



SCHOOL OF HEALTH SYSTEMS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

How to Successfully Complete Your Doctorate in the School of Health Systems and Public Health - a Brief Guide (Updated January 2016)

Important notice

The steps outlined in this document are the proposed process and the amended regulations that reflect this process are currently pending.

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the School of Health System and Public Health. This document outlines the key steps in the doctoral journey and should be used in conjunction with other documents on the SHSPH website, the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office's website and the University's regulations. In particular the Research Office

2. Getting admitted to the programme

As part of your application process please send your CV and proposal document to the research coordinator of the SHSPH, via Mrs Jo-Anne Adams (e-mail address: Jo-Anne.Adams@up.ac.za). This submission will serve at the SHSPH Research Committee (Rescom). The dates of the meetings are available on the SHSPH's website.

Once your application has been evaluated, a potential promoter/s will be approached by the research coordinator to find out if they are able to supervise your thesis. You may also suggest a promoter should you have any preferences or a prior working relationship. Should you wish to have a promoter who is a member of another department (e.g. paediatrics), that individual may be given a joint-appointment in SHSPH, which would allow them to fulfil the promoter role. Should you wish to have a promoter who is a member of an organization external to the University of Pretoria (e.g. a research institute, or another university) that individual can be appointed as an extraordinary member of staff in the SHSPH, as long as the Faculty of Health Sciences Post Graduate Committee approves the appointment. Do remember that you will need to have regular and easy access to your promoter and this may be difficult with an external promoter.

2.1 Registering as a doctoral student

If your draft proposal is approved by the SHSPH Rescom then you may apply for your doctoral studies. ***The SHSPH strongly recommends that you work via the SHSPH student administration (Mrs Rene de Waal) to expedite your application.*** The reason for this is the necessity to be registered by end March to be eligible for a postgraduate bursary.

Once your application is approved by the Head of School you may register. Please take careful note of the information letter from Rescom that indicates for which doctoral programme you may register.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Please also download and read the Guidelines for Postgraduate studies that is available from the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office's webpage.

3.1 Understanding your responsibilities as a student

You are required to take responsibility for your **progress** and not wait for your promoter to remind you of the activities that are required.

Individual styles and needs differ greatly, from person to person and beyond a mandatory twice annual review of progress, there is no formal contact schedule in the university regulations. The agreement of the timing and the mode of contact are some of the aspects that form part of the postgraduate supervision contract (Memorandum of Agreement).

All students are required to read and understand the Faculty and University's **regulations** in terms of the study that you have embarked on. These regulation books are available on line or from the Client Service Centre.

The Faculty has a number of requirements regarding process, documentation and format that you should acquaint yourself with at the beginning of each progressive step through your studies.

As an adult learner you are also required to contact the secretary of each meeting that you need approval from and ensure that your documentation is complete and correct. Also contact the secretary after the meeting for feedback on your submission.

4. Process

The SHSPH website has a protocol template and protocol guidelines that are useful.

4.1 Doing an oral defence

Once your protocol has reach an advanced stage of development, your promoter will select at least two committee members to form an oral defence panel. This panel will consist of:

- your promoter/s
- a university staff member that are external to the School (but who may have joint appointments)
- as many external experts as your promoter deems necessary

The intent of the defence is to ensure that a doctoral student has a broad understanding of the general area their thesis is located within and to ensure that the planned research is feasible and will contribute new knowledge to the field.

The role of the committee members is to provide you with expertise and advice relevant to your thesis topic, and to offer you support.

The format of the presentation is a 30 minute presentation outlining what you want to do, why you want to do it, how you propose to do it (along with any relevant background information) and finally, how you think this will contribute to new knowledge in the area.

After a successful oral defence you will make any required changes and then you may register and attend a TNM 800 module.

4.2 Completing the TNM 800 (refining the protocol)

All doctoral students in the Faculty of Health Sciences are required to attend a TNM 800 (Applied Research Methods) module. This module is a preparation for submission to the Ethics Committee and students must have an advanced draft protocol before the start of the module. Students who have previously completed a TNM 800 may apply for accreditation (details or requirements are available from TNM 800 page on the Faculty of Health Sciences website). The TNM 800 module booking must be made timeously to ensure attendance of the module.

Box 1: Coursework

A doctoral degree is a research degree and therefore there is no prescribed coursework. However there is one module (TNM800) which you have to register for and attend as part of your doctoral studies – the TNM800 is a workshop where you refine your protocol. The SHSPH also expects you to attend the PHM 870 module (Learning in Public Health) as this is an orientation and introduction to many of the systems and support structures in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

In some cases your promoter might suggest that you attend some modules that are considered to be critical for the successful completion of your project. Please note that if this is the case you will have to register separately as a “postgraduate medical special” student and there are costs involved.

4.3 Preparing the protocol for ethics

In collaboration with your promoter/s you should develop your **final protocol** after the TNM 800 which should outline what you want to do, how you are going to do it, why it's worth doing and what the implications of your research might be. The Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Committee has an online submission system and the deadlines for submission etc. are on their website.

4.4 Registering your title and approving your protocol

After the TNM 800 module the final protocol must be submitted to the SHSPH Academic Advisory Committee (AAC) via the secretary of the meeting (meeting dates and contact persons are available on SHSPH website). This committee will review your protocol and once approved your title will be registered with the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Your examiners will be appointed at this committee and their identity is confidential until the final marks have been received. Once your protocol is approved at the SHSPH AAC, you may submit to the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Committee.

4.5 Getting ethical approval

All research carried out in the Faculty of Health Sciences MUST have **ethics approval**. The guidelines, required documentation and deadlines are available on the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Committee website (link available from SHSPH webpage).

Application for ethics approval is normally made immediately after AAC approval committee has approved your research proposal. Do not delay submission as these committees only meet a few times a year. Once approval has been given to your study you may start your data collection.

4.6 Doing the research

Remember to spend time developing your proposal as this will go a long way to making the actual “doing” of the research relatively straight-forward and stress-free. It’s well worth investing time and getting it right at the proposal development stage. Make use of your promoter/s. Their task is to guide, encourage and support you during this process. Prevention (through a well designed proposal) or early detection (through regular meetings with your promoter) and treatment (talk to your promoter and get the advice you need) is, as always, the key to a healthy research experience.

4.7 Reviewing progress

At your first meeting complete and sign the standard Memorandum of Agreement and remember to ask for a copy for your records. You will also have to submit a progress report (template available from the SHSPH website) to your promoter twice a year in April and October.

Box 2: The question of satisfactory progress

Please note that at the end of each academic year the progress reports are used to determine whether you have made satisfactory progress so that you may register for the next year of study. In your first year of study you must have a successful oral defence to meet the criteria for satisfactory progress.

Do remember that you must **register for your studies** at the beginning of each year and that you have a maximum two years of study for fulltime students and three years of study for part-time students.

5. Product

5.1 Writing up your research

As your research nears completion, it's time to **write it up and defend it**. Don't delay the writing phase. It can be started before the research is complete.

Good communication with your promoter is the key to having a relatively pain-free and productive writing experience. In collaboration with your promoter, develop a structure for your thesis; make sure you both share the same vision for this, and establish a mutually agreeable provisional time line for the completion of your thesis.

Box 3: Two options for thesis structure

Your promoter will guide you on your choice of thesis structure (either traditional format with chapters or a thesis including published papers). You should consult the General Regulations as well as the Faculty of Health Sciences regulations for more information on the required elements of your thesis.

5.2 Defending the thesis

You will be contacted by the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office to do an oral defence of thesis. This defence is an open forum where your friends and family may attend. The length of the presentation is 45-60 minutes.

5.3 Submitting the thesis for marking

Your thesis must be handed in the required format and number of copies to Postgraduate Office of the Faculty of Health Sciences (Mrs Alta Strauss). Please note that there is also paperwork that must be completed (forms are available from the Faculty of Health

Sciences Research Office's website and that your promoter/s will be required to sign that you may submit the thesis.

Your promoter/s will contact you approximately two months after the submission with the required changes that have been requested by the external examiners.

Besides the submission of the final leather bound hardcopy version/s you are also required to submit your thesis electronically. The Postgraduate Office of the Faculty of Health Sciences (Mrs Alta Strauss) will guide you on the process.

5.4 Timelines

Please remember that the doctoral degree is the major university degree and the process has a clearly defined and relatively complex path that is partially managed by the Faculty of Health Sciences.

This means that you must be mindful of **time line issues**. For example, if you wish to graduate in the April convocation, you should get your copies for marking to the postgraduate student administrator at the Faculty of Health Sciences' Client Service Centre before the end of November, or before the end of April for September graduation. The precise dates vary from year to year.

Disclaimer:

Every attempt has been made to ensure that the information contained in this guideline is accurate. In the event of discrepancies, the University of Pretoria's regulations and/or the decision of the Academic Advisory Committee is considered as the authoritative source.

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