# Manual for Higher Degrees Studies

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**Preface**

The Senate of the North-West University (NWU) approved this Manual for Higher Degree Studies on 1 September 2020 for use by master's and doctoral students of the University.

The manual is a binding policy document, and provides guidelines regarding the policies, rules and processes involved in master's and doctoral studies at the NWU.

All prospective and registered students should acquaint themselves with the different policies, rules and processes outlined in this document.

**The following policies, rules and guidelines must be read in conjunction with this manual:**

- General Academic Rules of the NWU ("The A Rules")

- Admissions Policy

- The rules and regulations of NWU faculties (Faculty Rules)

- Rules for the Classification of Theses and Dissertations

- Rules for the Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (RERC) of the NWU

- NWU Financial Rules

- Research Ethics Policy

- Higher Degrees Policy

- Language Policy of the NWU

- Library guidelines for writing master's dissertations and PhD theses (including the NWU Referencing Guide)

- Institutional M and D template for the manuscript of the dissertation/thesis

- Policy on Academic Integrity

- Library and Information Services Policy

# Table of Contents

# 1. Definitions

In this manual, the term "higher degree studies" refers only to studies towards a master's and doctoral degree. The master's degree usually follows on an honours degree (or a four-year professional bachelor's degree), while the doctorate follows on the master's degree.

This manual uses the following terms:

"**assistant promoter**" means any person who is normally but not necessarily on the staff of the University and who, in consultation with the promoter, renders assistance and guidance to a student studying for a doctorate in respect of *some particular part or parts of the study* undertaken by the student; approved by the faculty committee, listed on the title registration document and afterwards appointed in writing by the Higher Degrees Administration Department.

"**assistant supervisor**" means any person who is normally but not necessarily on the staff of the University and who, in consultation with the supervisor, affords assistance and guidance to a student studying for a master's degree in respect of *some particular part or parts of the study* undertaken by the student; approved by the faculty committee, listed on the title registration document and afterwards appointed in writing by the Higher Degrees Administration Department.

"**co-promoter**" means a person who is normally but not necessarily on the staff of the University and who, in consultation with the promoter, affords assistance and guidance to a student for a doctorate with regard to the study undertaken by such student; approved by the faculty committee, listed on the title registration document and afterwards appointed in writing by the Higher Degrees Administration Department.

"**co-supervisor**" means a person who is normally but not necessarily on the staff of the University and who, in consultation with the supervisor, affords assistance and guidance to a student for the master's degree with regard to the study undertaken by such student; approved by the faculty committee, listed on the title registration document and afterwards appointed in writing by the Higher Degrees Administration Department.

"**dissertation**" means a manuscript prepared for examination purposes, or a single published research article or set of published research articles or unpublished manuscript(s) in article format, in accordance with the prescripts of documentation, argumentation, language and style in which the student must provide proof that he/she is conversant with the method of research, and which is presented in partial or full compliance with the requirements for the prescribed outcomes for the specific master's degree from the University.

"**examiner**" refers to the person identified by the supervisor/promoter, approved by the faculty committee, listed on official documentation and appointed in writing by the Higher Degrees Administration Department. The Glossary of the A Rules should be consulted for a detailed description, which includes references to internal and external examiners.

"**functionary/-ies**" is an umbrella term used in higher degree documents to describe supervisors, promoters, assistant and/or co-supervisors or promoters.

'**life cycle of an M and D student**" refers to the processes that include aspects such as application, registration, title registration, study guidance, examination and graduation of a student.

"**mini-dissertation**" means a manuscript prepared for examination purposes, or a written report or a single published research article or set of published research articles or unpublished manuscripts in article format, more limited in scope than a dissertation, and in accordance with the prescripts of documentation, argumentation, language and style and which, in addition to the writing of a number of prescribed examination papers, will be evaluated with a view to

determining whether the student is conversant with the method of research, and is presented in partial compliance with the requirements for obtaining a structured master's degree or honours bachelor degree or another professional degree from the University in terms of the prescribed rules.

**"ORCID"** means an Open Research Identification number for which every master's and doctoral student is required to register (an NRF and Department of Education directive). The ORCID number is required on the title registration document presented at the faculty.

**"promoter"** means a person who is normally on the staff of the University (but who can also be contracted in) and who has been appointed to give guidance to a student registered for a doctorate and to supervise the work which the student is required to do in this regard; approved by the faculty committee, listed on the title registration document and appointed in writing by the Higher Degrees Administration Department; the promoter is primarily responsible for overseeing the academic life cycle of the PhD student, and keeps record of supervision provided to the student.

**"research product"** refers to the outcome of the research process, as specified in sections 4.4 and 5.4 of the A Rules.

"**student**" (see A Rule 1.4) refers to a student who is registered with the NWU for the current year and is enrolled and active for subsidy purposes during a specific academic year. A registered student is required to participate actively in the prescribed teaching, learning, research and assessment activities of every programme module for which he/she is registered during that academic year, so that the responsible academic unit can provide proof of such participation. Such proof must be provided by the applicable census dates of the academic year concerned.

"**supervisor**" means a person who is normally on the staff of the University (but who can be contracted in) who has been appointed to give guidance to a student who has registered for a master's degree, and to supervise the work which the latter is required to do with regard to a dissertation or mini-dissertation; approved by the faculty committee, listed on the title registration document and appointed by the Higher Degrees Administration Department; the supervisor is primarily responsible for overseeing the completion of the academic life cycle of the master's student and keeps record of supervision provided to the student.

"**thesis**" means a manuscript prepared for examination purposes, or a set of research articles or unpublished manuscripts in article format, and/or an internationally examined patent, which represents a distinct contribution to the knowledge of, and insight into, a subject and provides proof of originality, either by the presentation of new facts or by the exercise of an independent and critical faculty, in accordance with the prescripts of language, style, documentation and argumentation, and which is presented by the student in partial or full compliance with the requirements for the particular doctorate from the University in terms of the prescribed rules.

## 2. Introduction

The North-West University strives to discover, develop, apply and communicate knowledge by means of its research activities. Therefore, all higher degree studies (including structured master's degrees) involve some element of research.

At the NWU, research is mainly conducted in a number of approved research entities. Each of the research entities functions under the guidance of a research director. The research director guides the staff and postgraduate students who participate in the research work of the research entity, and is also responsible for managing the entity. In this regard, research directors act in close consultation with school directors and deans. The research entities are tasked with promoting quality research and the ability to compete on an international level. Details on the research entities and different directors are available on the website of the University and at the Department of Research Support.

Higher degree studies are also conducted outside the ambit of a research entity. In these cases, where the higher degree qualification is not hosted in a research entity, the relevant school director takes responsibility for the management of the student's academic life cycle.

It is important for the University (as well as the country and its citizenry) that these studies should be of outstanding quality and maintain research integrity. Research integrity includes the genuineness and credibility of research findings reported by researchers. To ensure that there are no aspects of the study that can compromise research integrity, the Faculty should ensure that a "complete" integrity assessment is conducted. The main indicators of research integrity in the higher degree environment include copyright, plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of data, ethical clearance, and intellectual property rights and patents (where applicable). Therefore, at least two main integrity checks should be completed within the higher degree academic life cycle, one during/prior to proposal approval, and another just before examination of the research product. The other integrity-related matters that may need to be considered, depending on type of proposed research study, include classification of the research product, and research data gatekeeping.

Each faculty has at least one research ethics committee responsible for ethical clearance of study projects. Some projects may not require ethical approval. In most cases, however, the research ethics committee reviews projects involving human participants, animals or those that might have an impact on the environment. The committee considers and provides ethical clearance in such cases.

The guidance provided to students registered for a higher degree determines the quality of the study to a great extent. The University employs a variety of rules and procedures to guarantee this quality. This manual aims to give a brief overview of these rules and processes.

This manual provides information on the following aspects:

- The student academic life cycle: The administrative and academic milestones that must be reached before a higher degree can be conferred.

- Before commencement of the study: Vital information that the student must be aware of before the study can commence.

- Early stages of the study: Aspects like registration of a topic, compiling a research proposal, seeking ethics approval, etc.

- Guidance during the study: What the student can expect from the supervisor, and vice versa.
- Producing the research product.
- The examination process.

## 3. Higher Degrees Academic Life Cycle

The academic life cycle is summarised in the Table below, also showing responsible functions including Higher Degrees Administration (HDA), Higher Degrees Academic Support (HDAS) and Research Ethics and Integrity (RE&I). All these processes require some administrative action from the student and the faculty/supervisors/promoters. Note that the processes do not necessarily proceed in a linear fashion. For instance, the application process must be completed before the student may register. The registration process has to be repeated annually, and hence the study guidance process and the registration process may run concurrently.

| | Process and/or stage | Description/ Activities | Time lines (Months) | Responsible Function(s) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Student | HDA | Faculty | HDAS | RE&I |
| 1 | Application | HDA receives application, checks for supporting documentation and forwards to the Faculty | 0 - 1 | X | X | X | | |
| | | Pre-screening & Establishment of Resources and Support | 0 - 6 | | | X | X | |
| 2 | Admission and Registration | Admission | 0 - 1 | X | X | X | | |
| | | Orientation/Induction | February & July | X | X | X | X | X |
| | | Registration | February - March July - August | X | X | X | | |
| 3 | Supervision Assignment | Appointment of Supervisor(s) | Part of screening | | | X | | |
| | | Signing of Supervision Agreement | At the end of orientation | X | | X | | |
| 4 | Supervision | | Immediately after registration | X | | X | | |
| 5 | Proposal Approval & Title Registration | Proposal compilation and submission (proposal submitted together with online ethics clearance application) | 1 - 6 | X | | X | | |

| # | Process | Description/Activities | Timelines | HDA | Faculty | HDAS | RE&I |
|---|---------|------------------------|-----------|-----|---------|------|------|
| | | Integrity Check | | | | X | X |
| | | Proposal Evaluation and Approval | | | | X | |
| | | Ethics Clearance/Approval | | | | X | X |
| | | Title Registration (may include appointment of examiners) | | X | X | X | X |
| 6 | Thesis Work | Field work, Experimental work, etc. Thesis Chapters Compilation | | X | | X | |
| 7 | Examination | Notice of Submission (including appointment of examiners if it was not done at Title Registration) | | X | X | X | |
| | | Confirmation of Examiners (if they were appointed during title registration) | | | X | X | |
| | | Integrity Check | | | | X | X |
| | | Submission to HDA | | X | X | X | |
| | | Examination Reports | | | X | X | |
| 8 | Graduation | Confirmation of Graduation (including results and loading of the degree) | Month 24 or 36 | X | X | | |
| | | Ceremony and Archiving of documents | | X | X | | |
| | | | | | | | |

| Process | Description/Activities | Timelines | Responsible Function(s) | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-----------|------|---------|------|------|
| | | | HDA | Faculty | HDAS | RE&I |
| Monitoring & Reporting | NB: This is a continuous process, which may coincide with any of the eight stages in the student life cycle | Online reporting at the end of each Semester (June & December) | | X | X | |

## 3.1  Application

*Rules/policies/guidelines*: Admissions Policy, Global Engagement Policy, General Academic Rules of the NWU ("The A Rules")

*Responsibilities*: Student, Higher Degrees Administration, Faculty Administration

Any prospective higher degree student should have a very clear idea of the study programme or field he/she wishes to pursue. In many cases, this will be a continuation of work done for a previous degree; this is especially true for students who have completed their previous study at the NWU. Students who have completed their previous study at another university are advised to consult the NWU website ([www.nwu.ac.za](http://www.nwu.ac.za)) before attempting to gain access to a higher degree. In particular, these students should visit the websites of the various research entities and familiarise themselves with the research programmes of the relevant entity and admission requirements of each programme. To access this information, select **Research** on the NWU homepage, and click on **Research Entities**.

A student who wishes to proceed with a study at higher degree level at the NWU will be subject to an application process. This is done to establish:

1. Whether the candidate satisfies the entrance/minimum requirements for the programme.

2. Whether the NWU has the capacity to accept the student.

3. Whether the student submitted the required documentation to allow an evaluation of the application.

The specific nature of this process will depend on the faculty/school or entity involved. In some faculties, an applicant must identify a supervisor/promoter as part of the application process, and the application can only be processed once this requirement has been complied with and the supervisor has the capacity to take the student in his/her programme.

Before proceeding with the application process, students from abroad (i.e. prospective students who are NOT South African citizens) should visit the Global Engagement office on campus or if not on campus should visit webpage for international students at [http://www.nwu.ac.za/nwu/students/int.html for specific information and guidelines for applying at the NWU.](http://www.nwu.ac.za/nwu/students/int.html)

In some cases, point 1 above is straightforwardly determined. For instance, if a student has completed all previous studies at the NWU, his/her academic record will be available for evaluation. In other cases, admission may be more complex than simply assessing a student's previous learning or recognition of prior learning (RPL). For example, the specific programme may have specialised entrance requirements. Programmes may also require all applicants to undergo some assessment process.

Point number 2 can only be answered by the director of the relevant research entity (and/or relevant school). Admission may, for instance, depend on whether a suitable supervisor or promoter for the chosen subject field is available, and then assessing whether the workload of that staff member is such that he/she will have the capacity to supervise the student.

A prospective student wishing to apply for entrance into any specific programme must first ensure that he/she has all the relevant information on the specific programme. Such information is available on the NWU webpage for the entity or school presenting the specific programme. The relevant entity and/or school director may also be consulted. The applicant must also consult the information on higher degree studies, available at http://studies.nwu.ac.za/postgraduate-studies/.

The applicant may apply online by following this link: http://studies.nwu.ac.za/postgraduate-studies/higher-degree-admissions.

Applications must be submitted before the published closing date for applications of each programme. All items of supporting documentation as requested in the specific guidelines must be submitted.

Once an application with the relevant supporting documentation has been received, a student number will be issued, a profile created, and the relevant faculty notified. Applications are evaluated by the relevant faculty structures, with a report to the admissions office with which to notify the applicant of the outcome of the application (*Approved*, *Conditionally Approved*, *Unsuccessful* or *Unsuccessful due to the capacity of the faculty*). Successful candidates will receive registration documents once the application process is concluded.

Applicants will appreciate that this process may take some time as selection processes differ from faculty to faculty, and some programmes may have extensive selection procedures. The NWU will adhere to the dates advertised, i.e. the closing date for admissions applications, as well as the closing date for formal notices to the applicant.

The student may consult the academic staff member under whose supervision he/she would like to conduct the research at any time during this application process. The student may also consult the relevant research or school director. The research or school director could request a potential promoter or supervisor to assist with the conceptualisation of a research project until a formal allocation is made. The possible supervisor or promoter will then consult the research director about a possible research topic that slots in with the focus of the research entity, and also about the availability of funds. This is followed by consultations with the appropriate director (and, where applicable, subject chairperson) to determine whether the supervisor's or promoter's workload allows him/her to accept the student.

## 3.2    Admission and Registration

*Rules/policies/guidelines*: Admissions Policy, Faculty Rules, A Rules (1.18.1, 4.14 & 5.13)

*Responsibilities*: *Student, Higher Degrees Administration, Faculty Higher Degrees Administration*

### 3.2.1  Admission

A student will receive a letter stating the outcomes of the selection process. If the application for admission was successful, the student will receive the registration documentation or confirmation to register online from Higher Degrees Administration.

### 3.2.2 Orientation/Induction

It is mandatory for all first-time higher degree candidates to complete the orientation programme before registration. The orientation programme will include introduction to faculty higher degree processes and research entities/programmes/projects, available resources including funding, research equipment and facilities, and other support functions including the library and writing centre.

The programme should conclude with signing of supervision agreements and code of conduct.


### 3.2.3 Registration

The nature of this process will largely depend on the conventions of the faculty/school or entity.

#### First time registration

If the application for admission was successful, the student will receive the registration documentation or confirmation to register online from Higher Degrees Administration. To complete the registration process, the student must complete the online web registration or submit the signed documents together with proof of payment to the administration office. A web registration is provisional and not valid if the needed funding is not available on the account of the student. Thus, the student must already have secured the necessary funds to continue with the study. Information on funding schemes and bursaries, as well as assistance with how to apply for funding, may be requested from the relevant faculty, entity or school. Proof of registration will be sent from the system upon web registration, or sent to the student by the relevant higher degrees administrator. Failure by the applicant to submit the required forms will mean that he/she will not be registered on the NWU system for that specific year, even if the application form has been received and approved and a payment has been made.

Payment of registration fees, study fees, etc. does not mean that the registration has automatically been completed. Students must ensure that they follow the full registration procedure as directed by the Faculty and Higher Degrees Administration (HDA).

All international students submit additional documents upon registration and should consult the Global Engagement officials on campus before registering. A web registration should not be completed by international students.

If an unregistered prospective master's or doctoral student wishes to use the library, the applicant must register with the library as a prospective student and pay the prescribed fees.

Access to facilities and learning platforms (e.g. eFundi) used by faculties are not accessible without registration.

#### Maximum period of registration/study

There are prescriptions for the maximum duration of study in the University's A Rules.

For full-time contact students, the maximum duration of study is as follows:

> Master's degrees: 3 years

> Doctoral degrees: 4 years

For part-time contact and distance students, the maximum duration of study is as follows:

> Master's degrees: 4 years

Doctoral degrees: 5 years

It should be noted that the required registration period does not include any period of suspension of registration.

These terms also inform the period for which study permits to foreign students are issued. Refer to the relevant faculty rules for details.

### *Annual re-registration*

Higher degree students must re-register on an annual basis for each consecutive year of study at the specified cut-off date. Failure to register may result in the termination of a study. Refer to the different rules and policies with regard to the annual re-registration as well as the cut-off dates, available on the NWU website.

The re-registration process may also entail the approval of a special request submitted by the student. Students may be prohibited from registration for a particular year due to academic reasons. The removal of such a block on the system by the HDA Office requires a faculty decision which is displayed on an approved student request. The student request form is available at the faculty or at HDA. The student must submit proof of registration to the supervisor/promoter annually to ensure continuation of study guidance.

Students who fail to re-register will not qualify for study guidance. Any student who has failed to re-register for one complete academic year should apply to the relevant dean for re-admission to the programme. The student request form for re-admission is available at the faculty or at HDA.

If a student wishes to use the University's facilities (e.g. the library) he/she must first register for the new academic year to ensure continuation of access to the facilities.

### *Termination or extension of study term*

See the A Rules regarding the possible termination and the possible extension (1.18.1, 4.14 & 5.13) of the study term.

Note that the extension of studies may have financial implications, as stipulated in the *A Rules*. Students are advised to discuss these implications with the research director or school director before making a final decision on the matter.

## 3.3 Supervision Assignment

**Principle(s):** *(1) Higher degree students and their supervisors or promoters are treated in a fair and transparent manner. (2) Mutual relationship and accountability between supervisor and student.*

**Rules/policies/guidelines**: Higher Degrees Policy, A Rules

**Responsibilities**: *Student, Supervisor, Faculty Higher Degrees Management*

### 3.3.1   Appointment of Supervisor(s)/Functionaries

Once the student has registered for the first time, the faculty will go through a formal process to appoint a supervisor/promoter and other relevant functionaries for the student. In many cases, the student will already have started negotiations with a potential supervisor/promoter, and this person can then be recommended. However, it is still the prerogative of the research or school director to recommend one or more suitable supervisor or promoter. The faculty will then consider this recommendation, and if found acceptable, will make the necessary appointment(s). This will be communicated to the student. If no such communication is forthcoming within a reasonable period after registration, the student must approach the relevant director to seek clarity on the matter.

In some faculties a preliminary supervisor/promoter is appointed to a student as part of the admissions process. Documents to support the process are provided to students from the HDA Office. Once a study field has been selected, the prospective student can start with the application and registration process.

Students are encouraged to engage with a prospective supervisor/promoter as soon as possible. They may also wait for the faculty management to appoint a supervisor/promoter. This is often not the best strategy, since it could lead to incompatibilities between the student and this functionary. A better strategy is to contact a suitable supervisor/promoter or consult with potential ones. The names and contact details of potential functionaries are listed in the research entity details, together with their research interests. The student should start a discussion with a possible supervisor/promoter in order to gain some insight into the suitability of the person as a study mentor.

Once a suitable supervisor/promoter has been agreed upon, other functionaries could be appointed if necessary. In some cases, the supervisor/promoter (or student) will request the appointment of a co-supervisor or co-promoter. This person will also be involved in guiding the entire project. The study may touch on some aspects of a research field with which the supervisor/promoter is not entirely familiar. In such cases, an assistant supervisor/promoter can be appointed, who will provide input into that part of the study.

**The relationship between student and functionaries**

The final responsibility for the appointment of functionaries lies with the faculty, and is usually based on the recommendations from the relevant director or scientific committee. This decision is based on aspects such as the knowledge of the academic relative to the proposed study, the workload of the person, and other relevant factors.

The student should consider the fact that there is always a human element involved in study guidance at this level. The student and supervisor/promoter will work in close collaboration for the entire period of the study. Therefore, students are advised to gauge the level of compatibility with potential functionaries before committing to the study. The student should also respect the decision of a potential functionary who declines to work with the student. A forced relationship between student and functionaries, with no mutual trust and respect, is not feasible. For the agreement document between the student and his/her supervisor/promoter, see the addendum attached below.

### 3.3.2   Signing of Supervision Agreement

A key factor to success in supervision of student research is the relationship between the student and the supervisor. Thus, supervision agreement sets out guidelines for the student–

supervisor relationship. Both parties should sign an agreement clarifying the roles, responsibilities and expectations for the relationship. Other matters to be discussed and documented before signing the agreement include supervisor accessibility, frequency and records of supervisory meetings, feedback, grievance procedures and continuous monitoring and reporting of student progress. (ref: Appendix A, B and C)

Supervision is an academic process and is administered within the faculty. The student and his/her supervisor(s)/promoter(s) will enter into a formal agreement on the conduct of the study (Appendix A). If this is not done soon after the appointment of these functionaries, the student is advised to seek guidance from the director. This agreement will, amongst other things, set out the various academic milestones for the study.

As soon as possible after the appointment of a supervisor/promoter, the parties must agree on the course of the study, volume of work to be submitted, time schedule, appointments and reporting on progress made.

**Course of the study**

It is essential that an agreement be reached in terms of when and with what the student should commence. The study may be of such a nature that the empirical or experimental part may start immediately. In other cases, the theoretical basis of the investigation must be completed first. It is therefore essential that the student receive very clear guidance on the course of the study, always bearing in mind the maximum period allowed.

**Volume of work to be submitted**

An agreed-on volume of work should be submitted to the supervisor/promoter at regular intervals. It is preferable that the work be submitted chapter by chapter (or even chapter section by chapter section). This has the benefit that any amendments and changes in direction are effected early on, without wasting time on redundant work.

The supervisor/promoter, in consultation with the student, must decide on the format in which the student's work must be submitted for comment and guidance. Normally this will be in electronic format, and the comments will be done by means of track changes. eFundi is an effective platform on which to submit the manuscript.

**Time schedule**

It is in the interest of both the supervisor/promoter and the student that a time schedule for the study and/or the research product be set. If both parties act in a responsible manner, provision may be made, within limits, for deviations from this schedule. The student must undertake to provide the supervisor/promoter with a certain portion of the work within an agreed-upon period (not less than two weeks), and the supervisor/promoter must undertake to work through the submission within a certain time and provide the student with the appropriate feedback. The feedback may occur in the form of written comments and suggestions, and/or a personal interview. If the student cannot meet the deadline, he or she must inform the supervisor/promoter in time and an alternative date may be agreed upon. *If the student is of the opinion that the study is being delayed by the supervisor/promoter not adhering to the agreed-upon time schedule, and the student cannot obtain any response from the supervisor/promoter through a diplomatic approach, he/she must bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate director (or applicable dean if the director is the supervisor/promoter) concerned.*

**Appointments**

Appointments are made in writing (preferably using the diary functionality of GroupWise) or verbally, and the supervisor/promoter must ensure that enough time is allowed for in-depth discussions of all relevant aspects of the student's work. Any text the student would like to discuss with the supervisor/promoter must, as a rule, be submitted to the supervisor/promoter at least two weeks prior to the appointment. Obviously, appointments must be strictly kept. If either of the parties cannot keep an appointment, the other party must be informed timeously. Contact between student and supervisor/promoter should occur regularly, preferably at least six times a year.

**Reporting on progress**

The supervisor/promoter must report on progress on a six-monthly basis as required by faculty specifications. At the same time, the faculty will ask the student to evaluate the study guidance received.

## 3.4   Supervision

***Principle(s)****: 'Supervision should be guided by the principles of intellectual and interpersonal integrity, fairness, respect, clarity about roles and responsibilities, student autonomy and working in the best interest of the student.'* (UEA, 2007: 3)

***Rules/policies/guidelines****: A Rule 4.8.6 and 5.8.5, Higher Degrees Policy*

***Responsibilities****: Student, Supervisor(s), Faculty Higher Degrees Management*

Study guidance entails the provision of assistance, advice and support to a student towards the submission of a research product. It implies a relationship of trust in which all parties should have the confidence to take a stand openly and freely on a professional as well as a personal level and communicate in a responsible and mature manner. However, the supervisor/promoter remains the senior partner, which means that he/she is accountable for all decisions and guidance. *This necessarily means that the supervisor/promoter, like the student, must remain up to date on the topic concerned.*

If the supervisor/promoter finds that the study is running the risk of deviating from the original scheme, he/she may – in the case of smaller changes – allow such deviation. In the case of a more drastic deviation from the original study, the supervisor/promoter and the student must inform the relevant research director. An assistant supervisor/promoter may be appointed if required. In such a case, the student may also apply for a change of title. *In the case of a* drastic *change in the contents of* the research product*, an amended research proposal must be submitted.*

If a student experiences any difficulties in the supervision process, he/she should immediately raise these with the relevant director. If the director is the supervisor, the students should raise the issue with the relevant deputy dean or executive dean of the faculty prior to submission for examination. (A Rule 4.8.6 and 5.8.5)

### 3.4.1 The protocol for study guidance

- The supervisor/promoter should make sure that the student is thoroughly aware of the applicable rules, as well as the nature and format of and requirements for mini-dissertations/dissertations and theses. The supervisor/promoter must bring this Manual to the attention of the student. In accordance with the general prescriptions, it must be assumed that what the student eventually submits is his/her own work, and he/she should therefore be given the opportunity to optimally utilise his/her own style, points of view and personality in the document.

- The identification of sources is the duty of the student and not of the supervisor/promoter.

- The supervisor/promoter must ensure that the sources and their correct use are checked; tools such as Turnitin may be used.

- The supervisor/promoter should draw the student's attention to poorly substantiated or formulated statements and arguments, but the student must make the improvements him-/herself.

- It is not the responsibility of the supervisor/promoter to correct language errors, but to guide the student towards using the correct scientific language and a scientifically acceptable technical finish. The supervisor/promoter should also ensure that the technical language satisfies the required standard.

- It is not the responsibility of the supervisor/promoter to rewrite portions of the work, but to indicate shortcomings to the student and provide guidance for correcting these.

- The supervisor/promoter should provide only general criticism and comments on the technical finish and methods and allow the student to correct these him-/herself.

- Before the research product is submitted for examination, the supervisor/promoter must review it thoroughly. He/she will likely work through the document several times and provide the student with comments and suggestions. Only when the supervisor/promoter is satisfied with the structure and standard of the work, will permission be granted for the product to be finalised as a manuscript for submission. A text-similarities report (e.g. Turnitin) is required to ensure that all parallel texts are checked for plagiarism. To prevent bottlenecks during the period of submission for examination, the Turnitin could be done earlier in the process, i.e. regularly after each chapter is completed, and should not only be conducted at the end of the study.

- The supervisor/promoter must ensure that the student has had the research product properly language edited. An official letter or document must be made available to substantiate this editing.

- The supervisor/promoter and student should set a date on which the final revised or corrected version of the document should be submitted to the supervisor/promoter to ensure that the final manuscript is print-ready well ahead of the final deadline. The official timetable is the decisive factor.

- The supervisor/promoter must undertake to adhere to the code of conduct for promoters and supervisors provided in the Addendum of this manual.

- Master's and doctoral students must undertake to adhere to the code of conduct for master's and doctoral students provided in the Addendum of this manual.

### *3.4.2 Functions of the co-supervisor/promoter or assistant supervisor/promoter*

As mentioned, the supervisor/promoter may request that a co-supervisor/promoter or an assistant supervisor/promoter be appointed for the study. A co-supervisor/promoter is usually involved in the full course of the study in consultation with the supervisor/promoter. If discussions are held about the study, the co-supervisor/promoter must be involved at all times.

The assistant supervisor/promoter is often involved in providing guidance with regard to aspects or sections of a specific study. When a study has a clearly interdisciplinary character, an assistant supervisor/promoter from another discipline is appointed for practical and technical reasons. A postgraduate student may request the supervisor/promoter to appoint a co-supervisor/promoter or an assistant supervisor/promoter for the study.

The supervisor/promoter remains primarily responsible for the study.

## 3.5   Proposal Approval and Title Registration

***Rules/policies/guidelines****: Policy on Academic Integrity, *Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4/2013), A Rules (4.9.1 and 5.9.1), Rules for the Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (RERC) of the NWU, Research Ethics Policy,* Rules for the Classification of Theses and Dissertations*

***Responsibilities****: Student, Supervisor(s), Faculty Scientific Committee, Research Ethics Committee*

The early stages of the study consist of developing a research proposal, and obtaining the necessary approvals before proceeding with the actual study. At this stage, the supervisor/promoter (the functionary) will guide the student in completing the necessary documentation.

The student, under the guidance of the appointed functionary/functionaries, will develop a research proposal and title for the study, which will be submitted together with an online ethics clearance application to the relevant faculty structures for final approval.

**The research proposal**

All faculties expect the student to provide a research proposal before commencing with the actual research. This proposal can take many forms, and is prescribed by research entities. The functionaries will guide the student in the process. The proposal will usually consist of background material in the form of a literature study, a problem statement and a research question (perhaps broken up into sub-questions), and a description of the proposed method of research and some predicted outcomes.

The student is advised that the most important part of this aspect of the study is the formulation of the research problem and questions. This critical formulation will guide him/her in the entire study, and must therefore contain the essence of the entire research programme. In some cases, it will only be possible to formulate this after an exhaustive literature review. Sometimes, it can arise from work done in a previous degree (i.e. a doctoral study can build on the outcome of a master's degree).

The process for ethical clearance or approval of the proposed study runs concurrently with the research proposal process.

**Formulating the title**

In all cases a title (which may be amended later if required) must be formulated for the study. The title should have a clear link with the aims of the study. Supervisors/promoters guide the student so that the proposed title covers the topic meaningfully and optimally refers to the main aspects of the study. (Example: The relationship between A and B; The implications of A for B; The effect of A on B; The impact of A on B; An analysis of A.) The title must have the necessary impact and should preferably not be longer than 12 words. Supervisors/promoters should guard against efforts to include all aspects of the study in the title, as such titles become unwieldy. The title should be brief and to the point for two reasons: the various aspects of the study are set out in the course of the study and need not all be reflected in the title, and the title has to appear on the title page and spine of the research product.

A title must conform to the standards of academic language used by NWU. Its wording must be accurate and correct.

### 3.5.1 *Evaluating the Integrity of the proposal*

The main indicators of research integrity in the higher degree environment include copyright, plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of data, ethical clearance, and intellectual property rights and patents (where applicable). However, at this stage, the study has not developed to a point of assessing all indicators. Thus the proposal is only assessed for signs of plagiarism and ethical clearance. Supervisors confirm by completing and signing an integrity checklist/form that the title of the proposed study is not duplication of other studies within the relevant scientific community. The supervisor should also submit a Turnitin (similarity) report of the proposal to the Faculty Scientific Committee.

Also, if the content of the study needs to be classified, the supervisor should complete the application form for classification available from Higher Degrees Administration.

**Classification and declassification of the research product**

As prescribed by the A Rules, it is sometimes necessary to classify the study as confidential. This could be determined early in the study, for instance when the study makes use of proprietary data obtained from an outside source, which should be kept confidential. In other cases, it may be discovered at some later stage that the results have the potential to be commercialised or that the intellectual property right of the NWU must be protected. In such cases, the study should be classified before the research product is published.

Consult the *Rules for the Classification of Theses and Dissertations* containing information on the classification process. The application form for classification is available from Higher Degrees Administration. The application must be motivated by the supervisor/promoter, and recommended by both the relevant director and dean. In cases where the intellectual property rights of the NWU must be protected, the Director: Technology Transfer and Innovation Support must also make a recommendation.

The generation and dissemination of scientific knowledge through research at higher degree level form an integral part of the University's core business. The University is a public institution and the knowledge generated by it should in the first instance be available for the benefit of the general public. The classification of research products through which some or other restriction is imposed on the disclosure or dissemination of such knowledge should thus be regarded as an exception. It is usually only permitted in exceptional cases and after due consideration at a suitable level and in accordance with accountable norms and fixed

procedures. All applications for classification and associated processes should therefore be tested against this principal point of departure.

**Research Data Gatekeeping**

Research data gatekeeping is a procedure developed to evaluate all research data requests that require access to NWU data and NWU staff and students against the edicts of the Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4/2013). Proposals for research that is planned to engage NWU staff and/or students as research subjects or use NWU information should be submitted to the Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (RDGC). The RDGC will assess the application to ensure that the subjects are recruited in an open and voluntary way; and a transparent and objective process is followed in obtaining data from such individuals. The Committee also requires that any identifiable personal information be obtained with full informed consent from such subjects and not from any other sources or databases.

### 3.5.2 *Proposal Evaluation and Approval*

Refer to the applicable A Rules and Faculty/School/Entity rules concerning the approval of the research proposal and the title of the research product.

A considerable amount of prior study is required before one will be ready to apply for approval of the research proposal and title registration. According to the A Rules (4.9.1, 4.9.2, 4.9.3, 5.9.1, 5.9.2 and 5.9.3), a student must submit a research proposal within six months after the final date for the annual registration for the relevant degree, or (in the case of structured master's degree) six months after completion of the last required module assessment of the degree. There may, however, be specific faculty rules on this matter. The research proposal must be approved by a Scientific Committee (SC).

### 3.5.3 *Ethics Clearance/Approval*

All research projects need to go through a process of ethics clearance or approval. The Scientific Committee (SC) will refer the study to an appropriate Research Ethics Committee (REC). If a study does not involve human participants or animals, or will not impact negatively on the environment, the SC recommends to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) that the research project does not require ethical approval, and ethical clearance is provided by the REC. Should a research project, however, involve human participants or animals or could have a possible negative impact on the environment, the research project must be reviewed by an REC and ethical approval must be obtained before the empirical or experimental study can commence. Whether an expedited or a full review is required will depend on the decision of the REC.

In order to ensure the protection of humans and animals involved in research or the prevention of negative environmental impact, all students registering for a higher degree must apply for research ethics approval. Applications must be directed to a specific faculty REC. In some faculties, securing ethics can be a time-consuming process, and students are therefore advised to start this process as soon as possible.

Besides the code of conduct, guidelines, policies and compulsory registration with the applicable national professional bodies, research is also controlled by ethics principles underlying empirical or experimental work. The NWU Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (RERC) has formulated general rules and guidelines for the functioning of Research Ethics Committees. Functionaries will inform students of faculty-specific ethics rules.

As mentioned above, the general principle is that all higher degree studies are subjected to a research ethics clearance process and should receive an ethics clearance number despite the risk level with regard to ethics codes. The process involves independent review and approval by an REC as to whether the research activities of a study satisfy specific ethical principles. These are based on generally accepted ethical norms and standards. The guiding question is whether the study poses any potential harm to human participants or animals involved in the study, or might have any negative impact on the environment. The answer to this question will also determine the level of possible harm, and will therefore determine possible restrictions placed on the limits of the study.

Each faculty has a Research Ethics Committee (REC), which will consider applications for ethics clearance. Students are advised to ensure that they pursue this matter as soon as possible after registering.

The Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (RERC) of the NWU is responsible for the formulation of ethics guidelines for the institution. Applications for research ethics approval is considered by the relevant Research Ethics Committee (REC), as organised by the Faculty. All research involving human beings (including human material such as blood, cells, urine, etc.), animals or that may have an environmental impact must be cleared by an REC *before the empirical or experimental study may commence*. Supervisors/promoters of a higher degree student often apply to the REC for clearance of the relevant research project in which he/she is the chief investigator. Higher degree students are then allocated to projects which resort under a broad research programme. Each student's study project should, however, obtain its own ethical approval to safeguard participants, researchers and the University against any unethical conduct linked to changed methods and additions of new researchers to a project. An application has to be submitted to the REC by a permanent staff member of the University, as, in this context, students may not act as primary researchers.

The process for obtaining research ethics clearance is described in the Rules of the RERC and the relevant REC.

### 3.5.4 Title Registration

The registration of a title takes place during the study guidance process, and as stipulated by the rules of the relevant faculty. Students are reminded that they must acquaint themselves with faculty rules related to title registration and the period that must follow before submission of the research product for examination. Examiners may be appointed at any time after the title has been registered but no later than six months prior to submission for examination. Whatever the process may be, the faculty will formally approve the title of the study. Any changes to the topic of study or the formally registered title must be reported to the faculty for approval.

In some cases, the student may only finalise the registration of a title after approval of the research proposal. Students must ensure that they are familiar with the procedure of the faculty on this point; the supervisors/promoters will be able to advise on this matter.

The title registration process should include registration of a persistent digital identifier (ORCID iD). The ORCID iD enables a researcher to own and control their work, and distinguishes one researcher from every other researcher. Every student is expected to register and obtain their ORCID iD through the NWU Library website.

## 3.6 Thesis Work

*Rules/policies/guidelines*: *Policy on Academic Integrity, Library and Information Services Policy, Library guidelines for writing master's dissertations and PhD theses (including the NWU Referencing Guide)*

*Responsibilities*: *Student, Supervisor, Faculty Higher Degrees Management*

### 3.6.1 Field work

Planning is essential for the success of any type of fieldwork including (but not limited to) site visits for data collection, in situ field measurements, laboratory work and industrial plant visits. Supervisors should guide and support the students during the planning and implementation of the actual fieldwork. Both the student and supervisor should protect institutional reputation and maintain academic integrity. The Supervisor must ensure compliance with ethics, health, safety and environment, and legal and statutory requirements.

### 3.6.2 Thesis/Dissertation Compilation

Producing the research product is a major activity of any advanced study. The student will probably have no experience of compiling a document or work of this magnitude, and may find it a daunting task. Students often underestimate the complexity of this task. The supervisor should guide the student in this process.

Students should be especially aware of the dangers of plagiarism and should always ensure that their work complies with the requirements in this regard. Discuss this with your supervisor/promoter to obtain clarity on this crucially important issue.

**Language use**

It is a basic requirement that the language and style of the research product must be correct. While there are comprehensive guidelines for the accurate use of academic language, it is not possible to provide fixed rules for the most suitable writing style for a (mini-)dissertation/thesis. However, the writer must meet two requirements: the information must be structured in a clear, careful, logical and unambiguous manner, and it should be conveyed to the reader in correct, elegant language.

The selection of the right words, the formulation of well-constructed sentences and the layout of sentences in systematic and logical paragraphs are essential to retain the reader's active and engaged attention. In short, this means that the writer must arrange the information in such a way that the reader receives it in units that are not so brief that they interrupt the flow of the presentation, but are also not so long or complicated that they are confusing or allow the reader's attention to wander. The writer should always take the reader into consideration.

Most of the obvious errors in sentence construction arise when the writer tries to write too concisely and omits words that are essential for a good understanding of the information being presented. This links up with inadequate use of a good explanatory dictionary.

Errors that occur in (mini-)dissertations/theses are in many cases the result of incorrect use of language. These include grammar, spelling and punctuation errors, -isms and incorrect word choice. Because the premise is that not all students necessarily possess an adequate

knowledge of language usage, it is a **requirement** that the language of the research product must be edited by a competent language editor.

Language editing primarily remains the responsibility of the student. However, the supervisor/promoter should ensure that the student has the research product edited.

**Language of (mini-)dissertations and theses**

The choice of language should be in accordance with the language policy of the University and language use should follow its style guide.

**Word processing functionality**

It is essential that students should use word processing. This facilitates correction and final completion of (mini-)dissertations/theses. It is also essential that the full functionality of the word processor must be used to assist in the formatting of the document, automating cross-referencing, numbering of sections and subsections, creation of the bibliography, inserting references in the correct style, etc.

**Format and length**

The format of the page layout of the research product must be determined beforehand. Two possible formats are acceptable:

**A4 format** is 210 x 297 mm and must make provision for margins: approximately 2,5 cm on the left and approximately 2 cm on the three other sides, i.e. the page number must be included. **A5 format** is approximately 147 x 210 mm and may be printed on both sides of the paper, with about 2,0 cm for margins.

Printing in double line spacing is acceptable if one-and-a-half spacing is not possible. A font size 11 may be used. The fonts **Arial** or **Times New Roman** are recommended because of their legibility.

There are no universal rules about the length (minimum and maximum number of pages/words) for a (mini-)dissertation or thesis; each faculty has its own rules for each type of research that is done.

**Page numbers** may appear at the top or bottom of a page, and placing them in the middle of the page eliminates confusion.

A Word template customised for (mini-)dissertations/theses at the NWU is available at the following link http://services.nwu.ac.za//it/sc/nwu-templates-postgraduate. Students are encouraged to use all of the features of this template, such as the automatic creation of the table of contents, list of figures/tables and page numbering, headers and footers, section numbering, cross-referencing and automatic creation of references and bibliographies.

**3.6.2.1 Example of thesis/dissertation layout/components**

Any (mini-)dissertation or thesis should be compiled according to a clear plan and in such a way that the layout is clear to the reader. The following is an *example* of the various elements that may typically be found in the research product:

- Title page

- Proof of ethics approval or that no ethics approval was required

- Proof of the Turnitin process

- Abstract in the language used in the study

- Preface

- Table of contents

- Introduction

- Sections of the text

- Concluding chapter

- Annexures

- Illustrations (if any; may also be distributed in the text)

- Bibliography

**a) Title page**

On the title page of the (mini-)dissertation or thesis the following must appear in this sequence:

Title as approved by the Faculty

Full initials and surname of the student

ORCiD of the student

Wording of the degree qualification: This wording does not refer to the Faculty or Entity/School, but only to the subject (e.g. for a thesis in Biochemistry only "Biochemistry" and the University is used, not the Faculty of Natural Sciences or School of Chemistry and Biochemistry). In all cases, the registered name of the University must be used, namely "NWU". Exceptions: In the case of (mini-)dissertations for degrees like Magister Musicae, Magister Bibliothecologiae and Magister Artium et Scientiae [Planning] – which must be indicated as such in the wording – the subject may be omitted. In all cases the correct name of the qualification, as indicated in the NWU Calendar, must be used.

All supervisors (including co-supervisors and assistant supervisors) and all promoters (assistant and co-promoters) must be mentioned by Title, Initials and Surname. Note the following Afrikaans and English terms:

| ENGLISH | AFRIKAANS |
| --- | --- |
| Supervisor | Studieleier |
| Co-supervisor | Medestudieleier |
| Assistant Supervisor | Hulpstudieleier |
| Promoter | Promotor |
| Co-promoter | Medepromotor |
| Assistant promoter | Hulppromotor |
| Mini-dissertation | Skripsie |
| Dissertation | Verhandeling |
| Thesis | Proefskrif |

**The student number of the student**

**The month and year of submission for examination**: Provide the month and year of the submission for examination.

**Or after final marks have been awarded:**

**The month and year of the graduation ceremony for which the student qualifies to attend.** Provide the month and year of the submission for the graduation ceremony.

**b) Preface and acknowledgements**

The preface, which does not form part of the content of the research product, should not be confused with the introduction. In contrast to the introduction, the preface – which is brief – is used for **personal** comments about the conditions under which the research was conducted and about persons and institutions that provided assistance (including financial assistance). The acknowledgements, if any, are therefore given in the preface. If only acknowledgements are given, they may be placed at the front or back of the document under the heading "Acknowledgements". The style and nature should be sober.

Required mentioning of a donor/funder may be indicated under acknowledgements, and is not mentioned on the Title page of the research product.

**c) Summary and keywords**

*A dissertation/mini-dissertation/thesis must contain a summary of no more than 500 words and five to ten descriptive key terms in the language in which the document is written.*

The summary should contain a brief and relatively complete version of the line of argument of the research product. The aim, method and core of the findings must be set out in the summary. The summary is intended for publication in an abstract journal. It does not form part of the text and may be placed either between the title page and the table of contents, or between the final chapter and the bibliography.

**d) Table of contents**

The main heading is "Table of contents" or just "Contents". If the table consists of more than one page, the pages must be numbered in lower case Roman numerals and each must bear the heading "Contents (continued)". The **decimal system must** be used as it has an inherent logical sequence. The page indication in the table of contents must appear on the right-hand side of the page.

If the document contains many photos, maps, illustrations and/or tables and figures, a list of these features must be included after the Table of Contents. The headings "Illustrations" or "Tables" or "Figures" or whatever the case may be must be used for this purpose. If the captions are too long to be contained comfortably in such a list, summaries may be used, provided the heading is then changed to "Illustrations (short list)" or something similar. Each caption relating to a figure or table in the text must refer to the relevant page number in the text.

**e) Introduction**

The function of an introduction to a research product is to introduce the reader to the topic of the research product, to indicate what previous work has already been done, what the problems are, and why they have been investigated, so that the reader may be prepared to

read the text and evaluate the results and findings. The following matters are usually discussed in the introduction – not necessarily in this sequence:

- Problem statement, i.e. an explanation and substantiation of the choice and relevancy of the topic, the aim of the investigation, etc.

- A literature review of previous research in this field and of shortcomings that still exist.

- A demarcation of the field of study.

- A breakdown of sources, methods and procedures regarding the investigation.

- Definition of terms.

- Explanation of a certain viewpoint or approach.

- A statement with regard to the further breakdown of the topic and/or the structure of the (mini-)dissertation/thesis.

- Problem questions to be addressed.

**f) Sections of the text**

The text of the research product must be divided into specific sections, with each section subdivided into subsections. As no set, universally applicable prescript for this division can be provided, the general term used here is "sections". The division of the research product will primarily be determined by factors such as the nature and method of the subject and/or subject group involved, the nature of the topic, and the data obtained by way of research on the topic. The most common division is that of **chapters,** which have to be duly numbered and provided with headings. A document may also be divided into **parts** and **sections** (indicated as Part I, Section II, etc.), and each section is then divided into chapters. Each chapter may also be divided into subsections, etc., depending on what is required. In this regard the student will find the advice of the supervisor/promoter indispensable.

The division of a text into sections (or chapters) is extremely important, as it largely determines the shape of the research product and the line of argumentation. For this reason, the student should pay particular attention to this aspect. There is **one rule** that applies to all writers of scholarly documents: the division should be **simple, clear and effective,** so that it gives a clear indication at first glance of what each individual section and, eventually, the whole document entails. The division should be done in such a way that each section contains only the information relevant to it, and all the sections must be arranged so that the required unity is accomplished and emphasised. Because the supervisor/promoter has to assist the student with this process, it is essential that the supervisor/promoter is always up to date on the progress of the research.

On the other hand, the student should guard against using too many and small divisions, as these may confuse the reader rather than help him/her, and they needlessly complicate the document. Too many sections and subsections also hamper the flow of the text. As the ranking of sections and headings is usually adequate, the headings in the text should, as far as possible, be limited to the following:

- Primary headings, usually written in upper case (e.g. chapter headings)

- Secondary headings

- Tertiary headings

The decimal numbering system is excellent for reflecting the relationship between these three types of headings. Normally it is meaningful to use no more than four, and in exceptional cases five, decimals; for example, 2.1.3.2 or 2.1.2.3.1, but not 2.1.2.3.1.7.

In addition to sections, the text should also contain a logical system of paragraphs. These are indicated by leaving some blank space between consecutive paragraphs. The fact that a text is divided into paragraphs is an indication that the author has analysed the material for the reader and has set it out in units that the reader can understand. Paragraphs are a necessary concession to the natural limitations of the human attention span; consequently, the length of paragraphs is determined by careful and sympathetic consideration of the complexity of the topic and the knowledge and experience of the person who has to read the document.

A paragraph is not an isolated, unrelated breakdown of a single thought or idea, but usually fits in with a relatively complex structure (or argument) of which it is only a component part. The author should therefore be able not only to use the paragraph throughout as a cohesive, united discussion of a single aspect or view, but also to indicate carefully and clearly the link between the paragraph and the paragraph system in the text.

Guard against presenting the same information in tables as well as in figures. Tables should be fully comprehensible as separate units.

**g) Concluding chapter**

A closing chapter is essential for any research product. In the first place, it must provide a summary of the deductions, conclusions, viewpoints, etc. that arose from the argument. Since each chapter could also end with a summary or conclusion, the summary in the closing chapter should be at a more advanced level. However, this chapter should be more than a mere summary. It should be used to draw a final conclusion on the essence of the investigation and/or argument. The student's own view on the matter should be stated as clearly as possible in the conclusion. The insights and viewpoints of the student that emerge at different points in the text should be brought to a final synthesis here. The closing chapter should clearly indicate whether the gaps in the literature have been filled, and whether the research aims have been achieved. This chapter is the final proof of the student's mastery of the topic. Recommendations on further research should also be made.

**h) Annexures**

Annexures are particularly valuable for presenting data that are not suitable for inclusion in the text or in footnotes, but are essential for a full understanding of the text. This applies particularly to extensive descriptions, the contents of sources (documents) not published elsewhere and/or not easy to obtain, tables, mathematical arguments which conclusions are based upon, different kinds of maps, questionnaires, tests, etc. Such annexures are usually indicated only as "Annexure", and if there is more than one, as "Annexure A", "Annexure B", etc. *Annexures should be used extremely judiciously and students should consult their supervisors/promoters in this regard.* The student should also ascertain if any of the material requires permission from the publishers before it is included in an annexure.

**i) The bibliography**

The NWU Referencing Guide is available to all registered students on the library's website. All literature references in the text must be supported by a bibliography containing full bibliographical details of the sources referred to in the text. This list of sources is placed right at the end under the heading "Bibliography". However, the bibliographical style used for this purpose is no random matter and must conform to the Referencing Guide.

In some cases, it may be necessary and/or desirable to provide a full bibliography on the topic, even if all the sources are not directly referred to in the text. This should be explained in a footnote.

**3.6.2.2 Guidelines for submitting a dissertation/thesis in article format**

In some cases, a student may choose to submit the research product in the so-called article format. In this case, the document will consist of a number of scholarly articles (published or unpublished, but submitted for publication) and other documentation. In particular, it will contain the following elements:

- A title page as prescribed above

- Acknowledgements

- A table of contents of the dissertation/thesis

- An abstract with 5-10 keywords

- A preface comprising the following:

    - A statement that the article format has been selected.

    - An indication of the student's share in the research if there are co-authors for the article(s)/manuscript(s).

    - An indication of the journal the article(s)/manuscript(s) was/were submitted to if not yet published.

    - Permission from co-authors that the article(s)/manuscript(s) may be submitted for degree purposes.

    - Permission from the editor of the technical journal if any copyright is involved.

- If more than one article/manuscript is used, the dissertation/thesis must be presented in a scholarly unitary format.

- Depending on the field of study, the supervisor/promoter may also require that a literature review be included.

- Each article must be preceded by a copy of the guidelines for authors for the journal concerned (or included as an appendix).

- When a dissertation or mini-dissertation or a part or summary or the student's adaptation thereof is published, mention must be made of the fact that it results from a master's degree study at the University and, where applicable, the name of the supervisor(s) must also be mentioned as co-author(s).

## 3.7    Examination

***Rules/policies/guidelines****: Policy on Academic Integrity, A Rules (4.10 & 5.10 4.11.5 & 5.11.5; 4.13), Faculty Rules*

***Responsibilities****: Student, Supervisor, Higher Degrees Administration, Faculty Higher Degrees Administration, Faculty Higher Degrees Committee/Scientific Committee*

All research products produced as an outcome of a higher degree study are subjected to an examination process. The student and supervisor/promoter are not involved in this process, and the identities of the examiners are kept confidential and not made available to the student.

### 3.7.1 Notice of Submission

The notice of submission might include the appointment of examiners if it was not done at Title Registration stage.

Before a student can submit the research product for examination, the prescribed number of examiners must be appointed by the relevant executive dean or faculty structure, and submitted for ratification by the faculty board. In some faculties, this appointment process is triggered by the title registration process, i.e. examiners are appointed as soon as a title is registered. In other faculties, examiners are appointed later in the study process. In the case of PhD studies examiners may rather be appointed early in the final year of the study of the student due to the time lapse between the title registration and the examination process.

It is the responsibility of the student, in collaboration with the supervisor/promoter, to ensure that all relevant parties are informed of the possible submission date well in advance.

A student has to submit a form for notification of their intentions to submit for examination three months before the actual submission (or as otherwise stipulated in the Faculty Rules). This is to ensure that Higher Degrees Administration has sufficient time to prepare and conclude all the required administrative matters. The form and process is referred to as the Notice of Submission. The student may complete this action online via the DIY platform at http://diyservices.nwu.ac.za/apps/postgraduate-studentsor by submitting the form to his/her supervisor. The process can be accessed via this link; http://studies.nwu.ac.za/postgraduate-studies/higher-degree-academic-lifecycle-forms-m-d.

A student who has not registered may not give notice to submit.

After approval by the supervisor/promoter, the notice of submission must be submitted to Higher Degrees Administration and marked for the attention of the specific faculty administrator.

A student who wants to give notice on DIY, needs complete research data to be displayed on VSS;

• ORCID

• Ethics number

• Registered title

• Name of supervisor

• Keywords

If these or not on the profile of the student on VSS, it will not be possible to submit a Notice of Submission through the DIY platform.

**Authorisation for submission**

See A Rules (4.10 & 5.10) for specific details.

Faculty rules may require that any dissertation or mini-dissertation not submitted in the form of a series of manuscripts in article format be accompanied by proof that the candidate has submitted a research article to an accredited journal. In the case of a thesis, such proof must be provided in the form of a letter from the editor, or, if the article has already been accepted or published, this may be provided as proof.

The supervisor/promoter must sign a declaration, consenting to the student's submission of the research product. This does not guarantee the student's success. Conflict may arise between student and supervisor/promoter if this consent is refused, in which case the relevant director or dean will decide the issue after consultation with all parties involved.

### 3.7.2 Integrity Check on the Research Product

Supervisors should confirm by completing and signing an integrity checklist/form that the research product was assessed for signs of plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of data and ethical clearance. The supervisor should also attach a Turnitin (similarity) report of the thesis and an ethics approval letter from the relevant Research Ethics Committee (REC).

**Turnitin process and correct methods of referencing in text**

Testing for similarities is part of the study guidance process. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that the research product is subjected to similarity testing. The supervisor should contact the eFundi staff with regard to the availability of licences for this process.

The faculty creates a space on eFundi where students may submit their work for testing on similarities using the Turnitin platform. The supervisor should view and interpret these reports and advise their students on problems that may be identified. The supervisor should guide the student through the necessary amendments before submission for examination. If an examiner reports on perceived plagiarism on a research product, the matter is no longer between the student and the supervisor/promoter but needs to be dealt with according to the policies on academic integrity.

The supervisor should also guide the student with regard to academic writing and referencing in such a manner that plagiarising someone's work is not an unintended consequence of bad academic writing or lack of proper referencing in the text of the research product. Also refer to the Referencing guide of the NWU available on the website of the NWU Library.

### 3.7.3 Submission of the research product

A student submits the research product for examination to the Higher Degrees Administration. Refer to the A Rules (4.10 & 5.10) and Faculty/Entity rules with regard to the submission of the (mini-dissertation/dissertation/thesis.

**3.7.3.1 Submission date**

There are submission dates published on the NWU calendar for every examination opportunity available to master's and doctoral studies. Also, see the A Rules (4.10 & 5.10) and Faculty/Entity rules as well as specific dates for submission. It is in the student's best interest to adhere to submission dates, as late submission may result in a delayed examination process and postponement of graduation. This may imply that the student **will have to register again for an additional year**.

### 3.7.3.2 Format and number of copies for examination

A student may submit the thesis or (mini-)dissertation in any one of the following formats:

- Electronically

- Electronically, plus a printed copy (or copies) if it is requested by the examiners when they complete the acceptance of their appointment letters to HDA.

Printed copies may be bound with a spiral or ring binding at this stage. One-sided printing is required. Printing in full colour is not required, unless colour coding is essential. No printed inspection copy for the library is required at present, since the electronic version is made available. In future the submission will be done online; full information will be made available at a later stage.

In cases where an examiner(s) requested a printed copy a student must establish beforehand from the relevant university official the number of copies to be submitted for examination.

Examples of title pages are available from the relevant faculty/entity.

### 3.7.3.3 The printing process

It is advisable to liaise with printing and copying firms beforehand to ensure that all their technical requirements are met.

If the student arranges the binding him-/herself and it is not done by the Library printer, he/she should ascertain beforehand how many copies have to be submitted and what requirements apply. An abbreviated title should, for example, appear on the spine of the hardcover copies. In cases where the approved title is too long for the spine of the hard copy, exceptions may be made.

### *3.7.4   Examination of the Research Product*

The entire examination process is administered by the Higher Degrees Administration (HDA) in consultation with the faculty. The student and the supervisor/promoter are not involved in this process. The student will be notified of the outcome of the examination process once all procedures have been concluded. The Higher Degrees Administration office receives the copies for examination from the students, with the declaration and permission to submit signed by their supervisors/promoters. HDA sends the examination copies to examiners after ensuring their contact details are correct and that they are still available.

The names of the examiners of the research product are not be revealed to the student. Once the examination copies of the mini-dissertation/dissertation/ thesis have been submitted, no supervisor/promoter or co-supervisor/promoter or assistant supervisor/promoter may contact or attempt to negotiate with the examiners whatsoever, as this may put the examination process at risk.

The examination copy may also not be withdrawn or re-submitted. It is therefore important that a research product is not submitted to HDA without making sure that the document is complete and correct, with regard to content and addendums.

**Guidelines for the examination of the research product**

Examiners normally assess the research product by evaluating the following aspects:

**a) The topic:**

- Is the topic demarcated meaningfully, is it appropriate and worthy of research?

- Is the research design scientifically based?

**b) Problem statement, aims, hypotheses or central theoretical statement:**

- Have the above-mentioned been formulated clearly and unambiguously, and are they related and relevant to one another?

- Is the problem statement scientifically relevant and are the aims clear?

**c) The research method:**

- Does the study show that the student adequately controls the theoretical basis?

- Is the research method suitable, selected in a critical and accountable manner, and described clearly?

- Is there evidence that the student has properly mastered the methods and/or techniques?

- Is the student's own contribution clear in the case of a multidisciplinary study or project, as well as in the scientific processing, content and contribution of the work?

- Is the work systematic, logically developed, well-structured, and balanced?

- Do the chapters form meaningful units?

- Does the content reveal in-depth knowledge of the research field?

- Is there evidence that the student can interpret and argue in a scholarly manner, discuss different views and theories critically, and motivate his/her own views where necessary?

- Is the final summary meaningful and does it clearly reflect the character of the study?

- Is the relative meaning of the study presented briefly?

- Do the conclusions follow logically on the problem statement and aims of the study?

- Does the student make meaningful recommendations that may be followed up by other studies?

- Does the student provide meaningful and convincing solutions to problems?

- Are the aims of the study achieved satisfactorily?

- Is adequate attention given to the internal as well as external validity of the findings and interpretation?

- Does the work display originality (in the case of doctoral study) with regard to the retrieval and/or development of knowledge?

- Can the work or parts of it be published?

- Is the work subject-philosophically and scientific-theoretically accountable (where applicable)?

- In the case of theses – does the work contribute to knowledge of and insight into the subject, and does it illustrate the abilities of the student in terms of independent thought, effort, and research?

**d) Use of sources:**

- Does the student illustrate assimilated knowledge of the relevant literature by handling it in a suitably critical and integrated manner, or is the literature merely used as tool for supporting the student's own views?

- In the case of qualitative studies, has an adequate literature review been conducted?

**e) Language and style, technical composition, care and finish:**

- Is the student's writing up to standard in terms of style and ease of expression? Is the text easy to read (with respect to font size, typing format and spacing) and was it language edited?

- Does the research product comply with the requirements as far as technical care is concerned (title page, table of contents, footnotes, reference technique, graphs, figures and tables, list of sources)?

- Does the document contain a summary in the language it was written in, as well as annexures of relevant research documents?

- Is the quality of the printing and binding acceptable?


### *3.7.5 Examination Reports*

Every examiner is supplied by the HDA Office with faculty-specific examination guidelines and mark sheets on which their examination report is completed.

Each examiner must make a clear recommendation on the basis of the evaluation guided by the mark sheet provided by the faculty (cf. A Rules 4.11.5 & 5.11.5).

In the case of a (mini-)dissertation a specific mark and result (option) is awarded. The student must obtain at least 50% in the (mini-)dissertation to pass. If examination papers are required together with a dissertation for a master's degree, at least have 50% is required for each examination paper (or as indicated in faculty rules), while 50% for the dissertation and an average examination mark of at least 50% is required to pass. A master's degree may be awarded with distinction.

In the case of a thesis, only a result and option is awarded. A thesis may not be awarded with distinction.

Reports by the various examiners must be submitted individually to Higher Degrees Administration.

As soon as evaluation reports from examiners are available, Higher Degrees Administration informs or submits them to the applicable administrator in the faculty for processing and approval.

Students are not informed of their result before it is officially confirmed and signed off by the executive/deputy dean and the signed form is formally submitted to Higher Degrees Administration.

A formal result letter will be issued to the student once all processes have been concluded in the faculty. The result may require the student to make certain corrections or to revise and resubmit it. The product may also be rejected entirely.

After the examination results have been released, the final manuscript must be submitted to Higher Degrees Administration in the form of **hard copies**, **CDs** (where applicable), or **online** (as specified at that stage). The required number of copies should be confirmed with Higher Degrees Administration beforehand.

*If a student fails to submit these additional copies in hard, electronic, or CD format (where applicable), the degree certificate will be held back until this requirement is met.*

**Upgrading of a dissertation to a thesis**

A master's dissertation may, in exceptional cases, be upgraded to a doctoral thesis. In such a case the A Rules (4.13) as well as applicable faculty specifications must be followed.

Request for upgrading of a dissertation to a thesis should be documented on a student request form signed and approved by the relevant faculty structures, and submitted to HDA. The decision could be implemented on VSS and displayed on the student's record.

**Publication of research**

Higher degrees students are reminded that it is in their best interest and that of the University that their research be optimally accessible. Permission to publish the entire (mini-)dissertation or thesis in book form must be obtained from the relevant deputy vice-chancellor in writing.


# 4.  Monitoring and Reporting

***Rules/policies/guidelines****: Policy on Academic Integrity, Higher Degrees Policy*

***Responsibilities****: Student, Supervisor, Faculty Higher Degrees Management*


Monitoring and reporting is a tool for the University to support and promote the progress and timeous completion of master's and doctoral studies. This is a continuous process, which should be implemented in all stages/processes of the academic higher degree life cycle. The student-supervisor meetings record (Appendix B) and the progress reporting form (Appendix C) should be used for continuous reporting and support. Full-time students are required to complete six supervision meetings records per year (one every two months); part-time students are required to complete four records per year (one every three months). Supervisor should complete the form, discuss and sign with the student. The Supervisor (or Co-supervisor) should submit the progress reporting form to the Deputy Dean R&I or Designate in the last week of the semester.

# Appendix

## A. SUPERVISION AGREEMENT

The purpose of this agreement is to ensure mutual working relationship between the supervisor(s) and the student. The agreement also provides clarity of roles and responsibilities and ensures commitment and accountability of all parties involved.

Programme: _____ Research Entity/School: _____

Faculty: _____

**THE SUPERVISOR AND THE STUDENT WILL:**
1. Establish agreed roles and clear processes to be maintained by both parties. In the case of joint supervision, all participants' roles need to be clarified.
2. Communicate regularly and as frequently as is reasonable to ensure steady progress towards the completion of the proposal and research product (dissertation or thesis).
3. Keep appointments, be punctual and respond timeously to messages.
4. Inform one another of any planned leave of absences as well as changes in personal circumstances that might have a negative impact on the research schedule.
5. Ensure that the research is conducted according to the procedures and the requirements of the relevant ethics committee.
6. Complete progress reports as requested by relevant faculty higher degrees committee.

**THE SUPERVISOR WILL:**
1. Undertake to provide guidance for the student's research project in relation to the design and scope of the project, the relevant literature and information sources, research methods and techniques and methods of data analysis.
2. Have a responsibility to be accessible to the student.
3. Be prepared for the meeting with the student. This includes being up-to-date on the latest work in his/her area of expertise.
4. Assess written work and provide feedback within a timeframe jointly agreed at the beginning of the research.
5. Give advice that can help the student to improve his/her writing. This may include referrals to research support programmes including language training and academic writing. The supervisor will provide guidance on technical aspects and discipline-specific requirements.
6. Support the student in the production of a research report, dissertation or thesis. Provision should be allowed for adequate, mutually respectful, discussion around recommendations made.
7. Assist with the compilation of a written time schedule which outlines the expected completion dates of successive stages of the work.
8. Discuss the ownership of research conducted by the student in accordance with the University guidelines and rules on intellectual property, co-authorship and copyright.
9. Ensure that the research product is not plagiarised.
10. Ensure that the student is made aware in writing of the lack of progress and/or of any work that is below the set standards.

**THE STUDENT WILL:**
1. Undertake to work independently under the guidance of the supervisor. This includes reading widely to ensure that the literature pertinent to his/her chosen topic has been identified and consulted.
2. Be obliged to make appointments to see the supervisor and will arrange meeting times well in advance.

3. Submit written work for discussion with the supervisor well in advance of a scheduled meeting. The kind and frequency of written work should be agreed with the supervisor at the outset of the research.

4. Take responsibility for the accuracy of language, the overall structure and coherence of the final research report, dissertation or thesis rests with the student.

5. Undertake to pay attention the advice given by the supervisor and to engage in discussion around suggestions made.

6. Take responsibility for the quality and presentation of the work.

7. Maintain a focus on his/her research area and to work within the agreed time schedule.

8. Honour agreements about ownership of the research and in accordance with the University's guidelines and rules in relation to co-authorship, copyright and intellectual property.

9. Ensure that the work contains no instances of plagiarism, and that all citations are properly referenced and the list of references is accurate, complete and consistent.

10. Work in accordance with the criteria of acceptability as supplied by the supervisor. This includes attending all support programmes (e.g. seminars, short courses, etc.) that may be prescribed to improve performance.

We confirm that we have read and understood this statement and agree to be guided by its principles.

Name of student: _____

Student's signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Supervisor: _____

Supervisor's signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Co-Supervisor: _____

Co-Supervisor's signature: _____ Date: _____

## B. SUPERVISORY MEETING RECORD FOR DOCTORAL STUDIES

1. **Date of meeting:**

2. **Student:**

3. **Supervisor(s) present (Supervisor and/or Co-Supervisor):**


4. **Review of actions from the last supervisory meeting:**


5. **Topics discussed:**

   - **Is progress being made?**      Y/N (delete as applicable)
   - **Are goals being met?**         Y/N (delete as applicable)


6. **Identification of any issues:**


7. **Actions points set for the next meeting:**


8. **Additional support activity undertaken to improve on the PhD study**


| **Number of hours undertaken on:** | Training Courses | _____ |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Seminars | _____ |
| | Other (details) | _____ |


| **Confirmation from student and supervisor** | **Date** |
| --- | --- |
| Student _____ | _____ |
| Supervisor _____ | _____ |


**Please note**

Supervisory meetings can be conducted electronically or by phone, and agreement by email is accepted in lieu of signatures. Full-time students are required to complete 6 records per year (1 every 2 months); part-time students are required to complete 4 records per year (1 every 3 months).

## C. PROGRESS REPORT FOR DOCTORAL/MASTER'S STUDIES

**Student Name:** _____

**Supervisor:** _____

**Title:** _____

**Date of First Registration:** _____

| Milestone | Progress/Achievement | Reasons for lack of progress | Proposed mitigation/support |
|---|---|---|---|
| Proposal | | | |
| Literature Review | | | |
| Ethics Approval | | | |
| Title Registration | | | |
| Data Collection | | | |
| Laboratory Analysis | | | |
| Data Analysis | | | |
| Thesis write-up | | | |

**Confirmation from student and supervisor**            **Date**

Student _____            _____

Supervisor _____            _____

**Completing the form**
Supervisor should complete the form, discuss and sign with the student. The Supervisor (or Co-supervisor) should email the form to the Deputy Dean R&I or Designate in the last week of the semester. Note: the standard email subject heading is 'Semester Report-Student Name & Surname-Programme-Year of Study-Supervisor Title & Surname'.

**D. HIGHER DEGREES SUPPORT DIRECTORY**

| Support Functions/Offices | | |
|---|---|---|
| Higher Degrees Administration | Marietjie.Ackermann@nwu.ac.za | 0182994043 |
| Higher Degrees Academic Support | | |
| Research Ethics and Integrity | | |
| Library and Information Services | | |
| Writing Centre | | |
| Language Directorate | | |
| Faculty Higher Degrees Office | | |
| Economic and Management Sciences | | |
| Education | | |
| Engineering | | |
| Health Sciences | | |
| Humanities | | |
| Law | | |
| Natural and Agricultural Sciences | | |
| Theology | | |