

# POSTGRADUATE STUDENT, HOME ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT 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). 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.

## **Undertakings by the student and academic supervisor**

1. The student undertakes to stay informed of the infrastructure and the accompanying rules of his/her home academic department (with the requisite input from the supervisor).
2. The University undertakes not to select a student for a specific project without confirming beforehand in writing with the faculty concerned that the project may be undertaken. Specifics regarding the responsibility for the required funds and relevant infrastructure shall be indicated.
3. The student shall acquaint him/herself with the guidelines for recording research, as is generally accepted within the discipline concerned, with the aid of the supervisor.
4. The student shall confirm that they possess or will acquire, the computer skills necessary to complete the project in a satisfactory manner.
5. Pre-study work, as required by the University, shall be completed in an agreed period.

6. A work schedule for each student must be drawn up within a reasonable time (as a rule within 60 days) in consultation with the supervisor. The schedule shall include target dates for, among others, the submission of a project protocol, the completion of a literature survey, the completion of specific chapters and the submission of progress reports. Times of absence (study leave, university holidays, etc.) shall also be included.
7. During the academic year, regular meetings on fixed dates shall be scheduled between the student and the supervisor. The supervisor shall report annually in writing to the departmental chair/ postgraduate coordinator/dean concerned on the student's progress.
8. All submitted work shall be returned to the student by the supervisor within a reasonable time, but not exceeding 60 days for a complete thesis/dissertation.
9. When a project is near completion, the student shall make the necessary submissions in accordance with the requirements for graduation within the discipline concerned. (Refer specifically to the University Almanac as set out in Part 1 of the University Calendar, to ensure that theses/ dissertations are finalised and examined in time for the graduation ceremonies in December or March). The student undertakes to produce suitable outputs (such as publications, patents, reports), as arranged with the supervisor. The student shall acquaint him/herself with the customs in the discipline concerned regarding authorship.
10. Where applicable, the student and the supervisor shall acquaint themselves with the requirements regarding intellectual property in the environment concerned.

### **Responsibilities of the academic supervisor**

1. To familiarise themselves with procedures and regulations.
2. To establish a stimulating research environment.
3. To establish a relationship with 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 the student, to monitor progress continually and to provide structured feedback.
9. To be aware of the student's situation and needs.
10. To arrange for study guidance during periods of absence.

## **Responsibilities of the student**

1. To familiarise themselves 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 the 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 the supervisor of non-academic problems.
10. To prepare and write the 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](mailto:pgskills@sun.ac.za).

### **Progress reports - annual reporting**

All students enrolled for Master's and Doctorate 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 (details are available later in this publication).



## COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES

If you have a grievance or wish to pursue any matter relating to academic departments or the university administration, you can address such matters as follows:

### **Academic issues**

Try to resolve your concern with your academic supervisor. Failing this, contact your head of department, the vice-dean for research or the dean of your faculty. Please find contact details later in this publication.

### **Administrative issues**

Contact the Postgraduate Office 3rd Floor, Room 3018,  
Krotoa Building,  
Ryneveld Street,  
Stellenbosch  
Email: [postgraduate@sun.ac.za](mailto:postgraduate@sun.ac.za)  
Tel: 021 808 4208

# TOP TIPS FOR YOUR POSTGRADUATE SUCCESS

Take on board these top tips to assist you in succeeding as a postgraduate at SU:

## 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, immediate 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 subscribe to 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, join the Postgraduate Office's, Postgraduate Skills Development Programme's online weekly Shut Up and Write group. Alternatively, create your own study group or join a relevant society.

## 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 so that it is easy to pull your sources together later. See the Enhancing Postgraduate Environments website ([postgradenvironments.com](http://postgradenvironments.com)) for more on the value of creating a research journal.

## 5. Know the important policies and processes

Find out what information is relevant to you as a postgraduate student, such as important deadlines (e.g., for ethics clearance submission), mandatory procedures (e.g., signing a Memorandum of Understanding between you and your supervisor). Some of these have been highlighted in this publication. Also, identify the support services that can assist you with various aspects of your studies. Remember to ask when you are unsure of something!

## 6. Develop your own voice

Most disciplines have their own acronyms, vocabulary, and specific terminology. It is useful to come to grips with these, but it is equally important to find your own voice and to express yourself in an understandable way. Explaining something complex in a straightforward way is often (but not always) evidence of your own understanding of the concept. It is worth practicing this as it improves your academic writing style too.

(Tips adapted from [postgrad.com](http://postgrad.com)).

# POSTGRADUATE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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:

## 1. 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](http://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 here. The *plan.it* helps you to be aware of the important research milestones and aids with plotting these milestones effectively.

## **2. Hone essential graduate skills – free of charge**

The Postgraduate Skills Development Programme offers a range of research-related workshops throughout the year, presented both virtually and in-person (COVID-19 pandemic measures permitting). Book to attend these workshops via the Programme's website ([www.sun.ac.za/pgo/pgskills](http://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](http://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](mailto:pgskills@sun.ac.za) for help finding them.

## **3. Keep you up to date through the Postgraduate Times Newsletter**

Read news, tips, and the latest opportunities in this monthly newsletter. Stay informed about postgraduate skills development events tailored specifically for postgraduate students' needs. As a registered postgraduate student, you will receive a monthly Postgraduate Times newsletter automatically via the email you provided upon registration as your primary email for correspondence. Update your contact details under the personal information tab on MySUN. Find previous Postgraduate Times editions here: <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/newsletter>.

## **4. Become part of the postgraduate community**

You are invited to attend informal Pop-Up cafés, typically held quarterly, where you can meet other postgraduate students from different disciplines. These take place over lunch and include a brown bag lunch (you must RSVP) when hosted on-campus. During lockdown periods, the Pop-Ups typically

take place virtually in the form of webinars. These are great opportunities to 'connect' with other SU postgraduates in an informal space. Then there are also Shut Up & Write writing sessions for postgraduate students who are looking for a regular, communal time to write. These Shut Up and Write sessions are hosted virtually. Send an email to [pgskills@sun.ac.za](mailto:pgskills@sun.ac.za) to find out more.

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

Facebook: Stellenbosch University Postgraduate Office

Twitter: @PGSkillsStell Instagram: Stellenboschunipgo

Postgraduate Office, Krotoa Building corner of Ryneveld and Victoria Street, 3rd Floor, Room 3018

Email: [pgskills@sun.ac.za](mailto:pgskills@sun.ac.za)

Tel: 021 808 3727

Website: [www.sun.ac.za/pgo/pgskills](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgo/pgskills)



# POSTGRADUATE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

[www.sun.ac.za/pgo/pgskills](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgo/pgskills)



Attend our  
workshops



Access a  
range of  
academic  
e-resources



Join our  
virtual Pop Up  
Cafes



Use our plan.it  
project  
management  
e-calendar



Consult our online  
Research Degree Toolkit



Consult our website for  
other support at SU



Read our  
Postgraduate Times  
Newsletter