



## Ad Astra PhD – UCD College of Business: Accountancy Group

**Starting date:** September 2024

**Deadline for application:** 16<sup>th</sup> July 2024

**Interviews with short-listed candidates:** 17<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> of July

**Position:** 100%, full-time position, tuition fees waived by the College of Business

**Remuneration:** PhD studentship renewable for up to four years and consisting of:

- PhD student stipend of €22,000k per annum (tax free)
- Some equipment and travel funding will be available

**Eligibility:** EU and non-EU students are equally eligible for studentships under this award

**Requirement:** Students accepted under this scheme must meet the university entry standards

### Description of the Post:

The Accountancy group at the UCD College of Business is inviting one fully funded PhD scholarship under the supervision of Dr Fabiola Schneider.

Talk is cheap. Voluntary reporting is ever increasing yet remains largely unregulated. Given the rise of green preferences both on the consumer as well as the investor end, there's a natural incentive for firms to present themselves as green. If the bold sustainability claims are not met with actions and performance, this gives rise to greenwashing concerns.

This research sets out to scrutinize corporate sustainability disclosure. Using data scraping techniques, public disclosures of corporates are collected for a multiyear period globally in the English language. First, generally trends will be observed:

- Can we classify the increase in voluntary reporting?
- Do disclosures follow public attention and buzz words?
- What was the influence of key events such as the Paris Agreement?
- Are there regional differences?
- Are industry specific trends observable?
- How does the volume change in voluntary disclosure vs regulated reporting?



The next step then takes a deep dive on US listed firms. Focusing on one jurisdiction and firms listed on public exchanges creates a level playing field in terms of mandatory disclosures. The US represents a better market to study voluntary disclosures as in the European Union stricter mandatory disclosures apply, leaving less room for additional discretionary reporting.

First the link of disclosure behaviour and firm fundamentals is explored. It is plausible that firms that are financially constrained or in distress take a different approach to sustainability reporting than cash rich firms. The influence of cash flow will be assessed in this context.

As a final analysis, the difference between SEC filings and sustainability reports is investigated. SEC filings are heavily regulated and serve to inform investors about material risks. Sustainability reports on the other hand usually take the form of colourful and glossy publications, aimed at a broader audience. Studying the difference of what firms deem important for investors but not for other stakeholders and vice versa could be most insightful, particularly vis a vis the greenwashing debate.

Ultimately, the research will address the following questions:

- How does voluntary disclosure compare to regulatory reporting in terms of volume?
- How does voluntary disclosure compare to regulatory reporting with regard to tone?
- Who reports the risk of being seen greenwashing?

#### **Research Area:**

The successful candidate will be supervised by Dr. Fabiola Schneider and will contribute to her overall research within corporate sustainability reporting. The candidate is expected to have a strong general interest in corporate disclosures and green data.

Fabiola's work is focused on leveraging accounting to drive impact in the space of corporate transitions. She works on related sustainable finance policies at the European



Commission level and co-leads the GreenWatch project ([greenwatch.ai](http://greenwatch.ai)), which applies AI to tackle greenwashing in financial markets.

**Responsibilities:**

The post-holder will be expected to write and successfully defend a PhD thesis focused on the areas listed in the description of the post and meet the degree requirements set by UCD to advance through the PhD programme.

The candidate is also expected to produce research outputs in relation to their doctoral research and attend conferences to disseminate the research findings. The post-holder will collaborate closely with their supervisor to produce outputs on their combined research areas. The candidate is expected to take part in seminars, workshops, and events organised within the College of Business and across UCD that are relevant to the project. The post-holder will be expected to contribute to the intellectual life in UCD and participate in research activities to the level and extent of their qualifications. The candidate will also be expected to complete a total of 30 ECTS credits spread across the post as part of the university's structured PhD path.

**Role profile:**

The topic requires that the successful candidate be familiar with and/or proficient in (or willing to learn) the necessary research and technical skills. This is a PhD with an empirical focus, and hence, candidates are expected to have experience of or must be willing to learn quantitative research methods and data analysis techniques and other econometric skills. It would be beneficial if candidates had an Accounting or Finance, or a similar background and/or they can demonstrate practical and applicable technical skills. Experience or a strong interest in sustainability and data science are desirable. Candidates must demonstrate an awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion agenda.

**Post Requirements:**

Strong written command of English is required. English proficiency at the C2 or C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is advised. Candidates are expected to hold a strong Masters degree of 2:1 and above (or equivalent



GPA) in Accounting or Finance or other relevant subject areas. The candidate should be able to demonstrate exceptional organisational experience and skills. Preference will be given to candidates who:

- Can demonstrate experience and skills that match their proposed PhD topic. Those who propose a quantitative or data focused project should be able to demonstrate that they are technical, analytical, detailed and process orientated.
- Have read some of the main literature related to their proposed topic.

Applications are open to students of all nationalities and backgrounds. Women and people of colour are especially encouraged to apply.

#### **Enquiries:**

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Fabiola with the following before submitting a formal application.

1. A one-page cover letter describing how you meet the mandatory/desired requirements.
2. A detailed curriculum vitae (CV) including education history, work experience, skills, research projects/publications and other relevant information.
3. A one or two page outline of a proposed research topic, which may be based on one of the topics above, or be of their own design.

For a formal application a full research proposal will be required, as well as:

4. Scanned copies of relevant academic transcripts.
5. English Language Proficiency for non-native English speakers, in line with UCD requirements

(<https://www.ucd.ie/registry/prospectivestudents/admissions/policiesandgeneralregulations/generalrequirements/minimumenglishlanguagerequirements/>).



Please see the main College of Business and UCD Graduate Studies sites for detailed application requirements:

<https://www.smurfitschool.ie/programmes/phdmphil/phdprogramme/>

<https://www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/studywithus/applicationprocess/>

Applications will be reviewed through our system of open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment of researchers. Short-listed candidates will be invited to an interview for the position, which will be held online. Candidates will be given at least five days' notice if selected to interview.

**For any questions** related to this post please contact Dr Fabiola Schneider (<https://people.ucd.ie/fabiola.schneider>) at [fabiola.schneider@ucd.ie](mailto:fabiola.schneider@ucd.ie)