



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

DOCTORAL DEGREES BOARD

GUIDELINES FOR PhD CANDIDATES AND SUPERVISORS

This document is a brief guide to what the University expects of a supervisor and student. It is not, nor could it be, comprehensive, as each supervision relationship is unique. We do, however, hope that it is helpful to candidates and supervisors alike.

1. A prospective supervisor, after or in consultation with the head of the department, will usually:
 - (a) Discuss with the prospective candidate the proposed field of study and research, which must be within the supervisor's expertise and, as far as possible, within the supervisor's area of research.
 - (b) Make sure that the project is readily feasible, given the material, facilities and equipment that are likely to be available to the candidate.
 - (c) Ensure that the candidate prepares a carefully written research proposal. (This is required of prospective candidates for application purposes and should serve to show the candidate's ability to understand the problem and to guide the candidate at the start of the work.) In, for example, theoretical sciences, the precise research proposal may need to emerge as work in progress, but the student must then show, or be helped to develop, an understanding of how to construct a research proposal.
 - (d) Submit via the head of department and/or in faculties where this is the requirement, through the Doctoral Committee of Assessors, a proposal that the prospective candidate be registered. This proposal will detail the proposed thesis title or field of work, and planned methods of analysis and should be submitted to the relevant Ethics Committee for consideration.
2. **The responsibilities of the supervisor include:**
 - (a) Giving guidance about the nature of research and the standard expected, about the planning of the research programme (including facilitating any scientific and ethics approvals and reporting required), about literature and sources, attendance at taught classes, about requisite techniques (including arranging for instruction where necessary), and about the problem of plagiarism.
 - (b) Complete the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) annually with the candidate, detailing the expectations and commitments for the supervisor and student for the year. The MOU will determine the progress for the year. Before a Dean or a faculty will permit a candidate to continue to the next academic year, the supervisor must report on progress. A brief report is all that is needed if the candidate's progress is satisfactory; however, it must include a statement of what work has been completed, what still needs to be done and an estimation of how long it will take before completion. If progress is not satisfactory, a statement of reasons and of how the progress is to be corrected is required.
 - (c) Maintaining contact through regular tutorial and seminar meetings, in accordance with faculty/departmental policy and in the light of discussion of supervision arrangements with the student as outlined in the MOU.
 - (d) Being accessible to the student at appropriate times when they may need advice.
 - (e) Giving detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work so that the whole thesis may be submitted within a scheduled time.
 - (f) Requesting written work, as appropriate, and returning such work with constructive criticism, in a reasonable time.
 - (g) Arranging, as appropriate, for the student to talk about their work to staff or graduate seminars, and to

have practice in oral presentations.

- (h) Ensuring that the student is made aware of inadequate progress or of work which may be below the expected standard for a PhD.
 - (i) Ensuring that the candidate is (or becomes) familiar with, and observes, one of the internationally recognised guides to scholarly conventions on presentation, documentation of sources and the like. In particular, the candidate must:
 - adopt and use a standard and convention for citation and referencing.
 - attribute, cite, and reference all significant contributions to, and quotations used in, the thesis.
 - be aware of the consequences of any attempt to pass on the work of others as their own, or other forms of plagiarism, namely, an end to any prospect of a scholarly career, failure, and disciplinary measures. The UCT plagiarism policy is available at <http://www.uct.ac.za/main/about/policies>.
 - (j) Guiding the candidate in understanding the use of Turnitin as a tool for identifying similarity and avoiding plagiarism, specifically assisting the candidate in relation to interpreting the so-called Turnitin "Similarity Index". A UCT article on interpreting the "Similarity Index" is available at <https://vula.uct.ac.za/x/Su3i9F> and a discussion on this topic is available in the video <https://www.youtube.com/embed/1yYf8AihndI?wmode=opaque>
 - (k) Drawing the student's attention to the paragraph on problems that may arise from the use of word-processors, which is included in the letter sent to the student by the DDB when they are advised of acceptance as a candidate for the degree of PhD. The DDB recommends that the thesis should not exceed 80 000 words or 200 pages plus appendices and illustrations.
 - (l) Although it is not in any way obligatory for a supervisor to keep a record of contacts with candidates concerning the thesis, a brief note of the date, nature of the contact, duration and content is recommended.
3. A candidate is required to renew their registration each year. Before a Dean or a faculty member will re-register a candidate, the supervisor must report on progress. A brief report is all that is needed if the candidate's progress is satisfactory; however, it must include a statement of what work has been completed, what still needs to be done and an estimation of how long it will take before completion. If progress is not satisfactory, a statement of reasons and of how the progress is to be corrected is required. Supervisors should complete this report via the PPA at the end of the academic year.

Candidates must renew their registration before the end of February each year. Although the Doctoral Degrees Board (DDB) does not lay down a maximum period for completion of a thesis, it requires the candidate to complete the thesis within a reasonable period (usually a maximum of five years). A warning should be given to the candidate by the Dean of the Faculty if satisfactory progress is not being made. Candidates are expected to be registered for a minimum of two years before submitting their thesis for examination.

In cases where the candidate is registered for a master's degree, the supervisor should consider whether or not the candidate's work is of such a quality that they should be encouraged to upgrade their registration to a doctorate.

4. Research projects for higher degrees are undertaken at universities to enable a candidate to learn through and gain from interaction with others. A supervisor will, where possible and appropriate, involve their candidate in the academic life of the University and the department. The supervisor should arrange for the candidate to present their work at departmental or faculty seminars. During their period of registration for the degree of PhD, candidates will normally be required to attend the University for a period or periods totalling at least one year. By "attend at the University", the Senate understands that the candidate shall, within reason, be readily available for discussion at the University. This principle of interaction is clearly desirable for candidates away from the University, and supervisors should ensure that this is happening where the candidate is resident at another institution.
5. The supervisor is expected to ensure that the candidate is made aware of the rules for the degree. The rules

for the PhD, the DMus and the LLD place certain obligations on supervisors, and there are functions of an administrative nature that are required of supervisors. These include submitting draft citations for doctoral candidates prior to graduation and making the reports of examiners available to candidates after degrees have been awarded.

It should be noted that a supervisor is required to state, at the time that the candidate submits their thesis for examination, whether they approve the submission. This statement is made for the record, but it is up to the candidate to decide whether or not to submit the thesis for examination. The fact that a supervisor has not approved the submission is not made known to examiners. In all cases, the supervisor is required to provide the DDB with a descriptive report on the thesis, sufficiently specific about the subject matter of the project to assist a potential examiner in deciding whether or not to accept appointment as such. The report should not include an evaluation of quality. In addition, the supervisor may, where appropriate, provide a separate report about factors other than personal ones which affected the carrying out of the research and the writing of the thesis. This second report would be for the information of the Faculty's Doctoral Committee of Assessors (DCoA) only.

6. Where candidates intend to include publications, the supervisor should ensure the relevant approvals have been sought before submitting the thesis for examination. Similarly, the supervisor should ensure that a candidate does not indicate in publications that their work is associated with or is part of work being done towards a PhD without having obtained permission. Publication of work towards a PhD is encouraged in some faculties and, while candidates may make mention of their affiliation with the University they may not, prior to the award of the degree, indicate in such publications that their work is associated with or is part of work being done towards a PhD, without having obtained permission from the DDB to do so. Once the degree has been awarded, such permission need not be sought from the DDB. Please refer to the document "Publications, Copyright, and your PhD Thesis".
7. Doctoral supervisors will be party to the nomination of examiners, but may not discuss these with, or disclose them to, candidates. Please note that examiners' names and institutional affiliations are kept confidential during the entire examination process. This is to avoid difficulties that could arise were a candidate to contact an examiner during the process or to write in a way directed to the known views of particular examiners. It is a matter of academic ethics. If a doctoral degree is awarded, the candidate is usually told the names of their examiners. While the thesis is under examination, the candidate is not allowed to contact the DDB office to enquire about examiners' reports. The supervisor may, however, on behalf of the candidate, enquire whether reports have been received. The content of the reports may not be divulged.
8. As a rule, the supervisor is appointed by the DCoA to see that corrections to the library copy are satisfactorily made. Supervisors should note that corrections have to be incorporated into the thesis and that errata slips and addenda are not acceptable. When corrections have been made to the satisfaction of the supervisor, the Chair of the DCoA must be provided with certification to this effect.

9. **Co-supervisors:**

A primary supervisor must be appointed for each candidate. This person is typically a UCT staff member approved by the Faculty Board who has appropriate expertise and is available to supervise the candidate's research. The primary supervisor is responsible for the largest proportion of the academic supervision and is accountable for ensuring that all administrative requirements are complied with.

In many cases, one or more co-supervisors may be appointed by the Faculty concerned to direct the work of a PhD candidate. One or more of these supervisors may be external to the University. There is a special responsibility on the co-supervisors to ensure:

- (a) that the role of each supervisor is clearly demarcated at the outset of the research programme and that the candidate is fully informed about the respective roles of each co-supervisor; and
- (b) that special efforts are made to avoid conflict between co-supervisors, which will be to the detriment of the candidate who may be trapped in the middle; under these circumstances and if the conflicts are not speedily resolved, the co-supervisor should guide the candidate to discuss their predicament with the Head of Department or with the Dean, as necessary.

10. Responsibility of the Student

- (a) A candidate is required to renew their registration each year. Candidates must renew their registration before the end of February each year. Student should be registered for a minimum of 2 years before submitting their thesis for examination. Although the Doctoral Degrees Board (DDB) does not lay down a maximum period for completion of a thesis, it requires the candidate to complete the thesis within a reasonable period (usually a maximum of five years). A warning should be given to the candidate by the Dean of the Faculty if satisfactory progress is not being made
- (b) Complete the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) annually with the supervisor, detailing the expectations and commitments for the supervisor and student for the year. The MOU will determine the progress for the year, as well as be used as a measure of progress at the end of each year.
- (c) During their period of registration for the degree of PhD, candidates will normally be required to attend at the University for a period or periods totalling at least one year. By "attend at the University" the Senate understands that the candidate shall, within reason, be readily available for discussion at the University. This principle of interaction is clearly desirable for candidates away from the University and supervisors should ensure that this is happening where the candidate is resident at another institution.
- (d) A candidate is expected to be aware of the rules for the PhD degree, as outlined in the General Rules and Policies Handbook (Handbook 3).
- (e) Where a candidate is planning to publish work from the thesis, they should ensure that this has been discussed with the supervisor and noted in the MOU. Permission to include published works should be applied for in advance through the Faculty Office. Publication of work towards a PhD is encouraged in some faculties and, while candidates may make mention of their affiliation with the University, they may not, prior to the award of the degree, indicate in such publications that their work is associated with or is part of work being done towards a PhD, without having obtained permission from the DDB to do so. Once the degree has been awarded, such permission need not be sought from the DDB. Please refer to the document "Publications, Copyright, and your PhD Thesis".
- (f) A candidate who believes that their supervisor is not providing the guidance they need should discuss this with the supervisor in the first instance, and thereafter with the Head of Department or the Dean.
- (g) Every graduand is encouraged to submit to the Chair of the DDB a report on any aspect of their registration for the degree: this could include a report on the quality of supervision received; on the sources of particular assistance, or of particular difficulty; on the facilities available - library, equipment, etc.; on the extent to which there was involvement in the academic life of the Department and of the University, and opportunity to present work at departmental or faculty seminars; on the length of the period of registration; on the administration of the submission/examination process; and prospects or expectations of employment. The Chair of the DDB will send the report to the Dean of the Faculty concerned, and the Dean will pass the report to the relevant supervisor. The Dean may also provide the Head of Department with a copy of the report.

Revised 11 October 2018
Revised 19 February 2020
Revised January 2025