



PhD Program in Bioengineering and Robotics

Department of Informatics, Bioengineering, Robotics, System Engineering DIBRIS - University of Genova

Students' Handbook, Edition 2019

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Introduction

The PhD program in Bioengineering and Robotics is a doctoral program of the University of Genova (UNIGE). In this document, you will find the main relevant information about the *educational, training and research* activities offered within the doctoral program.

Organization

During the 3-years program, PhD students get an in-depth training in modern engineering techniques and, depending on the specific curriculum, in *life sciences, cognitive sciences, robotics, biomedical technologies*. Such educational activities are offered through specific courses, national and international (summer) schools, seminars and/or additional activities proposed by the tutors of the student.

At the beginning of the PhD program, each student selects a specific research area and is expected: to develop a personal research agenda, under the supervision of a tutor and in close collaboration with an existing research group, and to acquire the related analytical and/or experimental abilities.

Curricula

The PhD program is organized in 5 separate curricula and for each curriculum there are designated *Reference Faculties* that will coordinate the training and research activities in agreement and collaboration with the *Coordinator of the PhD program* and the *PhD Board (Collegio dei Docenti)*. The curricula are listed in the following while the list of Reference Faculties with contacts is reported in Appendix A.

- *Advanced and Humanoid Robotics*
- *Bioengineering and Bioelectronics*
- *Bionanotechnology*
- *Cognitive Robotics, Interaction and Rehabilitation Technologies*
- *Robotics and Autonomous Systems*

Tutors

At the beginning of the program, for each student the PhD Board appoints one or two Tutors¹, who is(are) responsible for her/his scientific, technical as well as intellectual training. At least one of the Tutors must be a University Professor, a University Researcher or a highly qualified Scientist² at the IIT. The relationship between PhD student and Tutor(s) is the key element of the success of the training process. Tutors make sure that PhD students become active members of their research group. Tutors also take care of encouraging and supporting the publication of their students' scientific results on international scientific journals or relevant conference proceedings, as well as their active participation to scientific conferences and schools in the relevant disciplines.

To host a PhD student, a research group must satisfy a number of conditions:

- (i) presence of one or more senior members with solid international reputation, and with recognized attitude and commitment to support students in developing his/her research agenda;
- (ii) presence of a creative and competitive working environment, in contact with foreign researchers and institutions.

Tutors are responsible for making available to their students all the resources needed to carry on their research project. Availability of sufficient resources is checked by the PhD Board and is a necessary condition to be appointed as Tutor.

Credit system

Over the whole 3-year duration of the program, PhD students are required obtain at least 180 credits (CF) - a CF corresponds nominally to about 25 hours of work – subdivided in the following way:

- *Structured Training activities (40 CF)*
- *Research activities (120 CF, i.e. 40 CF per year)*
- *Thesis writing (20 CF)*

Structured Training activities

Structured training activities include attending classes, national and/or international schools on advanced topics.

¹ In case of two Tutors one have to be indicated as *Reference Tutor* and will become a member of the PhD Board.

² At level of Team Leader or higher.

At least 30 Credits (CFs) have to be obtained during the first two years³.

In general, “*structured training activities*” belong to the following typologies, and PhD Board will acknowledge an amount of CFs as shown below.

- (i) **PhD courses**, specifically offered by the *PhD Program in Bioengineering and Robotics*^{4,5}.
 - a. A final exam must be positively passed
 - b. 1 CF correspond to 3 hours of lecture⁶

- (ii) **Courses that are part of one of the Graduate programs** (*Corso di Laurea Magistrale*) offered at the University of Genova⁷ in agreement with the Tutor and with the approval of the PhD Board.
 - a. A final exam must be positively passed
 - b. CFs are the credits reported for the course on the official University website

- (iii) **PhD Schools**. International PhD Schools **must be approved in advance** by the PhD Board upon a formal request to the Coordinator⁸ made by the Tutor including the detailed program of the School and its duration.
 - a. A certificate of attendance of the school must be presented for the CFs to be assigned.
 - b. 1 CF can be assigned every 6 hours of lecture

- (iv) **On-line Courses**. The attendance and CFs assignment for on-line courses must be officially requested by the tutor and approved in advance by the PhD Board.
 - a. An official certificate of attendance (issued by the legal entity providing the course) must be presented for the CFs to be assigned.
 - b. CFs will be acknowledged by the PhD Board on the basis of:

³ It is highly recommended, that these CFs are allocated over the three years in decreasing weight, e.g. 25-30/5-10/0-5 to have more time during the 3rd year to formalize and disseminate the research results.

⁴ A list of offered courses is available on the PhD web site: http://phd.dibris.unige.it/biorob/media/Courses%202018-2019_FinalVersion.pdf.

⁵ Or offered by other PhD programs of the University of Genova (e.g. PhD in Computer Sciences and Engineering).

⁶ E.g. an 18 hrs course will give 6 CFs.

⁷ For instance, the Graduate Programs in *Bioengineering* or in *Robotics Engineering, or Computer Engineering, etc.*

⁸ The Tutor of the student must send a letter

- i. course topic (basic/advanced);
 - ii. reputation of course provider;
 - iii. expected workload.
- c. A maximum of 10 CFs can be acknowledged over the three years

Remark. Participation to *conferences, seminars, workshops* etc. does not grant CFs.

Remark. The list of the courses offered may vary over the years. In addition, others PhD programs might offer courses in a wide range of science and engineering disciplines and they can be proposed by the student in agreement with her/his Tutor(s) and evaluated by the PhD Board.

Remark Students with a non-engineering background, or whose research project requires the knowledge of topics that they never addressed before during their previous career are recommended to take some of the courses offered by the Graduate programs in engineering, science and/or mathematics (mainly, but not exclusively, the programs of Bioengineering, Computer Science and Engineering, Robotics and Physics).

Remark Students without fellowship are expected to obtain at least 180 credits as specified above. Tutors of students, without fellowship, employed in high tech companies and involved in R&D and engineering activities can require, in written form to the PhD board, the exemption of the student from the Structured Training Activities.

Training to Scientific Research and Evaluation Procedure

At the beginning of the PhD program, PhD students formulate a research plan of activities under the supervision of her/his tutor(s). Research is expected to be carried out in the labs which are made available by the Departments participating in the PhD Program.

At the end of each academic year, PhD students must submit to the *Reference Faculties* of their curriculum:

- 1) a detailed report of their research activities;
- 2) a list of publications and,
- 3) a workplan for the following year.

Students will be also required present their results in an oral presentation to a specific commission⁹ for each one of the five curricula.

⁹ The *Coordinator* and the *Reference Faculties* for the curriculum, will appoint an evaluation commission (at least two reviewers within the PhD Board or qualified Faculties excluding the tutor(s))

The Year 1 report will consist of the formulation of a thesis project identifying:

- 1) the research domain;
- 2) the themes addressed and their relevance for bioengineering and robotics;
- 3) a tentative workplan and,
- 4) the preliminary findings (if any).

At the end of Year 2 and 3, the students are expected to exhibit a substantial progress in their thesis project. The report will focus on the state of advancement of the thesis work and on the results obtained.

After the presentations students will receive appropriate feedback/advice, and the commission will formulate a written evaluation. Based on this and on recommendations of the tutor(s) the PhD Board will approve the admission (pass/fail) to the following year, including recommendations to the students.

Final examination and thesis defense

At the end of Year 3, based on the evaluation of the commission and the recommendation of the tutor(s), the PhD Board will decide on admission (pass/fail) to the final examination¹⁰.

The requirements for admission to the final examination are summarized as follows:

- (i) Fulfilment of the training requirements (40 CFs);
- (ii) Positive evaluation from their tutor(s);
- (iii) Positive evaluation from the evaluation commission;
- (iv) PhD board approval of Year 3 report;
- (v) Being author or co-author (first name) of at least one scientific paper in a peer-reviewed international journal (published or accepted for publication) or in a well-recognized international conference with peer review of full papers.

The PhD candidates admitted to final examination must submit a written dissertation (in English). In agreement with the university rules for the doctoral programs¹¹, the PhD Board will appoint, for each candidate, at least two external reviewers with relevant expertise in the field of the PhD work at international level. The reviewers will assess the quality and the scientific relevance of the thesis work and within 30 days will provide a written evaluation report. The evaluation may propose to either admit candidates to the final exam or (in case of major requests for modifications) to

¹⁰ From 33rd cycle it is no more possible to extend the Doctorate for research activities beyond the third year.

¹¹ <http://www.unige.it/regolamenti/studenti/>

postpone the exam for up to 6 months, during which candidates will be required to revise their work. The reviewers will provide an updated written evaluation that accounts for the revisions. After 6 months the thesis is admitted in all cases to public defense.

The final exam consists of a public thesis defense, in front of a commission composed by three University Professors (including university Professors of foreign institutions and with at least one member of the PhD Board) and up to two external experts (possibly among the reviewers that revised the thesis works) in a field related to the specific curriculum. The PhD Board may appoint different commissions for each candidate or groups of candidates with similar research themes.

Research Allowance

Phd students have available an increase of 10% of their phd fellowship, considered as an overall fund (€1.650,00 per year) that can be used for the sporadic mobility (attendance at conferences, workshops, PhD Schools, short visits at other universities or laboratories).

In order to use this funds PhD students must follow the procedure described in appendix.

Activities of Tutoring

PhD students, as an integral part of the training project, may carry out activities of tutoring for bachelor/master students and, for a maximum forty hours each academic year, the activities of teaching assistance.

The previous activities must be previously authorized by the PhD Board and they will not entail any increase in the scholarship.

International dimension

The PhD Committee encourages PhD students to carry out periods of research activity in foreign institutions as an integral part of their PhD training. During the period carried out abroad, the scholarship is increased of 50% with respect to its nominal value.

Long-term collaborations exist between foreign labs and the faculties belonging to the departments, which contribute to the PhD Program.

A period abroad for a PhD student is supervised by the Tutor(s) and must be approved by the PhD Coordinator (in case of stays shorter than 6 months) and by the PhD Committee (in case of stays longer than 6 months). A letter of acceptance provided by the host institution must be obtained beforehand. University regulations do not allow visiting periods lasting more than 18 months.

The University of Genova and the Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia are involved in a number of activities, which enforce an international dimension of the PhD. In the following, a not exhaustive list of collaboration is given:

- Collaborations with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) that allow students as well as teaching staff to spend research periods in this institution.
- Collaborative research projects with the University of Surrey (Guildford, *UK*) and University College (London, *UK*) in the field of bioengineering with a specific focus on tissue engineering, regenerative medicine, and biosensors.
- A collaboration with Northwestern University and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC). This interaction has allowed trainees both at the pre and postdoctoral level to spend research periods of various durations (from 1 month to 4 years) performing research activities in neural engineering, motor learning and rehabilitation at the Department of Physiology of Northwestern University and at the Sensory Motor Performance Program of RIC. At present, there is a plan to formalize these interactions by establishing a bilateral student exchange agreement between the University of Genoa and the McCormick School of Engineering of Northwestern University.
- The DIBRIS department has established a Memorandum of Understanding with the Japanese Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, with the aim of enforcing mutual activities in Robotics and Artificial Intelligence techniques applied to Robotics. The current agreement provisions for the exchange of Ph.D. students as well as teaching staff.
- The Robotics, Brain and Cognitive Science department of IIT has a formalized exchange program with University of Tokyo and Osaka in the field of robotics, cognitive sciences and rehabilitation.
- The University of Genova has formalized a Joint Study Agreement with IBM Research – Almaden, San Jose, California (USA), that includes collaboration between IBM scientists, University scientists and graduate students on specific joint projects.

PhD Structure

COORDINATOR

Prof. Giorgio Cannata, Università di Genova
giorgio.cannata@unige.it

CURRICULA REFERENCE FACULTIES

ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS		
Dr. Lorenzo Natale	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia	lorenzo.natale@iit.it
Dr. Ferdinando Cannella	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia	ferdinando.cannella@iit.it

BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS		
Prof. Sergio Martinoia¹²	Università di Genova	sergio.martinoia@unige.it

BIONANOTECHNOLOGY		
Dr. Francesco De Angelis¹³	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia	francesco.deangelis@iit.it

COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES		
Prof. Giulio Sandini	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia	giulio.sandini@iit.it

ROBOTICS AND AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS		
Prof. Fulvio Mastrogiovanni	Università di Genova	fulvio.mastrogiovanni@unige.it

¹² Possible change is foreseen

¹³ Possible change is foreseen

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTACTS

PhD Secretariat

phd.biorob@dibris.unige.it

Valentina Scanarotti (valentina@dibris.unige.it)

ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS			
BETRO Lucia	IIT-iCub	Lucia.betro@iit.it	010 717 81863
IVALDI Silvia	IIT-Advanced Robotics Department	Silvia.ivaldi@iit.it	010 717 81815

BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS			
SCANAROTTI Valentina	DIBRIS	valentina.scanarotti@unige.it	010 33 56682
USARI Roberta	DIBRIS	roberta@dibris.unige.it	

BIONANOTECHNOLOGY			
SALVATORI Manuela	IIT – Nanophysics	manuela.Salvatori@iit.it	010 717 81762

COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES			
BRUZZONE Anastasia	IIT - RBCS	Anastasia.Bruzzone@iit.it	010 717 81472

ROBOTICS AND AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS			
SCANAROTTI Valentina	DIBRIS	valentina.scanarotti@unige.it	010 33 56682
USARI Roberta	DIBRIS	roberta@dibris.unige.it	

PhD Board 2019

34th cycle

Membri del collegio (Personale Docente e Ricercatori delle Università Italiane)

n.	Cognome	Nome	Ateneo	Dipartimento/ Struttura	E-mail
1.	FATO	Marco Massimo	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	marco.fato@unige.it
2.	SANGUINETI	Vittorio	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	vittorio.sanguineti@unige.it
3.	MARTINOIA	Sergio	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	sergio.martinoia@unige.it
4.	ZACCARIA	Renato	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	renato.zaccaria@unige.it
5.	CASALINO	Giuseppe	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	pino@dist.unige.it
6.	CANNATA	Giorgio	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	giorgio.cannata@unige.it
7.	BAGLIETTO	Marco	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	marco.baglietto@unige.it
8.	SANDINI	Giulio	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	giulio.sandini@iit.it
9.	SABATINI	Silvio Paolo	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	silvio.sabatini@unige.it
10.	BONFIGLIO	Annalisa	CAGLIARI	Ingegneria Elettrica ed Elettronica	annalisa@diee.unica.it
11.	RAITERI	Roberto	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	roberto.raiteri@unige.it
12.	CASADIO	Maura	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	maura.casadio@unige.it
13.	SGORBISSA	Antonio	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	antonio.sgorbissa@unige.it
14.	GIACOMINI	Mauro	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	mauro.giacomini@unige.it
15.	MASTROGIOVANNI	Fulvio	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	fulvio.mastrogiovanni@unige.it
16.	SOLARI	Fabio	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	fabio.solari@unige.it

n.	Cognome	Nome	Ateneo	Dipartimento/ Struttura	E-mail
17.	PANI	Danilo	CAGLIARI	Ingegneria Elettrica ed Elettronica	danilo.pani@diee.unica.it
18.	BOCCACCI	Patrizia	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	patrizia.boccacci@unige.it
19.	ROVETTA	Stefano	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	stefano.rovetta@unige.it
20.	MASSOBRIO	Paolo	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	paolo.massobrio@unige.it
21.	PASTORINO	Laura	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	laura.pastorino@unige.it
22.	SIMETTI	Enrico	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	enrico.simetti@unige.it
23.	ARNULFO	Gabriele	GENOVA	Informatica, bioingegneria,robotica e ingegneria dei sistemi (DIBRIS)	gabriele.arnulfo@unige.it

Membri del collegio (Personale non accademico dipendente di altri Enti e Personale docente di Università Straniere)

n.	Cognome	Nome	Ruolo	Ateneo/Ente di appartenenza	E-mail
1.	ATHANASSIOU	Athanassia	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	athanassia.athanassiou@iit.it
2.	BARTOLOZZI	Chiara	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	chiara.bartolozzi@iit.it
3.	CALDWELL	Darwin	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	darwin.caldwell@iit.it
4.	CANNELLA	Ferdinando	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	ferdinando.cannelle@iit.it
5.	CHIAPPALONE	Michela	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	michela.chiappalone@iit.it
6.	CINGOLANI	Roberto	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	roberto.cingolani@iit.it
7.	DANTE	Silvia	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	silvia.dante@iit.it
8.	DE ANGELIS	Francesco	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	francesco.deangelis@iit.it
9.	METTA	Giorgio	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	giorgio.metta@iit.it
10.	MORASSO	Pietro G.	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	pietro.morasso@iit.it

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n.	Cognome	Nome	Ruolo	Ateneo/Ente di appartenenza	E-mail
11	MUSSA-IVALDI	Ferdinando	Altro Componente	NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY	sandro@northwestern.edu
12	NATALE	Lorenzo	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	lorenzo.natale@iit.it
13	NORI	Francesco	Altro Componente	GOOGLE	fnori@google.com
14	PUSCH	Michael	Altro Componente	Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche	pusch@ge.ibf.cnr.it
15	SCAGLIONE	Silvia	Altro Componente	Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche	silvia.scaglione@leiid.cnr.it
16	TSAGARAKIS	Nikolaos	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	nikolaos.tsagarakis@iit.it
17	WYKOWSKA	Agnieszka	Altro Componente	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia - IIT	agnieszka.wykowska@iit.it

PhD Students and Tutors 34th Cycle

NOME	COGNOME	CURRICULUM	UNIGE/IIT	EMAIL	REFERENCE TUTOR
JUAN DAVID	GAMBA CAMACHO	ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS	IIT	4607991@studenti.unige.it	Roy Featherstone
NICOLA AGOSTINO	PIGA	ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS	IIT	4620387@studenti.unige.it	Lorenzo Natale
GIULIO	ROMUALDI	ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS	IIT	4625205@studenti.unige.it	Giorgio Metta
AKASH	SINGH	ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS	IIT	4609157@studenti.unige.it	
XINYUAN	ZHAO	ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS	IIT	4622884@studenti.unige.it	Nikolaos Tsagarakis
EDOARDO	ROMITI	ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS	IIT	4617769@studenti.unige.it	Nikolaos Tsagarakis
PRASHANTH	RAMADOSS	ADVANCED AND HUMANOID ROBOTICS	IIT	4143349@studenti.unige.it	Giorgio Metta

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MARTINA	BROFIGA	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	3928060@studenti.unige.it	Paolo Massobrio
ROSELLA	TRO'	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	3892714@studenti.unige.it	Marco Fato
LORENZO	MUZZI	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	4266406@studenti.unige.it	Sergio Martinoia
PIETRO	ARNALDI	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	3508365@studenti.unige.it	Laura Pastorino
FEDERICO	BARBAN	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	IIT	3837056@studenti.unige.it	Michela Chiappalone
GIULIA	BALLARDINI	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	4212221@studenti.unige.it	Maura Casadio
GIULIA	BALDAZZI	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	4625337@studenti.unige.it	
GIORGIA	MARCHESI	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	3952083@studenti.unige.it	Maura Casadio, Andrea Canessa
ELENA	LAZAROVA	BIOENGINEERING AND BIOELECTRONICS	UNIGE	3803594@studenti.unige.it	Mauro Giacomini
FEDERICA	GRILLI	BIONANOTECHNOLOGY	IIT	4626965@studenti.unige.it	Paolo Decuzzi

VALENTINA	TOLARDO	BIONANOTECHNOLOGY	IIT	4616153@studenti.unige.it	Athanasia Athanasiou
ALESSANDRO	ROSSETTA	BIONANOTECHNOLOGY	IIT	4615042@studenti.unige.it	Alberto Diaspro
FABRIZIO	FIORENTINI	BIONANOTECHNOLOGY	IIT	4626008@studenti.unige.it	Athanasia Athanasiou
DAVIDE	ESPOSITO	COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES	IIT	4622994@studenti.unige.it	Monica Gori
MARIA ELENA	LECHUGA REDONDO	COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES	IIT	4619123@studenti.unige.it	Francesco Rea
CECILIA	ROSELLI	COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES	IIT	4618726@studenti.unige.it	Agnieszka Wykowska
DARIO	PASQUALI	COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES	IIT	4614481@studenti.unige.it	Francesco Rea
NICOLA	DOMENICI	COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES	IIT	4623478@studenti.unige.it	Monica Gori
VALERIA	FALZARANO	COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES	IIT	4625162@studenti.unige.it	Jacopo Zenzeri

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GIULIA	BELGIOVINE	COGNITIVE ROBOTICS, INTERACTION AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIES	IIT	4625579@studenti.unige.it	Jacopo Zenzeri
HOSSEIN	KARAMI	ROBOTICS AND AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS	UNIGE	4603634@studenti.unige.it	Fulvio Mastrogiovanni
CRIS	THOMAS	ROBOTICS AND AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS	UNGE	4605878@studenti.unige.it	Pino Casalino
SI AO	WANG	ROBOTICS AND AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS	UNIGE	4608134@studenti.unige.it	Giorgio Cannata

Appendix

Before travelling (at least 2 weeks before planned date)

- Go to www.dibris.unige.it
- Log-in to restricted area (Area Riservata) using your UNIGE credentials¹⁴
- Click on the tab *ModMiss -> Mobilita' Formativa*
- Complete the form. In the field "graverà sulla voce/progetto" insert "10% dottorato di ricerca 32" (32 being the number of your doctorate cycle).
- Click on the tab "Crea Modulo in Locale"
- Click on the tab "MODULI INSERITI IN LOCALE" open your completed form and click on "INVIA MODULO AL GESTORE"

The Department Administration will activate the procedures to authorize your travel/mission.

Phd students for their can use only the ordinary means of transportation that are:

1. Train, plane, suburban bus, and all public urban transportations.
2. Taxi only for urban ways as from and to the airport, train station, hotel, conference venue or meetings.

If you leave from an airports other than Genova you have to show that this option is cheaper. When you book the flight, you must print from web the flight offers from Genoa airport and your selected airport. The printout must be attached to the documentation at the time of the refund request.

The Department can directly pay the registration to conference/workshop or Winter/summer schools when the bank transfer is available as method of payment. It is exceptionally possible to ask an advance payment of the possible expenditures for the mission when the quote is equal or higher than €200,00. For missions in Italy an anticipation of the 75% of the all expenses is possible while for missions abroad it is possible to anticipate only the hotel expense.

The PhD student has to pay in advance all of the expenses and collect all the original receipts (train/flight tickets, meals, public transportation, certificate of attendance) therefore when you will come back you have to deliver the original receipts to the Department Administration, Villa Bonino Viale Causa 13, 1st floor.

The reference persons are Roberta Usari (roberta@dibris.unige.it) and Roberta Fraguglia (roberta.fraguglia@unige.it)

¹⁴ In case of technical problem, send an e-mail to webmaster@dibris.unige.it