



THIS DOCUMENT SERVES AS AN  
INFORMATIVE GUIDE FOR  
CLARITY-SEEKING PURPOSES.



# Contents

<b>Section A: About the project.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1. What is the USDP?.....	4
2. What does the scope of the project entail and which issues or developmental needs does it seek to address?.....	4
3. What are the main objectives of the project?.....	5
<b>Section B: Management structure.....</b>	<b>5</b>
4. Who forms part of the management structure and processes to support effective implementation of the project?.....	5
5. What are the roles of the partnering universities in the collaboration?.....	10
<b>Section C: Funding of the project.....</b>	<b>10</b>
6. Is the scholarship fully funded?.....	10
7. Are doctoral candidates allowed to seek additional funding?.....	11
8. It was stipulated in the acceptance letter that an amount of R129 500 has been budgeted for financial research support. What are the cost modalities and how are the funds spread over the three-year period?.....	11
9. What is the procedure that one must follow to be financed and prepare for the UVa mobility?.....	12
<b>Section D: Mobility information.....</b>	<b>13</b>
10. Pre-departure information.....	13
11. Procedure for candidates who do not hold a valid US visa.....	14
12. Post-mobility information.....	18
<b>Section E: Student support.....</b>	<b>18</b>
13. How will the committee support candidates' capacity-development needs?..	18
14. What are the steering committee's expectations for the candidates?.....	18
15. How will the partner universities benefit from the project?.....	19
16. What happens once the project comes to an end?.....	21
17. Which institution will be awarding the qualification?.....	21
18. Contact information for further enquiries.....	21



## Section A: About the project

**Q: What is the USDP project?**

**A:** The University Staff Doctoral Programme (USDP), which falls under the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), is a doctoral training programme aimed at developing a cohort of ten academically excellent and competent doctoral staff members in the field of global health, who are in addition interculturally highly competent and capacitated to advance academic collaboration between South African and US higher-education institutions. The project provides funding to clinicians in the field of global health in order to achieve a PhD qualification.

**Q: What does the scope of the project entail and which issues or developmental needs does it seek to address?**

**A:** Global health is one of the critical issues for the future of the human species, especially in Africa, where both infectious and non-communicable diseases threaten development. The University of Virginia and the University of Venda have a good track record of developing academics who are competent to address global health challenges. In more than a decade of collaboration, the universities have successfully developed global health researchers, some of whom are internationally renowned scientists today. The capacity development initiatives, which include a doctoral split-site programme and postdoctoral fellowship programmes, are ongoing and have made a significant contribution towards transformation. As a research-led university, the University of the Free State has relevant experience in master's and doctoral training.



**Q: What are the main objectives of the project?**

**A:** The main objectives of the project are as follows:

- To increase the number of PhD holders in global health at the UFS and Univen (five per institution).
- To strengthen cross-border collaboration between the three partner universities, thereby diversifying knowledge paradigms.
- To ensure the sustainability of the programme through the conceptualisation of spin-off ventures in research collaborations with colleagues at the various institutions.

## **Section B: Management structure**

**Q: Who forms part of the management structure and processes to support effective implementation of the project?**




**A:** The project is overseen by a steering committee (Table 1), which comprises members of the three partnering universities, i.e. the University of the Free State (UFS), the University of Venda (Univen), and the University of Virginia (UVa).







Table 1: USDP steering committee members

Institution	Name	Designation
<p><b>1. University of the Free State (LEAD)</b></p> 	<p>Prof Gert van Zyl <b>(UFS coordinator and grant author)</b></p>	<p>Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences</p>
	<p>Prof Corli Witthuhn</p>	<p>Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation</p>
	<p>Mr Cornelius Hagenmeier <b>(grant author)</b></p>	<p>Director: Office for International Affairs</p>



	<p>Mrs Chevon Slambee</p>	<p>Chief Officer: Office for International Affairs</p>
	<p>Ms Bonolo Makhalemele</p>	<p>Project coordinator</p>
<p><b>2. University of Venda</b></p> 	<p>Prof Pascal Bessong <b>(UNIVEN coordinator and grant author)</b></p>	<p>Head of the HIV/AIDS and Global Health Research Programme</p>






	<p>Prof Natasha Potgieter</p>	<p>Dean: School of Mathematical and Agricultural Sciences</p>
<p><b>3. University of Virginia</b></p>		
	<p>Dr Rebecca Dillingham (UVa coordinator)</p>	<p>Director: Center for Global Health</p>
	<p>Ms Amber Steen</p>	<p>Associate Director: International Programs</p>
	<p>Ms April Ballard</p>	<p>Associate Director: Program Development</p>





Furthermore, there is an academic advisory board (Table 2), which serves to ensure that the programme is informed by cutting-edge thinking/research in doctoral training and research-capacity development.

*Table 2: USDP academic advisory board*

Name	Designation	University
<p>Prof Corli Witthuhn</p> 	<p>Vice-Rector: Research</p>	<p>UFS</p>
<p>Prof Gert van Zyl</p> 	<p>Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences</p>	<p>UFS</p>
<p>Prof Jan Crafford</p> 	<p>Vice-Rector: Academic</p>	<p>Univen</p>



<p>Dr Rebecca Dillingham</p> 	<p>Director: Center for Global Health</p>	<p>UVa</p>
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**Q: What are the roles of the partnering universities in the collaboration?**

**A: UFS and UNIVEN:** These institutions are to identify and select candidates who meet the requirements for the programme. Because the UFS is also the LEAD University, it also has a project coordination role.

**UVa:** This institution’s role is to provide technical expertise to the project in the form of co-mentors who have a strong international leadership pedigree in global health and will journey with the students towards the completion of their PhDs. They will further provide access to high-tech labs and equipment for the purposes of testing and data analysis.

### Section C: Funding of the project

**Q: Is the scholarship fully funded?**

**A:** No, the scholarship is not fully funded. The University Staff Doctoral Programme and the DHET allocation to support its implementation are premised on a co-funded financial principle. As such, there are certain costs that will be covered by the project, while other cost will have to be carried by the candidates as well as their respective institutions.



According to the activity map of the project, the sharing of costs is as follows (Table 3):

Table 3: A list of costs that are borne by the candidates and home institutions

<b>Costs borne by the candidates and home institutions</b>
Establishing steering committee
Annual in-person and quarterly Skype steering committee meetings
Enrolment of all candidates at the SA partner universities
Staff time for supervision and administration
Subsistence allowance for UVa mobility

**Q: Are doctoral candidates allowed to seek additional funding?**

**A:** Yes.

- Doctoral candidates are encouraged to seek additional funding to assist them in completing their academic goals for their research work.
- Proof of additional funding should be provided to the USDP co-ordinator for record and reporting purposes.

**Q: It was stipulated in the acceptance letter that an amount of R129 500 has been budgeted for financial research support. What are the cost modalities and how are the funds spread over the three-year period?**

**A:** Every South African institution is responsible for allocating, transferring, managing, and reporting to the committee on the research funds for its respective candidates. The exact amounts for each candidate will be treated on a case-to-case basis with reference to the individual budgets submitted by the candidates. Eligible payment tranches are as follows:



- A fraction of the funds, ranging between 20 and 25%, are paid upfront to the candidates, with a clause stating that a:
- Further 20-25% of the funds will only be released once they have visited the UVa for their one-month mobility.
- Further funds will then be released once the candidates have visited the UVa for the second cycle of the mobility, as well as further unforeseen expenses in the project.
- A contract must be signed by the committee, supervisor, and the candidates to acknowledge receipt of the funds. These budgeted funds are for all research-related costs, such as the purchasing of kits, lab experiments, and so forth.

**Q: What is the procedure that one must follow to be financed and prepare for the UVa mobility?**

**A:** Candidates and supervisors are eligible for a mobility window in the United States of America as follows:

- Candidates: one month
- Supervisors: one week

The option of a second mobility to the UVa will be granted on a case to case basis, to those candidates who will be able to supplement the remaining funds left in their mobility budgets. Candidates will be provided with the maximum amount which is available for the mobility funding. From this, candidates will then be requested to work out a mobility package to maximise the use of funds and show how they will supplement a second mobility should they require one.



## Section D: Mobility information

### 1. Pre-departure information

- The identification and confirmation of mobility dates to the University of Virginia is the responsibility of the candidates and supervisors.
- Once dates have been identified, the candidates must share them with the project coordinator, who will then forward it to the steering committee for evaluation.
- The evaluation follows a resolution stipulating that all candidates and supervisors are required to set out milestones for every phase of their work, which includes the following requirements:
  - 1.1. A timeline linked to milestones must be developed to ensure that these milestones are achieved.
  - 1.2. The supervisors are required to provide the steering committee with a progress report regarding the achievement levels of the milestones.
  - 1.3. The required timelines and milestones must be included in the candidates' project files/plans.
- Pending the outcome of the committee's assessment of each candidate's progress, a decision will be made whether the candidate and supervisor will be awarded mobility to the University of Virginia, USA.



- Once approved, the project coordinator will share the dates with the following stakeholders:

1.1.1. The UVa team, so that they can prepare accordingly for the arrival of the fellows as well as to write invitation letters that will assist the candidates and supervisors in various processes, such as visa appointments and to apply for special leave from their respective institutions.

1.1.2. The project's travel agent, who is responsible for booking the necessary international flights, airport transfers, as well as the accommodation, which are all in line with the budget of the project.

## 2. Procedure for candidates who do not have valid US visas

In the interim, candidates and supervisors who do not have valid US visas need to apply online as follows:

- 2.1. Visit <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visitor.html> to apply for the B1/B2 long-term tourist/business visa. You will be able to check waiting times for appointments. This type of visa is generally valid for a term of five to ten years.
- 2.2. Once on the site, you will be requested to complete the DS160 application form ([Learn more](#) about completing the [DS-160](#)). You must: 1) complete the online visa application, and 2) print the confirmation page of the application form, which you need to bring to your interview. You will also be requested to upload your photo while completing the online form. Your photo must be in the format explained in the [Photograph Requirements](#).



- 2.3. Once you have completed the form, you will be required to make an appointment for your interview at the US embassy in your country. Waiting times for interview appointments vary by location, season, and visa category, so you should apply for your visa early. Check the interview waiting time for the location where you will apply:

**Appointment Wait Time**

Check the estimated wait time for a nonimmigrant visa interview appointment at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Select a U.S. Embassy or Consulate:

Enter a City

Nonimmigrant Visa Type	Appointment Wait Time
Visitor Visa	- days
Student/Exchange Visitor Visas	- days
All Other Nonimmigrant Visas	- days

[See details on appointment availability and processing times](#)

- 2.4. You will then be requested to pay the non-refundable visa application fee of \$160 USD. If your visa is approved, you may also have to pay a visa issuance fee, if applicable to your nationality. The credit card payment is required because the visa application is done online by the individual.

**Select your nationality to see Issuance Fee**

Enter a country/authority or area



2.5. Once you have an appointment and are set to attend the interview at the embassy, make sure that you share the dates with the project coordinator so that she can make the necessary travel arrangements. Furthermore, make sure that you have the following documents with you when you attend the interview:

2.5.1. Passport valid for travel to the United States – your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the United States (unless exempted by country-specific agreements). Each individual who needs a visa must submit a separate application, including any family members listed in your passport.

2.5.2. Non-immigrant visa application, Form DS-160 confirmation page.

2.5.3. Application-fee payment receipt – if you are required to pay before your interview.

2.5.4. Photo – you will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. If the photo upload fails, you must bring one printed photo in the format explained in the photograph requirements.

2.6. Additional documents that may be requested are as follows:

2.6.1. The purpose of your trip.

2.6.2. Your intention to leave the United States after your trip.

2.6.3. Your ability to pay all costs of the trip.





- 2.6.4. Evidence of your employment and/or your family ties may be sufficient to show the purpose of your trip and your intention to return to your home country. If you cannot cover all the costs for your trip, you may show evidence that another person will cover some or all the costs for your trip.
- 2.7. A consular officer will interview you to determine whether you are qualified to receive a visitor visa. You must prove that you meet the requirements under US law to obtain a visa. Follow the link to view the interview procedure at the embassy – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzZOvF1EEXE>
- 2.8. Regarding the \$160 USD, we request that you pay it and keep the receipt so that we can reimburse you.
- 2.9. Visas are often available within five days of your appointment and will be couriered to your nearest courier outlet. Once picked up, make a copy of the visa and passport, and send it to the project coordinator so that she can share it with the travel agent in order to confirm bookings.
- 2.10. Once bookings have been made, the project coordinator will share the vouchers with all candidates as she receives them from the travel agent.

It must be noted that UVa co-supervisors and mentors are also eligible for a biannual stay of one week at their mentees' South African home institutions. The above procedure also applies, with the only difference that they would apply for South African visas and that they would receive their invitation letters from the South African institutions.



### 3. Post-mobility information

Upon return, all candidates and supervisors will be requested to submit any receipts for reimbursement. Expenses that will be considered for the reimbursement process are mainly airport transfers (taxi, Uber, etc.). As such, it is important to request and retain all receipts for expenses of this nature incurred during the mobility window. It must be noted that the process must take place within 10 working days as prescribed by the Finance department.

- Candidates and supervisors will also be requested to complete a post-mobility questionnaire in order to share in their mobility experiences.

## Section E: Student support

**Q: How will the committee support candidates' capacity-development needs?**

A: Each institution holds various capacity-development training and workshop sessions that will cover scientific writing, research grant-proposal writing, innovation, implementation, and leadership in research. Communiques regarding the details of these sessions will be shared with all candidates. Furthermore, the UVa will capacitate candidates in various knowledge paradigms in their respective mobility windows.

**Q: What are the steering committee's expectations for the candidates?**

A: The committee expects the candidates to honour the commitments of this programme as agreed to in the USDP declaration and commitment annexure. Furthermore, the committee expects the candidates to notify the committee of any immediate challenges that may delay or affect their progress towards completing their PhDs on time.



**Q: How will the partner universities benefit from the project?**

**A:** The UFS and Univen stand to benefit significantly from strengthening their partnerships and doctoral training programmes, which will swell the pool of PhD holders in their departments/faculties and consequently boost the research output and impact of these institutions.

- Univen, as a historically disadvantaged tertiary institution, is developing a critical mass of qualified staff doctoral degrees for its core teaching and research imperatives. This is done through various mechanisms, such as approving study leave and sabbaticals for staff to embark on higher-degree programmes. Specifically, the university established a global-health research programme comprising microbiologists, clinicians, clinical psychologists, nurses, epidemiologists, and community-based field workers.

Therefore, the training of additional collaborators towards PhD degrees on aspects of global health will without a doubt boost the capacity of the global-health research programme and provide graduates with the necessary skills and perspectives to initiate independent research and foster additional collaborations in seeking solutions relevant to national imperatives. Intangible benefits for Univen include the enhancement of the culture of research, as well as the motivation of other junior colleagues to seek higher training, with positive impacts on the quality of teaching, postgraduate training, research, and community engagement.



- The UFS, as a traditionally advantaged university, is in the process of transforming its academic staff contingent, which has traditionally been predominantly white and male. Capacitation of young staff members from previously marginalised backgrounds is a high priority for the university. The hallmark of the UFS Human Project is to achieve staff and student equity, ensuring that both students and staff embrace diversity, and also ensuring that they learn to live with differences of race, gender, class, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, culture, language, and national origin. This provides scope for addressing challenges of marginalisation, both within the institution itself and within the society that the university serves. The core benefit for the UFS will be the further capacitation of a cohort of competent, young academics with leadership skills and doctoral degrees. The university further has an opportunity to engage in Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) discussions in the field of global health.
- The relationship between the UVA's Center for Global Health and Univen is a cherished relationship that has facilitated education, research, and capacity building in global health to an outstanding degree. The project will serve to ensure that the UVA strengthens its partnership with Univen even more and to grow its partnership with the UFS, as both universities are already achieving excellence in the relevant academic field. The UVA's internationalisation and diversity development processes will be strengthened, and the university will be able to leverage the programme for additional research and educational engagement by students and faculty. The international exposure of its staff will contribute to the development of its Center for Global Health.



**Q: What happens once the project comes to an end?**

A: A closing conference will be held during which the results of the candidates will be discussed, and future projects and collaborations will be planned. It will be conducted in South Africa, and the US co-supervisors and mentors will also participate. Additional members who will be present include the steering committee as well as the advisory board.

**Q: Which institution will be awarding the qualification?**

A: South African home institutions will award the doctoral qualifications once they have verified that candidates meet all the necessary institutional requirements for the awarding of a PhD qualification.



**For any further enquiries, please contact the USDP project coordinator:**

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