



# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN DOCTORAL DEGREES BOARD

## INCLUSION OF PUBLICATIONS IN YOUR PHD THESIS

### GUIDELINES FOR THE INCLUSION OF PUBLICATIONS IN A DOCTORAL THESIS

This Guideline is intended to assist in answering the 'frequently asked questions' that PhD students and their supervisors ask with regard to the inclusion of publications in a PhD thesis as envisaged in Rule GP 6.7, which states (inter alia):

*"PhD candidates who contemplate including published papers in their theses must accept that approval to do so is not automatic. If candidates contemplate doing this, they must note this in their memorandum of understanding (MoU) with their supervisor each year. In addition, they and their supervisor are advised to seek the advice of the Faculty's higher degrees committee about the plan to do so at an early stage (acting in accordance with any internal procedures and guidelines that a particular faculty may require). While the relevant faculty committee will not be able to give a binding answer, it will be able to indicate to the candidate and the supervisor whether: (i) it is likely to support the proposal; where published papers are included, the thesis must nonetheless show acceptable academic style, scholarly content and coherence as a connected account with a satisfactory introduction, statement of thesis and conclusion: or (ii) it is unlikely to support submission according to the plan outlined and why. A binding decision can only be given by the DDB. It is accepted that this may not be possible until some time into the PhD work"* (Taken from UCT Handbook 3, 2025, page 38)

**This rule specifically refers to those cases where a candidate intends to include in their thesis, a literal and word-for-word rendition of a paper already published or submitted for publication, in full.**

It is understood that there may be minor inter-faculty differences in theses including such publications, which reflect the variation in publishing norms between disciplines.

It is generally accepted that elements of a thesis may already be published, but where published content is not included verbatim, permission of the supervisor, and not the DDB, is required, as per Rule GP 7:

*'A candidate may, subject to the prior written approval of their supervisor and subject to the provisions of rule GP9, publish a part or the whole of the work done by them under supervision for the degree before presenting their thesis for examination.'* (Taken from UCT Handbook 3, 2025, page 40)

### GUIDELINES

When a student contemplates inclusion of publication(s) or submitted manuscripts in his or her PhD thesis as envisaged under Rule GP6.7, the DDB requires that the following is considered:

#### GENERAL

- All rules as laid out by UCT must be satisfied. It must be borne in mind that the PhD is a UCT degree (with the oversight of the DDB) and not a Faculty degree. Further, a UCT PhD is considered a research degree of high international standing and recognition.
- A plan to include publications in a thesis should be developed by the student in consultation with their supervisor and included in their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the appropriate time. The best time to do this will vary from project to project. Advice may be sought from their Departmental Postgraduate Committee (or equivalent) and their Faculty Higher Degrees Committee (or equivalent).

- In addition to considering a plan and structure for the thesis, Rule 6.7 must be satisfied, viz. “A binding decision can only be given by the DDB”. Thus, formal permission must be sought from the DDB prior to submission for examination. The formal request and motivation to include publications and submitted manuscripts is best prepared in the final year of registration but well before thesis submission (i.e. a student must not submit a thesis and request permission simultaneously, as permission may not be forthcoming. In such a case the student would be required to rewrite/restructure their thesis and significantly delay the submission)
- Application to include published or submitted papers must be submitted to Faculty committees (on behalf of the DDB) prior to submitting the thesis for examination and after the requested papers have been submitted or published.
- Requests to include publications in a thesis must be considered on an individual basis – i.e. ‘blanket’ approval for a group of student PhD’s cannot be sought nor given.

## SCOPE OF THE PHD THESIS

- It is important to note that UCT does not offer a PhD “by publications”. The University offers a PhD which requires a thesis to be produced in accordance with standard requirements and in fulfilling these requirements it is possible, if the prescribed permission has been obtained, to *include* publications in the thesis.
- The thesis, whilst including publications or submitted manuscripts, is not simply a compilation of relevant publications. It must be a thematically coherent, substantive, and scholarly discourse, presented as a composite body of work with all the necessary elements to make it comparable (and therefore examinable) to a PhD presented in the traditional way.
  - A PhD examiner has to be satisfied that a candidate has formulated appropriate research questions and mastered the relevant methodologies, analytical, and presentation processes necessary to answer such questions in a discipline-specific, scholarly defensible way – publications alone cannot be adequate to demonstrate this aspect of a candidate’s work.
  - The main aim(s) and answer(s) to the research questions must be apparent and they must permeate the thesis as a whole. Even though there are publication(s) included, the thesis must nonetheless show acceptable academic style, scholarly content, and coherence as a connected account with a satisfactory introduction, statement of the thesis aims, and conclusion.
  - The thesis must include a thorough and critical literature review that also succeeds in demonstrating acceptable academic style and scholarly content – as would be true of any PhD thesis. This must be in addition to any literature review sections appearing in the included publications. The exception would be where the student has published the literature review in the form of a narrative or systematic review or meta-analysis and is included as one or more of the complete publications.
  - There must be a significant academic discussion leading to clearly articulated conclusions, based on the thesis as a whole and best presented as a final chapter.

## NATURE OF THE PUBLICATIONS INCLUDED IN THE PHD THESIS

- It should be clear to the reader/examiner what the rationale for including papers is. It should demonstrate specifically how including the publication(s) assist(s) in fulfilling the thesis. We suggest that each paper is prefaced with a synopsis of how the paper contributes to the thesis aims and objectives. This in addition to full discussion in the appropriate place(s).

- For a submitted or published paper to be approved as an ‘included publication’, it should already be published or ‘in press’ (i.e. accepted for publication), or at the least submitted and under review by the editorial team of a UCT-accredited peer-reviewed journal. Preprints without peer review or other non-peer-reviewed documents, may not be included in verbatim format, but content may be included as part of an expanded/extended chapter.
- In some circumstances it may be that the ‘included publication’ is of another type (e.g. a policy document or technical report or book). In such cases, the motivation and ‘publication’ would be considered on its specific merits.
- It is expected that the PhD candidate is the lead author of each included publication, as the candidate should be the primary researcher. The candidate needs to provide evidence of their role in each included publication or submitted manuscript.
- All included publications must have been written under the supervision of the supervisor(s) while registered as a PhD student. Publications that have not been written under the supervision of the supervisor as part of the PhD may not constitute ‘included’ publications. It is therefore generally expected that the supervisor is a listed co-author of papers to be included in theses.
- In their motivation to include publications or submitted manuscripts, candidates should provide evidence that they are complying with publisher requirements and copyright restrictions and that all necessary permissions have been obtained from the publisher prior to applying for permission to include the published or submitted paper

## **SUPPORT FROM CO-AUTHORS OF PUBLICATIONS INCLUDED IN THE PHD THESIS**

- Rule 6.3 states that: “The thesis must constitute a substantial contribution to knowledge in the chosen subject and may embody only the original work of the candidate with such acknowledged extracts from the work of others as may be pertinent.” In accordance with this, it should be made unambiguously clear at what levels the candidate was involved in the research and publication(s), and what the specific roles of the candidate and co-authors were. This should be verified by the supervisor(s). There is no rule regarding the maximum number of allowed co-authors, but it must be understood that the more co-authors listed, the more difficult it will be for a student to demonstrate their own intellectual drive and lead.
- The motivation to include publication(s) should be accompanied by a letter from the supervisor stating
  - supervisor support for the inclusion of the paper(s)
  - verifying the stated roles of the candidate and co-authors
- Written letters of support should be obtained from each co-author, attesting to their agreement on the stated contributions that the candidate made to the study and the role they played as co-authors, and that permission is granted to the student to include the co-authored paper in the thesis. In certain cases, where there are a large number of co-authors (usually ten or more), the principal investigator and supervisor can sign such support on behalf of the group.
- The candidate should state, in their motivation letter to include publications or submitted manuscripts, whether any co-author/s are themselves a postgraduate student, in which case
  - Postgraduate student co-authors are not permitted to include the same publication or parts thereof in their own thesis.
  - If any co-authors are postgraduate students, they need to verify in writing that they will not be including the publication or submitted manuscript in their own thesis.

## Thesis requirements

- The DDB requires that the declaration stipulate that publication/s or submitted manuscripts have been included in the thesis and they must be listed clearly. Thus, if you have been granted permission to include publications, please include the following statement as a separate page at the front of your thesis as part of, or immediately following the declaration that the thesis is their own work:

*“I confirm that I have been granted permission by the University of Cape Town’s Doctoral Degrees Board to include the following publication(s) in my thesis, and where co-authorships are involved, my co-authors have agreed that I may include the publication(s):*

*Publication 1*

*Publication 2*

*etc.”*

- If including a published or submitted paper/s in the thesis:
  - a face page should be included prior to each published or submitted paper in the thesis, which should clearly identify that the chapter/s has/have been published or submitted for publication, with full citations of the publication where applicable
  - There should be a consistent formatting style throughout the thesis. This means that, while the content of the publication or submitted paper is included verbatim, the paper must be reformatted from the published/submitted version to match the format, themes, and styles used in the thesis as a whole. Figure and table numbers must be renumbered to follow chronologically throughout the thesis; figures may be adjusted and the referencing style used in the thesis should be consistent throughout the thesis.
  - Within chapters including published or submitted papers, it is permissible to include some cross-referencing to material in other chapters, and minor editing to ensure consistency of terminology and alignment of text across chapters.
  - In addition, the included paper may have minor additions and/or additional analyses, as required to provide more detail relevant to the integration and synopsis, or for the final version after examination, in response to examiner comments. If such amendments are made, publisher permission must be sought.
- Rule GP 6.8 stipulates a maximum word count for a PhD thesis of 80 000. In the case of a thesis including publications, this remains so – the included publications or submitted manuscripts must be included in the total word count (references, tables, and appendices are not included in the word count).

## **Requirements for the application to include publications in a PhD thesis**

Candidates should submit motivation letters and accompanying documents to the Faculty Postgraduate Office, for consideration by the CoA Chair and final approval by the DDB. These motivation letters should provide assurance of compliance to all the above requirements for including published or submitted papers and as such should include:

1. Candidate name, student number, thesis title, faculty and department
2. Evidence of thematic cohesiveness (e.g. describing each included paper's position and purpose within the thesis)
3. Assurance that the requirement for consistent formatting through the thesis will be adhered to
4. Full citations of each paper to be included
5. Letter of support from the PhD supervisor to include the published or submitted papers in the thesis
6. A description for each included paper of the role of the student and co-authors
7. Written permission from all co-authors to include the paper/s, and agreeing with their stated role on the paper.
  - a. This may be presented as a table with co-author signatures inserted
8. A statement as to whether any co-authors are themselves postgraduate students, in which case written statements must be provided by the student co-author that they will not be including the published/submitted work in their own thesis.

**Revised: 26 November 2024**