

Postgraduate student and supervisor

One of the primary purposes of postgraduate studies is to develop increasingly independent research skills and to become more specialised in a particular discipline. As early as undertaking an Honours degree, postgraduate students do a research project under the guidance of an academic supervisor. As you progress to more advanced postgraduate degrees, the expectation to contribute to the development of knowledge at an advanced level increases as well as the focus on the research component of your studies.

It is often this aspect of postgraduate studies that many students find most difficult because it requires more self-initiated work and has less structure than a taught course, for example. One thing that you can do to help yourself is to ensure that you are getting proper guidance and support from your supervisor. However, this is a mutually reciprocal relationship so you must put in your fair share of effort and hard work too. Stellenbosch University publishes a Code of Conduct in the General Calendar (Part 1). See section 7, *Code of conduct guiding the relationship between the supervisor and student*.

The following information has been extracted from the Calendar and is meant as a reference to guide the relationship between you and your academic supervisor to help to ensure that the relationship is conducive to effective studies at the University. The code consists of a set of undertakings or commitments and responsibilities.



Responsibilities of the supervisor

1. To familiarise themselves with procedures and regulations.
2. To establish a stimulating research environment.
3. To establish a relationship with you (the student).
4. To give advice about project choice and planning.
5. To discuss intellectual property and publications.
6. To ensure that facilities, where relevant, are available.
7. To provide research training.
8. To consult with you (the student), to monitor progress continually and to provide structured feedback.
9. To be aware of your (the student's) situation and needs.
10. To arrange for study guidance during periods of absence.

Responsibilities of you as the student

1. To familiarise yourself with the University regulations regarding postgraduate studies and to abide by these regulations.
2. To undertake research with dedication.
3. To develop initiative and independence.
4. To keep complete records of research results.
5. To establish a relationship with your supervisor.
6. To gain feedback by means of reports and seminars and to act on it.
7. To do a literature survey and to keep abreast of new literature.
8. To benefit from the research environment.
9. To inform your supervisor of non-academic problems.
10. To prepare and write your thesis or the dissertation.
11. To prepare and write publications, patents and reports.

Your academic department's role

Your home or academic department has an organisational structure that usually consists of a chairperson or a head of department, academic staff members who variously hold the ranks of professor, associate professor, senior lecturer and lecturer. In some departments, there are also technical staff members in addition to administrative support staff. Each academic department is part of a faculty, and each faculty is headed by a dean and in most cases, there are two or more vice-deans per faculty who focus on particular areas of responsibility. Each dean is supported by a personal assistant. Beyond your designated academic supervisor(s), take the time to find out who the academic, technical and support staff are that can and may play a role in your academic experience.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Your department is the place where you will most actively engage with your subject, and it is also responsible for managing your postgraduate degree. To this end, engage with your academic supervisor(s) about the aforementioned code of conduct. Master's and doctoral students are required, upon registration, to enter into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with their supervisor(s). In this MoU, the expectations and commitments of the parties are documented. Your faculty may have its own template but if there is no template available, you may suggest that you and your supervisor(s) use the institutional template prepared by the Postgraduate Office. It is available here under 'Resources' on our website or you can request it via email from pgskills@sun.ac.za.



Progress reports - annual reporting

All students enrolled for master's and doctoratal degrees are obliged to keep their supervisor informed about the progress of their research. If you experience a problem or concern that affects your academic progress, you should speak to your supervisor or head of department as soon as possible, against the background of the terms of your MoU. If you feel that you are unable to discuss your concerns with these individuals, you can contact the vice-dean for research in your faculty directly. Written reports In cases where the supervisor may consider it necessary (for example, where sustained contact with the student is not possible), the supervisor has the right to request one or more written reports, as may be necessary, from the student.

Departmental reports

Departments shall report to the faculty annually on the progress of students engaged in research for degree purposes. Reminder by the dean where a department's annual report shows that a student is not making satisfactory progress or has failed to report on their progress or lack thereof, the dean shall in a formal letter remind such a student of their above-said obligation.

Managing personal problems

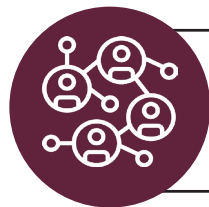
If you experience problems because of personal issues, you can approach your supervisor for advice on how to manage your workload under the circumstances. See information later in this publication about taking a leave of absence from studies, if applicable. You can also make an appointment to see a qualified counsellor at the Centre for Student Counselling and Development.

6 tips for your postgraduate success



1. Be self-directed

As a postgraduate student you will be expected to create your own structure, find, and manage resources and expertise and seek out opportunities to develop your research skills in consultation with your lecturers and/or supervisor. We encourage you to make the most of your postgraduate journey by being proactive directors of your success.



2. Connect with others

To enrich your postgraduate experience, extend your boundaries. Your peers, lecturers and supervisor(s) are of course vital to your success but there is much to be gained by crossing discipline specific boundaries and gaining different perspectives. Read relevant SU e-newsletters like the “Postgraduate Times” and Stellenbosch University International’s “Take Note” to find out about seminars, talks and informal postgraduate student events taking place in person and virtually elsewhere on campus.



3. Find your niche

Look both within and outside your department for groups that will give you a sense of belonging and a source of regular scholarly support. For example, your own weekly writing group within your department.



4. Manage your thoughts

Start a research journal; create a folder of readings, whatever works for you. It is helpful to jot down research ideas and topics that you find interesting as you come across them. You can revisit them later. Early on, adopt the habit of keeping a good record of what you have read making it easy to pull your sources together later. See the Enhancing Postgraduate Environments website (postgradenvironments.com) for more on the value of creating a research journal.



5. Know the policies and processes

As a postgraduate student you will be expected to create your own structure, find, and manage resources and expertise and seek out opportunities to develop your research skills in consultation with your lecturers and/or supervisor. We encourage you to make the most of your postgraduate journey by being proactive directors of your success.



6. Develop your own voice

To enrich your postgraduate experience, extend your boundaries. Your peers, lecturers and supervisor(s) are of course vital to your success but there is much to be gained by crossing discipline specific boundaries and gaining different perspectives. Read relevant SU e-newsletters like the “Postgraduate Times” and Stellenbosch University International’s “Take Note” to find out about seminars, talks and informal postgraduate student events taking place in person and virtually elsewhere on campus.

(Tips adapted from postgrad.com).

Postgraduate Skills Development

Free academic and professional skills workshops and resources

The Postgraduate Office houses a Postgraduate Skills Development Programme that offers a range of skills development opportunities. Engaging with this offering could help you to get the most out of your postgraduate studies. In the process, you might pick up some valuable skills transferable to your future career. Should you be completing your studies primarily off campus, take note of how the Programme can assist you to:



Plan your research aided by the Research Degree Toolkit and the *plan.it* calendar. The Research Degree Toolkit is an interactive e-tool specific to SU that includes information from the beginning stages of considering a research degree, all the way through to writing up your research. The stages in between include getting started, project management and conducting your research. The Research Degree Toolkit is available on the Postgraduate Skills Development web page (www.sun.ac.za/pgo/pgskills).

In addition to the Toolkit, collect a *plan.it* project management calendar from our Postgraduate Office (if or when you are on SU's central campus) or download it from our website under the 'Resources' page. The *plan.it* helps you to be aware of the important research milestones and aids with plotting these milestones effectively.



Free academic workshops

The Postgraduate Skills Development Programme offers a range of free research related workshops throughout the year, presented both virtually and in-person. Book to attend these workshops via the Programme's website (www.sun.ac.za/pgo/pgskills).

The Programme's website houses essential resources too, such as a template of the mandatory Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between research students and their supervisors, information on other SU support services, and the Enhancing Postgraduate Environments (EPE) web platform that contains useful South African contextualised, research-related resources (<http://postgradenvironments.com>).





The Postgraduate Skills Development Programme also maintains a bouquet of modules on the SUNLearn platform, the University's web-based learning platform: learn.sun.ac.za. These modules include a comprehensive online resource on Academic Writing Integrity: Avoiding Plagiarism and a Turnitin 'sandbox' where you can check your writing for citation errors or indications of ineffective paraphrasing to avoid plagiarism.

Turnitin is a text similarity detection tool that is used at Stellenbosch University to encourage best writing practices for using and citing other people's written material. You are required to submit your academic written pieces to Turnitin before submitting them for examination. If your department does not have their own Turnitin plugin, access the Postgraduate Skills Development Programme or the Library's Turnitin plugins on SUNLearn. Contact pgskills@sun.ac.za for help finding them.

Follow news of the Postgraduate Skills Development Programme's events:

Facebook: Stellenbosch University Postgraduate Office

Instagram: Stellenboschunipgo

Postgraduate Office newsletter sent at the beginning of each month to all registered SU postgraduates.

Contact us

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