



## **Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences**

### **PhD guidelines**

#### ***Applications, appointments, evaluation and examination***

This document provides only broad guidelines on the procedures that the departments follow to manage their PhD students. The specific procedure may differ per department. There are also a few instances where these procedures deviate from Stellenbosch University's general policy on the management of PhD students. Such deviations will be pointed out.

Additional guidelines to this document may be found in the Yearbook/Calendar (Part 1) of the University regarding matters such as:

- Awarding of degree
- Dissertation requirements
- Fees payable
- Publication of dissertations
- Sensitive dissertations, theses and assignments
- Code of conduct: supervisor(s) and student
- Continuing registrations after residential period
- Guidelines on interruption of doctoral studies
- Failure to register.

## **1. DOCTORAL DEGREES**

### **1.1. Application and admission**

A prospective PhD student will usually informally approach a lecturer or departmental chair for information about the degree. The next step is for the prospective student to submit a written initial study proposal to the chairperson of the department. The chairperson will then evaluate whether the proposed topic/title falls within the department's broad subject domain and also whether staff with the required expertise and experience will be available to supervise the student. It is however recommended that prospective students first discuss their initial PhD proposal with academics in the relevant field of study. When a student approaches a potential supervisor, the lecturer will discuss the proposal with the chairperson informally, or, if the latter was approached first, the student will be referred to a lecturer who has appropriate knowledge of the subject for an assessment and exploratory discussion.

The provisional supervisor may at this stage draft a letter to the library to arrange access for the student to the required resources in order to prepare his/her research proposal.

After an initial proposal has been submitted and both the chairperson and the supervisor involved are of the opinion that the student's planned study is feasible and could possibly represent a valuable contribution to the creation of new knowledge, the student is requested to start working with the supervisor on the drafting of an official and comprehensive research proposal. The supervisor has to occupy a full-time position at Stellenbosch University (SU). An Emeritus Professor will, for the purposes of supervision not be regarded a full-time employee but may serve as a co-supervisor. Supervisors may be appointed from outside the university, in which case a co-supervisor needs to be appointed from within SU. Individuals with extraordinary appointments may be considered as supervisors, but have to be appointed in conjunction with a full-time academic staff member as supervisor or co-supervisor.

In cases where the prospective student does not meet the admission requirements of the programme but does have relevant work experience and/or other academic merit, the department may request the student to submit a portfolio of evidence to the Departmental RPL/CAT (Recognition of Prior Learning/Credit Accumulation and Transfer) Committee for consideration. The prospective student may also be requested to complete additional academic modules (e.g. a research methodology module) before the application can be considered.

Departments are required to appoint a committee to evaluate the comprehensive research proposal and determine whether the proposed study will meet the requirements of a PhD degree. At least five days prior to the Admission Committee meeting, all members of this committee should have received a written research proposal. The members of this Admission Committee will usually include two academics from the relevant field of study. One of the committee members will be deemed an independent panel member and has to be from outside the relevant department.

The Admissions Committee has to evaluate and consider the following three issues:

- (a) Would the proposal lead to a successful PhD study?
- (b) Is the candidate capable of completing the study successfully?
- (c) Who could possibly act as supervisor and is it perhaps necessary to appoint one or more co-supervisors?

The general requirements that study proposals and PhD studies have to comply with are provided by the department and are also to be found in the Yearbook/Calendar (Part 1) of the University.

Should the research proposal be approved by the Admission Committee, the chairperson sends the completed PhD admission form to the faculty secretary for a recommendation to the Faculty Board that the student be admitted to the PhD programme. The candidate's admittance will follow the Admin Committee's approval of the research proposal. The application and endorsement by the Faculty Board form part of the Faculty's communique to Senate.

Should the departmental research committee and/or supervisor be of the opinion that the proposed study could possibly have ethical implications, the proposal will also have to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of Sub-Committee A (Research Committee) for evaluation.

## **1.2. Enrolment period of PhD studies**

A student may be enrolled as a PhD student for a period of three years. If the student has not handed in or shown sufficient progress by the fourth year, he/she will then receive a letter from the

supervisor/department to inform the student that his/her studies will be terminated unless he/she hands in the dissertation by a certain date. (The date is to be determined in cooperation with, and permission of the department where the student is registered.)

### 1.3. Duties and responsibilities of the supervisor

After the Faculty Board has approved the admission of the prospective student, the supervisor is responsible for:

- (a) ongoing supervision;
- (b) correspondence about and monitoring of the progress of the study;
- (c) managing the research process in accordance with the University's policy on intellectual property;
- (d) maintaining a record of communication with the student;
- (e) granting permission to submit copies of the dissertation to the faculty office for examination.

### 1.4. Examiners

The appointment of examiners is a faculty matter that is handled under supervision of the Vice-Dean (Research).

The examination panel consists of three independent examiners who were not in any way involved in the preparation of the specific dissertation. At least two of these examiners have to be external examiners who do not have any formal association with the University. For this purpose extraordinary professors and honorary professors at SU are not regarded as external examiners. Extraordinary and emeritus professors may be appointed as internal examiners. An emeritus professor will only be regarded as "external" three years after retirement. Supervisors and co-supervisors are not examiners and do not compile reports on the dissertation. **For logistical and practical reasons it is recommended that not more than one external examiner from outside of South Africa should be appointed.** The following considerations are taken into account in the appointment of examiners:

- (a) Qualifications (at least a PhD)
- (b) Adequate knowledge of the study field and topic
- (c) National or international stature
- (d) Appropriate practical experience
- (e) Availability
- (f) Academic orientation (of external examiners who do not hold an academic position)
- (g) Deliberate strategy to prevent over-utilisation of the same (internal and external) examiners within a particular environment
- (h) The absence of any formal academic, professional or personal relationship between the candidate and the examiner (i.e. independence).

#### 1.4.1. Approval of examiners

The supervisor, in consultation with the departmental chair, submits the names of possible examiners to the PhD coordinator in the office of the Vice-Dean (Research). **This needs to be done at least one week before the closing date of the agenda for the next meeting of the Faculty Board.** To this end, a PhD examiners form has to be completed. This form must contain the accurate contact details of all the examiners (**physical** address, contact details including e-mail and telephone numbers) and detailed reasons for the recommendation of the relevant examiners, including copies of their CV's. These examiners have to be of an academic standing that makes them suitable to evaluate original research. The panel of examiners needs

to be constituted to contain the technical expertise in the specific knowledge fields, researched in the dissertation. An ad hoc committee assembled by the Vice-Dean (Research) and consisting of himself, and at least one independent expert in the field of study, recommends the examiners to the Faculty Board for their approval.

### **1.5. Submission and examination of a dissertation**

The examination process for all PhD's in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences is handled entirely by the Office of the Vice-Dean (Research).

When a PhD student is planning to hand in a dissertation for examining, the supervisor must inform the PhD coordinator in the Vice-Dean's Office at least two weeks before the deadline that the dissertation is ready to be examined. The coordinator will contact the various examiners and enquire about their preference for receiving hard- or electronic copies. The candidate must submit an electronic copy by the deadline as well as ringbound hard copies for each examiner who prefers this option. Candidates need to bear in mind that they have to submit their copies before or on 29 July of a particular year (if they wish to graduate in December of that specific year), and before 1 October of the specific year (if they wish to graduate in March/April of the following year).

Before a dissertation is handed in for examination, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that the appointed examiners are still available for the examination. This confirmation, together with a written confirmation that the dissertation is ready to be examined (please see paragraph 1.5 below) should then be submitted. This assessment must include confirmation that the document has been language-edited by an accredited language editor and has been assessed for potential plagiarism using appropriate software.

Dissertations, together with the necessary documentation, are sent to the examiners by courier, financed by the Dean's office. These examiners have six weeks in which to examine the dissertation and to return their feedback in the form of an examiner's report and a completed standard report form to the PhD Coordinator in the Vice-Dean's office.

Supervisors are not involved in any correspondence with the examiners on their official appointment, despatching of dissertations to the examiners, or receipt of the examiners' reports. Doctoral candidates or supervisors may not under any circumstances communicate with the examiners about the dissertation. Examiners may also not communicate with one another about the content of the dissertation they are required to evaluate.

Should a PhD candidate insist on submitting a dissertation for examination without the approval of the supervisor, this can be allowed if the potentially negative outcome of the decision has been pointed out in writing to the candidate. The chairperson of the relevant department will then write a formal departmental letter to the Vice-Dean (Research) to confirm that the dissertation is being submitted without approval.

### **1.6. Procedure for evaluating dissertations**

The evaluation of the dissertation is done in four stages.

**1.6.1.** The Chairperson/Director of the department/school involved, in collaboration with the supervisor, informs the Vice-Dean's office in writing that the dissertation is ready to be examined. This evaluation is not necessarily based on content, but rather on:

- (a) the structure of the document;
- (b) the scope of the document (what is expected of a PhD); and
- (c) the technical preparation of the document.

The evaluation should also be based on the question of whether the dissertation contains the basic elements, including:

- (a) an introductory chapter
- (b) an in-depth literature review
- (c) a thorough description of the methodology
- (d) a presentation of the empirical results
- (e) interpretation of the results, leading to conclusions
- (f) the implications flowing from the empirical results and findings
- (g) a summary of the study's contribution to the academic discipline of study.

Additional requirements are that the candidate includes a written declaration by a professional language editor (preferably accredited by a professional body such as The Professional Editors' Guild) to confirm that both the language and technical aspects of the dissertation have been edited. Should the services of an accredited editor not be used, the supervisor has to approve the editor whose services are being used. The Faculty will not provide any funds in this regard, but departments, as well as the supervisor can make a contribution if they wish to do so. PhD students must be made aware of this requirement when registering so that they can make provision for such funds.

Also attached to the dissertation must be a statement from the student/ department/school that the dissertation has gone through the Turn-it-in process to assess potential plagiarism concerns.

**1.6.2.** The candidate's dissertation is evaluated by each examiner individually.

**1.6.3.** When the written reports of all the examiners have been received, the Vice-Dean (Research) considers all the examiners reports and decides whether the faculty may proceed with an oral defence. The Vice-Dean then produces a quality assessment report to formalise the recommendation. This quality assessment report, as well as the examiners original reports are sent to the supervisor. The quality assessment report is confidential and its contents should not be disclosed to candidates. The supervisor may discuss the contents of the examiners reports with the candidate but he/she is not allowed to have direct access to examiners' reports.

**1.6.4.** It is expected of the candidate to submit a full written response report with a list of all the changes that has been made to the dissertation to the PhD coordinator in the Vice-Dean's office. This report should be submitted at least 10 days prior to the oral defence. It should be approved by the candidate's supervisor before submitting it to the PhD coordinator who shall forward the response report to the various examiners at least six days prior to the oral defence.

When a dissertation is referred back for further examination (and the oral defence therefore does not proceed), the supervisor(s) and candidate are still not allowed to contact the examiners.

It is important to note that a PhD thesis can only be submitted twice for examination. A student is not allowed to submit a dissertation for examination a third time. If there is no finality after the second round of assessment, a single assessor will make the final recommendation whether the dissertation can be accepted and the degree be awarded. The assessor is appointed by the Vice-Dean (Research) and must be approved by the Faculty Board.

## **1.7. Oral defence**

An oral defence is required by the Senate for the awarding of a doctorate (but, subject to the approval of the Senate, exemption from this examination may in special cases be granted on the basis of adequate justification).

The arrangements for the oral defence are made in consultation with the supervisor, but will not proceed unless **at least one of the external examiners is able to participate in person** in the oral defence process along with the internal examiner. The Vice-Dean (Research) or his nominee acts as chair of the examination panel. A notification of the event is placed on the Faculty website and external parties interested in the presentation of the candidate may attend the oral defence.

The presentation is followed by a question session, when first the examiners and then any other person present have the opportunity to ask the candidate clarification questions. After this, everyone except the examination panel are excused from the examination venue. The supervisor/s have to confirm in writing that all changes requested by the examiners have been implemented to his/her/their satisfaction. The examiners' reports are then discussed by the examination panel and the panel may call in the supervisor to provide additional information. The examination panel then makes a recommendation to the Faculty Board as to whether the degree may be awarded to the candidate. The examination panel may recommend that the degree be awarded on condition that the supervisor sees to it that specified final changes are made to the dissertation.

An electronic copy, as well as a hard copy of the dissertation, must be available during the oral defence.

### **1.8. Recommendation to Faculty Board**

After a successful oral defence the recommendations of the committee and the examiners reports are sent to the Faculty Secretary. The Dean submits the recommendation of the examination committee and the individual examination reports to the Faculty Board for approval. The Faculty Board reports its decision to Senate.

With a view to the graduation ceremony the supervisor (or the administrative staff member in the specific department/school) has to electronically submit the final dissertation and relevant information on the University's SunScholar system.

### **1.9. Dealing with differences of opinion on dissertations:**

- (a) Disputes between student and supervisor are referred to the Departmental Chair in a specific department.
- (b) If disputes or differences on the outcome of the examination process amongst PhD examiners are of such a nature that the faculty cannot proceed with the normal examination process, the matter will be referred to one external independent assessor. The appointment of the assessor is recommended for approval to the Faculty Board by the Dean. In such a case the assessor will receive the unabridged reports of the original examiners, as well as the dissertation evaluated in the reports. This dissertation does not have to be re-examined; the assessor only provide a decisive answer as to whether or not the negative assessment of members of the first examination panel is justified. Thereafter the Dean decides whether the dissertation should be recommended to the Faculty Board for approval.

The PhD coordinator in the Vice-Dean's office has to inform all examiners in writing of the final result of the examination. Where a negative assessment by an examiner has not been accepted, the final decision of the panel has to be justified.

The Academic Registration Division arranges for the examiners to receive the necessary remuneration for their work. These costs are recovered from each department's ad hoc funds. Examiners' travel and accommodation expenses are funded by the department concerned. Telephone and Skype expenses are carried by the Dean's office.