

University of Cape Town



PhD PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Doctoral Degrees Board

It is a requirement of all PhD candidates that they prepare, and submit a written PhD research proposal and seek departmental, faculty and ultimately DDB approval of the proposal. This is in line with best international practise and is to ensure that PhD candidates are appropriately prepared and supported to carry out studies leading to a PhD degree.

Exact requirements differ slightly, depending on the faculty/department/discipline in which the research is to be undertaken and details are provided by each faculty on their websites as follows:

Commerce	http://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/com/Postgraduate-Studies
Engineering & the Built Environment	The general guidelines apply.
Graduate School of Business	https://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/academic-programmes/phd
Health Sciences	Please contact your Faculty Office directly.
Humanities	https://humanities.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content_migration/humanities_uct_ac_za/55/files/Research_prop%2520guide_2014.pdf
Law	http://www.sals.uct.ac.za/sals/programmes/doctoraldegrees
Science	http://www.science.uct.ac.za/sci/postgrad/current/guide

In general all proposals are intended to demonstrate:

- A rationale for the study (i.e. why has this topic been chosen?)
- An adequate comprehension of the current literature in the field (with variations in disciplines e.g. Law proposals may include reference to case notes; legislation surveys etc. in addition to key journal articles and texts).
- A clear articulation of the key question(s) to be addressed and the main aim(s) of the
- A clear knowledge and justification of the research design, methodology and methods. -
- That the research work is feasible within an appropriate timeline, that there is funding and support available or planned, and is of sufficient scope to result in a significant and original addition to knowledge on the chosen topic.
- That, where relevant, the necessary ethical approval will be obtained, and the anticipated process for obtaining such.

In general, once departmental processes have been followed and a PhD proposal has been approved at the departmental and faculty level the relevant faculty administrators process the proposal and accompanying forms further. Faculty approval is normally sought via a Deans Circular, before ultimately being sent to the Doctoral Degrees Board for final ratification and confirmation of candidature of the doctoral student at UCT.

It is the normal expectation that a PhD student has completed and received approval for a PhD proposal within their first year of registration. Only in exceptional cases will a PhD student who has not submitted their proposal to the Faculty and Doctoral Degrees Board within their first year of registration be considered for re-registration and progress into the second year.

Peter Meissner (on behalf of the DDB)

26 June 2017

Updated 20 May 2019

Updated 17 August 2021

Updated January 2025