

THE STUDENT / SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIP

Postgraduate School

**Newsletter 06/
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From Office of the Director

The postgraduate school strives to promote excellent postgraduate education at UFS. We believe that postgraduate education open many new opportunities in the current fast paced labour market. In the modern knowledge economy there is a high premium on the ability to think, define, analyse and conceptualise new ways of interacting with existing problems. The benefits of advanced studies lie just as much in the knowledge and competencies gained as in the personal changes that it brings about in the candidate. Advanced studies change the way we think about ourselves and the world around us. Employers often cite the need for critical thinking, problem solving skills, creativity and flexibility as important ingredients for successful employees. Quality postgraduate education foster exactly these attributes in students. The research project is in essence a creative process that require the ability to investigate and identify, to plan, be flexible and think critically about our own research.

In this edition we recognise the role of supervisors as important partners in the postgraduate journey of students and development of students. We therefore focus on the supervision process and encourage students to become active agents that ensure that they get maximum value from their supervision and at the same time maintain good working relations with supervisors. We invite you to tell us about your experience with your supervisor – the joys and the sorrows.

We recommend that students submit a summary of their meetings with their supervisor to their supervisor within a week after the meeting. This helps the process and provides a helpful overview of the main issues discussed and the decisions made during the appointment. It also helps the supervisor to assess whether the student grasps the feedback received. See the attached template as an example for feedback purposes.

Remember that everybody who want to graduate in July 2014 must complete the Notice of Submission form which your supervisor must sign. It has to be submitted to Mrs Marilyn Meyer's office before **27 October 2013**. To be considered for graduation in June 2014 the deadline for submission of theses and dissertation is **31 January 2014**. We've attached the Notice of Submission form for your convenience.

Warm regards

Henriette

The student-supervisor relationship

The student-supervisor relationship is a fundamental part of postgraduate study, and while this relationship will of course vary between individuals and also between different departments, there are some aspects which will apply in general for most postgraduate students.

Relationship:

The desired professional approach is one where you are treated with respect, with an atmosphere where you are not afraid to ask questions, or even show your ignorance of a topic when necessary. Your supervisor should provide intellectual and emotional support, while also taking a critical approach to your work; remember that any criticisms or suggestions are about your work rather than you. While you will be doing your own independent research, you should also consider, and not dismiss out of hand, ideas put forward by your supervisor. If you do decide not to implement a suggestion/edit, you should be prepared to justify this.

Practicalities:

It is professional for both of you to be prepared to be accountable, and to plan a mutually agreeable working structure. Establish guidelines about who will take responsibility for arranging meetings and

how often you will meet, and how far in advance of meetings you will submit your work. You are responsible for the quality assurance of the work you submit to your supervisor, so while your draft work does not have to be the finished article, it can be a good idea to get someone else to read through it before you submit it.

It is also worth remembering that your supervisor is likely to have a lot of demands on their time as well as other students requiring their attention. This means that you should not necessarily expect to get feedback straight away; conversely **six months to return a piece of work isn't acceptable** or useful to you so you have to keep the process going. In the end it is your PhD so it is not unreasonable to expect the onus to be on you to get the best out of the relationship.

Expectations:

- to receive a reasonable level of supervision – frequent, dedicated meetings
- to have your work considered well in advance of any meeting
- to have constructive feedback on your written, oral and lab work
- to have access to your supervisor when needed
- your supervisor to be open, friendly and supportive

- your supervisor to have a good knowledge of the area
- your supervisor to be interested and involved in your ultimate success

Your supervisor will also have reasonable expectations of you:

- to be reasonably independent, while asking for help if you need it
- to produce written work that is not just a first draft
- to meet with them regularly
- to prepare for meetings so that work done and ideas had can be presented coherently
- and in a way that's easy to absorb in a short time
- to work according to an agreed timetable and to keep accurate records
- to be honest when reporting progress and results
- to raise difficulties promptly and keep them informed of your progress

Feedback:

It is useful to record a brief summary of any formal supervision meetings with your supervisor as soon as possible after they take place, and then email this back to them.

Strategies for getting the best feedback possible:

- Be prepared
- Know what you want – it is useful to specify in advance at what level you're seeking feedback, or if you want feedback on specific areas (e.g. general structure, the quality of your evidence, writing style) – this will help your supervisor to focus
- Ask questions – better questions should result in better feedback e.g. 'Do you think the discussion of X fits better in section A or B?', rather than 'Would you look at my writing?'. Or you could say, 'Don't bother at this stage with the sentence structure, but tell me if the argument is logical and convincing'.
- Seek feedback from as many sources as possible – your supervisor is not your only source of feedback; you could ask other students, or other academics (though it is best to mention this to your supervisor in the latter case)

Overcoming reluctance to seek feedback can stem from several reasons:

- Imposition on the supervisor – you may think that you are imposing on your supervisor, but remember that providing supervision is part of their

role and what they have agreed to do. If you are prepared and know what you want, this makes the process run more smoothly

- Doubts about your own work – this is a normal feeling with any academic work. Accept that, to get the job done well, you have to deal with discussion of the weaknesses as well as the strengths of your work
- Protecting yourself – some people only give negative feedback and never mention what is good – they may assume you already know what is good so there is no need to talk about it, in which case you could try asking something like 'OK, we've talked about the problems with my work. Are there some good points you're happy with?'
- Worthless feedback – if everything you produce yields just a nod or tick, you need to ask specific questions to elicit more useful comments

Dealing with critical feedback:

- Critical feedback is a way of improving your work, and a means of the supervisor sharing their expertise about the topic
- Remember that criticism is based on your work, rather than you as an individual. Try to consider critical

feedback in a calm and reasoned, rather than emotional way.

- Although you should consider all feedback, this does not mean you have to suspend your judgment and blindly follow it. It may be helpful to consider questions such as: am I sure I understand what the reader is getting at? Do I think the reader has understood the points I was making? Do I agree with the feedback? To what extent do I want to follow it? Why did I do it in the way I did it in the first place? Is it consistent?

Useful websites:

Maintaining a good student/supervisor relationship

<http://thesiswhisperer.com/2011/03/22/happily-ever-after/>

Expectations and feedback

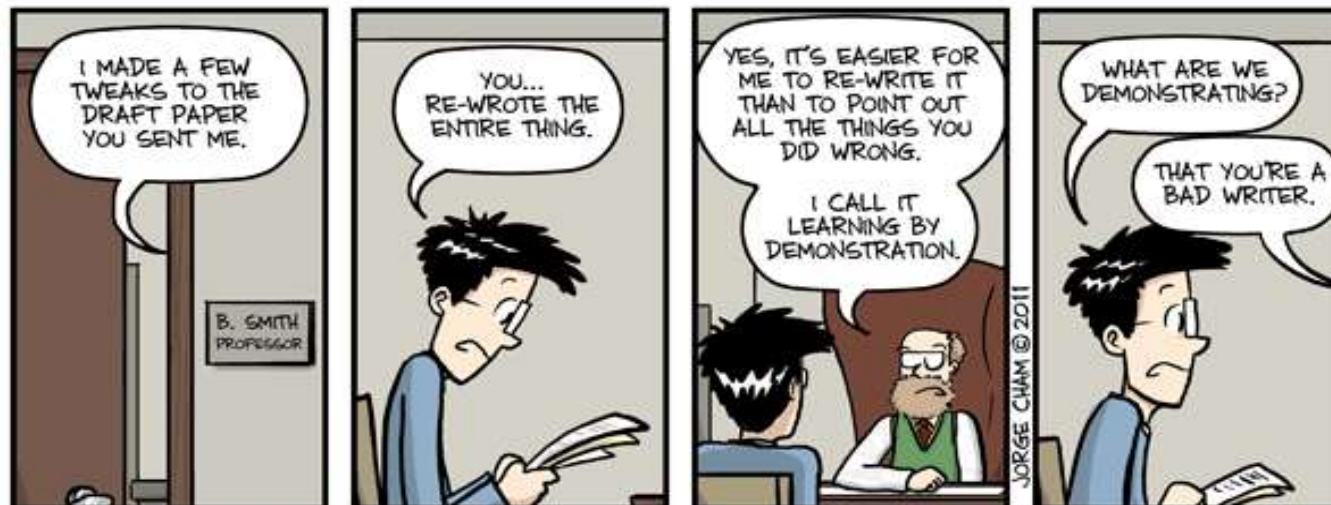
http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/phdwriting/fr_phfaq.html

Student-supervisor relationships

<http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/supervisor/relationships/>

UPCOMING SCHOLARSHIP CALLS:

1. Doug Banks Renewable Energy Vision Scholarship for a Masters in renewable energy studies in 2014 **Closing date Friday 27 September 2013**
www.dougbanks.co.za
2. Call for SKILL Masters coursework bursaries at for a maximum period of three months at International Institute of Social Studies (The Hague), Part of Erasmus University Rotterdam **Closing date for applications for courses (Masters level) in academic term 2 (13 January – 28 March 2014): 29 September 2013**
<http://www.fsw.vu.nl/en/privacy/index.asp?Referer=/en/international-relations/savusa/skill-programme/index.asp>
3. NRF Freestanding, Innovation and Scarce Skills Masters and Doctoral Scholarships **Closing date 30 September** <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>
4. Innovation Masters and Doctoral Scholarships for non-South African Students Call for 2014: **Closing Date 30 September** <https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>
5. The South African Square Kilometre Array Project (SKA SA) - Undergraduate and Honours Scholarship Programme **Internal closing date:30 September 2013**
<https://nrfs submission.nrf.ac.za>
6. Next generation social sciences in Africa **Closing date 01 October 2013** <http://www.ssrc.org/programs/nextgenafrika/>
7. The Carl Fuchs and Emily Fuchs Doctoral Scholarships **Closing date for submissions, Friday 04 October 2013**
http://www.fuchsfoundation.co.za/calls_proposals.htm
8. Poliomyelitis Research Foundation Travel grants **Closing dates: 15 October** http://www.prf.ac.za/pages/rules/travel_rules_01.htm
9. Poliomyelitis Research Foundation Study bursaries **Closing dates 15 October** http://www.prf.ac.za/pages/rules/bursary_rules_01.htm
10. Swiss Government Excellence Scholarships **Closing date 30 October 2013** <http://www.eda.admin.ch/pretoria>
11. Commonwealth Split-Site Doctoral Scholarships - **Closing date Friday, 29 November 2013.** <http://csc.do-it-online.org.uk/csc/ElectronicApplicationSystem.htm>
12. FoodBev SETA Bursary Grant - Research and Innovation **No closing date** www.foodbev.co.za



Introducing one of our Postdocs - Ms Emmie Smit

My PhD journey of mercy, grace and EXUBERANCE

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing: it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well” - François-Marie Arouet (1694 – 1778)

I don't know why, but it seemed like if the most monstrous upheavals a person can endure are awakened at the same moment when the proof of postgraduate study registration is printed. According to universal experience a postgraduate student does not only enrol for a study, but also for a super-complex life-changing experience in their professional lives – and even more so, in their personal lives. When the going gets tough, the tough runs to the supervisor.

I am one of the blessed ones who thrived during my PhD journey, because of the extraordinary person who supervised and mentored me. My PhD journey was exhilarating and exciting for the entire three years. Even now that my Post Doc journey has commenced, I am excited because of my magical relationship with “my” supervisor. Rita Niemann just has the magical ability to balance the professional and personal aspects of such a relationship. In her I found an accomplished academic, mentor and leader, who signals compassion, approachability and authenticity while remaining professional. With her radiant enthusiasm, she became a co-traveller on my research journey. She played a determining role in my study, as well as my future career.

Rita challenged me to present my research at national and international conferences and in academic journals, developed my capacity by urging me to attend academic colloquiums, workshops and research indabas. Rita also knew that there were times that a glass of wine was more necessary than a theory. She never-ever-opted for the restrictive “it-cannot-be-done” approach, but always opted for the bungee-jump challenge towards “there-must-be-a-way-to-do-it”!.

I am grateful for this life-changing opportunity to work with a supervisor who is more-than-worthy of her honourary position on the Postgrad School's Supervisor's Wall of Fame!

Emmie Smit
Post Doctoral Fellow
Postgraduate School
University of the Free State



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Research & careers week

16 October

- **CV writing, preparing for the 21st century workplace - Tasneem Mohamed, Amrop Landelahni**

Venue: Odeion

17 October

- **Postgraduate supervision workshop with Prof Driekie Hay, UFS**
- **3-minute thesis competition (closing date for submission is 10 October)**
- **A poster exhibition of postgraduate students' research projects**

Venue: Odeion

18 October

“Intellectual Property & “Authorship” – Herman van Schalkwyk, Spoor & Fisher

Venue: Johannes Brill Building, Room 19

Programme for October 2013

| Date | Time | Topic | Presenter |
|------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| 9-11 | 09h00 – 16h30 | Project Management | Dr Francois Minnaar |
| 14 - 17 | 12h30 – 17h00 | SPSS | Dr Melody Mentz |
| 16 | 09h00 – 15h30 | Developing your career brand, CV writing, interview skills | Tasneem Mohamed, Amrop-Landelahni |
| 17 | 09h00 – 11h00 11h30 – 15h30 | Research Supervision Three Minute Thesis Competition | Prof Driekie Hay Postgraduate students |
| 18 | 09h00 – 13h00 13h00 – 16h30 | Intellectual Property Rights & Authorship Discussion on authorship of research projects involving postgraduate students | Herman van Schalkwyk, Spoor & Fisher |
| 23 | 10h30 – 12h30 | Evaluation of internet sources & tips for effective information searching | Rene du Plessis Annamarie du Preez |
| 24 - 25 | 09h00 – 16h00 | Questionnaire design | Prof Rene Pellisier |

As space is limited, it is compulsory to register for all courses. Enquiries can be sent to postgraduatersvp@ufs.ac.za