

# GUIDELINES FOR MASTERS BY RESEARCH THESIS IN THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES

THESE GUIDELINES ARE FOR MASTERS BY THESIS (100% RESEARCH) PROGRAMMES ONLY, AND NOT FOR MASTERS' PROGRAMMES WITH STRUCTURED, MODULE, COURSEWORK, OR RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT COMPONENTS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This document is meant to guide students, supervisors, programme leaders, and Heads of departments or divisions.

The Guidelines should be consulted in conjunction with formal provisions governing masters' degrees provided in the rules related to the "The Degree of Master" in the Stellenbosch University (SU) General Calendar (Part 1) and the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) Calendar (Part 12 of the SU Calendar). Please read this document in conjunction with the two sets of formal provisions.

## 2. APPLICATION AND REGISTRATION

All prospective masters' students must apply to the relevant programme on the university's website: [www.maties.com](http://www.maties.com), before the end of September every year.

2.1 Applications are handled by the Centre for Academic Administration (CAA), Tygerberg campus, with the help of the relevant academic environment. The Head of the environment is responsible for confirming that an application for admission to a masters' programme may be accepted. The CAA, Tygerberg campus, will notify applicants of their acceptance in writing. For this purpose, contact the CAA on [fmhsregistration@sun.ac.za](mailto:fmhsregistration@sun.ac.za).

2.2 The **appointment** and **approval** of a supervisor is the responsibility of the Head of the academic environment. Supervisors must ensure that they can cope with the number of students they accept.

2.3 **Registration** will take place once the application has been approved and the student has accepted placement.

2.4 **New** masters' degree candidates have two opportunities annually to register – preferably **before 31 March**, or if prior permission has been granted based on highly exceptional circumstances, **during the course of July** each year.

2.5 All students are required to complete and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with their supervisors and co-supervisor(s) on arrival.

2.6 **Continuing** masters' degree candidates should register **before 7 February** each year. Late registrations will be penalised. Students who fail to re-register annually will not be allowed to engage in academic activities until they have completed their annual registration.

## 3. PROTOCOL AND ETHICS APPROVAL

3.1 Protocol Format (Recommended length is approximately 10 pages):

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methods (including collaborators)
- Ethical considerations
- Anticipated outcomes and benefits
- Budget
- Timeline

3.2 All protocols must be approved by the relevant Postgraduate Programme Committee (PPC) before the head of department or divisions signs off on submission for ethics approval.

3.3 **ALL** research projects for masters' studies **MUST** obtain ethics approval (**online application**) from the relevant Ethics Committee **BEFORE** the project may begin. Should the Masters' research project be part of a larger study, the Masters' student does not require further ethics approval - provided that the overarching study has valid, up-to-date ethics approval

#### 4. SUPERVISORS

4.1 **All** supervisors should have co-supervised previously at least at Masters' level and have attended a supervisor training course (Faculty Board, 1 November 2018).

4.2 The supervisor must consider their own availability when accepting candidates for postgraduate study. If some subsequent event radically affects their availability, with a concomitant effect upon postgraduate programmes, arrangements must be made with the head of the academic environment and the executive head of the department concerned, and every student thus affected should be informed accordingly in writing, after which alternative arrangements must be made. Such instances should be reported to the Committee for Postgraduate Research (CPR) through the relevant PPC for approval.

4.3 In cases where the nature of the topic or research methodology requires expertise in more than one area, consideration must be given to involving a co-supervisor(s) with the appropriate qualifications and experience.

4.4 The supervisor must ensure that, where appropriate, the required equipment and laboratory, computer and library facilities are available or accessible.

4.5 The supervisor assumes responsibility for the scientific merit and standard of the research work that is to be performed.

4.6 The supervisor must be knowledgeable in terms of all the provisions governing the handling of the protocol, the research and the submission of the thesis, as well as the examination thereof.

4.7 Feedback on the progress of the student should be provided to the Postgraduate Programme Committee (PPC) on a regular basis.

4.8 For further information regarding the relationship between the supervisor and student please refer to the MoU.

#### 5. EXAMINATION

5.1 A candidate for a masters' degree must – with the supervisor's permission – notify the Tygerberg Doctoral Office **AT LEAST SIX MONTHS BEFORE THE DATE OF GRADUATION** of the intention to submit a thesis for examination. The intention-to-submit form is available on the website of the Tygerberg Doctoral Office.

5.2 The relevant PPC is responsible for the nomination of examiners for approval by the Committee for Postgraduate Research **AT LEAST SIX MONTHS BEFORE SUBMISSION FOR EXAMINATION**.

5.3 The supervisor may propose the names of two independent examiners (one internal and one external) to the PPC to be presented for acceptance by the Committee for Postgraduate Research..

5.3.1 An internal independent examiner is a person who is on the university or associate's staff establishment, but who is independent. A person is independent if they were not involved in the realisation of the thesis in any way.

5.3.2 An external examiner is a person who is not on the university's staff establishment and who should be independent. Extraordinary professors and honorary professors of the university do not qualify to be appointed as external examiners.

5.3.3 **Examiners may not have been involved in the planning or in conducting any aspect of the research.**

5.4 When the examiners' names are submitted (**with nomination forms and CVs**) to the Committee for Postgraduate Research and to the Faculty Board for approval, the following information and documentation concerning each proposed examiner must be furnished:

- The person's current post;
  - The person's academic and professional qualifications;
  - An abridged curriculum vitae of the person; and
  - A brief statement on the person's previous experience as an examiner.
- It is a requirement that the same examiners are NOT used too often.

5.5 In the upper half of the second page of the thesis, the candidate shall place and sign the following text:

English set wording:

#### **DECLARATION**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date

Afrikaans set wording:

#### **VERKLARING**

Deur hierdie tesis elektronies in te lewer, verklaar ek dat die geheel van die werk hierin vervat, my eie, oorspronklike werk is, dat ek die alleenouteur daarvan is (behalwe in die mate uitdruklik anders aangedui), dat reproduksie en publikasie daarvan deur die Universiteit Stellenbosch nie derdepartyrechte sal skend nie en dat ek dit nie vantevore, of in die geheel of gedeeltelik, ter verkryging van enige kwalifikasie aangebied het nie.

Datum

5.6 Abstracts of not more than 500 words each are to be placed directly after the title page and the author's declaration.

5.7 For the examination, a candidate must submit work in the form of a thesis. The term "thesis" is the only officially recognised term for referring to the product of the research done for a (100% research) masters' degree.

5.8 The candidate must compile a thesis made up of chapters - one of which maybe an article, with evidence that the candidate is able to:

- Plan research;
- Apply the literature study to the research;
- Apply elementary analytical principles (quantitative or qualitative);
- Draw meaningful conclusions; and
- Conclude a project.

5.9 The candidate must demonstrate that they have developed a capacity for independent, critical judgement, ie that they are able to discuss methodology and existing and newly acquired knowledge rationally and objectively.

5.10 Both primary and secondary research are acceptable.

5.11 **Research must be consistent with the following definition:**

On the basis of clearly formulated problems and through the methodical gathering and systematic processing of data, all efforts must be made to gain insights through which:

- Scientific knowledge can be expanded; and/or
- The application possibilities of theoretical knowledge can be scientifically developed; and/or
- Techniques, systems, processes or methods for practical use can be developed or improved in a scientifically planned and well-grounded way.

5.12 **A conventional thesis should fulfil the following minimum requirements:**

5.12.1 **Declaration** of the nature and extent of the contributions of the candidate and of collaborators;

5.12.2 A **Table of Contents** with accurate page references;

5.12.3 An **Abstract** in both English and Afrikaans;

5.12.4 An **Introduction**, preferably not more than one page in length, briefly defining the topic of the research;

5.12.5 A **Literature Review**, which focuses on the specific, demarcated area, elucidating the topic of the study, and which may culminate in a **problem statement and/or hypothesis and/or research question**;

5.12.6 The **Aim of the Investigation**, which develops logically from the literature review and which may serve as the **motivation** for the study;

5.12.7 The **Methodology** and **Materials** (experimental animals, patients, tissue culture, therapeutics, participants, etc.);

5.12.8 The **Results** or findings after applicable analysis, elucidated by clearly comprehensible tables, diagrams, graphs, etc, with appropriate annotations;

5.12.9 The **Discussion**, in which the results are succinctly argued and interpreted in the light of the literature review;

5.12.10 The **Conclusion**, in which the findings, the interpretation thereof, and unresolved issues are concisely summarised. The chapter may close with a set of **recommendations** suggesting new approaches, clinical applications or further research projects; and

5.12.11 The **Bibliography** in accordance with any acknowledged style..

5.13 An **article format thesis** comprises a submission-ready, submitted, accepted or published manuscript for an approved peer reviewed subject journal (i.e. one that appears on the list of subject journals approved by the Department of Higher Education and Training) with the candidate as principal author. In addition the article format must include the following:

5.13.1 **A Summary** - It is important to illustrate the overall purpose, methods, results and conclusions of the study (or studies) in a brief summary.

5.13.2 **An Introduction** - The central research theme, background literature, problem statement, research question and possible hypothesis (hypotheses), including the study aims, must be discussed in the introductory chapter. Any unnecessary repetition of aspects explored in the publishable article should be avoided.

5.13.3 **Article**

5.13.4 **A Conclusion / Summarised Comments** - In this important final chapter the candidate must critically consider all data in deciding:

- to what extent preliminary hypotheses were proven correct/incorrect, or the research question was answered;
- whether or not the study aims were achieved;
- what the overall conclusions were; and
- which fields of research could be explored in future.

5.14 Editing costs are the responsibility of the candidate.

5.15 To submit a 100% research master's thesis for examination, the main internal supervisor emails the final approved thesis, signed dissertation release form, and Turnitin report, to the Tygerberg Doctoral Office at [tyg-thesis@sun.ac.za](mailto:tyg-thesis@sun.ac.za).

5.16 A thesis will NOT be accepted unless it is accompanied by the **Release Form** signed by all the relevant parties.

5.17 A Postgraduate programme Committee (PPC) may determine the formula, in terms of which the final mark is calculated. Although an oral examination on the thesis has to take place, the PPC may determine the portion of that mark that is contributed by the oral across each programme.

5.18 No hard copies are required for submission. The University offers facilities for the printing and binding of theses. Full information on these facilities can be obtained from SunMedia.

## 6. GUIDELINES FOR DISPUTES

### 6.1 BOTH EXAMINERS HAVE PASSED THE STUDENT, BUT WITH MORE THAN 20% VARIATION IN THE MARKS

6.1.1 In cases where both examiners have passed the thesis, but there is a 20%, or greater, variation in marks between the two examiners, this will automatically be flagged by the Tygerberg Doctoral Office and will activate the option for the student to dispute the variation (**PLEASE NOTE**: a separate process is in place for cases where one examiner failed the student).

6.1.2 The Tygerberg Doctoral Office will contact the student, with a copy to the supervisor, and will offer the student the option to initiate a dispute. This will make clear that initiating the dispute process might cause a delay in finalizing the examination (and therefore also the date of graduation). The dispute process needs to be completed before the oral examination can be conducted. Furthermore, the student cannot withdraw the dispute once

the process has been initiated. Disputing the variation will not necessarily mean that a higher mark will be accepted, as a lower mark might be the outcome at the conclusion of the dispute process.

- 6.1.3 The student has to confirm in writing whether they choose to pursue the dispute or not.
- 6.1.4 In cases where the dispute is **not** taken up, the marks awarded are regarded as the final marks from the two examiners and no further dispute may be declared.
- 6.1.5 In cases where the dispute is taken up, the Tygerberg Doctoral Office will inform the Vice Dean: Research and Internationalisation, who is Chairperson of the Committee for Postgraduate Research (CPR), of the dispute.
- 6.1.6 The Tygerberg Doctoral Office will inform the two examiners, on behalf of the Vice Dean: Research and Internationalisation, that a dispute has been declared because of a large variation in marks. The examiners will be requested to have a collegial mediated discussion (in person or electronically, arranged by the CPR to review the reasons for, and try to resolve, the large difference. This may lead to one or both examiners offering to change their mark (either upward or downward as applicable after the discussion) to decrease the variation to below 20%.
- 6.1.7 Where one or both of the examiners offer(s) to change their mark, either upward or downward, so that the variation becomes less than 20%, this will be regarded as the final mark from the examiner and no further dispute may be declared.
- 6.1.8 If this does not lead to a solution (i.e. where neither examiner is prepared to change their mark), the average will be taken as the final mark.

## **6.2 WHERE ONE EXAMINER FAILS OR REJECTS THE THESIS**

- 6.2.1 In cases where one of the two examiners rejected the thesis, the Chairperson of the Committee for Postgraduate Research will nominate an additional examiner in order to obtain an additional opinion. An ad hoc committee of the Committee for Postgraduate Research will then consider all the reports in order to make specific recommendations to the Committee for Postgraduate Research.
- 6.2.2 The final results of the examination must be conveyed to all examiners in writing. The panel must motivate its decision if an examiner's negative result is not accepted.

## **6.3 WHERE BOTH EXAMINERS FAIL THE THESIS**

In cases where the thesis is failed by both examiners, the Committee for Postgraduate Research (CPR) must appoint an ad hoc committee to review the reports of the examiners and to report to the next meeting of the CPR. The ad hoc committee must consist of the two examiners and two members of the Committee for Postgraduate Research as nominated by the Chair. After the ad hoc committee has dealt with the reports, the supervisor must carry out the decisions of the ad hoc committee, if applicable, before reporting to the CPR.

## 7. ORAL EXAMINATION AND SUPERVISOR REPORT

7.1 Once the written examination of the thesis has been completed, the supervisor arranges an oral examination. The oral examination is conducted by the examiners and has an important quality assurance function. Examiners are notified ahead of time of the oral examination in which they are required to participate. The two examiners are to be invited to the oral examination. At least one of the examiners is required to be part of the oral examination during which the student is expected to demonstrate expert knowledge of the study before the examiners ask relevant questions. If applicable, the absent examiner is required to email the supervisor explaining absence and approval of the result of the oral examination. The relevant Postgraduate Programme Committee (PPC) decides on the format, content and outcome of the oral examination. However, the supervisor and co-supervisor(s) may only observe and may not participate in the process.

7.2 After the oral examination, the supervisor should compile a report, where applicable, together with the co-supervisor(s), to provide insight into the process that culminated in the realisation of the thesis, and to record the details of the examination including the oral (**Template available**). This report is submitted to [tyg-thesis@sun.ac.za](mailto:tyg-thesis@sun.ac.za).

## 8. FINALISATION OF MARKS

8.1 The Tygerberg Doctoral Office coordinates the examination process of Research Masters' degrees. All examination reports for internal and external examiners of 100% research masters' degrees are processed via [tyg-thesis@sun.ac.za](mailto:tyg-thesis@sun.ac.za).

8.2 Examiners must be allowed a set period of preferably **six weeks** within which to assess the thesis and submit the Standard Report Forms and comprehensive reports to the Tygerberg Doctoral Office.

8.3 Following the oral, the Tygerberg Doctoral Office submits the final supervisor report and all examiner reports to the Vice Dean: Research and Internationalisation, for approval of the result.

8.4 Once all aspects of the examination have been completed, the thesis is to be uploaded on SunScholar via the e-thesis nomination system and with the assistance of the supervisor or administrator in the academic environment.

## 9. GRADUATION

9.1 For possible graduation **in December**, candidates must submit their theses before or **by 30 August**

For possible graduation **in March of the next year**, candidates must submit their theses before or **by 30 November**.

9.2 The supervisor is responsible for notifying candidates of these deadlines.

ENDS.