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Description of the thesis project

What is the ExposUM Doctoral Nexus?

PhD funding opportunities in Montpellier, France : ExposUM Doctoral Nexus

A Doctoral Nexus, as proposed by the ExposUM Institute, brings together networks of three to four PhD students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, affiliated with at least two distinct research units.

Unlike traditional PhD programmes, a Doctoral Nexus is designed to enhance collaborative skills and the ability to develop transdisciplinary projects, while allowing students to deepen their own field of expertise.

Nexus doctoral students will benefit from a dedicated training programme and will have the opportunity to organise seminars within their Nexus network.

The ExposUM Institute provides full funding for four years, covering both the PhD students' salaries and an environmental allowance.

Summary of the Nexus SENS-ALIM project

Food choices play a key role in human health and lie at the intersection of nutritional, environmental, psychological, and social issues. Despite the widespread dissemination of recommendations promoting healthy and environmentally sustainable eating practices, a gap persists between intentions and actual dietary behaviours, particularly among young adults. This discrepancy highlights the limitations of approaches based on a strictly rational view of decision-making, as emotions, cognitive biases, and psychological states strongly influence eating behaviours. In this context, the Nexus project SENS-ALIM pursues three complementary objectives:

1. To understand the influence of emotions, particularly negative emotions, on eating behaviours.
2. To identify potential levers for modulation and prevention by analysing educational, psychosocial, and communication-based interventions that may mitigate the negative effects of these emotions on food choices.
3. To analyse the effects of food choices on other decision-making processes that are crucial for health and well-being, in order to better understand medium- and long-term health trajectories.

The second objective of the Nexus SENS-ALIM project constitutes the core of the thesis proposed in this announcement.

The context of the thesis

Eating behaviours are not solely a matter of informational rationality (De Iulio and Romanelli, 2021). Well documented in public health and exploited by the food industry, they are influenced by numerous cognitive (Toscani, 2019) and behavioural biases, reflecting limited rationality (Simon, 1957). In light of these findings, public health policies oscillate between incentive-based approaches (nudges, social marketing) and educational approaches aimed at fostering individual autonomy (Arboix-Calas, 2024).



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This thesis falls within the latter perspective, drawing on the fields of food education and psychosocial skills (Lamboy, 2021). Emotional skills (Mikolajczak, 2014), particularly the regulation of emotions and stress, appear to be a central element of dietary decision-making, insofar as the choice-making process involves an emotional component (Damasio, 2006). This development of skills (Barabel and Meier, 2025) forms part of a process of consciousness-raising in the sense of Freire (1974/2021), enabling individuals to understand the determinants of their choices and to act in a more autonomous and responsible manner (Lombardot and Haikel-Elsabeth, 2017).

Although the overall effectiveness of psychosocial skills has been demonstrated in the field of global health (Lamboy and Guillemont, 2014), their application in the field of food education remains largely unexplored in France and is focused on the sensory aspects of food (Bertin et al., 2021; Jaunet et al., 2024). This research is set against the backdrop of national guidelines (interministerial resolution of August 2021) encouraging the development of psychosocial skills among young people to improve their health.

Planned start date : October 1, 2026

Title of the doctoral position : Nutrition Education and Emotional Skills

Main mission: The thesis will lead the student to question the role of emotional skills (emotion and stress regulation) in the food decision-making of young adults. This objective will be considered through the treatment of three secondary objectives:

1. Evaluate the effect of emotional skills development workshops on students' ability to identify and question the determinants of their food choices;
2. Examine the impact of emotional regulation and stress on the integration of health and environmental determinants in food decisions;
3. Explore, based on the discourse of the study participants, how emotional skills influence the perception of autonomy and control in food choices.

Activities:

The proposed objectives will lead the candidate to:

1. Conduct a literature review on nutrition education, and in particular on eating behaviors in relation to emotional skills.
2. To consider and implement methods and tools for data collection and processing;
3. To conduct interviews with young adults;
4. Promote its research activities by offering interventions in places where scientific work is disseminated (in France and abroad) but also to raise awareness among different societal groups (e.g., "Fête de la science");



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Expected skills and qualifications :

- English level B2;
- Use of data collection and analysis tools (design of online questionnaires, statistical processing software (SPSS, R...), discourse analysis software (Alceste, N'vivo...), conducting interviews);
- Communication skills;
- Knowledge of the field of psychosocial skills and in particular emotional skills;
- Ability to conduct a workshop on developing emotional skills based on techniques validated by scientific literature.

Diploma/field required :

Master 2 or equivalent in one of the following fields : education and training sciences, psychology, biology-health or public health.

Knowledge of the field of "education about" and in particular of food education and its socio-environmental issues from a sustainability perspective is expected.

Keywords: *Education, Learning studies, Nutritional science, Behavioral sciences, Science communication*

CNU section to which the applicant belongs: Educational Sciences and Training (70th section)

Application procedures:

The application must include the following elements:

- A CV
- A cover letter
- A copy of the diploma required for registration or, failing that, the most recent transcripts from the Master 2 (semester 1 and/or semester 2)
- Specific elements possibly required by Doctoral School 58 Languages, Literature, Culture and Civilization (LLCC)

Please **address your application** to the two thesis supervisors:

- PELISSIER Chrysta, chrysta.pelissier@umontpellier.fr
- ARBOIX-CALAS France, france.arboix@umontpellier.fr

And copy:

- LICHTLE Marie Christine, marie-christine.lichtle@umontpellier.fr
- And exposum-aap@umontpellier.fr

Application deadline: Before **20th MAY, 2026**



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KEY FIGURES



RESEARCH CENTERS

From space exploration and robotics to ecological engineering and chronic diseases, UM researchers are inventing tomorrow's solutions for humanity and the environment. Dynamic research, conducted in close collaboration with research organizations and benefiting from high-level technological platforms to meet the needs of 21st century society.

The UM is committed to promoting its cutting-edge research by forging close links with local industry, particularly in the biomedical and new technologies sectors.

More Information <https://www.umontpellier.fr/en/recherche/unites-de-recherche>

SCIENTIFIC APPEAL

Open to the world, the University of Montpellier contributes to the structuring of the European higher education area, and strengthens its international positioning and attractiveness, in close collaboration with its partners in the I-SITE Program of Excellence, through programs adapted to the major scientific challenges it faces.

More Information <https://www.umontpellier.fr/en/international/attractivite-scientifique>



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