

Standard operating procedure for Faculty of Health Science's PhD Committee's assessment of studies

Faculty of Health Sciences PhD website: <https://www.up.ac.za/school-of-medicine/article/2416606/phd-committee>

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1. Submission requirements for PhD protocol review

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- 1.5 Protocol
- 1.6 Confirmation of Head of Department funding letter
- 1.7 Turnitin report
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- 1.9 Short CV of candidate, supervisor and co-supervisors

If submitted within the submission time a protocol will be reviewed during the following meeting. Please add a note regarding the submission dates before each meeting/specific day and time?

2. Points of review before the committee meeting

2.1 PhD title form, candidate CV, Supervisor's CV and co-supervisors CV, Turnitin report?

- Candidate is qualified to register for a PhD degree and has at least a master's (MSc, MMed) or equivalent degree as per UP regulations; should have completed a TNM 702, 802 or 900 course or equivalent within 5 years before PhD registration.
- Supervisor must have a PhD. In addition, should have at least successfully co-supervised one PhD student to completion. The latter requirement may be waived under exceptional circumstances upon a justification made to the committee based on for example extensive master's degree supervision and the number of accredited publications in lieu of PhD supervision. There can only be one supervisor. A supervisor must contribute to the subject matter of the thesis.
- Co-supervisors: at least one, maximum three with justification. At least one must have a PhD and should have successfully supervised at least one Master's student to completion. The second and third co-supervisors require a letter of motivation and support from the supervisor and must include their contribution to the study. All co-supervisors should have a significant contribution to the study.
- Registered postgraduate students may serve as collaborators, but may not be nominated as co-supervisors (i.e., a PhD candidate cannot be appointed as co-supervisor of another PhD candidate)

2.2 Memorandum of Agreement

Signed and dated by candidate, supervisor and co-supervisors.

2.3 Declaration of originality and Turnitin report

- Declaration signed and dated by candidate, supervisor and co-supervisors.
- Turnitin settings should be standardised to exclude bibliography and sources which account for <2% of the similarity. Similarity indexes will be viewed as follows:
 - <10% similarity index accepted.

- $\geq 10\%$ review sources of similarity if no overt plagiarism from a specific source it will be accepted. If from a specific source the candidate and their supervisor will be informed before the meeting to review and rewrite relevant sections. If at resubmission, $\geq 10\%$ similarity index UP's [Plagiarism policy](#) will be followed.

2.4 Confirmation of funding

- Letter clearly states that funds have been secured and are available for the study including the source of the funding. This letter should be signed by the supervisor, co-supervisor/s, head of department (HoD) and candidate.
- Student self-funded studies will not be encouraged, and require a motivation to the committee.

2.5 Statistician letter

All quantitative studies require on a formal letterhead, a letter from a qualified or recognized statistician who collaborates with the candidate. If relevant to the study, confirmation of the sample size, a brief description of statistical analysis plan, as well as availability to assist must be included in the letter. The extent of statistical input should match the statistical requirements of the study.

3. Overview of study protocol review process

Members of the committee will review the protocol before the allocated PhD committee meeting. At the committee meeting a quorum will be accepted if 60% or more of the committee members are present. The candidate, supervisor and at least one of the co-supervisors should be in attendance. A candidate will have 5 minutes to describe their study verbally such as: the problem statement, relevance aims and objectives and briefly describe the methodology of their study as well as anticipated outcomes, contribution to research field and problems. Thereafter the members will ask questions and have a discussion with the candidate as required. At the end of the meeting the chairperson will summarize the committee's opinion and deliver an outcome as either:

1. approved with no changes,
2. minor amendments required without reappearance at the committee, or
3. major amendments with reappearance at the committee,
4. complete revision of the study with resubmission, and reappearance at the committee
5. redesign study making a new submission.

All candidates and their supervisors will receive a letter from the Committee chairperson together with a table of comments within one week of the meeting.

4. Study protocol content review

Generic requirements

- i. The candidate and the supervisors should ensure sufficient
 - Scholarly sophistication and quality of the proposed work
 - Novelty and originality of the research problem and/ or methodology
 - Envisaged contribution to the field of research

- ii. If research has already been commenced, it may be included with motivation. It must be described in detail as well as how it contributes to the study. It must have appropriate ethics approval. A substantive amount of research must still be completed for the thesis to be awarded.
- iii. If a pilot study had been undertaken, the results thereof should be presented, and how these affect the proposed study.
- iv. For quantitative studies, the methodology should describe sufficient detail so that it may be replicated.
- v. The candidate should demonstrate a clear understanding of the proposed research methodology
- vi. Phased PhD studies will be considered with motivation, where methodology may evolve after completion of sub-studies. Detailed methodology of the first phase must be included within the submission.

Various Types of study designs will be considered, for example

- Qualitative
- Quantitative
- Conceptual
- Knowledge synthesis studies

Review goals for the proposed PhD study

- Is the proposed research achievable within time frame and other constraints?
- Will the candidate do sufficient scholarly work for a PhD degree?
- Is the content and format of the protocol sufficient for the type of study?
- Does the proposed field of study fall within the domain of Health Sciences?
- Is the protocol format according to the type of study and as required by the Faculty of Health Sciences, UP?
- Is the protocol's presentation appropriate, following the recommended layout and structure and does it show scientific writing and understanding?
- Is the candidate's contribution clearly indicated and sufficient when working in a research team? If some of the methodology and analysis will be performed at another institution has it been defined who will perform the work, and how the student will be involved?
- Does the candidate have the capacity and be in a position to complete the PhD?

5. After the first protocol presentation

Candidate needs to address each comment in a Response letter and submit it together with two revised protocol copies: One with track changes and one without track changes to the chairperson for re-evaluation by the committee. The committee will review the amendments. If not satisfied a further comment table will be issued or representation at a committee meeting will be requested.

6. Number of resubmissions

Following **two** unsuccessful submissions (including the index submission) the committee chair will meet the supervisor with/without the candidate to discuss the committee's concerns with the protocol.

A protocol will be reviewed for a maximum of **three** times (including the index submission), after which the committee will discuss the merits of the study and review the previous decisions and student responses. Should the committee conclude that the study will not produce a PhD, the PhD-committee may choose to cease further consideration of the study and inform the candidate and supervisor of their decision.

7. Upgrading an MSc to a PhD degree

The University of Pretoria's Office of the Vice-Principal Research and Postgraduate Studies Policy: [Conversion of Masters to Doctoral study](#) will be followed.

The committee will consider the academic merit of the MSc and if agreed by a quorum will follow point 4 of the above policy where the candidate's application, together with the committee's recommendation will be submitted for consideration to the Senate Committee for Student Cases.

8. Joint PhD's

The University of Pretoria's [Policy for Joint Degrees](#) will be followed.

Joint PhD's initially registered in another institution will be assessed according to the Committee's SOP. Consideration will be taken of the other institution's PhD requirements and if deemed appropriate the Committee reserves the right to adjust this SOP, however must be satisfied that the student has a reasonable opportunity of achieving their degree both at UP and the other institution.