

College of Health Sciences Guidelines for Postgraduate Supervision

Preamble

The College of Health Sciences (CHS) strategy recognizes the role of postgraduate students (PG), not only as its mandatory teaching responsibility but also as a means of advancing health sciences research. The number of PG students in the college has significantly increased (260 in 2010 to 547 in 2014) in recent years as the college channeled much of its strategic funds towards supporting students by providing scholarships (stipend and research funds). This increase has not been matched by the growth of the supervision capacity. In fact the supervision capacity has been temporarily compromised by the credentialing project which has seen a very large proportion of staff embarking on PhD studies. While this is the most reasonable way to develop PG supervision capacity, in the short term PG students suffer from inadequate supervision.

In 2010 the Senate approved generic guidelines for PG supervision in the university. The guidelines provide a framework of the supervision of PG degrees and are intended to “*clarify the process, increase the likelihood that research training is regarded as a positive experience, enhance the quality of the research carried out, and improve the chances of the successful awarding of a research degree.*” While the guidelines provide overall guidance for PG supervision the situation on the ground (college and schools) requires more refined guidelines in line with the college strategy. It is in view of this that the CHS management committee (CMC) in its meeting held on 9 September 2014 agreed to develop guidelines for postgraduate (PG) supervision that are specific for the college.

The guidelines described in this document are based on the university wide guidelines but are largely influenced by the CHS prevailing environment. The guidelines focus on the following stages in the progression of a student; 1) identifying student/identifying supervisor, 2) getting the student started, 3) supervising data collection, 4) supervising data analysis and write up. At all the stages the roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and student are stated.

Identifying student/identifying supervisor

The following are ways in which supervisors identify and recruit PG students.

- supervisors may look for students with specific skills or background to work on a particular project
- supervisors may be allocated students by the discipline
- supervisors may recruit students to achieve the minimum Senate norm number of PG students
- students may approach a supervisor because they feel that the academic is able to direct their work

Final decision to accept a student should consider the following

1. available resources, eg. laboratory space, working space and equipment relevant for the student's work
2. funding for the student (stipend and research funds)
3. number of students already being supervised
4. a clearly defined research area that the student will develop their own research
5. supervisor competence on the research topic of the student
6. enabling student academic background for the area of research
7. enabling supervisor/student relationship
8. marginalized student populations and those with disability

Getting the student started

Students do not necessarily have to have a concept paper for them to be accepted by a supervisor. In fact it is encouraged that potential students only indicate a research topic that is in the area of competence for the supervisor. The full proposal should be developed with guidance from the supervisor so that both the supervisor's and the student's interests are accommodated. The following are expected for getting the student started

1. While it is largely an administrative job to get the student settled, the supervisor is expected to support their students by directing them to the relevant offices and by making them feel wanted
2. The student must be registered before a proposal is developed. The student must receive training on research methodology, particularly proposal development
3. A full proposal should be developed within 3 months of the student's registration
4. Application for ethics approval must be submitted to the relevant ethics committee within 4 months following the student's registration. This will ensure that the student gets approval to conduct their studies within 6 months of being recruited
5. All health and safety issues related to the work of the student must be addressed upon registration of the student

Supervising data collection

While it is the role of the student to collect data for their studies the supervisor is expected to adequately supervise this process. The following principles should be observed

1. Supervisor must ensure that the data is collected in accordance with the proposal and that ethical conduct is in line with approvals given by the ethics committee
2. Supervisor must ensure that the student has the requisite skills for collecting data; if necessary training should be given to the student
3. Supervisor must ensure that the student collects their own data; in cases where they need research assistants it must be clear that the student plays a leading role in the process
4. Supervisor must conduct quality checks on the work (field or laboratory) of the student and document them

Supervising data analysis and write up

Data analysis should be an ongoing activity. Writing up the thesis can also be an ongoing process particularly when the thesis is intended to be submitted in a manuscript or publications format. In both processes the following is expected of the supervisor and the student

1. Supervisor must guide the data analysis process ensuring that the data sets are "cleaned" and ready for analysis
2. Supervisor must guide the interpretation of the data
3. Student must do their own analysis; where specialized analysis is required and does not necessarily have to be done by the student, a clear understanding of the analysis must be demonstrated by the student
4. Student must initiate a good draft of their thesis (manuscripts or dissertation) for submission to supervisor
5. Supervisor must comment on the student's write up timeously and must sign off the thesis or manuscripts before submission
6. The student must always be the first author of their work and other co-authors, in addition to the supervisor, must be decided in accordance with the principles of responsible authorship as delineated in the UKZN Ethics Policy [https://innerweb.ukzn.ac.za/RegulatoryDocuments/Academic%20General/A\)%20Policies/RESEARCH%20POLICY%20V%20-%20ETHICS%20---CO06290607.pdf](https://innerweb.ukzn.ac.za/RegulatoryDocuments/Academic%20General/A)%20Policies/RESEARCH%20POLICY%20V%20-%20ETHICS%20---CO06290607.pdf)
7. Students doing laboratory based work should keep a laboratory book documenting all aspects of their work, eg. dilutions etc. The supervisor has a right to request these manuals and check

progress and accuracy and at any time of the year. On completion of the project, these manuals are handed in with the thesis and retained by the supervisor for a period of 10years.

General supervision principles

The above guidelines for supervision are done in the context of the following general guidelines

1. In cases where there is an external supervisor there must always be another supervisor within the school. Should the external supervisor be a former UKZN member of staff HR should be consulted to see if the individual is not on the “persona non grata list” before appointment
2. Supervisor should be familiar with discipline, school and college regulations and procedures, and should seek clarification of unusual situations promptly
3. Supervisor should inform the student about Departmental expectations for research and for completion of the academic programme.
4. Supervisor should develop a Research Agreement with the student, following the format and guidelines recommended by the college, which should be signed by both supervisor and student and submitted to the School for approval
5. The main supervisor has overall responsibility over the student progression and is the one to sign off the thesis or manuscripts. However, there should be due consultations with the co-supervisor(s) and any disagreements between the supervisors should not prejudice the student
6. The main supervisor must have a PhD to supervise a PhD student but the co-supervisor may not have a PhD; in such cases the co-supervisor is expected to have technical expertise relevant to the student’s work. While a PhD is also required to supervise a Masters degree, individuals with publications equating to those of a senior lecturer and have a track record for supervision may be allowed to supervise a Masters degree.
7. The supervisor must ensure that there are adequate resources for the student to complete their studies
8. The supervisor must meet (face to face or by skype) with the student at least once a month to discuss progress and there must be minutes of such meetings, usually taken by the student and endorsed by the supervisor.
9. In association with other staff, supervisors should provide a stimulating academic environment that encourages a commitment to scholarship and lifelong learning.
10. Supervisor is expected, within 6 months of registering the student, to detect student academic problems that may result in failure to complete the degree and address them or recommend de-registration A student has a right to change the supervisor if there are irreconcilable differences between the student and the supervisor
11. In the interest of the student management may effect supervision changes to strengthen the supervision
12. In cases where a student is a staff member PUs arising from publications from the research work are shared between the supervisor(s) and the student