



Stellenbosch
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CST

Centre for
Sustainability Transitions



PhD in Sustainable Development

PROSPECTUS

forward together · sonke siya phambili · saam vorentoe



Institutional setting

The PhD in Sustainable Development is offered by the Centre for Sustainability Transitions, a leading international research centre located within the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at Stellenbosch University.

The CST brings together research on transdisciplinary, complexity theory, sustainability, and social-ecological and social-technical systems to inform pressing national, continental, and global sustainability and development challenges. The Centre hosts leading scientists and students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and fosters collaborations with a variety of departments across the University, as well as other institutions nationally and globally, supporting a vibrant hub for solution-oriented, transdisciplinary sustainability science.





Programme overview

The PhD in Sustainable in Development is a research-intensive programme, embedded in theory and practice. The programme capacitates students to be leaders in addressing sustainability challenges, focusing on purposeful transformative student development. The PhD programme seeks to develop powerful African knowers, thinkers and doers who can address pressing socio-technical and social-ecological challenges locally and globally.

At a glance

	Intake	One intake in January of each year
	Duration	Typically, four years full-time, but may be completed in three years or five years part-time
	Venue and format	Full-time students are usually expected to be based at the CST in Stellenbosch. Part-time students can be based off-campus, but their studies typically need to align closely with their work to be admitted. All students must attend two in-person foundational courses covering key concepts and methods during the first year. Fully online attendance is not possible for this degree.
	Accreditation	Doctoral-level qualification (NQF level 10)
	Courses	<p>Given the inter- and transdisciplinary nature of the programme, students are required to pass two foundational NQF level 9 courses covering foundational concepts and methods in the first year to advance to the second year of study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations of complex social-ecological and social-technical systems • Methods in inter- and transdisciplinary sustainability science
	Format	Typically, thesis by publication, but traditional thesis is also possible



Programme objectives

The PhD programme aims to enable global South leadership in navigating and bringing about urgent societal transformations towards a just and sustainable future. We train and develop independent transdisciplinary researchers and knowledge leaders, who conduct novel and significant research that advances a wide variety of topics that can inform and support sustainability transformations. Graduates of this programme will be equipped to become leaders and change-makers in academic and non-academic fields (e.g. industry, policy) alike.

We offer a four-year full-time or five-year part-time research-intensive programme, embedded in both theory and practice, to capacitate students towards leadership in addressing sustainability challenges, with purposeful transformative student development. Four years is the timeframe given the inter- and transdisciplinary nature of the programme, but in exceptional cases completion with three years is possible. Part-time students typically take five to six years to complete the PhD.

This programme will develop research competencies required for a NFQ Level 10 qualification. These include:

- Advanced in-depth knowledge in your chosen field of study.
- Technical skills relevant to your field of study.
- Engagement with societal challenges and broad scientific interest outside of your specific research area and research skills, including formulation of clear research questions and hypotheses, and design of rigorous research processes.
- Advanced ethical research capabilities including the ability to generate significant novel insights and knowledge in the fields of sustainable development, systems thinking/complexity theory, and/or sustainability transitions/transformations.
- The ability to communicate your research to both the public and academic peers in multiple formats including reports, policy briefs, videos, media articles.
- The ability to apply theory and contextual knowledge to a practical and/or theoretical sustainability challenge.
- The ability to teach, supervise, and evaluate others in your chosen field.
- Highly connected scholarship through interactions, networks, and collaborations.
- The ability to lead solutions and knowledge production from a global South perspective.

In addition to research competencies, the programme develops sustainability competencies including systems-thinking, anticipatory, strategic thinking, interpersonal/collaborative, and values-thinking competencies; and global South leadership competencies including thought leadership, facilitation and coproduction, care and contextual competencies.





Programme structure

Trans or Inter-disciplinary thesis by publication

The core focus of the PhD qualification is the PhD thesis. No two theses have the same format, but individual theses are expected to include some main features:

- An **action and solution-orientated research focus** linked to the core CST research themes of bullco-production, social-ecological resilience, transformative futures thinking, finance and resource flows, political economy and development, in a diversity of contexts including food, water and energy, climate, conservation and the oceans at multiple scales.
- Research projects will usually be embedded in larger **trans- and interdisciplinary research programmes**, focused on building strong trust and relationships with industry, policymakers, practitioners, and local communities
- A mixed methods approach to research with supervisory guidance on using mixed methods in a rigorous and defensible manner.
- We emphasise a **PhD-by-publication** model to drive work that is internationally recognised (by virtue of peer review), provides training in the process of publication, and is aligned with the CST's identity as a leading international research centre. However, a traditional thesis format is also possible.

Coursework as a supportive element

The PhD programme incorporates two non-credit bearing modules, which students must complete and pass within their first year. These courses serve to equip students from a diversity of fields with basic knowledge of core concepts and methodological approaches used in research on complex social-ecological and social-technical systems.

- 1. Conceptual Foundations:** An introduction to core concepts underpinning the CST's research themes and approaches. The course usually runs in early February, right after orientation.
- 2. Methodological approaches in sustainability:** A core focus on mixed and multi-method approaches and applying methodological rigour in inter- and transdisciplinary research. This course usually runs in the second term of the year.

PhD candidates are offered the option to attend a third module focusing on research outreach and communication. This can be taken in the second or third year.

Support for professional development

This programmatic element aims to be responsive towards individual student aspirations, whether they aim to work in more academic or more practitioner-focussed settings upon completing of the PhD, and to provide guidance when making this choice. This includes offering optional opportunities for teaching, supervision and practitioner experience, and guidance on career goals and identification of required skills.

Networks at multiple scales

Strong networks are necessary to support inter- and trans-disciplinary theses, publication, and the development of graduate attributes, as well as to improve international competitiveness. This is achieved through support for engagement with international networks, projects, and conferences, depending on student needs and funding availability.



Supervision

This PhD programme involves a deep relationship between the student and their supervisor or supervisory team. The CST's deep supervision strategies are informed by systemic learning theories and theories of adaptation and transformation. Such strategies include, but are not limited to:

- Setting up diverse systems to facilitate the development of a professional identity and encourage students to foster strong systems to develop and connect to their "other" identities.
- Facilitating learning around complex adaptive systems thinking through supervision teams, transdisciplinary learning, and reflection.
- Developing a theory of change with students that account for their full identities and prospective visions for themselves.

Assessment

The PhD thesis will be examined by qualified national and international examiners, nominated by supervisors and appointed by the faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (EMS). Project proposals need to be approved by a proposal committee and the faculty of EMS by the end of the first year of study.

Admission requirements and selection process

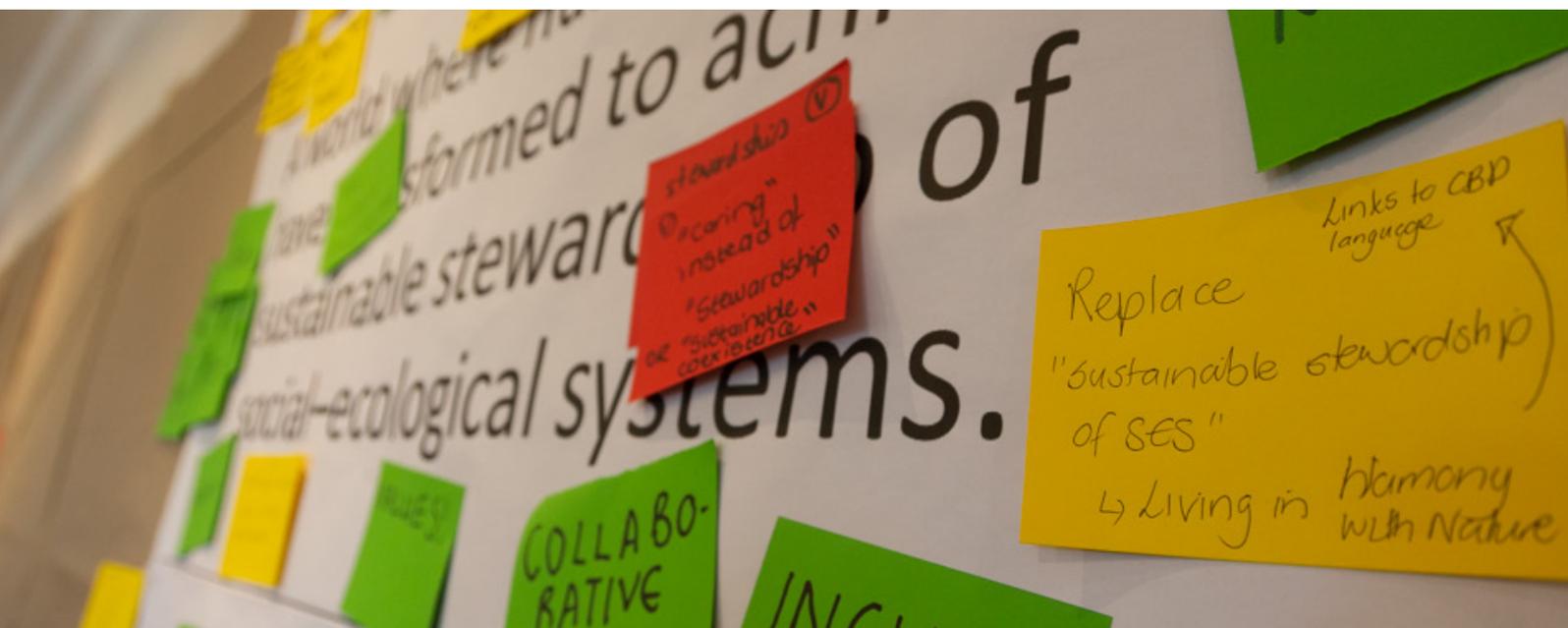
The admission requirements of the faculty of Economics and Management Sciences will apply.

To be admitted to a PhD programme, the applicant must have a master's degree from a reputable university approved by Senate for this purpose or must have in some other manner attained a standard of competence in their field of study, which is deemed adequate by Senate for this purpose.

Admission requirements refer to the minimum standards that must be met by applicants to be considered for selection to the programme.

The programme aims to attract students from a wide range of countries, particularly in Africa, and a wide range of lived experiences, who show evidence of:

- An interest in sustainability or solving critical societal challenges
- Academic excellence
- Involvement in leadership and engagement with their societal challenges at any scale
- Skills relevant for their project of interest





Application process

Students are encouraged to first secure a supervisor at the CST before applying to the University. Students can approach supervisors they have identified and who are aligned with their interests by emailing a two-page concept note, CV, academic transcript, and writing sample. The email should contain an expression of your general interest, and a short motivation of why you are interested in a particular field. It should also contain mention of any potential or secured funding sources for your thesis (some supervisors will have funding to support bursaries). Details of CST research interest and activities, as well as contact information, can be found on the CST website.

Once a supervisor has been secured, students must apply formally to the programme via the University's online application system. **All applications must be submitted by 30 October 2024.**

The University Registrar's division will communicate the outcome of the application based on its fulfilment of the faculty's criteria. If the outcome is positive, the student will be able to officially register for their degree the following year.

PhD projects may be advertised at times. Advertisements of open PhD positions will be available from the CST's website and social media platforms and will contain specific details on how to apply. In these cases, prospective students should follow these instructions instead.

Fees

Stellenbosch University's fees for postgraduate studies can be accessed on the University's Postgraduate Student **website**. Please note that different fees apply for International students, as outlined on the webpage.

At the CST, our policy is for supervisors to support their students with registration and course fees whenever possible, but this depends on available funding and must be discussed with prospective supervisors. Supervisors will, with a few exceptions, only take on full-time students if students have secured a bursary for covering their living expenses. Supervisors may sometimes have such funding, but not always, and students may have to apply to the NRF, the EMS faculty, or other funding sources to secure such a bursary. Part-time students will usually need to secure a bursary, but supervisors are sometimes able to cover their registration and study fees, as well as their field work. This again should be negotiated ahead of the start of the project.

How do I apply?

1. Secure a supervisor at the CST – the researcher's interests and contact details can be found on the CST's home page. PhD positions may also be advertised on occasion.
2. Apply online to Stellenbosch University with a short concept note, CV and academic transcripts. An application link can be found on the CST website. Application deadline is **30 October 2024.**

Contact information

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