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## **GUIDELINE FOR VISITING STUDENTS WISHING TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WHILE AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY**

Document title	Guideline for Visiting Students wishing to conduct research while at Stellenbosch University
Type of document	Guideline
Purpose	Offers guidance for international students who wish to conduct research in South Africa while visiting Stellenbosch University for a short period
Approved by	Senate Research Ethics Committee
Date of Approval	14 November 2024
Date of Implementation	2 January 2025
Frequency of revision	Biennially (or as required)
Previous revisions	2013
Owner of these guidelines	Division for Research Development
Curator of Guidelines	Director: Research Integrity and Ethics
Related Policies	Policy for Responsible Research Conduct at Stellenbosch University

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## Abbreviations

HSRC	South Africa Human Sciences Research Council
SUI	Stellenbosch University International
IRB	Institutional Review Board (same as Research Ethics Committee)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
DIG	Division for Information Governance (Stellenbosch University)
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SU	Stellenbosch University

## 1. Introduction

Stellenbosch University (SU) hosts many international students during an academic year. These students are registered for a degree at another institution but arrange to visit SU for a short time, usually between three and six months, as part of an exchange or other collaborative process. Often, they plan to conduct some form of research activity during this period.

## 2. Implementation

These guidelines will be jointly implemented by the Stellenbosch University International Office (SUI), the Division for Research Development (DRD) and, where applicable, the Centre for Information Governance (CIG).

## 3. Definitions

**Affiliated Research student** refers to a student who plans on doing fieldwork or research at Stellenbosch University for non-degree purposes. The terms 'affiliate student', 'affiliate research student' and 'affiliate' can be used interchangeably.

**Animal** refers to a live, non-human vertebrate, including fertilised eggs, fetuses and embryos, i.e. fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, and encompassing domestic animals, feral animals, purpose-bred animals, farm animals, wildlife and higher invertebrates, such as the advanced members from the Cephalopoda and Decapoda (for example, octopus, squid, cuttlefish) (SANS10386:2021)

**Biological and environmental safety** is the application of knowledge, techniques and equipment to prevent personal, laboratory and environmental exposure to potentially infectious or hazardous agents. Biosafety defines the ethically responsible handling and containment conditions under which infectious microorganisms and hazardous biological materials can be safely manipulated and disposed of.

**Human participant** is generally a living person who voluntarily takes part in a research study where a researcher obtains data through intervention or interaction with the person or their identifiable information. However, where applicable, this definition may be extended for the purposes of this guideline to include deceased persons or fetuses.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)** is the equivalent of a REC. This term is used widely, particularly in the USA, instead of REC.

**Research** is any systematic, scholarly and/or creative enquiry aimed at producing new and generalisable knowledge, new meaning or a deeper understanding of meaning.

**Research Ethics Committee (REC)** is a formally constituted committee that is mandated to review (primarily from an ethics perspective) and provide approval for research. Stellenbosch University's Research Ethics Committees are registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC) and follow the South African Ethics in Health Research Guidelines: Principles, Processes and Structures.

#### **4. Purpose**

This document provides step-by-step guidance for affiliated research students to obtain the necessary research ethics approvals and permissions for their research. This guideline does not apply to international students registered for a full degree or joint degree at SU, as SU is deemed their institution of registration, and they are thus required to comply with the academic requirements and processes that apply to all SU students enrolled for full-degree programmes.

#### **5. Objectives**

1. To describe the pre-conditions required before a student can apply to conduct research at SU.
2. To explain the purpose and role of the Stellenbosch University International Office (SUI).
3. To describe ethics approval processes and structures at SU.
4. To describe and explain the process for obtaining institutional permission from the Stellenbosch University Centre for Information Governance (CIG), when applicable.
5. To describe other permissions required for research involving external organisations or institutions such as schools, health care facilities or business entities.

#### **6. Stepwise approach**

Visiting students are requested to read the following steps carefully and ensure that they have completed all the applicable processes before starting their research. These processes may take time (up to three (3) months), and thus, students are advised to start applying for approvals well in advance of their visit. It is ill-advised that these processes be started upon or after arrival.

##### **Step 1: Fulfilling pre-conditions prior to SU visit**

Visiting students planning to conduct research, especially if it involves human participants, animals, biological hazards, nanomaterials, or Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), must take note of the following requirements:

1. A written research proposal that has been reviewed and validated by the student's home institution as scientifically sound (confirmed by a signed letter or similar from the department or faculty).
2. Ethics approval for the research from the student's home institution (if applicable)

3. An academic supervisor from their home institution
4. A local supervisor at Stellenbosch University who will host the student and oversee the local research activities of the project.<sup>1</sup>
5. Complete and finalise the SU Postgraduate Memorandum of Understanding for supervisors and students: <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/memorandum-of-understanding-supervisor-and-postgraduate> <sup>2</sup>

### Responsibilities of the SU supervisor

The supervisor at Stellenbosch University who agrees to oversee the visiting student is responsible for the following:

- Advise the student with aligning their research activities to meet local research ethics requirements and local considerations.
- Advise and support visiting student with their online REC application and submission thereof.
- Submit the REC application on behalf of the affiliate research student.
- Assist the visiting student with responding to modifications requested by the REC and revising their application form.
- Facilitating regular check-ins with the student regarding their local research activities and confirming whether necessary permissions have been obtained and uploaded as part of the REC submission.
- Facilitating and submitting a final progress report to the REC upon project completion.

### Step 2: Make contact with Stellenbosch University International Office

Stellenbosch University International plays an essential role in advising international students regarding visa requirements and facilitating their visits. The student must apply as an affiliated research student via this office and take cognisance of the relevant fees payable to register at SU and gain access to the facilities. Only visiting students who are registered as affiliate research students may conduct research in South Africa. Please visit <http://www0.sun.ac.za/international/> for further information and contact details.

By the time the visiting student makes contact with SUI, they must have already secured an SU academic host by contacting departments or individuals.

### Step 3: Obtaining ethics approval for the project

Many research projects at SU require ethics approval before they may proceed. This applies to all projects involving human participants, animals, or research activities that raise environmental or biosafety concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> The South African Ethics in Health Research Guidelines (2024), section 5.4.2.2 (a), states that students from abroad (foreign) must be under the oversight of a local supervisor.

<sup>2</sup> The completion of the Postgraduate MoU is critical for facilitating agreement and arrangements between the local supervisor, the lead supervisor and the visiting student with reference to authorship, intellectual property and dissemination of findings after the research is complete.

Affiliate Research students should consult the [Research Ethics infographic](#) to confirm which research ethics office to contact.

**Affiliate Research students** (see above definition) are advised to familiarise themselves with the [SU Policy on Responsible Research Conduct](#). Once admitted by Stellenbosch University International, they should contact the appropriate research ethics office and approach their SU academic host to apply for ethical clearance for their research. The SU academic host is responsible for submitting the REC application on behalf of the affiliate research student.

A full application will be required, and the project will serve at the relevant REC meeting. After the meeting, the student will receive written feedback from the REC. Students should respond as quickly as possible and address whatever changes or clarifications have been requested. In rare cases, if the REC has significant concerns with the project, it may need to serve at a second REC meeting.

Please visit <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development> for information regarding RECs and their processes.

#### **Step 4: Obtaining institutional permission from the Stellenbosch University Centre for Information Governance (CIG)**

All research that potentially involves SU staff, students, or access to SU information in any capacity requires permission from the CIG. Permission is also required to distribute information via mailing lists or other forms of media, including social media, place adverts, and conduct interviews or surveys.

Please visit [www.sun.ac.za/paia](http://www.sun.ac.za/paia) for further information regarding application procedures and requirements.

#### **Step 5: Obtaining additional permissions and permits**

Students who plan to conduct research at external institutions such as local schools, clinics, hospitals, and NGOs should consult with their SU supervisor regarding the processes or requirements to gain access to these institutions/organisations. In some cases, additional permits might be required, e.g. from the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) or the Department of Health (DoH).

If the student plans to transfer materials or data outside South Africa (e.g. to their home institution), a Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) or a Data Transfer Agreement (DTA) will be necessary. The SU supervisor must contact the DRD's Research Contracts Office ([contracts@sun.ac.za](mailto:contracts@sun.ac.za)) for assistance with drafting an MTA or DTA.

#### **Step 6: Initiating the research project**

The research project may be initiated only after all the necessary approvals are in place. Thus, it is imperative that students complete these approval processes before their visit. Failure to do this could make it impractical to complete or even start the research project during the visit.

## 7. Relevant Policies and Guidelines

1. Policy for Responsible Research Conduct at Stellenbosch University.  
<https://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/policies-guidelines>
2. Stellenbosch University's (SU) procedure for the investigation of allegations of breach of research norms and standards.  
<https://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/policies-guidelines>
3. Stellenbosch University's Regulations for recruiting Stellenbosch University persons as research participants and for conducting research on Stellenbosch University-held personal and institutional information.  
<https://www.sun.ac.za/english/InformationGovernance/services/access-to-information/access-to-information-for-research-and-other-purposes>
4. Stellenbosch University International Affiliate Research Students Information: A Guideline for Application.  
<https://www.sun.ac.za/english/SUInternational/Pages/Affiliates.aspx>