



Postgraduate School

Newsletter 15/ November 2014

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From the Office of the Director

Dear postgraduate student,

The campus looks beautiful after the much needed rain that we have had during the last week. It is clear that the examinations are coming to an end, with the hustle and bustle slowing down and lots of space in the parking areas. Staff members are either marking scripts or working on course manuals and schedules for next year and trying to finish a last article before they leave on vacation in December.

In this newsletter we focus on writing a thesis or dissertation, especially writing the conclusion chapter and how to deal with writer's block. An experience all too familiar to many students and staff members. Literature on postgraduate success identifies academic writing as a critical success factor for students. It is very important to submit written work to supervisors as you progress through the academic journey. Writing assists you with the clarification of your thought processes about your research constructs and the supervisor's feedback serves as a valuable measure of your progress. Look at our electronic resources for helpful hints and even short tutorials about writing, especially if you are writing your dissertation/thesis in your second or third language.

We also present a framework for good practice in postgraduate education in this newsletter. The reason why we present this is for you to reflect on your own postgraduate experiences and to measure your experience against what you should expect from your department/ university.

We invite postgraduate students to provide us with feedback your experiences and make suggestions about how we can improve with regard to any of the dimensions presented in the framework. The postgraduate school is serious about our responsibility to advocate for the interests of postgraduate students and it will be valuable to receive feedback from you.

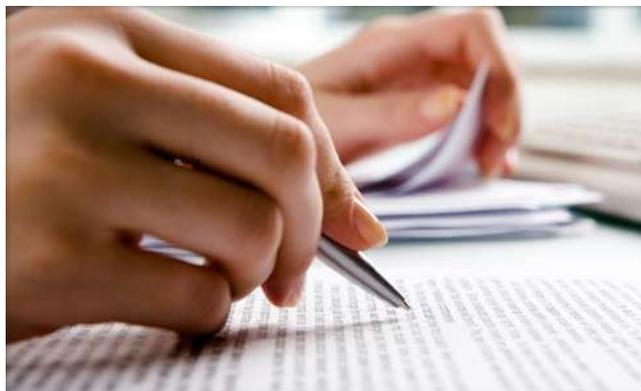
The next date for submission of dissertations and theses is 2 February 2015. Best wishes to all candidates who are working to submit their work, we know this is a challenging time – little sleep and hard work. Our thoughts are with you and your supervisors.

We wish you a fulfilling, pleasant academic experience during this month.

Henriëtte van den Berg
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Upcoming workshops at the Postgraduate School:

NOVEMBER 2014		
21	The dynamics of resilience from engineering to ecology, anthropology and beyond	Prof Michael Thompson & Prof Bruce Beck, Advanced Systems Analysis Programme, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) FGG202 10h00 – 12h00
28	SA-YSSP (Southern African Young Scientists Summer Programme) lecture: Solution oriented problem analysis – strengths and pitfalls of diverse paradigms	Prof Marek Makowski (IIASA) CR Swart Senate Hall 10h00 – 12h00

DECEMBER 2014		
10	SA-YSSP mid-programme presentations (part 1 of 2)	The Young Scientists FGG202 09h00 – 17h00
11	SA-YSSP mid-programme presentations (part 2 of 2)	The Young Scientists FGG202 09h00 – 17h00

Please note that details of workshops for 2015 below are currently **provisional** and liable to change. To keep up to date you can email postgraduatersvp@ufs.ac.za to join our mailing list, if you are not already on it, or check the [Training and Development Opportunities](#) section of our website.

JANUARY 2015 (provisional)		
28-29	SA-YSSP Mini Colloquium	CR Swart Auditorium 10h00 – 12h00 28 Jan: 08h30 – 16h30 29 Jan: 08h30 – 13h00

FEBRUARY 2015 (provisional)		
2-5	Orientation for Postgraduate Students	Various speakers 09h00 – 16h30
6	Facilitated discussion: Resources available to support postgraduate students - Library, international office and student counselling.	Mr M Maphile, Mrs D Gaofhiwe-Ingram and Ms L Makhele 14h00 – 16h30
7-8	Weekend programme for off-campus students	Details tbc
9	The Research chain of reasoning	Prof W van Rensburg 09h00 – 16h30
10	Theorising about your research constructs	Prof W van Rensburg 09h00 – 16h30
11	Delineating your research topic	Prof A Wilkinson 13h00 – 16h30

FEBRUARY 2015 (cont; provisional)		
12	Library support for researchers in a technological age	Mrs A du Preez 14h00 – 16h00
12-13	Qwaqwa campus: Principles of academic writing: writing a research proposal	Mrs Alet Olivier Qwaqwa campus, venue tbc 12 Feb: 09h00 – 10h00 13 Feb 09h00 – 16h30
16	Writing the literature review	Dr S Brokensha 14h00 – 16h30
17	Writing your research proposal: Research considerations in the Natural and Agricultural Sciences	Prof M Tredoux 14h00 – 16h30
18	Effective search, use and evaluation of websites and academic databases	Ms Rene du Plessis and Mrs Annemarie du Preez 10h00 – 13h00
18	Career planning: Your personal professional development plan	Dr Henriette van den Berg 13h00 – 16h00
19	Linking research questions with research methods	Dr Petrus Nel 13h00 – 16h30
20	Preparing an ethics protocol or application	Prof W Kruger 09h00 – 16h30
25	Research supervision community of practice	Various presenters 13h00 – 16h00
26-27	Mendeley	Dr J Raubenheimer 09h00 – 16h30

MARCH 2015 (provisional)		
4-5	Project Management and the use of Microsoft Projects 2013	Mr Nico Bekker and Dr Priscilla Mensah 09h00 – 16h30
6	Identifying research funding using the Research Africa platform	Ms Mandy Jampies 12h30 – 14h00
6-7	Writing boot camp for postgraduate students	Details tbc
11	Mixed methods	Prof B Smit 09h00 – 16h30
12-13	Qualitative research methodology and the use of Atlas.ti software	Prof B Smit 09h00 – 16h30
16-17	The importance of technology transfer	Mr G Verhoef 13h00 – 16h30
23	Writing a conference abstract and preparing conference presentations	Dr Valerie Corfield 09h00 – 16h30
24	Doctorateness	Dr Henriette van den Berg 09h00 – 12h00
25	Research supervision community of practice	Various presenters 13h00 – 14h00

Writing your Conclusion

One particular aspect of academic writing is how to write your conclusion section. We will discuss this issue and suggest some exercises which can help you with this process, based on a book called *Becoming an Academic Writer* by Patricia Goodson (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), which is a guide to all different stages of the academic writing process. While the section of Goodson's book about writing conclusions focuses on academic journal articles, much of the advice is also relevant to writing theses and dissertations.

The first thing to note is that there is a slight difference between a 'conclusion' and a 'discussion'; in the context of journal articles, some journals request one or the other, or both. As they are similar, many writers see these terms as interchangeable, however it's worth looking at recent articles in the journal you are intending to publish in to check what the journal wants exactly.

Your conclusion section is vital as, in the article context, many readers may only read the abstract and conclusion in full, and skim-read the rest. So it's important here to have a tightly written opening paragraph which contains your key idea in the opening sentence, to make sure the reader is aware of what your work is about straight away. While it's easy to assume that your findings speak for themselves, particularly if you have been immersed in your research for a long time, the reader will not necessarily see what you do in your findings/data. Thus you

should spell out your findings and their implications as they will not necessarily be self-evident to the reader. Furthermore, the applications that you perceive will not necessarily be those that the reader sees. We will now consider some exercises from Goodson's book which may help you with the process of writing your conclusion. The 'reader' of a journal article can be seen as analogous to the examiner of a thesis or dissertation.

Exercise 1: Brainstorming your key findings



You may find it useful here to set a timer for 10 minutes. List your thoughts about the main findings in your research in bullet point form. Then brainstorm any other questions that your research brings up (you can again use bullet points). Think like a reader would – what questions would they have if they are reading your study for the first time? Begin to answer these questions – in doing so you interpret your findings for the reader. You can also use this

exercise to pose new questions of your own which appear.

Exercise 2: Link your findings to other research

It's a good idea to start your conclusion with a summary of your study's most important findings, using concise sound bites, which refresh the reader's memory. You can then link your findings to other studies in your field, and discuss how similar or different your results are to other authoritative research on the topic. This helps the reader to see the bigger picture, and joining the dots between your research and that of others starts a discussion/conversation about the topic.

In this exercise, draw up a grid/matrix with nine columns (the last five columns will be used in the next exercises). In the first column, write down each of your most salient findings. In the second column, put down references which agree with your findings, and in the third column put down references which disagree. Then, in the fourth column, write down *how* these other references converge or diverge with your own.

Exercise 3: Relating your findings to theory

The conclusion/discussion section is where you go beyond description to *interpret* your findings. This involves telling the reader what your findings mean, explaining why you may have obtained these, rather than other, results, and clarifying what the results point to. Thus, you will explain *why* you obtained the results you did,

and this will be how your study contributes to theoretical thinking in your field.

In the fifth column of the matrix from the previous exercise, list the theoretical perspectives which may help your readers understand each particular finding. In the sixth column write down how your findings relate to that theory – how they support or disprove it.

Exercise 4: the implications of your research

We now consider the *implications* of your research – now that you know your research findings, what can be done with this information? This can be summarised as the reader asking 'so what?' about your research.

In columns seven, eight and nine, consider the question of 'So what?' applied to your main findings, in terms of 'So What... for practice?', 'So What... for Future Research?', 'So What... for Theory?'

Exercise 5: the limitations of your research

Most articles will include a paragraph or two discussing the limitations of the research; keep this fairly brief and only discuss the most important limitations. Many authors seem to rush through this section so it's worth giving it some more thought.

Create a new grid with 4 columns. In the first column, write down any problems or difficulties you had during the project, and in the next column put down 'Yes' or 'No' as to whether

each issue affected your results. Then in the third column write down the ways you dealt with each issue (you only need to do this for the 'Yes' issues), and in the last column write down a positive characteristic of your study which counterbalances the problem. While you should highlight the limitations of your study, you don't want your reader to only remember the negatives so you should also try to balance problems with the contributions your study makes. Help the reader to see the big picture about what your research brings to the topic as a whole, despite its problems.



Dealing with Writer's block

Writer's block is more serious than the odd off day which all academics and writers have. If you're having difficulties motivating yourself to write for an extended period of time, then it's worth taking steps to try to address this. Sometimes difficulties in writing may be due to other reasons, such as poor time management, or stresses caused by non-work related issues. Resolving these other issues may help you to

start writing again. However, general writer's block is something that happens to many academics at some point(s), and here is some general advice on ways to overcome this.

- Try reading instead of writing; reading a book or article related to research may inspire you with a new idea, or reading something non-related may inspire you through the quality of the writing.

- Don't try to write a perfect draft first time round. If each paragraph has to be perfect it can take a long time before you move on to the next one. It can often be better to get something down which can be edited later, as at least this gives you something to work with. There will usually be many stages of revising and editing a piece of academic written work, so don't worry about it being flawless straight away.

- Taking notes and brainstorming ideas can be useful if you are struggling to formulate full paragraphs. This means that you at least get down something to work with, and are thinking about issues related to your research while doing so.

- Taking a break from your work can sometimes be more productive than struggling on and not really writing anything. Coming to your work fresh can sometimes be helpful.

- Sometimes a change of writing/studying routine and scenery can help. E.g. writing at a different time of day, writing at home when you normally write on campus, or vice versa, or writing in a different room or a different part of the library.

- Writing something that's not related to your studies can sometimes help, especially if it's the actual writing process rather than the intellectual ideas that you're struggling with. Some people find mundane writing useful here, such as replying to emails, while other people benefit from a more creative process, such as spending a few minutes writing about a random topic or whatever comes into your head. Different strategies can work for different people.

- If you're stuck on a particular section of a chapter, try thinking about the chapter or dissertation as a whole. Considering the bigger picture may help you think about the area you're struggling with in a new way. If you're struggling to write your dissertation or chapter from the beginning, it can sometimes help to start with a section you're more confident with, and then go back to the start.

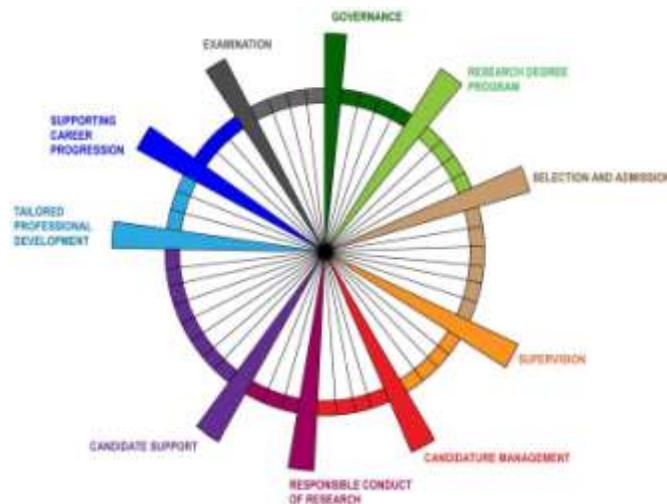
- If you're struggling to find the right formulation for a particular phrase, it can sometimes be useful to write out crudely what you mean to say, then move on rather than letting it derail your writing. You can then come back to it later – often the right wording can come to you when you're not fixated on that particular phrase or topic.

For more advice see for example:

<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/tips/writersblock/>
<http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/dissertation-writers-block.html>

Postgraduate academic and administrative processes: the Good Practice framework for research training

Alongside conducting one's own academic research, there are a range of other processes involved in the successful completion of a postgraduate degree. These include both academic processes (e.g. supervision, examination, the research itself), and administrative procedures (e.g. research ethics and the application/registration process). One way of considering these processes is the '[Good practice framework for research training](#)' developed by Professor Joe Luca at Edith Cowan University, Australia, which provides a useful tool for both the student and the institution to see how well the needs of the postgraduate student are being met.



While originally developed for the Australian academy, this framework has a wider relevance to universities elsewhere, and we will consider how it relates to postgraduate study at UFS. We are planning a process where every student will have a chance to give us feedback about their postgraduate experiences at UFS. In the meantime you can look at

the information and reflect about your experiences as a postgraduate student in your department.

The framework consists of the following nine areas:

1. GOVERNANCE

The university should have an efficient and effective governance framework, which assures and enhances research training quality. Policies should be accessible, transparent, clearly communicated and regularly reviewed. These include policies related to grievances and appeals, which should be readily available on the university website and other media, and should be addressed through formal procedures in a timely manner.

2. PROGRAMME AND OUTCOMES

Academic programmes should require students to produce quality research. In the case of doctoral students, this must be a significant body of original research and contribution to knowledge. Research degree programmes should be evaluated on how well they meet the needs and expectations of students, employers, discipline groups and the wider community, e.g. in terms of completion rates, time to completion, and examination outcomes. Students should be provided with the opportunity to develop professional and transferable skills during their research programme.

3. SELECTION AND ADMISSION

The university should ensure that selection and admissions procedures are inclusive, clear and easily accessible, consistently applied and equitable. These requirements ensure successful students complete their research in a timely manner.

4. SUPERVISION

The university should provide students with a supervisory team that has an appropriate mix of

expertise in the discipline(s) of the candidate's research, the relevant research methods, and in supervising successful research degree completions. The supervisory team must mentor and actively assist the candidate, meet the academic and administrative requirements of the institution, tailor their practice to the needs of individual candidates and provide access to appropriate support and pastoral care as required.

5. CANDIDATURE (STUDENT) MANAGEMENT

The university should provide clear, detailed and accessible information to students and supervisors to support them in managing student progress and professional development. The roles and responsibilities of both student and supervisor should be clearly defined.

6. RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

Research training is supported by academic structures, policies and practices that require, facilitate and promote responsible research and integrity. Mechanisms should exist to ensure ethical approval is granted before data collection takes place, for any projects where this is necessary.

7. CANDIDATE SUPPORT

The university should ensure that students have access to required resources which enable timely completion of a quality degree including appropriate physical, financial, administrative, academic, counselling and disability support services. The institution should be committed to providing a research environment for research candidates that is engaging, culturally sensitive, locally and globally relevant and supports diversity.

8. EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The university should support students to be competitive and successful in both academic and non-academic careers. The institution should work with

the student to determine short, medium and long-term goals that assist the student with employability skills and their broader development as a researcher. Attention to career development needs to be given during the degree itself, and also after submission of thesis for examination. Students should have access to support mechanisms for building their CVs and portfolios, and opportunities for networking with potential employers should also be available.

9. EXAMINATION

Work submitted for examination meets international standards and the examination process ensures successful students merit the award of the degree.

All of these dimensions work together to create a positive and supportive experience for students.

Postgraduate student drop out

A large percentage of postgraduate students both internationally and in South Africa never complete their postgraduate studies. This is a difficult decision given the financial and emotional investment in postgraduate study. We thus encourage students who are considering terminating their studies to consult with your academic supervisors, mentors in your department or counselling services before you make a final decision.

Internationally, there is a high rate of drop out for postgraduate students. There are a variety of reasons why postgraduate students drop out of their courses before completion, and in most cases this is due to a combination of factors rather than one single cause. study by Yorke and Longden (2004)¹ lists four main categories of factors:

1. Flawed decision making about entering the programme
2. Students' experience of the programme and the institution generally
3. Failure to cope with the demands of the course
4. Events that impact on students' lives outside the institution.

The second category is one that universities have most control over, although they can also have some influence on the first and third. Many studies have looked at more specific reasons for student drop-out. Academic factors include the wrong choice of course, which can involve either the academic subject (where the student feels that it is not what they thought it would be like, that they are not interested in the subject any more, or that it will not lead them to the career they are interested in), or the course itself (where the student finds that the course content is not what they expected, or they have difficulties with the style of assessment or teaching). Other potential difficulties with the course itself include the quality of teaching, the quality of supervision, or a lack of contact with academic staff. The relationship between student and supervisor becomes increasingly important as the level of study becomes higher, as the focus on research rather than taught courses increases.

Factors affecting students outside of the academic world include changes in personal circumstances, financial difficulties, family issues and health issues (both physical and mental). Sometimes students change their mind about the career they wish to pursue and this leads to them leaving their course to follow a different career path. If a student has moved to a different university to take up their postgraduate

studies, sometimes they find it difficult to adjust to the new environment, both in terms of the new academic environment and the new city. McGivney (1996)² found that different reasons are more common causes for withdrawal at different stages of the course. The wrong choice of course or problems with the institution are more common reasons for early withdrawal from university, while withdrawal later on in the course is more likely to be associated with reasons such as financial problems, or changes in personal circumstances or domestic commitments.

For students who are suffering from any of these issues, two departments at UFS who you can speak to are the UFS [Career Development](#) office and the UFS [Student Counselling and Development](#) department. It can help to write down the different reasons for your dissatisfaction with your studies, in as much detail as possible, which may of course include reasons not discussed above. This kind of exercise can help at a later stage when considering your options.

For the Postgraduate School it is important to know how our students experience their postgraduate studies at UFS. Our main responsibility is to advocate for the interests of postgraduate students and work to change those circumstances that they experience as negative, stressful and as obstacles to their successful completion of their studies. We therefore ask you to communicate with the school about your experiences and challenges. Tell us about those things that you experience as positive and those that are negative so that we can use the information to create an enabling, positive postgraduate environment for all our students.

¹ Yorke, M and Longden, B (2004). *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education*. Society for research into

Higher Education. Open University Press: Maidenhead, UK.

² McGivney, V (1996). *Staying or Leaving the Course*. NIACE: Leicester, UK.

BURSARY & SCHOLARSHIP CALLS

1. NRF: [renewal](#) of certain 2015 scholarships can now be done by submitting Annual Progress Reports [online](#) (by 30 November 2014, submissions after this will not be considered until March 2015)
2. [NRF Honours Scholarships](#) Closing date: **30 January 2015**
3. Embassy of France Master's Scholarships – [information](#) and [application form](#). Study in France, open to all disciplines, knowledge of French language not required. Closing date: **23 March 2015**
4. [Academia Sinica of Taiwan](#) PhD scholarships in science and technology. Closing date: **31 March 2015**

Please visit <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za/nrfmkii/> for details of all current NRF funding calls.

More information on bursary and scholarship calls is available in the *Bursaries and Scholarships Guide for Postgraduate Students 2014/5* booklet which can be [downloaded](#) from the Postgraduate School website.



Prof **Harry Kotze** at the Postgraduate School is available for students who want advice and guidance on their proposals for NRF and other funding: KotzeHF@ufs.ac.za

Joy Nogabe, our Chief Officer for Postgraduate funding, is on maternity leave until 1 January 2015. While Joy is on leave, **Naomi Haupt** can be contacted for enquiries on funding on x9432 or DeValdoNE@ufs.ac.za.

Postgraduate School Online Resources and Useful Links

We have a series of links to online resources for postgraduate students on the [Resource Centre](#) section of the Postgraduate school website. Areas include research methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), academic writing, statistical analysis, writing research proposals, funding proposals, academic articles and conference papers, action research and research paradigms.

You can keep in touch with the Postgraduate School by following us on **Facebook** and adding us on **LinkedIn**:

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/postgraduateschoolufs>



Linked In:

<http://za.linkedin.com/pub/postgraduate-school-ufs/85/202/627>



We also have a **Youtube** page where we have posted some video clips from previous courses which we have run:

Youtube:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxV8rEqyn5N2J8MsT9b41_g or search for 'Postgraduate School UFS' on Youtube.



Who are we?

• Director:

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