

PhD Student Position

The **Laboratory of Natural and Artificial Intelligence (LNAI)**, led by Alireza Modirshanechi at the **Institute of Computer Science, University of Göttingen**, is recruiting several fully funded PhD students.

- Salary: **TV-L E13, 100% position**
- Start date: **flexible, preferably before February 2027**
- Application deadline: **rolling**, with the first review round on **September 15, 2026**

We believe that diversity is not just desirable; it is essential for better science.

We hence strongly encourage applications from people of all backgrounds, genders, identities, and experiences.

What is the position about?

The position will be part of our young and growing group, where we work at the intersection of cognitive science (CogSci; behavioral experiments and computational modeling) and machine learning (ML; theory and algorithm design), asking: “How do biological systems make intelligent decisions?” and “How can we design artificial systems that do the same?”

The specific direction of your project is flexible and will be shaped together with Alireza during your first months in the lab. For this hiring round, however, we are particularly interested in candidates who want to help us build a **unified science of control in humans and machines** by addressing questions such as:

- Why and how do people differ in how much control they feel over their lives? (CogSci)
- How do interactions with humans and AI agents shape our sense of control and agency? (CogSci/ML)
- How can we design AI agents that seek, maintain, and expand control over their environments? (ML)

These questions build directly on our recent and ongoing work; [see our research page for more information](#).

Who are we looking for?

- a **Master's degree (or near completion)** in a related field, including cognitive science, psychology, neuroscience, computer science, mathematics, physics, and electrical/computer engineering;
- strong analytical and computational skills (**important** for ML, **preferred** for CogSci);
- experience with computational modeling and, *ideally*, experimental design (**important** for CogSci, **preferred** for ML);
- strong skills in statistics, data analysis, and programming (**important for both** CogSci and ML);
- interest in **working across disciplinary boundaries** and learning methods outside your primary area of expertise;
- curiosity, creativity, independence, and a **collaborative mindset**.

These are general guidelines rather than strict criteria; the exact profile may vary, and we will consider each application holistically based on research fit, potential, and relevant experience.

What do we offer?

- the opportunity to **shape the science and culture of a young, growing lab**;
- an **open, collaborative, and supportive lab culture** where your well-being comes before any paper or deadline;
- freedom to pursue **ambitious, interdisciplinary research**;
- **close mentorship** with regular one-on-one meetings and multiple forms of feedback;
- opportunities to **mentor students and take on teaching responsibilities**;
- a strong network of **collaborators in Germany and beyond**, including in Switzerland, the UK, and the US;
- support for **conference travel, scientific exchange, and career development**.

How can you apply?

Please send the following as a single PDF to alireza.modirshanechi@gmail.com, with “**PhD-2026**” in the subject line:

- **Cover letter (max. two pages)**: your background, research interests, and motivation, including how they connect to the questions above;
- **CV**, including publications where applicable;
- **Copies of relevant degrees and transcripts**;
- **Names and contact details of two or three referees**.

Applications received by **September 15, 2026** will receive full consideration. Recruitment continues until all positions are filled, so please do not hesitate to apply after that date as well.

Where is Göttingen?

Göttingen is a small, lively university city in the heart of Germany, with a beautiful old town and an unusually rich scientific history. It is compact, green, bike-friendly, and very pleasant to live in—while also being well connected by train, with direct connections to Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt, and Hanover.

Scientifically, Göttingen offers an exceptionally dense research environment. **Gauss**, **Hilbert**, **Heisenberg**, and many others worked here, and that tradition is still very much alive. Today, in addition to the Georg August University of Göttingen, the city is home to several Max Planck Institutes, the **German Primate Center (DPZ)**, the University Medical Center Göttingen, and a wide range of interdisciplinary research initiatives. Particularly relevant to our work are the **Human Cognition and Behavior Center (HuCaB)**, the **Campus Institute Data Science (CIDAS)**, the **RTG 2906 “Curiosity”**, and the **Lower Saxony Center for AI and Causal Methods in Medicine (CAIMed)**.



Göttingen's old town. Photos: Jorge Franganillo, CC BY 4.0.

Equal opportunities and data protection

The **University of Göttingen** is an equal opportunities employer and places particular emphasis on fostering career opportunities for women. Qualified women are therefore strongly encouraged to apply in fields in which they are underrepresented. The university has committed itself to being a family-friendly institution and supports its employees in balancing work and family life. The mission of the University is to employ a greater number of severely disabled persons. Applications from severely disabled persons with equivalent qualifications will be given preference.

Please note that, by submitting an application, applicants consent to the processing of their applicant data in accordance with applicable data-protection law.