

GUIDELINES FOR DOCTORAL APPLICATIONS AND SUBMISSIONS

This document contains the general guidelines that must be followed for applications for doctoral study and the submission of such applications in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Promoters are requested to ensure that submissions are drawn up in accordance with these guidelines.

A. Requirements for application

- (1) A candidate intending to register for doctoral study in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences must first discuss the matter with the promotor of his/her choice. The promotor informs the departmental chair concerned. If there is any uncertainty about the most suitable person, the departmental chair will investigate the matter and appoint a promotor, if possible.
- (2) The candidate must submit a written application to the Registrar for admission to doctoral study, completing the required form and paying the applicable fee. All relevant information on the candidate's existing qualifications and where they were obtained must accompany the application. International students must also ensure that their previous qualifications are assessed by the International Office (information in this regard is available on the [website of the International Office](#)).
- (3) The Office of the Registrar will refer the application to the departmental chair concerned. After consulting with the promotor, and ensuring that the policies of both university and department have been complied with, the departmental chair will make a recommendation whether or not the candidate may be considered for admission.
- (4) If the candidate can be considered, an Admissions Committee will then be formed. The Committee must consist of at least five members who should normally all have doctorates, including (a) the promotor, (b) the departmental chair (or another senior member of the department or related department if the chair is the promotor) who chairs the committee, (c) an additional member who is a senior member of the department or of another related department and (d) two other members who each represent other departments. If desired, the Admissions Committee may consist of more than five members, but it should include representatives of at least three departments. The Admissions Committee is recommended to the Dean by the promotor in consultation with the departmental chair, and must be approved by the Dean before it can begin its work.
- (5) The candidate, in consultation with his/her promotor, is expected to formulate a proposal of the intended research, and how it will be undertaken. The doctoral research proposal must be drawn up in accordance with the guidelines given in [Section B](#) of this document.

- (6) The doctoral proposal must be made available to all members of the Admissions Committee. The Committee will meet to discuss the proposal and recommend possible changes to it. The proposal will be referred back to the candidate for revision if the Admissions Committee is not satisfied with it. The primary role of the Admissions Committee is to ensure that submissions meet acceptable research standards and to take note of aspects such as the quality of submissions, the achievability of the proposed study and the extent to which it is innovative or will supplement existing knowledge. The function of the Admissions Committee is therefore to make an expert judgement on submissions and to evaluate their scholarly value.
- (7) Once the proposal is acceptable to the Admissions Committee, the application will be recommended, via the faculty secretary, to the chair of the Faculty's Research Committee. This must be done on the prescribed form (the pro forma cover page; see [Addendum A\[iii\]](#)), which must be completed and signed by all members of the Admissions Committee. The Committee must also provide a short recommendation (approximately 150-250 words) on the academic merits of the proposal, and indicate whether or not the research proposal needs ethical clearance.
- (8) The doctoral research proposal should, wherever possible, be accepted by all members of the Admissions Committee before it is submitted. If consensus cannot be reached, the majority report and the minority report must be submitted together, in which case, the chair of the Research Committee will submit it to the Research Committee for decision.
- (9) The chair of the Research Committee and the vice-dean(s) of the subject group(s) from which the proposal comes, scrutinise the proposal to ensure that it meets the *formal* requirements; the *merits* of the proposal, however, are not reconsidered. If the proposal does indeed meet the requirements, it is referred to the Research Committee for its information and then recommended to the Faculty Board. If it does not meet the requirements, it is referred back to the Admissions Committee for revision. (Vice-deans may also serve as members of the Admissions Committee, in which case a vice-dean who is not concerned will join the chair of the Research Committee for the final scrutiny. If the chair of the Research Committee is a member of the Admissions Committee, a second vice-dean or another member of the Research Committee will be appointed in consultation with the Dean to do the final scrutiny).

B. Format of the doctoral proposal

[Please note that the following section is based on the structure and elements of a research proposal as summarised by Mouton, Johann (2001), *How to Succeed in Your Master's and Doctoral Studies: A South African Guide and Resource Book*. Pretoria: Van Schaik. It is highly recommended that doctoral research proposals are prepared in consultation with the information contained in this publication. The format below serves merely as a recommendation, but promoters must ensure that the eventual research proposal pays sufficient attention to all required facets of a proposal.]

(1) Candidate, Title of dissertation, Promotor, Co-promotor, Degree, and Field of study

The title of the dissertation must be concise but informative. The names of the promotor and co-promotor (if necessary) must also be clearly stated.

(2) Preliminary study and rationale

In this section, a detailed background to the proposed study has to be given, i.e. a thorough explanation of why the study is being undertaken. Reference is usually made to existing knowledge that has already been generated in relation to the field of investigation and the approaches that are usually used, and the deficiencies in respect of existing research are pointed out. This section thus contains a brief summary of the state of research on the topic.

In addition, the candidate may mention under this heading his/her research experience or other academic background, relevant to the proposed study (for example, a Master's [or other] degree or other research/training in a related topic).

***NB** The candidate needs to provide references only to works cited under this heading or explicitly in the rest of the doctoral proposal.*

(3) Problem statement and focus

Doctoral study preferably concerns research undertaken with the intention of solving an existing and clearly formulated problem. The precise nature of the problem must be clearly formulated, taking into account, in particular, the meaning of the central concepts posed in its problem statement. The problem statement should be stated in not more than *a single paragraph*, and should formulate the focal point of the dissertation concisely, intelligibly and clearly. In short, the problem statement serves as the foundation for the study and clearly explains the key elements of the proposed study.

(4) Goals, theoretical points of departure, research questions and/or hypothesis/hypotheses

Although the statement of the problem poses the central question addressed in the dissertation in a concise and focused form, this heading offers the opportunity of formulating the goals more systematically. Assumptions and/or points of departure on which the research will be based and the theoretical framework(s) within which the research will be undertaken are also, as far as possible, stated under this heading, and provisional research questions or hypotheses, where relevant, formulated.

(5) Research design and methods

Candidates must clearly state what approach(es) and methods they intend using to address and attempt to solve the proposed problem. They should indicate their familiarity with possible controversies or limitations that exist in their field of research regarding the methods in question and/or potential problems and how they are planning to approach these. In the case of quantitative empirical research, details must be provided of the way in which key concepts will be operationalised and the manner

in which data will be collected and analysed, possibly with examples of questionnaires or references to standard or newly developed measuring instruments.

If the study is of an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary nature, this must be clearly stated. Candidates should then give an account of the questions that methodologically problematise such an undertaking, and indicate how such problems can/will be overcome.

(6) Time framework and provisional chapter layout

Candidates must give an explanation under this heading of the different phases through which the research will pass, and how these phases are linked logically and systematically. Preferably, they should provide clear indications, by formulating a provisional table of contents of the proposed dissertation, that they have a systematic and logically coherent and progressive plan of action for the project.

Candidates must also indicate the deadlines for the completion of each of the identified phases of the research. These deadlines should clearly indicate when the research is likely to be completed. Promotors and candidates should, as far as possible, use the time schedule to monitor the candidate's progress.

(7) Impact

The expected impact of the research should be indicated briefly under this heading: for example, in what respects it makes a new contribution to the discipline, how it confirms or challenges conventional views, how it contributes to the current debates and/or what consequences the implementation/application of the new knowledge in society might have (if this is relevant).

(8) Connection with the doctoral programme(s) of the department

An indication should be given here, in consultation with the promotor, of the way the proposed research is related to or is part of the doctoral programme(s) offered by the department according to the *Calendar*.

Submissions should usually be between 2 500 and 4 000 words.

Faculty Board of Arts and Social Sciences

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