



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

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 29 May 2019)

Introduction

A warm welcome to the School of Health System and Public Health!

The next pages outline the key steps in the doctoral journey and should be used in conjunction with other documents on the following websites:

- (1) SHSPH;
- (2) PhD@SHSPH on ClickUP (once you are registered at the SHSPH),
- (3) Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office (<https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-health-sciences-research>, accessed 29 May 2019),
- (4) the University's Regulations (<https://www.up.ac.za/yearbooks/2019/rules>, accessed 29 May 2019); and
- (5) Faculty yearbook
(<https://www.up.ac.za/yearbooks/2019/faculties/view/MED/Faculty%20of%20Health%20Sciences>, accessed 29 May 2019)

In particular, the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office has a number of useful documents.

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree is aimed at professionals who wish to advance their careers in research. In the case of the PhD degree offered through the SHSPH, the scientific orientation is toward the health sciences and, in particular, the field of public health.

The research methods used depend on a solid understanding of **epidemiology** and **biostatistics** as well as an advanced knowledge of the content area in which research will be conducted. These three components form the basis of the structure of the PhD degree.

The final outcome is that a student should be able to conduct public health research, substantially on their own, which will add new knowledge to the field of public health (See NQF level 10: http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/misc/2012/level_descriptors.pdf).

The PhD thesis counts **360** credits, hence **3 600 notional** hours, i.e. the time an average student requires to complete the thesis.

Getting admitted to the programme

As part of your application process please send your CV and PhD concept protocol document to the Academic Advisory Committee (AAC) of the SHSPH (email address: shsph_aac@up.ac.za) (**See flowchart on next page**). Your application will serve at the SHSPH AAC. 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 SHSPH AAC to find out if they are able to supervise your PhD project. You may also suggest a promoter should you have any preferences or a prior working relationship.

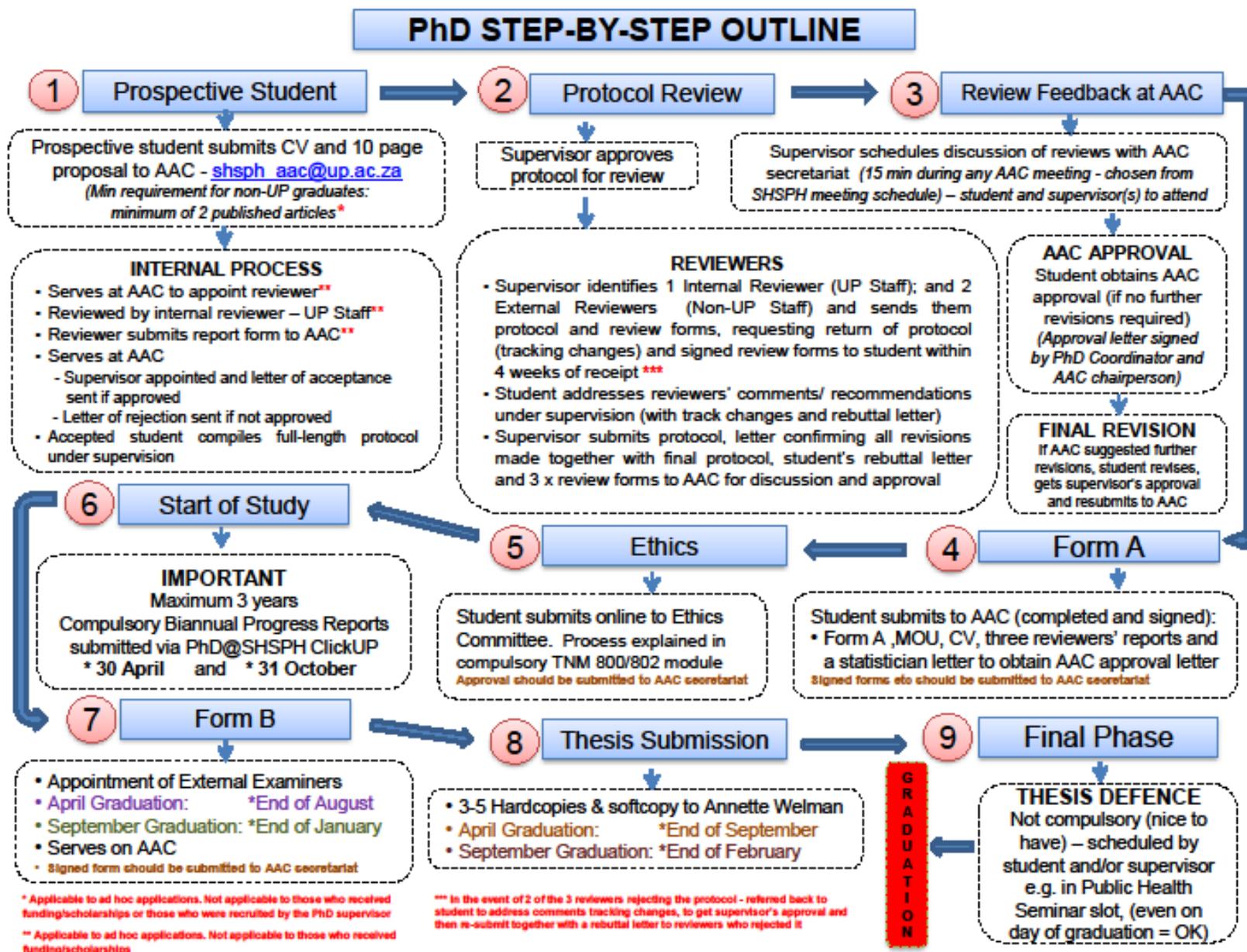
Should you wish to have a promoter who is a member of another department (e.g. paediatrics), that individual may be given an extra-ordinary appointment in SHSPH, which would allow them to fulfil the promoter role. Should you wish to have a promoter who is a member of an organisation external to the University 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 Chairperson of the SHSPH approves the appointment. Remember that you will need to have regular and easy access to your promoter and this may be difficult with an external promoter.

It is also important to take note that suggesting a promoter does not guarantee acceptance into the PhD degree programme, because the SHSPH AAC still has to consider your CV to see if you comply with the necessary requirements.

Registering as a doctoral student

If your PhD concept protocol is approved by the SHSPH AAC you may register for doctoral studies at UP.

PLEASE NOTE: The SHSPH strongly recommends that you work via the SHSPH student administration (Mrs René de Waal, email address: rene.dewaal@up.ac.za) and/or the Faculty student administration (Mrs Annette Welman, email address: annette.welman@up.ac.za) to expedite your application. The reason for this is the necessity to be registered by end March to be eligible for a postgraduate bursary.



Please take careful note of the information letter from SHSPH AAC that indicates for which doctoral programme you may register.

Current PhD degree options at the SHSPH

- Environmental Health (Thesis code OGS 990)
- Epidemiology (Thesis code EPI 990)
- Health Systems (Thesis code GSL 990)
- Public Health (Thesis code OGD 990)

Roles and responsibilities

Please download and read the document, *Guidelines for Postgraduate studies*, that is available from the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Office's webpage (<https://www.up.ac.za/faculty-of-health-sciences-research/article/1952978/postgraduate-studies-documents-and-tips-for-promoters-and-students>, accessed 29 May 2019).

Understanding your responsibilities as a student

As an adult learner you are required to take responsibility for your **progress** and not wait for your promoter(s) 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 (MoA)*): <https://www.up.ac.za/school-of-health-systems-and-public-health/article/1907387/guidelines-and-forms>, accessed 29 May 2019).

At the very first meeting with your promoter(s) complete and sign the standard MoA and remember to ask for a copy for your records. You will have to attach a MoA when you register to attend the TNM802 module and when you submit your PhD project title and promoter(s) name(s) for approval by the SHSPH AAC.

All students are required to read and understand the Faculty and University's **regulations** in terms of the study that you have embarked on (<https://www.up.ac.za/yearbooks/2019/rules>, accessed 29 May 2019).

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.

PhD@SHSPH ClickUP website

The PhD@SHSPH ClickUP website has a protocol template and protocol guidelines that are useful. Please note that if you are not registered for an academic year, you will not have access to any of the ClickUP sites, and will miss crucial communications.

Completing the TNM 802 (refining the protocol)

Once your protocol has reached an advanced stage of development you can attend **TNM 802**. All doctoral students in the Faculty of Health Sciences are **required** to attend a TNM 802 (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 802 may apply for accreditation (details or requirements are available on the [TNM 802 page](#) on the Faculty of Health Sciences website). The TNM 802 module booking must be made timeously to ensure attendance of the module.

Doing an oral protocol defence

According to the Faculty of Health Sciences regulations (e.g. <https://www.up.ac.za/yearbooks/2019/programmes/view/10260409>, accessed 29 May 2019), all PhD students must have a successful oral protocol defence before the end of their **first** academic year, regardless whether the student is part-time or full-time. **Permission to extend this to the second academic year must be requested from the SHSPH AAC before the first academic year.**

The intent of the defence is to ensure that a PhD student has a broad understanding of the general area their thesis is located within and to ensure that the planned research is feasible with regards to completion time (3 years max), that the planned research project is fundable (ideally funds must already be available) and that the planned research will contribute new knowledge to the field.

The role of the PhD protocol defence panel is to provide you with expertise and constructive advice relevant to your thesis topic, and to offer you support.

Once your protocol has reached an advanced stage of development your promoter(s) will nominate at least two external reviewers (not from SHSPH or UP) and one internal

reviewer (from SHSPH or UP) of your PhD protocol (**refer to the flowchart**). These three reviewers along with the SHSPH AAC constitute the PhD protocol defence panel.

Your promoter(s) must try to nominate external reviewers with whom they (and you) have not recently worked with on research projects or recently published with to minimise bias in the review.

Your main promoter emails the three reviewers your protocol as a Word document along with the review form. The three reviewers must email back within 2 weeks of receipt the protocol (with track changes) and also the signed and completed review forms to the promoter(s).

You then address the comments of the three reviewers and when your promoters are satisfied that all their comments and concerns have been addressed, your main promoter then submits a letter confirming that you made all the revisions together with your final protocol, your rebuttal letter and the three review forms to the SHSPH AAC and schedule a 15 minute discussion of the comments of the three reviewers with the SHSPH AAC, i.e. you and your promoter(s) must attend the next available SHSPH AAC meeting.

PLEASE NOTE: In the event of two of the three reviewers rejecting your PhD protocol, you must address their comments under supervision and re-send it to them for approval.

If the SHSPH AAC members do not recommend any further revisions, the SHSPH AAC will issue you an approval letter signed by the AAC chairperson and the SHSPH PhD coordinator. Also refer to the flowchart for the other documents that need to be submitted also to the SHSPH AAC. You need to attach this letter to your application to the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

If the SHSPH AAC suggested further revisions, then you must revise your protocol further. Your main promoter then submits a letter confirming that you made all the revisions along with your final protocol to the SHSPH AAC. The latter will then issue you an approval letter. Also refer to the flowchart for the other documents that need to be submitted also to the SHSPH AAC. You need to attach this letter to your application to the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

PLEASE NOTE: No oral defence (at the SHSPH AAC meeting) will take place on the day that your protocol submission is due to the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Therefore plan in advance.

Box 1: Coursework

A PhD is a research degree and students enrolled for this degree are already advanced in the public health field in which they want to do research, therefore there is no prescribed coursework. However there is one module (TNM 802) which you **have to** register for and attend as part of your doctoral studies. However, students who have previously completed a TNM 802 may apply for accreditation (details or requirements are available from [TNM 802 page](#) on the Faculty of Health Sciences website). TNM 802 is a workshop where you refine your protocol. The SHSPH also expects you to attend the PHM 880 module (Learning in Public Health) in the last week of January 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(s) might suggest that you attend some modules that are considered to be critical for the successful completion of your project, e.g. modules related to

- Epidemiology;
- Biostatistics;
- Environmental Health;
- Health Systems;
- Public Health

Please note that if this is the case you will have to register separately as a “postgraduate medical special” student. There are additional costs involved and these modules will reflect on your academic record. (Was about R6 500 in 2017 per module)

Students will normally first complete an MSc degree in the SHSPH before enrolling for a PhD degree. In such cases, students will have completed most course work requirements of the PhD already. Depending on the PhD research to be conducted, attendance of some further courses may be required.

Students who completed Masters degrees elsewhere will need to convince the Chairperson of the SHSPH that they have done sufficient course work or have obtained sufficient relevant experience in public health (see University’s Regulations, <https://www.up.ac.za/yearbooks/2019/rules>, accessed 29 May 2019). As a minimum requirement, this previous training or experience should be equivalent to the MSc degree course work requirements.

There is no minimum or maximum limit on course work, as students will be required to

convince their promoter that they have sufficient knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods and specialist knowledge of the content of their area of research. The promoter decides what modules are required during the annual review of progress.

Getting Ethics Committee approval

All research carried out in the Faculty of Health Sciences **MUST** have ethics approval. The guidelines, manual for uploading the application, required documentation and deadlines are available on the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee website.

The Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee has an **online submission system** and the deadlines for submission etc. are on its [website](#).

Do not delay submission as the Ethics Committees only meet a few times a year. Once ethics approval has been given for your PhD project then you may start your data collection.

Doing the research

The PhD thesis counts **360 credits**, i.e. 3 600 notional hours must be spend on it. Hence, do not conduct an overambitious project.

Remember to spend time developing your PhD protocol and obtaining funding for your PhD project as this will go a long way to making the actual “doing” of the research relatively straight-forward and stress-free. It is well worth investing time and getting it right at the protocol 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.

Box 2: Academic responsibilities

During the time of their studies, PhD students are considered to be part of the staff of the SHSPH, and will be allocated academic responsibilities by their promoters.

Box 3: Developing your research skills

As an adult learner you are required to take responsibility for your **research skills development** and not wait for your promoter to remind you of the activities that are required.

The **Graduate Support Hub** on Hatfield campus organizes various research skills activities nearly every week, e.g. writing for publications, writing up a thesis, setting up a research programme, funding opportunities, career options, etc. More information available at:

<https://www.up.ac.za/graduate-support-hub> (accessed 29 May 2019)

Reviewing your progress

You will also have to submit a *progress report* (template available from the PhD@SHSPH ClickUP website) via the PhD@SHSPH ClickUP website, twice a year in April and October. These progress reports will be filed at the office of the Chairperson of the SHSPH (Refer to G50.1e, University's Regulations, <https://www.up.ac.za/yearbooks/2019/rules>, accessed 29 May 2019).

If your progress is not satisfactory then the Chairperson of the SHSPH will put you on probation for 3 months. Thereafter the Chairperson of the SHSPH may terminate your studies, if required (Refer to G45, University's Regulations).

Box 4: 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 protocol oral defence to meet the criteria for satisfactory progress.**

Register for your studies every year

Do remember that you must **register for your studies** at the beginning of each year and that you have a maximum three years of study at the Faculty of Health Sciences (Refer to G44.2, University's Regulations). Thereafter, special extension of study period needs to be applied for via the SHSPH AAC, which must be approved by the Deputy Dean of Education, Prof Di Manning.

Product

Writing up your research

As your research nears completion, it is time to **write it up and defend it**. Do not 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.

Also keep in mind what you have written in your PhD protocol as now you must expand on this by adding the results and discussion.

Box 5: Two options for thesis structure

Your promoter will guide you on your choice of thesis structure (either traditional format with chapters and proof of submitted manuscripts 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.

Submitting the thesis for examination

Your promoter(s) must inform the Postgraduate Office of the Faculty of Health Sciences (Mrs Annette Welman, email address: Annette.welman@up.ac.za) **three** months in advance of your intend to submit your thesis for examination (Refer to G50.4a, University's Regulations).

Your promoter(s) must appoint two external and one internal examiner of your PhD thesis. Your promoter(s) must consult University's Regulations regarding appointment of examiners or contact (Mrs Annette Welman, email address: Annette.welman@up.ac.za).

The examiners will be approved at the SHSPH AAC.

Your thesis must be handed in the required format and number of copies to Postgraduate Office of the Faculty of Health Sciences (Mrs Annette Welman, email address: Annette.welman@up.ac.za).

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 two external and one internal examiner.

Besides the submission of the final bound hardcopy version you are also required to submit your thesis electronically. The Postgraduate Office of the Faculty of Health Sciences (Mrs Annette Welman) will guide you in the process.

Public presentation of thesis

Although it is not compulsory anymore, many PhD students at the Faculty still give a public presentation at the Faculty a few days before attending the graduation ceremony.

Your colleagues, friends and family may also attend. Your PhD thesis external examiners usually do not attend. The length of the presentation is 45-60 minutes.

Most SHSPH PhD students make a presentation at one of the Friday Public Health seminars (8:00-9:00).

Timelines

Please remember that the PhD degree is a 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 graduation, you should get your PhD thesis copies for examination to the Postgraduate Student Administrator (Mrs Annette Welman) at the Faculty of Health Sciences' Client Service Centre before the end of October, or before the end of April for September graduation. The precise dates vary from year to year. Refer to G50.1d (vi), University's Regulations.

Final marks must be in by 15 February to graduate April of the same year and by 15 July to graduate September of the same year (Refer to G50.1d (ix), University's Regulations.

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.