research Exchanges under the UT Austin Portugal Program and Program's Supervision

Work Plans must underpin all internships supported through this mobility scheme. Before an internship starts, the host at UT Austin should meet with the admitted candidate to discuss both parties' expectations regarding the work plan and its outcomes. The host should devise a realistic work plan and share it with the admitted candidate and the Program - through INESC TEC - before the internship.

Work plans must:

- Fit the candidates' research needs and goals;

- Identify the host or hosts at UT Austin;
- Foresee, during the mobility period, the candidates' integration within a team or group at UT Austin, participation in projects and communications, advanced training activities, outreach activities and/or relevant networking events offered by the host teams/centres/ schools at UT Austin.
- Set the proper context for a two-way transfer of knowledge between the candidate and the host team/centre/ school and for potential collaborations extending beyond the duration of the placement.

After approval of the work plan by the host at the American counterpart, the activities developed by admitted applicants will be subject to the supervision of UT Austin Portugal's Directors in Portugal, José Manuel Mendonça and Rui Carlos Oliveira, both affiliated with INESC TEC.

15. Establishing English Proficiency for the J-1 Scholar Visa

To apply for a J-1 Scholar Visa, UT Austin will accept from admitted candidates the following as proof of English proficiency in one of the following ways:

- Copy of a diploma, or other signed documentation, that confirms the exchange visitor earned a degree from an institution of higher education that operates in English.
- Approved English test score taken within the last five years:
 - TOEFL score of at least 79; or
 - IELTS score of at least 6.5.
- Texas Global [English Language Center](#) (ELC) interview: You will receive an email with instructions to sign up for an exam time with the ELC. The cost of the interview is \$80 and will be covered by the Program's office at UT Austin (contact person: Luz Vargas: luz.vargas@austin.utexas.edu).

To learn if you are from a country exempt from the English Proficiency Requirement refer to this [page](#).

Proof of English Proficiency will be requested by the Program only after participants are notified of their admission into the Program.

16. Reporting and Acknowledgments

At the end of internships, **admitted applicants will be asked to write and submit a report (maximum two pages) detailing their progress against the goals set in the work plan.** The report should include pictures and an **overall comment by the host at UT Austin on the participant's performance and achievements.**

UT Austin Portugal's Directors in Portugal, acting as supervisors of admitted applicants, should provide an overall assessment of each internship based on the reports submitted by admitted applicants and on the comments of UT Austin's hosts.

Publications or any other scientific outputs resulting from this funding must include an acknowledgement of FCT and the UT Austin Portugal Program.

17. Confidentiality and Privacy Policy

Before proceeding with EOI submission, applicants are advised to read the **Program's Privacy Policy** carefully.

18. Contacts

Should you have any queries about the Call, please contact us at research@utaustinportugal.org

19. Indicative Timetable (revised to accommodate an extension of the application period)

