

Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, University of Pretoria
Postgraduate Studies Committee (PGSC)
General guidelines and procedures

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PGSC COMMITTEE:

1. Approval of the appointment of an alternative supervisor.
2. Approval of (additional) co-supervisor/s.
3. Approval of the final titles of all postgraduate thesis/dissertations
4. Approval of internal and external examiners
5. Review appeals after the examination of a dissertation/thesis

REGISTRATION OF A CANDIDATE / APPOINTMENT OF SUPERVISOR(S)

The supervisor (and co-supervisor(s)) is(are) appointed as part of the application process. As this approval is overseen by the individual academic departments, it will not serve for approval at the PGSC. Only the appointment of external supervisors not affiliated to the university will serve at the PGSC for approval.

1. Academic staff members of an academic department evaluates the application of a potential PG student for formal qualification and personal suitability for an envisaged project. Where necessary they will confirm the suitability of the student by a personal exchange in the form of emails or ideally an interview – virtual or face-to-face. The potential supervisor completes and signs the Approval of Application form to formally indicate her/his ability and willingness to supervise the student throughout the PG degree. A provisional title of the study must be provided.
2. The Head of Department (HoD) evaluates the application plus any additional documentation to check the match between student and supervisor, the formal qualification of the candidate and the supervisory capacity of the supervisor. The HoD formally approves the application by signing the approval form. The recommendation is then submitted to the Deputy Dean (Research & Postgraduate Education) for approval.
3. Co-supervisor(s) may be nominated throughout the duration of PG degree but are only formally appointed by the faculty during the “title registration and appointment of examiners” process. Supervisors inform HoDs of the appointment or changes in co-supervisory teams through formal letters of motivation. HoDs approve changes by signing and returning the letters of motivation to the supervisors.
4. A student is accepted by a staff member in a department, who therefore serves as supervisor in that department.
5. The supervisor is appointed and the candidate registered.
6. The appointment of a supervisor remains in place until the supervisor submits a formal request for the appointment of an alternative supervisor with the HoD. Where possible, a

letter of support from the student and the alternative supervisor should accompany the letter of request. Letters are signed by HoDs to indicate their approval and are forwarded to Student Administration and the Deputy Dean (Research and PG Studies) for noting.

If a supervisor resigns as a staff member from the University, the HOD may appoint the existing supervisor to continue supervising the student provided the supervisor has made a substantial contribution to the study and/or it is in the best interest of the study and student. A motivation from the supervisor and supported by the HoD is forwarded to Student Administration and the Deputy Dean (Research and PG Studies) for approval. It is also advisable to appoint a co-supervisor from the University. Alternatively, the HoD formally appoints a new supervisor and forwards the letter of motivation signed by the student and the new supervisor to Student Administration and the Deputy Dean (Research and PG Studies) for approval.

7. If a student wishes to discontinue their PG degree, they inform the supervisor, the HoD and Student Administration in writing.

Guidelines and recommendations:

1. Co-supervisors will generally be academic staff members or extraordinary appointments of the University of Pretoria. This will be confirmed by providing the EMPLID or the staff member on the Title Registration form. If the co-supervisor is part of the academic staff of the faculty, this must be denoted on the title registration form.
2. Extraordinary staff may be nominated as the main supervisor for MSc and PhD candidates and can serve as sole supervisor for MSc-level studies but in the case of PhD-level studies a permanent UP staff member should be appointed as a co-supervisor.
3. Proposed co-supervisors who are not academic staff members of the University of Pretoria: their CV plus a motivation from supervisor countersigned by the HOD must accompany the Title Registration form of the student during the "title registration and appointment of examiners" process.
4. Registered postgraduate students may serve as co-workers, but may not be nominated as co-supervisors (i.e., a PhD candidate cannot be appointed as co-supervisor of an MSc candidate). *Note: This is not applicable to permanently appointed UP staff that are also registered as students.*
5. Postdoctoral fellows may be nominated as co-supervisors for MSc candidates. Senior postdoctoral fellows may be the main supervisor for MSc and PhD candidates but in the case of PhD-level study must have a permanent UP staff member appointed as a co-supervisor.

Recommendations:

The supervisor:

- The supervisor must be in an academic position at the University (General Regulation G.50.1(c)(iii)).
- Supervisors must hold a qualification that is at least equivalent to the qualification of the postgraduate candidate concerned and should have the appropriate stature and experience to supervise postgraduate candidates. If this is not the case the head of department must obtain approval from the PGSC for the designation (General Regulation G.50.1(c)(ii)).
- The supervisor is responsible for advising the student with regard to proper preparation of the thesis (General Regulation G.50.1(c)(iii)) and that all Faculty and University regulations/ guidelines are adhered to and that all relevant regulations and legislation is complied with. This may include various levels of ethics approval, protocol defence and/or approval from the relevant Government Departments. Students failing to comply with the applicable South African legislation or University regulations may be denied the degree on the basis that this would constitute a breach of the University's Policy on Research Ethics and Integrity.
- Supervisors are also responsible for ensuring that the student/supervisor memorandum of agreement is discussed and signed properly and complies with General Regulation G.50.1(c)(vi) and (vii).
- Supervisors must ensure that co-supervisors are approved by the HoD and that the information is forwarded to Student Administration. External co-supervisors must be approved by the PGSC during the Title Registration process on the basis of a letter of motivation by the supervisor and a CV of the proposed co-supervisor.

The co-supervisor:

- Co-supervisors should be selected on the basis of their technical or academic expertise and their ability to support the academic goals of the project.
- Co-supervisors provide alternative or complementary viewpoints, increase the breadth of expertise available to the postgraduate student and may be called upon to supervise the student should the principal supervisor be absent due to illness, sabbatical activities or departure from the institution.
- Supervisors must ensure that co-supervisors are approved by the HoD and that the information is forwarded to Student Administration. External co-supervisors must be approved by the PGSC during the Title Registration process on the basis of a letter of motivation by the supervisor and a CV of the proposed co-supervisor.
- In some instances a co-supervisor may be appointed as part of a mentorship programme (i.e. to "train" a young academic in supervisory skills).

Recommendations:

1. Where possible, at least one co-supervisor should be appointed for each MSc or PhD student.
2. Supervisory teams should be capped at three or, at maximum, four individuals.

RESEARCH PROTOCOL/PROPOSAL

NOTE: This is not the domain of the PGSC, but below some pointers.

1. An appropriate research proposal/protocol (see the Project Proposal or Protocol below), prepared by the candidate under supervision of the supervisor(s), is presented in an open forum (subject to departmental regulations).

2. The supervisor must ensure that all relevant ethical approvals and regulatory certificates have been obtained.
3. The proposal/protocol must be submitted to the HOD (and departmental Research Committee if required by departmental regulations), and kept on record in the Department. This should accompany the student/supervisor memorandum of agreement, which is signed by the HOD and submitted to NAS Faculty.

THE PROJECT PROPOSAL OR PROTOCOL:

The proposal/protocol should be a succinct document of ~5-15 pages. It may be combined with the literature review though the student should understand that the literature review needs to be revised regularly to remain up to date. The proposal should clearly motivate the need for the study. Students should finalise the proposal/protocol in 6 to 8 weeks. The proposal should summarize the study in a single aim broken down into achievable objectives. Where possible a working hypothesis, the deliverables or milestones should be provided. A clear timeline for the project needs to be developed in the form of a Gantt chart. The supervisor needs to have all overarching ethics and regulatory approvals in place ideally prior to the student developing their proposal/protocol development process.

TITLE REGISTRATION FORM

1. The provisional title, as captured during the registration process, remains valid until the final title is approved by the PGSC.
2. The supervisor must complete the Title Registration form (including examiners details) when a candidate proceeds to the final writing stage of their project.
3. The form should propose a succinct, encompassing yet unambiguous title, ideally as a single phrase or sentence without any punctuation. Correct scientific notations such as italicisation for biological species must be in place.
4. Ethical clearance numbers must be provided.
5. Supervisors and co-supervisor document their considered approval of the title and the proposed examiners (see below) by their signatures.
6. HODs confirm the suitability of the title and proposed examiners by signing the Title Registration form. HODs forward the form to Student Administration for approval by the PGSC.
7. If the final title as approved by the PGSC needs to be amended, the updated Title Registration form plus all supporting documentation need to be resubmitted to Student Administration for re-approval by the PGSC.
8. Though several students may undertake closely related research projects, each student must write distinct dissertations/theses based on their own work and results. Each dissertation/thesis must be assigned a unique title.
9. Where supervisors, co-supervisors and internal examiners are active academic staff members of the University of Pretoria, the title, full name, e mail address and EMPLID will suffice for identification.
10. For external co-supervisors or examiners, supervisors must provide a title, full name, main affiliation (in English), current Email address and telephone numbers.

NOTES:

- The title must comply with the UP General Regulations (e.g., avoid excessive capitalization; all scientific names must be in italics).
- The title should succinctly and aesthetically encompass the nature, scope, purpose and potentially outcome of the study.
- Avoid ambiguity or confusing formulations.
- Adding key words may aid others in locating the report.

Not permitted:

- Abbreviations
- Terminating full stops/periods
- Exclamation or question marks

Redundant phrasing, such as "A study of," "An analysis of" or similar.

INTERNAL EXAMINERS

The role of an internal examiner is to ensure that the University's expectations of a Master's degree/PhD are fulfilled. For a Masters, the expectations are that the candidate has been trained in how to do research, and can demonstrate that. The process is therefore more important than the outcome. For a PhD, the candidate should demonstrate that he/she is capable of planning, performing and publishing novel research.

If an internal examiner is not nominated, an additional external examiner should be nominated. Some examiners employed by the CSIR and other research councils (ARC and MRC) who as individuals collaborate closely with UP, may be considered as internal examiners. This will be determined on case by case when a CV is submitted to the PGSC.

1. The supervisor and co-supervisor(s) propose an internal examiner (UP staff or extra-ordinary appointment) who has supervised equivalent students, but was not involved in supervising/ assisting the candidate. *The supervisor may not be an internal examiner* [General Regulation G.50.4 (a)(iv)].
2. The supervisor should ascertain that the proposed internal examiner is available to examine the dissertation/thesis.
3. If the internal examiner is replaced by an additional external examiner, this needs to be clearly indicated as this has financial repercussions.
4. The internal examiner must have at least the same qualification as the degree being examined.

EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

UP regulations require at least one external examiner for a master's dissertation or two for a doctoral thesis (with at least one based outside South Africa). External examiners are established researchers in the specific field of study as demonstrated by their CV, which should accompany the nomination form.

1. The supervisor and co-supervisor(s) should identify suitable external examiner(s). They should ascertain whether the examiners will be available to accept the appointment.
2. Available examiner should be requested to provide a recent CV.
3. The CV should include a list of publications (at least for the last 5 years) and a record of postgraduate supervision, especially for PhD examinations.
4. Supervisor should never discuss any details of the dissertation/thesis with the external examiner nor in any way indicate their expectations of the examination. All further interactions will be coordinated by Student Administration. If communication with the examiner fails, Student Administration will request the HOD or Deputy Dean to contact the examiner.

Note: *When the submission process has started, the deputy dean and administration will briefly inform the examiners thereof by e-mail.*

Guidelines:

- External examiners may not have any close associated with the candidate or involved in prior research of the candidate. [General Regulation G.50.4 (a)(v)]. External examiners and supervisors should not have co-published papers for five 5 years. In exceptional circumstances, a letter of motivation may be provided to set aside this rule.
- External examiners may not be based at the same institution. [General Regulation G.50.4 (a)(vi)].
- The appointment of examiner without an appropriate publication record may in exceptional cases be motivated if their expertise can be demonstrated in a different way.

People who may not serve as external examiners, except in exceptional circumstances, include:

- Current UP staff and extraordinary appointees.
- Colleagues who resigned/retired from UP during the past three years. They may instead serve as internal examiners.
- Researchers with whom the supervisor, co-supervisor(s) or candidate have collaborated or published for five years.
- Former students of the supervisor/co-supervisor(s) graduating during the past five years.

SOME GENERAL REGULATIONS TO TAKE NOTE OF:

Identity of members of the examination panel [General Regulation G.50.4 (b)(i)]:

1. The identity of the examiners may not be revealed to the candidate until the examination process has been completed.

Treatment of examiners' reports [General Regulation G.50.4 (e)(i-iii)]:

2. Under no circumstances shall any party modify any examiner's report.
3. In the event that the candidate has to make corrections to the dissertation/thesis, the relevant section(s) of the examiners' reports will be made available to the candidate by the supervisor in order for the necessary changes to be made to the dissertation/thesis.
4. All examination copies of dissertations / theses returned to faculty, should be returned to the supervisor for safe-keeping for a period of at least 2 years.