

Welcome to the CGS

The Transformative Power of Postgraduate Studies on Career and Life

Artificial Intelligence - AI Wayfinder Seminar Series



Centre for Graduate Support *newsletter*

Your guide to navigate your *postgraduate studies*

May 2024



Centre for Graduate Support Staff

Welcome to the **Centre for Graduate Support (CGS)**, a vital hub that supports the academic journey of postgraduate students at the University of the Free State (UFS). Our mission is to empower students and staff, enabling them to complete their postgraduate journey successfully.

At the CGS, we offer various services and resources tailored to meet the diverse needs of Honours, Masters, and Doctoral students across all faculties with our **Research Capacity Development workshops** via blended learning formats, reaching students both on campus and in various locations regionally and internationally. These workshops cover various topics, including research methodology, academic writing, research ethics, research software programmes, research supervision, etc. The **Academic Writing portfolio** provides invaluable assistance to enhance writing skills, workshops, one-on-one consultations, and access to tools like Grammarly. The **Learning Design Portfolio** develops online courses aligned with online teaching and learning. The **Professional Development Programme** is designed to empower young academics across all disciplines to hone their research skills and advance their personal and professional attributes.

Recognising the financial challenges often faced by postgraduate students, the **Funding Portfolio** administers internal and external funding instruments, ensuring some financial support to aid in completing studies, consisting of UFS, NRF and External bursaries. In line with our commitment to excellence, CGS has implemented innovative systems, such as the **Graduate Research Management electronic student tracking system**, to monitor the progress of each postgraduate student's research journey. Additionally, we facilitate crucial administrative processes, ensuring smooth operations in the **Applications, Admissions, and Enrolment portfolio and the Thesis/ Dissertation Submissions portfolio**. We look forward to continuing our support and collaboration with the university community and fostering a culture of academic excellence and research innovation.

VISION: The CGS strives to be a globally reputable hub for impactful graduate and staff support that enables postgraduate and research excellence.

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POSTGRADUATE WELCOMING SESSION 2024: The Transformative Power of Postgraduate Studies on Career and Life

Professor Mpumelelo E. Ncube (UFS, Dept of Social Work)

We welcome the 2024 class of our postgraduate students and look forward to journeying with you to the end. We understand that pursuing postgraduate studies marks the ongoing progression of a journey of a student that would have commenced several years before with the pursuit of a tertiary education qualification. The fact that you are now enrolled as a postgraduate, attests that you have an undergraduate qualification in one or more fields. While you all seek to acquire a postgraduate qualification in the programme for which you are enrolled, the impetus behind your quest may differ from one student to another, and from one context to another. Some reasons may be internal while others may be external of you. Although some of you may view postgraduate studies as a natural progression from an undergraduate qualification, others may do it for prestige. Irrespective of one's programme, being a beholder of a postgraduate qualification enhances one's reputation in the eyes of society. In this case, the reason for attaining the qualification would be external to you. Others may undertake postgraduate studies to augment their self-esteem or for self-discovery (internal). Even though others are seeking to enhance their employability in a context of poor or noneconomic growth, and high levels of unemployment, others are here with an eye, largely, on the promotion criteria in their respective places of work or bigger and better opportunities elsewhere. All these reasons, and many more, are plausible enough for one's pursuit of a postgraduate qualification.

Whatever your reasons for the pursuit of a postgraduate qualification, your journey must lead you to further self-discovery, stimulate your intellectual curiosity, and cultivate your critical thinking skills. Your experience must calibrate you to be the kind of postgraduate that is sought by society. This would be an individual who could respond effectively and efficiently to the prevailing societal challenges. One who would provide leadership in their field and contribute through practice or research. One who would, ordinarily, not fold arms and await opportunities of employment but think critically of self-employment endeavours that would, advertently, create opportunities for others. This is the calibre of a postgraduate that we envisage here at the University of the Free State and, generally, from all institutions of higher learning in this country and continent.

All this begins here on campus. The campus is a kaleidoscope that should create different and unique experiences for each one of you. While ultimately, you should all rejoice with your degree certificates in your hands, not all experiences will be remarkable. From a systems theory point of view, for some of you, at some point in time, and for various reasons in your trajectory, things may fall apart. They may fall apart resulting from personal family dynamics, occupational pressures, or study-related dynamics, among others. Like the changing colours of a kaleidoscope, a new picture is created with each twist thereof. As such, even if you encounter any setbacks, pick the pieces and forge ahead in creating an even brighter picture with the benefit of hindsight, experience, and foresight. After all, this is the kind of resilience that is needed in the modern world without which even postgraduates, like the rest of the population with no requisite knowledge, experiences, and skills, become victims of psycho-socio-economic-political circumstances encountered in their day-to-day living. It is the ability to resile, not in the sense of 'recoilment' but bouncing forward.

As you journey towards your postgraduate qualification, you equally need to be cognisant of your sources of resilience that you will need to tap on from time to time to stay afloat. Some of those may mean having a family as your support structure or replenishing your spiritual repository among others. For each day spent as a postgraduate, be reminded of the kind of characteristics that you ought to possess at the end of your journey. Have an end in mind. Your experience should carve a graduate who would be able to engage with structural issues as they present themselves locally, regionally, and globally. While in certain circumstances, you may need to fit the mould, often, you would be expected to critique the very existence of the mould. After all, it is the uncritical acceptance of the mould that has perpetuated and even continues to heighten levels of injustices that have been experienced by humanity since time immemorial. What value is education and the educated in a society if problems pervading humanity remain unchallenged? You ought to question the status quo and suggest solutions. Break the mould if need be. Follow up your abstract thoughts with concrete suggestions and definitive actions as the old guard may be unwilling to embrace changes.

In his book, "The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization", Peter Senge emphasises the need for individuals and organisations to challenge conventional thinking and actively pursue change to adapt and thrive in a rapidly evolving world. He argues that learning, and critical and systemic thinking are crucial for addressing complex problems, and he advocates for questioning existing structures and paradigms to foster innovation and continuous improvement. This is the attitude that you should mentally robe yourself with as a postgraduate student as you journey towards your qualification. You begin to put this mentality into practice as you engage with the content of the various modules that make up your qualification. This is the thesis that Paulo Freire advances in his seminal work, where he critiques the traditional education systems that often serve to reinforce existing power hierarchies. As postgraduate students, you cannot afford to be complicit in such an injustice if it presents itself, and this university certainly does not expect you to. The University is mindful of its obligation to society through responsive education.

You cannot afford to have a postgraduate experience and ultimately a qualification, yet embark on what Heidegger, in his existential analysis of human existence, calls "idle talks", which subjects you to what he later referred to as the "inauthentic existence" of the educated. By "idle talk", Heidegger refers to the superficial chatter and gossip that permeates everyday social interactions, often distracting individuals from deeper reflections on their existence and authentic being. On the other hand, by "inauthentic existence", he describes a condition of 'being' that is characterised by conformity to societal expectations and norms rather than a preoccupation with genuine self-understanding and engagement with one's possibilities and potentialities.

So much is and has been invested in you by either yourself, your family, the state, or others. As the adage goes, 'Where so much is invested, so much is expected'. In the 18th century, Benjamin Franklin said, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." The statement is as true today as it was in the 18th century. As such, let dividends of the knowledge that you come with, that you are yet to acquire, and the experiences that you will obtain here as a postgraduate show. After all, that is the transformative power of postgraduate Studies on Career and Life. You cannot afford to be factory faults - getting into the system but emerging half-done and unfit for purpose.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ACADEMIA AI Wayfinder Seminar Series

The **Interdisciplinary Centre for Digital Futures (ICDF)** and the **Digital Scholarship Centre (DSC)** held the first **AI Wayfinder Seminar Series seminar** on 14 March 2024. Prof Susan Brokensha, Associate Professor at the English department in The Humanities at the UFS, presented on

- [Ethics and policies in AI.](#)

Prof Brokensha has written extensively on AI, for example

- [AI in and for Africa](#),
- [Is ChatGPT a friend or foe in the war on misinformation?](#), and
- [The potential of artificial intelligence \(AI\) for decolonising education in South Africa through the development of indigenous languages.](#)

Watch a recording of the seminar on [YouTube](#). To register for other seminars in the series or to attend one of the AI Sandboxes hosted by the ICDF and the DSC, [visit our calendar](#).

The next seminar in the **AI Wayfinder Seminar Series** hosted by the **Interdisciplinary Centre for Digital Futures** and the **Library and Information Services' Digital Scholarship Centre** will be **AI in writing: Implications of overreliance** by Dr Peet van Aardt and Zonnik Coetzer from the Centre for Teaching and Learning's The Writing Centre.

Watch the video on [YouTube](#) to learn more about identifying writing with AI to help you write.

<https://www.ufs.ac.za/centreforgraduatesupport>