Policy Name/Title: Policy on Master's and Doctoral Studies

Policy Group(s): Delete categories that are not relevant.	Academic Policies: Institutional Research and Planning

Type: Tick document category	Policy	X	Guideline	
	Procedure		Regulation	

UFS Statute and/or regulation reference number and date:	UFS Statute, Government Gazette, No 42337, 29 March 2019 UFS Statute, Government Gazette, No 41399, 26 January 2018
Relevant legislation and/or policy, codes of practice, professional authorities:	
Relevant institutional policies/manuals:	1. 2021 General Rules for Undergraduate Qualifications, Postgraduate Diplomas, Bachelor Honours Degrees, Masters Degrees, Doctoral Degrees, Higher Doctorates, Honorary Degrees and the Convocation 2. Policy on Preventing and Dealing with Academic Writing Misconduct 3. Policy on the Protection, Exploitation, and Commercialisation of Intellectual Property 4. UFS Strategic Plan 5. UFS Policy on Universal Access and Disability Support for students with disabilities 6. UFS Admissions Policy
Consultation process To be verified and signed off before approval	1. Centre for Graduate Support Staff, Date: 9 November 2021 2. UFS Student Representative Council, Date: 16 November 2021 3. Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences Date: 23 November 2021 4. Dean of the Faculty of Education Date: 23 November 2021 5. Dean of the Faculty of The Humanities Date: 23 November 2021 6. Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences Date: 23 November 2021

	7. Dean of the Faculty of Law Date: 23 November 2021 8. Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences Date: 23 November 2021 9. Dean of the Faculty of Theology Date: 23 November 2021 10. UFS Human Resources 11. UFS Finance 12. UFS Legal Services 13. Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support 14. Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice 15. Doctoral Degrees Committee: 10 May 2022 16. Rectorate: 25 May 2022 17. Executive Committee of Senate: 06 June 2022, 25 July 2022 18. Senate: 16 August 2022 19. Council: 16 September 2022
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POLICY STATEMENT	
1. Preamble/ background	1.1 This document sets out the policy of the University of the Free State (UFS) on Masters and Doctoral studies. 1.2 The general purpose of this policy is to establish a common set of standards for Masters and Doctoral Degrees across all Faculties of the University. 1.3 It outlines the general expectation for all UFS Master's and Doctoral Degrees, including structured Master's Degrees. 1.4 The policy takes as points of departure the vision and values of the UFS. 1.5 This policy is subject to changes in national policies and laws affecting postgraduate studies.
2. Purpose	2.1 The purpose of this policy, together with the rules and procedures set out in the UFS General Rules, is to provide a framework for the administration, governance, and quality management of Masters and Doctoral studies and programmes at the University. The framework aims to: 2.1.1 Establish rational and transparent decision-making processes around the governance and administration of Master and Doctoral student matters; 2.1.2 Provide for the generation and capture of relevant institutional management information relating to Masters and Doctoral students and programmes; 2.1.3 Ensure the highest levels of quality care regarding Masters and Doctoral studies; 2.1.4 Clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of Masters and Doctoral students and supervisors; 2.1.5 Ensure fairness and transparency in the treatment of Masters and Doctoral students and in addressing their concerns; and 2.1.6 Ensure adequate capacity development for the support of Masters and Doctoral students.
3. Scope	3.1 This policy outlines generic expectations for all the University's Masters and Doctoral Degrees.
4. Definitions and abbreviations	**Applying for postgraduate admission** The process by which a potential student indicates their interest in enrolling for a postgraduate qualification offered at the UFS. It entails capturing the applicant's personal and other data in the University's database. **Arbiter** An external examiner appointed by the University to give an outcome in the case of borderline decisions or when discrepancies occur in assessing a thesis or mini-dissertation/dissertation. **Co-supervisor** A person appointed together with the main supervisor to oversee the completion of a thesis or mini-dissertation/ dissertation.

Dissertation/Mini-dissertation
The supervised research component of all Masters' degrees, whether those degrees comprise supervised research only or a combination of coursework and research.

Doctoral Degree (NQF Exit Level 10; minimum total credits: 360)
A Doctoral Degree is the highest formal academic qualification at a University and calls for advanced research in a specific field of study that makes an original and significant contribution to that particular field of study. A doctorate is offered at NQF Level 10 and consists of a minimum of 360 credits. The exact requirements pertain to a Doctoral Degree (Professional), for example, D.Ed, and PhD (Child Psychology), but with greater emphasis on researching ways to solve the professional problems that feature in the training and research of the specific field. A graduate should be able to supervise and evaluate the research of others in the area of specialisation concerned.

Doctoral Degree (Thesis)
A Doctoral thesis is the sole research component of a doctorate. It must demonstrate that the candidate has made a specific contribution to enhancing knowledge in the chosen field while providing evidence of independent critical ability. The work must be of a quality to satisfy publication by reputable publishers. The degree may be earned through pure discipline-based or multidisciplinary research or applied research. A Doctoral thesis generally comprises between 70,000 and 100,000 words, or three publishable or published articles. One article from the three should have been submitted to a reputable journal at the time of submission for examination. This degree requires a minimum of two (2) years of full-time study, usually after completing a Master's Degree.

Doctoral Degree (Professional) (NQF Exit Level 10; minimum total credits: 360)
The professional Doctorate provides education and training for a career in the professions and/or industry and is designed around developing high-level performance and innovation in a professional context. Candidates are required to undertake a combination of coursework and advanced research leading to the submission, examination, and acceptance of a research component comprising an original thesis or another form of research commensurate with the nature of the discipline or field of the specific area of inquiry. The research component should comprise at least 60% of the degree. Professional Doctorates may also include appropriate forms of work-integrated learning (WIL). The defining characteristic of this qualification is that, in addition to demonstrating high-level research capability, it requires the ability to integrate theory with practice through applying theoretical knowledge to highly complex problems in a wide range of professional contexts.

External examiner
An academic or professional who is recognised for their expertise in a given field and appointed to examine the research work of a Masters or Doctoral candidate. At the Masters level, the examiner should preferably hold a doctoral degree. In exceptional cases where the examiner of a Masters student only holds a Master's degree, the examiner should have

extensive research experience and publications and should have examined at the Masters level as approved by the Faculty Board.

At the Doctoral level, the examiner should preferably hold a doctoral degree. In exceptional cases where the examiner of a doctoral student only holds a Master's degree, the examiner should have extensive research experience and publications and should have examined at the doctoral level as approved by the Faculty Board and the Doctoral Degrees Committee.

An external examiner should not have any present affiliation with the UFS. A person who has accepted an honorary appointment or an appointment as a research associate, is actively involved in a research project and/or who was employed at the University and has since left the University's employment is considered to have an affiliation with the University. The University may reconsider this after at least three years.

Full-time student /Part-time student
For full-time students, the minimum enrolment period is usually one (1) year for a Master's Degree and two (2) years for a doctoral degree.

For part-time students, the minimum enrolment period is usually two (2) years for a Master's Degree and four (4) years for a doctoral degree.

Higher Doctorate (NQF Exit Level 10; minimum total credits: 360)
The Higher Doctorate is an additional type of Doctorate, which may be awarded based on a distinguished record of research in the form of published works, creative works and other scholarly contributions that are judged by leading international experts to make an exceptional and independent contribution to one or more disciplines or fields of study.

Internal examiner
A person employed by the UFS who has not been involved in the teaching or guiding of a Masters or Doctoral candidate and is appointed to examine the student's mini-dissertation/dissertation or thesis. The internal examiner cannot in any way be a relative, someone directly involved in the study, or business associate of the supervisor and/or co-supervisor or a postgraduate student. The supervisor should motivate to the Faculty Board where they want to deviate from the above exclusions.

International student
A person who is not a South African citizen and does not have a permanent residence permit.

Master's Degree (NQF Exit level 9; minimum total credits: 180)
A Master's Degree is a postgraduate qualification offered at NQF level 9 and consists of 180 credits. A Master's Degree enables a student to be proficient in the principles of theory and research methodology while investigating a problem in a particular field of study. The student contributes to the field of knowledge.

Structured Master's Degree with a research component (mini-dissertation/research project) (NQF Exit Level 9; minimum total credits: 180)

The structured Master's Degree consists of coursework and a mini-dissertation/research project. The mini-dissertation/research project is the supervised research component of the structured Master's Degree. The research component comprises a minimum of 60 credits and entails completing a mini-dissertation/research project between 20,000 and 30,000 words or one publishable or published article. It contains a justifiable argument based on research of a limited scope that fits with NQF Exit Level 9. This degree requires a minimum of one year's full-time study, usually after completing an Honours degree.

Master's Degree by research (NQF Exit Level 9; minimum total credits: 180)

The Master's Degree by research is supervised research only. The degree is offered at NQF Level 9 and consists of 180 credits. A Master's Degree enables a student to be proficient in the principles of theory and research methodology while investigating a problem in a particular field of study. The student contributes to the field of knowledge. Although this research aims to, it does not necessarily have to make an original contribution to the field of expertise. A Master's Degree by research entails completing a Masters research dissertation comprising between 30,000 and 50,000 words or two interrelated publishable or published articles containing a justifiable argument. The dissertation or research papers (articles) count 100% of the achievement mark.

Master's Degree (Professional) (NQF Exit Level 9; minimum total credits: 180)

The professional Master's Degree provides education and training to graduates who can contribute to developing knowledge at an advanced level to prepare them for advanced and specialised professional employment. In some cases, a professional Master's Degree may be designed in consultation with a professional body or fulfil all or part of the requirements for professional registration or recognition and may include appropriate forms of WIL. The requirements for the successful completion of the professional Master's Degree are as follows: successful completion of a coursework programme requiring a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence, as well as a demonstration of the ability to relate knowledge to the resolution of complex problems in appropriate areas of professional practice. In addition, a professional Master's Degree must include an independent study component that comprises at least a quarter of the total credits, which must be at NQF Level 9, consisting of either single research or technical project or a series of smaller projects demonstrating innovation or professional expertise. Masters graduates must be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, design and critically appraise analytical writing, make sound judgments using data and information at their disposal and, communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences, demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks with a professional orientation, and continue to advance their knowledge, understanding, and skills relevant to a particular profession.

	Publishable article A "publishable article" is a manuscript ready for submission for publication in an academic journal or similar scholarly publication. This means that the manuscript's content has been supervised extensively and that the text has been edited and formatted according to the specifications of the particular journal. It also implies that the manuscript must function autonomously as a self-contained entity (i.e., it is not contingent on a preceding "chapter" or specific "introduction"). However, the candidate must be able to motivate the links between the "autonomous" interrelated publishable manuscripts at the end of the examination process. "Publishable" further implies that the manuscript has not yet been circulated for the required double-blind peer review process to which accredited academic publications subscribe in their normal functioning. This means there is no guarantee that the submitted manuscript will be accepted for publication. **Published article** A published article is an article that has been submitted and accepted or published in an academic journal. The author can provide a letter from the editor confirming acceptance in the scholarly publication. **Supervisor** A supervisor is a person appointed by a Faculty to oversee the research development of a Masters or Doctoral student based on their expertise and recognition in a particular field of study. Supervisors must not in any way be related to their students. Spouses, relatives, and individuals involved with the postgraduate candidate in any form are regarded as a conflict of interest and cannot be appointed as supervisors. **Work Integrated Learning (WIL)** WIL allows students to apply their learning from academic studies to relevant experiences and reciprocate learning back to their studies.
5. Guiding principles	5.1 This policy should be read in the context of the needs, structures, and practices of individual Faculties, which may develop their implementation procedures and can include professional body requirements. However, the benchmarks outlined should not be compromised, though they may be made more stringent by discipline and Faculty-specific regulations.
6. Policy	**Policy on Masters and Doctoral Degrees** **6.1 Admissions** All admissions to postgraduate study programmes are subject to the general institutional rules of the UFS. Students who wish to register at the UFS for the first time for a Master's or Doctoral Degree and students who interrupted their studies for at least one year must apply for admission in a prescribed way and before the closing date determined by the University each year. No student can be registered for a postgraduate degree without submitting a formal application and receiving an offer from the University and a formal letter of acceptance. All students must register annually and pay the annual prescribed fees. The University will consider no retrospective registration. Students must

also adhere to additional discipline-specific requirements of Faculties and Academic Departments.

International students must submit their certificates/degrees to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for assessment before applying to the UFS. The SAQA evaluation certificate and certified copies of degrees/certificates must accompany students' applications. Students should visit the SAQA website www.saqa.org.za for further details.

6.1.2 Admission requirements

The general standard for acceptance into a Master's Degree is an average of 60% obtained in an Honours Degree or equivalent qualification. The general standard for acceptance into Doctoral studies is 65% obtained in a Master's Degree. Departments might have specific entrance criteria based on interviews, tests, and/or the submission of an essay in which the applicant describes the focus of the envisaged study. There might be upward or downward exceptions to the admission standard in specific disciplines, but the Faculty Board must approve these exceptions. The exceptions should not contradict the General Rules of the University.

6.2 Selection process

The selection process and criteria to be admitted into a Master's or Doctoral Degree may differ according to Faculties and Departments. Staff with experience in the research area or knowledge of postgraduate research supervision should be involved in the selection process.

Selection criteria adopted by Faculties and Departments must ensure that students admitted to particular postgraduate programmes are adequately prepared to satisfy the demands of the degree. Equity and access considerations must be responsibly built into the selection criteria and protocols.

Students who might feel aggrieved by the selection outcome should appeal with motivation to the Dean of the Faculty. The number and nature of appeals should be tabled and considered at the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee meetings.

6.3 Interdisciplinary degrees

The UFS allows and encourages interdisciplinary approaches to studying complex human, social, and scientific problems. This policy makes provision for the registration of students in more than one Department and Faculty/School.

In the case of Masters degrees, the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee and in the case of Doctoral degrees, the Doctoral Degrees Committee, on the recommendation of the Dean, will decide which other Faculty/Faculties have an interest in the study and will request the joint appointments of supervisors from the relevant Faculties and Departments. The qualification that will be conferred will be interdisciplinary, and the names of the disciplines involved will appear on the degree certificate.

6.4 Joint degrees

As per the General Rules of the UFS regarding joint degrees, the University allows for a split-degree arrangement, in which students take at least 50% or more of their coursework or supervision at the UFS and the remaining coursework or supervision at an accredited University outside South Africa with which the UFS has a formal agreement. Students must meet the admission requirements at the UFS and the partner institution.

6.5 Registration of dissertation/thesis title

After registration, students must register the dissertation/thesis title by completing the prescribed process. The research proposal for a Master's Degree needs to serve at the Committee for Title Registration not later than three months after registration. The research proposal for a Doctoral Degree needs to serve at the Committee for Title Registration/Scientific Committee not later than six months after enrolment. On recommendation by the supervisor(s) and Head of Department or Programme Director concerned, the title of the dissertation/thesis will be approved and registered by the Faculty Board. Within the specific needs of each Faculty, the title registration must be preceded by a rigorous proposal formulation and assessment of the candidate's potential to complete their studies. At the Doctoral level, oral defence of the research proposal is compulsory.

6.6 Period of study

6.6.1 Masters study

The minimum study period for full-time students for a Master's Degree is one year. Full-time Master's Degree students are generally expected to complete their studies within three years. The minimum study period for part-time students for a Master's Degree is two years. Part-time Master's Degree students are generally expected to complete their studies within four years.

6.6.2 Doctoral study

The minimum study period for full-time students for a Doctoral Degree is two years. Full-time Doctoral Degree students are generally expected to complete their studies within four years.

The minimum study period for part-time students for a Doctoral Degree is four years. Part-time Doctoral Degree students are generally expected to complete their studies in six years.

6.7 Extension to study

The periods allowed under the Period of Study (section 6.6) are sufficient for students to complete their research in most circumstances. There are,

however, instances when students may apply for an extension or leave of absence.

Students within their prescribed period of study may obtain a leave of absence from their residential period in the case of serious illness, personal/professional reasons, or particular job requirements. A student who applies for a leave of absence must be unable to work on the dissertation/thesis for a significant period. The leave of absence is usually limited to a maximum of one year. The student must inform the supervisor and Head of Department/Programme Director in writing of their intention and must receive written confirmation of a leave of absence by the Faculty. The Registrar of the UFS must confirm the final approval for a leave of absence or abeyance from studies.

Extensions are applicable after completing the prescribed study period when mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis completion is delayed due to unforeseen difficulties. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances and require the approval of the Head of Department and the Dean, as well as ratification by the Faculty Board and the Doctoral Degrees Committee in the case of doctoral students.

A written application for extension or leave of absence is usually made on a prescribed form to the relevant Dean by the student. A Principal Supervisor or Programme Coordinator may make the application on behalf of a student in exceptional circumstances (for example, where a student is physically or mentally incapable of doing so).

Should the study not be completed after three years (full-time Master's students), four years (part-time Master's students), four years (full-time Doctoral students) or six years (part-time Doctoral students), ample reasons for further registration must be addressed to the research supervisor. The Dean, in collaboration with the Head of the Department and research supervisor, can approve an extension of the study.

Failure to submit a dissertation or thesis at the end of the residence period or the extended period (if the Dean has formally approved an extension) will result in the registration being automatically annulled by the University.

6.8 Supervision

A student's mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis is written under the guidance of a supervisor and/or co-supervisor. Supervision of Master's and Doctoral students varies considerably, depending on the subject area, background, and student needs.

All postgraduate research students should benefit from high-quality supervision, whether they have one or more than one supervisor. The supervisor should provide formal reporting on the student's progress twice a year. This will be done via the Graduate Research Management system. These reports will be available to the Department, Faculty and the Centre for Graduate Support.

6.8.1 Supervisor appointments and credentials

The main supervisor is the crucial point of contact with the student and, in general, between the student and the UFS. The main supervisor will generally be an academic staff member at the Department where the student is enrolled. Where permitted by a Faculty, the main supervisor may also reside in another Department or institution. External supervisors and/or interdisciplinary supervision may be allowed by agreement with the Dean of the relevant Faculty when there is insufficient expertise in the Department concerned. In this instance, it is generally expected that a co-supervisor from within the appropriate Department at the UFS is appointed to facilitate the student's activities and administrative processes within the University. The main supervisor is always encouraged to be an employee of the UFS except in exceptional circumstances, as stated above.

At the Master's Degree level, the supervisor should preferably hold a Doctoral Degree. In exceptional cases, where the supervisor of a Master's student only holds a Master's Degree, the supervisor in such case should have a substantive research track record as approved by the Faculty Board. The standard quality assurance processes at the Departmental and Faculty levels should ensure the quality of the research supervision.

At the Doctoral level, the supervisor should hold a Doctoral degree. In professional fields with few Doctorates, a supervisor with a Master's Degree and a substantive research track record may be appointed as a Doctoral supervisor (this should be an exception and not the norm). However, in such cases, an external co-supervisor with a Doctoral Degree must be appointed. There could also be more stringent Faculty requirements for appointment as a supervisor.

It is recommended that supervisors should have experience in supervision. In the case of inexperienced supervisors of either Masters or Doctoral students, co-supervision and participation in supervision mentoring and training are required as a capacity-building mechanism.

Any supervisor who may have a conflict of interest, or a perceived conflict of interest (for example, due to a family connection, personal relationship, or business relationship with the student), is excluded from serving as a supervisor for the student. Should such a conflict of interest arise during the research, the supervisor must immediately declare such interest to the Faculty. Another supervisor must then be appointed.

6.8.2 Supervisory allocation

A student will be assigned a supervisor by the Faculty (on recommendation from the Department and in consultation with the student) either before or within one month of registration. Students can make proposals to the Department for a particular supervisor, but the final decision rests with the Department.

6.8.3 Supervisory relationship/arrangement

The success of a student's research may depend on the contact and discussion between the supervisor and the student. Students and their supervisors should establish mutually agreed means of communication and connection. The frequency of meetings should be decided by the supervisor/co-supervisor and student in advance. This will be determined by the nature and extent of the work required and the stage of development of the student's research. All Masters and Doctoral students should interact with their supervisors at least once a month.

There should be a clear understanding and an agreement on the roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors. It is expected that students and supervisors adhere to a compulsory student-supervisor agreement that both parties must sign as soon as a supervisor has been appointed for a Masters or Doctoral candidate. The agreement indicates the importance of a commitment by all parties. Copies of the said student-supervisor agreement should be kept in the Graduate Research Management System. Heads of Departments and Deans are expected to enforce the signing of the student-supervisor agreement form. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that any barriers to the progress of their research, or any issues of concern that would delay progress, are raised with the supervisor as soon as possible.

The relationship between the student and the supervisor is essential. This can significantly and negatively impact the educational experience if it is unsatisfactory. If difficulties develop in this relationship, these should be dealt with as swiftly as possible. Before invoking formal procedures, every effort should be made to resolve grievances through frank, informal discussions between the student and the staff member(s) concerned. Wherever possible, grievances should initially be addressed at the Departmental level and referred to Faculty only if they cannot be resolved. If the intervention is still inadequate, the matter may be taken up with the Director: Centre for Graduate Support. An appeal to the Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation should be regarded as a last resort when a student/staff member feels that the initial processes have not resolved the issue adequately.

The Head of Department or Programme Director ensures that mediation is offered to the supervisor and student to reach an agreement and resolution. Mediation may be carried out by the Head of Department or Programme Director in collaboration with the Director: Centre for Graduate Support or any other suitable person mutually agreed upon. If an amicable resolution is not reached, the HOD/ Programme Director can recommend that the supervisor be replaced. The Dean must approve all such changes.

6.9 Progress review

The supervisor and the student are responsible for completing a progress report on the Graduate Research Management System at the end of each semester. The supervisor should guide and encourage the student to work within the planned time frame. Supervisors must alert students at any stage if their progress is unsatisfactory and help them identify any areas or issues affecting their progress, and suggest ways of addressing them. Where a student's progress has been unsatisfactory, the report

should identify reasons for the lack of progress and propose a mutually agreed-upon work plan.

If progress continues to be unsatisfactory, the matter should be discussed at the Departmental and Faculty Examination Boards (or other relevant Faculty Postgraduate Committee) and in the case of Doctoral degrees, the Doctoral Degrees Committee, and the student should be formally notified in writing of any decision reached. If progress continues to be unsatisfactory, and the Departmental and/or Faculty Examination Board (or other relevant Faculty Postgraduate Committee) finds insufficient mitigating circumstances, they may make recommendations regarding re-registration for the following year.

Students should note that there is no automatic progression from one year to the next, but that continuation of the degree will be determined by the progress made during the preceding year. The University reserves the right to terminate an enrolment where sufficient progress has not been achieved.

6.10 Postgraduate support

The UFS attributes value to expanding postgraduate students' research and employment-related skills. The Centre for Graduate Support (CGS) promotes excellent postgraduate education by developing an empowering environment for researchers and postgraduate students. It is part of the University's campus-wide commitment to academic excellence and its orientation toward becoming a research-led institution. The Centre for Graduate Support also advocates for postgraduate issues at the University.

The Centre for Graduate Support encourages Master's and Doctoral students to participate in the development and training opportunities offered. All new Master's and Doctoral students are encouraged to participate in the online and face-to-face courses, seminars, presentations, conferences, demonstrations, and teaching and discussion groups offered by the GCS and Faculties. Students are also encouraged to form part of this postgraduate community as part of the University's broader learning and growth opportunities.

Assistance will be provided for students with disabilities where needed.

6.10.1 Updating of contact details

All Masters and Doctoral students are encouraged to ensure that their contact details are correct upon registration with the University. This will enable the Centre for Graduate Support to contact them regarding the postgraduate newsletter, notices of postgraduate resources and funding opportunities, workshops, and other development opportunities.

6.11 Intellectual property right

Copyright in students' scripts (mini-dissertations, dissertations, theses) vests in the UFS. The University encourages the publication of derivative

works of such scripts, preferably in subsidy-bearing publications. Copyright (including associated risks and benefits) in derivative works of scripts shall vest in the student. Prior approval should be obtained from the Directorate of Research Development of the University in any of the three cases below:

6.11.1 Contract research: The publication of derivatives of scripts developed as part of contract research conducted by the University may be subject to specific contractual conditions (which may exclude student copyright).

6.11.2 Patents: Some scripts may contain patentable or protectable subject matter with potential commercial benefits.

6.11.3 Legislative requirements: The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Development Act (Act No. 51 of 2008) and its amendments may impose limitations upon the University to grant certain rights to students (which may exclude student copyright).

The UFS may commercially draw on the benefits of patents, plant breeders' rights, and models emanating from a student's mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis. As further outlined in the University's intellectual property policy, organisations that provide bursaries to students must agree contractually, in advance, with the UFS about intellectual property ownership that may arise from the student's studies at the UFS. If there was no prior agreement, the intellectual property should be owned by the UFS.

Should a student intend to submit a dissertation/thesis corresponding to a commission of their employer, the student must disclose their intention to the UFS and their employer on registration or as soon as possible after they become aware of the commission. The UFS and the employer shall then negotiate copyright ownership and confidentiality related to the student's mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis. However, the copyright in the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis and publications shall be owned by the UFS.

6.12 Ethics

The University places a high value and emphasis on ethical conduct in all aspects of postgraduate student research, recognising that ethics and intellectual honesty are essential in scholarship and University life. To this end, the University has established Research Ethics Committees, which consider all research-related ethical matters.

Faculties must ensure that all students are advised of the necessity to adhere to good research practice, ethical conduct, and the penalties resulting from research misconduct, including plagiarism. Students should not embark on any research without getting ethical clearance or waiver.

If a student is in doubt regarding ethical issues relating to research, they should seek advice from their supervisor or Head of Department.

All students' research proposals must be assessed for ethical risks by their Departmental and Faculty committee of title registration. All studies should be referred to the relevant Research Ethics Committee and request ethical approval, even if it leads to a waiver of ethical approval. Supervisors must ensure that students know their research's ethical clearance requirements. It is also the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to advise the student to include within the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis acknowledgement of ethical approval that has been sought and granted.

As highlighted in the University's *Policy on the Prevention of Plagiarism and Dealing with Academic Writing Misconduct*, plagiarism is a particular ethical issue of concern. This refers to duplicating someone else's work and claiming authorship and further includes inadequately acknowledging sources of data, analyses, and ideas and includes direct copying of passages of text. Plagiarism is a serious transgression and subject to strict corrective actions. All theses and dissertations must be checked using the Turnitin software to detect plagiarism before being sent for examination. Students who are found to have knowingly plagiarised their work will be subject to an inquiry on academic misconduct.

At the time of submission, all Master's and Doctoral students must provide a written declaration that the submitted work is their own and submit a Turnitin report. A summary of the Turnitin report and the written declaration should be included in the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis. The full Turnitin report should be submitted alongside the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis.

6.13 Research output

Masters and Doctoral students will usually deliver a mini-dissertation, dissertation, or thesis as the final product of their studies. Alternatively, permission may be granted by the relevant Head of Department for a portfolio of published articles to be presented as a final product for examination to obtain these degrees. In these cases, the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis will include the published/publishable articles as separate chapters.

In the case of publishable articles for Doctoral students, one of the articles should have been submitted to a reputable journal at the time of submission for examination. The research presented should be coherent with an all-inclusive abstract, an introduction (an orientation to the study that contextualises the research project about the present state of knowledge in the field), an independent and original discussion, and consolidated findings and reflections (as part of the conclusion chapter)

The dissertation/thesis must be presented in a good academic style, with consistent formatting and scholarly content. Alternatively, students may be required to prepare a critical discussion paper that summarises: the aims, methods, and results of the work in the portfolio; how these manuscripts form a coherent body of work; the extent of the contribution of the student; and the significance of the submission for the expansion

of knowledge. This critical discussion should be between 3,000 and 10,000 words in length. The student's contribution should be distinguished and clearly stated where multi-authored manuscripts are submitted. Additionally, supervisors are required to countersign a statement confirming the contributions of the student and co-authors in the manuscript.

6.14 Submission of theses/dissertations

At the conclusion of their supervised research, the student shall submit an electronic copy of the dissertation/thesis for examination to the Theses Submission Office at the Centre for Graduate Support. The student must submit all theses and dissertations with the supervisor's approval. If there is a disagreement between the student and supervisor on submission, an internal process should be used to resolve the impasse. If the student decides to submit the thesis/ dissertation without the supervisor's approval, the Dean should sign off the document indicating the absence of consent from the supervisor. No dissertation/thesis which comprises the same work as used previously by the student in a Master's dissertation or a Doctoral thesis for a different qualification may be submitted. Once a dissertation/thesis has been submitted, it cannot be withdrawn, and the examination process will commence. Students can submit their theses/dissertations to the Theses Submission Office at the Centre for Graduate Support anytime during the year, considering the submission deadlines in the General Rules if targeting a particular graduation date.

6.15 Format

There is no standard format for submitting a mini-dissertation/dissertation or thesis. Formatting is at the candidate's discretion but according to the guidance of the Department. Reasonable width margins (2-2.5 cm) and one-and-a-half spacing are desirable to ensure comfortable reading of the text. Consistent referencing should be applied. There may be Departmental variations regarding referencing system requirements.

6.16 Length

Discipline-specific guidelines will determine the length of dissertations and theses. Therefore, the following limits serve as a general norm. Significant deviations from these guidelines must be approved at the Departmental level. A Master's by research dissertation should generally be a maximum of 50,000 words. A Masters by research (article option) requires two publishable/published articles. A structured Master's dissertation typically comprises between 20,000 and 30,000 words or one publishable/published article.

Generally, a Doctoral thesis may not exceed 100,000 words and is usually between 70,000 and 90,000 words, excluding the bibliography and appendices. A PhD by publication requires three publishable/published articles. In the case of publishable articles for a Doctoral Degree, one article must have been submitted to a reputable

journal at the time of submission for examination. A summary of no more than 600 words must be included at the start of the dissertation/thesis, together with at least five (5) key terms describing the subject of the dissertation/thesis.

6.17 Submission of theses/dissertations for examination

As per the UFS General Rules, students must submit their mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis for examination purposes on or before the last working day in November to graduate at the April graduation ceremony and no later than the last working day in July to graduate at the December graduation ceremony.

6.18 Submission of final copies (after examination)

Once a mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis is passed, students must submit an electronic copy of the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis to the Faculty (for mini-dissertations) or the Theses Submission Office at the Centre for Graduate Support (for dissertations and theses).

In addition, each student must submit an electronic copy of the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis to the UFS Library Services in the format specified by the library and the Faculty. The theses/mini-dissertations/dissertations will be included in the UFS Library Services' database of theses and mini-dissertations/dissertations.

The academic process is considered incomplete until the student submits final corrected copies.

6.19 Examination procedures

6.19.1 Examination criteria

Faculties must communicate the examination criteria and a detailed account of the quality of research achievement required of students on commencement of studies.

6.19.2 Examiners

Departments must appoint the examiners once the student gives notice of submission of their work for examination. The examiners for Masters by research and Doctoral students should be three members. External examiners must always form the majority of the examiners. External examiners must be recognised experts in their fields and not have any association with the UFS. Examiners of Doctoral candidates must be experts of recognised international standing as approved by the Faculty Board. The examiners of a structured Masters mini-dissertation must consist of at least an external examiner and an internal examiner (who must not be either the supervisor or co-supervisor). Faculties/departments must provide clear written guidelines/criteria to the examiners before examining dissertations/theses on the required standard/quality of research achievement.

Any person who may reasonably be expected to lack sufficient objectivity in examining a dissertation/thesis is excluded from acting as an examiner. This includes, for example, relatives or dependants of students. The supervisor and co-supervisor(s) of a thesis/dissertation cannot form part of the examiners.

6.19.3 Examination results

a) Examination outcome
To pass a mini-dissertation/dissertation, students must obtain a final mark of at least 50% from each examiner. To give a Master's dissertation with distinction, a final mark of at least 75% has to be earned. All examiners' marks are taken into account to calculate the final mark. Doctorates are awarded if each examiner recommends that the degree be awarded. Doctorates are awarded either a pass or a fail and are not awarded with distinction.

The examiners are required to recommend one of the following outcomes:
1. That the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis be accepted without any corrections or revisions; or
2. That the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis be accepted provided certain minor corrections and revisions are done to the satisfaction of the supervisor/Head of Department/Dean; or
3. That the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis be accepted provided substantive corrections and revisions are carried to the satisfaction of the supervisor/Head of Department/Dean; or
4. That the candidate does substantive corrections and revisions to the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis and resubmits for examination; or
5. That the mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis be rejected, and the degree not awarded.

b) Oral /written defence of thesis/dissertation
The examiners may require a student to take a written examination or an oral defence on their thesis /dissertation topic.

c) Arbitration
Upon receipt of the examination reports from the Theses Submission Office, the Head of the Department may decide to appoint an arbitrator in consultation with the supervisor and the Dean. The use of an arbiter should be an exception and not the norm, as this may disenfranchise the student. The use of an arbiter may occur in the case of borderline decisions or when discrepancies arise in examinations. In these cases, the decision of the arbitrator will be final. Discrepancies concerning examinations occur when:
(a) there is a difference of at least 25% between any of the examiners' marks;
(b) only one (1) of the examiners did not award a distinction mark, or
(c) any one (1) of the examiners did not award a mark and recommended that the document be revised, resubmitted, or rejected.

The original work submitted for examination and the examiner's reports are submitted to the arbiter for the final determination. The outcome from the arbiter is either a pass or fail without the need for a comprehensive report.

d) Examination Reports

For mini-dissertations, dissertations, theses, or publishable articles/published articles, the examiners must provide the Registrar with the examination reports within forty-five (45) calendar days after receiving a mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis.

If a student is required to make changes or improvements, the supervisor and the academic Head of the Department must, in writing, confirm to the Dean that all of the requirements as specified by the examiners have been met, after which the Dean has to notify the Registrar. Only once this has been done will the result be confirmed to the student. Faculties take responsibility for the final evaluation of the examination reports. Faculties should submit a report on the process and outcomes of postgraduate examination twice a year to the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee for Masters' degrees and the Doctoral Degrees Committee for Doctoral degrees. The Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation can request examination reports and theses as a quality assurance spot check. Examination decisions should be transparent, and students must be afforded reasonable access to such information. Examination reports are de-identified and made available to students. The supervisor and co-supervisor may not peruse the examiners' examination reports before all reports have been received.

6.20 Appeals process

Appeals against an examiner's decision, including a decision not to award a degree, may be made. However, no appeal can be lodged concerning recommendations from the examiners or regarding the inadequacy of supervision. Any issues regarding supervision should be addressed directly at the time with the supervisor, Head of Department, Faculty/School or the Centre for Graduate Support.

An appeal should be addressed to the Dean, who will seek to resolve the issue. If the matter is not resolved, the appeal will be forwarded to the Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation, who will investigate, make recommendations, and provide a report. The appeal should have the following details:
a) A summary of the matter or decision being appealed;
b) Full name of complainant;
c) Contact details of the complainant (including email contact);
d) Statement of the details that are relevant to the matter;
e) List of attached relevant documents (if appropriate); and
f) Signature of the complainant and the date.

6.21 Publication of a thesis/mini-dissertation/dissertation

A student and the University may sign an agreement regarding the publication of an essay, a mini-dissertation/a dissertation, thesis, or draft article for publication.

If authorisation for publication has been obtained, the following information must appear on the title page:
a) Mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis approved for the qualification "Master ... in the Faculty ... Department ... of the University of the Free State."
b) Name of the supervisor and, if applicable, that of the co-supervisor.
c) Any reservations or other wording that the Head of Department sees fit to have mentioned on the title page.

6.22 Conversion of degrees

A Master's Degree can be upgraded to a doctorate on the supervisor's recommendation to the Head of the Department concerned, the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, and the Doctoral Degrees Committee. In this instance, the supervisor will need to motivate the case if the student has made good progress, has shown suitable potential, and there is scope within the study to lead to a higher qualification. The application for upgrading to a Master's Degree should indicate the original work and the additional work that will be done to make the work suitable for Doctoral studies. This would typically occur at the start of the second year of Master's registration and, at the latest, must occur by the end of the second year of Master's registration. Following admission to the Doctoral Degree, at least two years must elapse before the degree can be conferred. Therefore, the degree study period will be at least three years.

Examiners of Masters dissertations can also indicate in their reports that they regard the study as being of such quality, originality, and scope that the student should be allowed to convert it into a Doctoral thesis and resubmit it later as a doctorate. Their reports should provide a clear motivation for such a recommendation in such a case.

In the case of Doctoral research, a Master's Degree can be conferred upon the student in the following instances:
a) If the student, in consultation with their supervisor, withdraws candidature for the Doctoral Degree;
b) If the student cancels their candidature for the Doctoral Degree and re-registers for a Master's Degree; or
c) If the student's thesis does not meet the requirements for the Doctoral Degree.

The consideration for upgrading to a Doctoral Degree should only be considered in those exceptional circumstances where the quality of the Masters' work is beyond reproach.

6.23 Termination of studies

Through the Executive Committee of the Senate and on the recommendation of the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee or the

	Doctoral Degrees Committee, the Senate may terminate a student's studies for reasons of discipline or failure to progress in line with the regulations for the degree.
	A student who plans to withdraw from their studies for personal reasons should consult with their supervisor. If the student intends to withdraw, in writing, they should notify the Head of Department/Programme Director of their intent to withdraw. This request should be forwarded to the Registrar. The student may re-apply within two years of the withdrawal following the readmission procedure.
	6.24 Guidelines for authorship
	Authorship gives the author professional credit (and thus often the opportunity for promotion) but simultaneously requires the author to accept responsibility for the publication's content. All persons listed as authors must make a meaningful intellectual contribution and take responsibility for the publication's content. One of the authors, most often the first author (corresponding author), must accept responsibility for the process and is responsible for all authors complying with the basic requirements for authorship. Acquisition of funding, the collection of data, or general supervision of the research group, alone do not justify authorship.
	Authorship is based on the four following qualifying criteria: a) Substantial contribution to conception/design, or data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation; b) Drafting the article or critical evaluation of the manuscript for important intellectual content; c) Approval of the final manuscript for presentation to the journal; and d) Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.
	All articles derived from a Doctoral thesis should be published under the auspices of the UFS. All articles should include the author's association with the UFS. Should a student/staff member have a dual affiliation between different universities, it should be noted as such. Should the supervisor be a co-author, their name is listed as the second author. All conflicts of interest related to the relevant article must appear as a footnote on the title page[1].
7. Responsibility	7.1 There is a clear separation of responsibilities between the students, supervisors, Faculties, the Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation Office, the Directorate of Research Development, the Centre for Graduate Support, Student Academic Services, and associated Senate structures.
	7.2 For all academic and most operational purposes, the point of contact of postgraduate students is their supervisors, their Academic Department, and the Faculty. The Centre for Graduate

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[1] Consult the document "GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORSHIP" for further information.

	Support supports the supervisor-student relations where required.
	7.3 The UFS Centre for Graduate Support, in collaboration with Faculties and other related UFS departments, supports the research capacity needs of UFS postgraduate students.
	7.4 The Office of the Vice-Rector**:** Research and Internationalisation in conjunction with Faculty officers, academics, and committee administration are responsible for overseeing and administering the functions of the Faculty Higher Degrees Committees and the Doctoral Degrees Committee (DDC), as outlined in this policy. The UFS Senate has overall authority over the committees.
	7.5 The Doctoral Degrees Committee (DDC) and the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee (FHDC) take responsibility for the quality assurance and governance of all doctoral research outputs in whichever form. The DDC is responsible for all doctoral degrees and shall monitor and provide guidance on the development, maintenance, and implementation of measures for regulating the quality assurance, consistency, and integrity of doctoral degrees at the UFS. Faculties are responsible for the supervision, relevant research activities, academic development, and progress of doctoral students. At the same time, the DDC is responsible for ensuring that the Senate-approved processes required for awarding doctoral degrees have been adhered to. The FHDC assumes the same responsibility for Masters degrees.

8. Accountability and Authority:	
8.1 Implementation:	Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation
8.2 Monitoring and evaluation:	Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation
8.3 Development/review:	Director: Centre for Graduate Support
8.4 Approval authority:	Council
8.5 Interpretation and advice:	Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation

9. Who should know this policy?
All staff, Masters, and Doctoral students

10. Policy/ procedure implementation plan	10.1 Wide consultation throughout the University structures to ensure buy-in of the revised policy 10.2 Develop and carry out awareness workshops on the revised Masters and Doctoral policy. 10.3 FAQ's on the UFS CGS website and in the CGS newsletter on the Masters and Doctoral policy.

11. Resources required	11.1 Finance for the awareness workshops. 11.2 Finance to print a few hard copies to create awareness within the University community. 11.3 Engagement with the various stakeholders in postgraduate education at the UFS.

12. Answers to FAQs	List questions asked by participants in the development of the policy. Provide answers that will help direct action within the relevant Departments.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICY	
Performance Indicator(s):	a) Adherence to the Masters and Doctoral policy should result in uniformity in how the policy is applied. b) Improved understanding of the policy by administrators within the various University structures. c) A reduced number of complaints from Masters and Doctoral students, citing unfair/incorrect application of the Masters and Doctoral policy.