



# **GUIDELINES FOR MASTER'S RESEARCH IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES 2022**

## WHY THIS DOCUMENT

We strive towards research that is locally relevant, internationally recognised and intellectually excellent. We wish to enable graduate research that is ethically mindful and makes an original contribution to the Arts and the Social Sciences.

In this vision, research has high prominence, together with the other strategic aims of the University. Research plays an important role in the institutional focus on four strategic areas, namely, (i) to broaden our knowledge base, (ii) to promote student success, (iii) to increase diversity, and (iv) to become systemically sustainable. It is clear from this vision that one of the strategic goals of the University, as a 21st-century institution, is to be a leading research-intensive higher education institution on the African continent.

This document serves as a roadmap for all processes involving Master's degrees (referring to both taught and research Master's programmes) in the Faculty. It is not a legal text intended to replace the SU Calendar / Yearbook and/or Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Calendar / Yearbook. Rather, it captures the values informing higher degrees, from planning, through execution to publication. **Supervisors and students can click on any of the underlined text throughout the Guide to access the relevant policy document, form, or website.**

This set of guidelines is written around the three macro phases of higher degrees research:

- **PART 1: ADMISSION TO MASTER'S DEGREES**
- **PART 2: CONDUCTING AND SUPERVISING MASTER'S RESEARCH**
- **PART 3: SUBMISSION AND EXAMINATION**

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the various libraries on campus, students can also make use of several computer facilities and a language centre. The Division for Research Development provides services and information related to funding, scholarships and the ethics of research. The Postgraduate Skills Development Office offers workshops and seminars on various aspects of Master's research.



## **PART 1: ADMISSION TO MASTER'S DEGREES**

### **1. WHO QUALIFIES FOR ADMISSION?**

Specific requirements for admission differ from one department to another. In general, however, the minimum requirements for admission to Master's programmes are a good undergraduate and Honours degree. Students and supervisors should check with their host departments regarding specific admissions requirements and procedures.

Before recommending an applicant for admission to Master's studies, the supervisor and department should be convinced that the student has the capacity to complete the study successfully, bearing in mind the nature and quality of previous study, commitment to research, and available time (in particular for working students who study part-time).

Students with **QUALIFICATIONS FROM FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES** who wish to proceed to postgraduate studies should contact **Stellenbosch University International** in time for their qualifications to be assessed.

In certain cases, candidates who do not have the minimum academic qualifications may be considered for admission on the basis of professional experience. This process is called **RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)** and is administered by the host department. (For more on RPL, see the **Faculty's Calendar / Yearbook**).

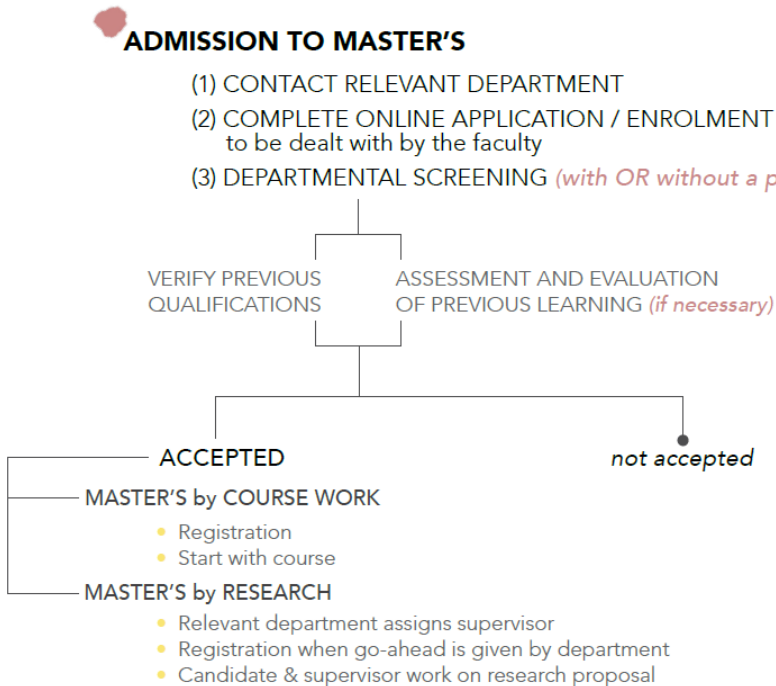
### **2. ENROLMENT FOR MASTER'S DEGREES**

Enrolment (sometimes also called 'provisional registration') involves an online application process that precedes full registration and provides students with a student number. This is used in all correspondence with the University, provides students with an e-mail address, and access to the library and other University resources.

Although the same online application is used for all Master's programmes, the procedure for Master's enrolment is not the same for all departments. Prospective students should check this with the supervisor and/or department concerned.

### 3. ADMISSION TO MASTER'S PROGRAMMES

The figure below illustrates the ADMISSION PROCESS for Master's studies.



#### 3.1 COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Proposals for Master's research are approved at departmental level. Some departments may require a research proposal prior to admission to a respective programme, while others may admit students to a programme (based on various departmental screening criteria) and require a student to complete a research proposal during their first few months of registration.

#### PURPOSE OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The proposal functions as part of the screening process of prospective Master's candidates and gives departments and prospective supervisors a sense of (1) the candidate's ability to formulate their ideas, (2) the contribution of the study to the field of research, and (3) the feasibility of the project.

## **FORMAT OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

At a minimum, any research proposal should include the following elements: (1) working title of thesis, (2) background and rationale, (3) problem statement and research question(s), (4) theoretical points of departure, (5) research design and methods, (6) provisional chapter layout and timeframe, (7) budget, and (8) ethical considerations.

The various elements as well as minimum and maximum word count of research proposals may vary from department to department. Prospective Master's students should check this with the supervisor and/or department concerned.

## **SUBMISSION AND APPROVAL OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

The process of submitting a research proposal is quite simple:

- The preliminary proposal (sometimes also called a 'concept note') is submitted to the department along with a comprehensive CV and a full academic transcript (and any other documentation specified by the department).
- If the preliminary proposal is accepted and the department has the capacity to supervise it, they will assign a supervisor.
- The supervisor then works with the student to finalise the proposal.
- Once the supervisor (and in some cases, department) is satisfied that the proposed research meets the requirements for Master's study, the student may proceed with the execution of the study as set out in the approved proposal.

### **3.2 WHO CAN SUPERVISE A MASTER'S DEGREE?**

- Supervisors of Master's students must have at least a Master's degree. Should a supervisor not yet have a Master's degree, a co-supervisor who does have a Master's degree must be appointed.
- Academic staff who retire from or have left the service of the University are considered to be internal for up to three years after their departure and may continue (co)-supervising Master's students. Departments may offer such supervisors an honorarium at their own discretion (and expense).
- Academic staff who have retired from or left the service of

the University more than three years ago may be appointed as “external” (co-)supervisors if their expertise is specifically suited to the research of a student and this expertise is not available in the department where the candidate is registered. In such cases, an internal (co)-supervisor must also be appointed.

- Where the nature of the subject is such that expertise in more than one field of study is required or where the research methodology requires it, the appointment of a co-supervisor from another field of study or an expert on the research methodology from outside the Faculty may be considered as an external (co)-supervisor.
- The general remuneration tariffs for external (co)-supervisors apply and is payable upon completion of the study (i.e., graduation). This payment is managed by the Postgraduate Examination Office.

#### **HOW TO AMEND MA SUPERVISORS**

The approval of Master’s research proposals is managed within individual departments and does not serve at the Faculty’s Higher Degrees and Research Committee (HDRC). As such, there is no formal appointment of supervisors, however, departments are responsible for updating supervision information on the University’s Postgraduate Administration System (PAS or NAO, in Afrikaans) once the research proposal is approved. The supervisory arrangement will be formally noted during the nomination of examiners phase (usually) in the student’s final year of study. If there is an amendment to supervision after the examiners have been nominated and appointed, the **Amendment of Supervisors form** must be completed and submitted on or before the relevant HDRC agenda deadline date.

#### **4 REGISTRATION FOR MASTER’S PROGRAMMES**

Registration for all Master’s programmes is preceded by the completion of an online application for admission to a particular Master’s programme before the deadline date for enrolments. The registration deadline for first time and continued registration for any Master’s programme is the end of March annually. Annual tuition fees are payable upon registration.

Master's students may register for a degree programme once the department has approved their admission.

#### **CONTINUATION OF REGISTRATION FOR MASTER'S PROGRAMMES**

Master's students must register every year for the full period of study until the degree is awarded to them. Should such students, before the degree is awarded, fail to register in any year before the prescribed date for that year, their registration will lapse. Should such students wish to be admitted again to the degree programme concerned, they will have to apply in writing for admission and will have to register for the programme concerned from the beginning and pay the required fees from the beginning. See the section on Continuation of registration for postgraduate programmes in Part 1 of the **SU Calendar / Yearbook** for more information.

The maximum registration period for a research Master's student is three years. Only in exceptional cases will continued registration beyond this date be considered by the Faculty. More specifically, further registration will only be allowed if the student can provide sufficient reasons for the slow rate of progress to date and submits a comprehensive work plan with deliverables and deadlines for consideration. In such cases both the departmental chair and supervisor(s) need to approve the request for continued registration and grant permission for the student to continue with their studies for an additional year.



## **PART 2: CONDUCTING AND SUPERVISING = MASTER'S RESEARCH**

### **1 AGREEMENT BETWEEN SUPERVISOR(S) AND MASTER'S STUDENT**

The Faculty has a formalised Agreement, which is intended to foster mutual understanding between supervisors and Master's students. The document establishes some basic principles for undertaking Master's research in the Faculty as well as the responsibilities of both supervisors and students. The implementation of the Agreement will depend on the needs and expectations of supervisors and individual Master's students. The contents of the Agreement should be discussed and agreed upon as soon as possible after the admission and commencement of the study. All Master's students are required to sign the **Agreement between supervisors and higher degree students**.

### **2 RESEARCH SPACE, SEMINARS AND SUPPORT**

The Faculty does not provide individual offices or assign individual workspaces for Master's students. Some departments may have designated workrooms or communal areas for higher degree students; however, Master's students must consult with their supervisor regarding any such space available in the department. Master's students may utilize the **Carnegie Research Commons**, which is a high-level research environment for all Master's and doctoral students at Stellenbosch University. The Research Commons, located on the lower level of SU Library, are equipped with computers, workstations and seminar rooms as well as areas for discussion and relaxation.

Several departments in the Faculty host weekly research seminars where guest speakers are invited to present their current research. Master's students are welcome to attend any of these departmental research seminars, regardless of whether they are enrolled at the host department.

There are a number of research skills and support seminars and workshops available to all Master's students and their supervisors in the Faculty. These include, but are not limited to:

- Library and Information Services
- Creating your thesis



- Academic writing skills
- Academic writing integrity: Avoiding plagiarism.

Master's students may attend any of these research skills and support opportunities free of charge; however, prior registration for each is required. For more information regarding the research skills and support seminars and workshops on offer, please visit the following websites:

- **Postgraduate Skills Development**
- **SU Library and Information Services**

In addition, several research training and skills development short courses are offered at departmental or institutional level. Unlike the research skills and support opportunities mentioned above, Master's students are required to pay for their participation in these various short courses. Master's students should consult with their supervisors about any such offerings within their department.

### **3 RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

All research conducted at Stellenbosch University should safeguard the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of all actual or potential participants. In almost all cases, the research ethics process in the Faculty is managed by the **Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research** (REC: SBE).

The research ethics application process starts with the **Departmental Ethics Screening Committee** (DESC) in each respective academic department. During the application process, students will be required to provide the approved title of their study and research proposal, with special attention paid to the research design and method of data collection. In addition, a number of screening questions are used to determine whether ethics clearance is required or not:

- 1 I will collect data from (or interact with) one or more individuals through interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations, video recording, etc.
- 2 I need access to confidential data or information (or archival data, contact lists or reports), of an organisation (or institution or company) where the data is not available in the public domain (i.e., not available to the general public). The data can be linked to individuals (or clients or employees, etc.)
- 3 I am collaborating with an institution (or organisation or company) that is giving me access to physical data (or

- financial data) that is NOT linked to individuals or any personal accounts (or information). I have been granted access to this data by an authorised representative of the organisation (or institution or company).
- 4 I will have access to a database/archive that holds information linked to personal identifiers (e.g., names, ID numbers, account numbers, student numbers); AND/OR the database contains coded information, but I have access to the codes that links the information to personal identifiers.
  - 5 I will gather information/data that is available in the public domain, but that could be regarded as sensitive or potentially sensitive information (e.g., you will collect data via social media networks or public profiles such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook).
  - 6 None of the above.

### **STUDIES THAT REQUIRE ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

A research study requires ethical clearance approval if a Master's student has selected Options 1, 2, 4, 5 or Option 3 in combination with the other options. In these cases, more detailed information relating the data collection will be required to determine the level of risk associated with the study. Low risk projects are screened by the DESC and are ratified by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research. Master's students may commence their data collection once the DESC has approved a minimal risk or low risk research study. Only applications that are deemed as medium or high risk are referred to the REC for review at a convened meeting. In such cases, Master's students may only commence their data collection once the REC has approved their research study and issued their Ethical Clearance Approval Letter. This letter forms part of the supporting documentation upon submission for examination.

**IMPORTANT:** Ethical clearance may not be approved retrospectively so it is imperative that Master's students who require ethical clearance complete the online ethics application once their research proposal has been approved by their supervisor and/or department.

The **Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research** webpage provides an overview of the DESC process, an overview of and access to the online application system, REC documents, meeting dates of the Research Ethics Committee and relevant contact information.

## **STUDIES EXEMPT FROM ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

Using the six ethics screening questions above, a research study is exempt from ethical clearance if a Master's student has selected: Option 6 (None of the above) OR Option 3 BUT only if none of the other options were also selected. [In other words: If Option 3 is selected in combination with the other options, then ethics clearance is required.]

Studies that are exempt from ethical clearance do not need to complete the online ethics application. Master's students and their supervisor(s) are required to complete and sign the **Provisional Ethics Exemption** as soon as the research proposal is complete or within the first six months of registration and submit the form to the respective Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC). Upon completion of the study, Master's students and their supervisor(s) are required to complete and sign the **Ethics Exemption Declaration**, which forms part of the supporting documentation upon submission for examination.

## **4 INTERRUPTION OF STUDIES**

The following acceptable reasons serve as guidelines for when a request must be considered for interrupting Master's study: (1) medical reasons, (2) financial reasons, or (3) special well-justified personal circumstances. All requests must be accompanied by the appropriate supporting documents. These documents can include, amongst others, letters of appointment, assignments, medical certificates, financial statements, sworn statements etc.

The procedure for applying for interruption of study is as follows:

- Applications for interruption of study must reach the Principal Faculty Administrative Officer before or on 30 April of the year concerned. Students should not register in the year that they intend to interrupt their studies.
- No applications for interruption of study will be considered after 30 April of the year concerned as the student would already be registered for the year concerned by then.
- Approval of the application for interruption of study will be considered on the recommendation of the supervisor(s) and the chair of the department concerned.
- Applications that have been approved in accordance with the internal procedures of the Faculty must be included in the next report of the Faculty Board and submitted to the Executive Committee of Senate (EC(S)) for approval.

- Permission to interrupt studies will not be granted for periods shorter than a year.
- Permission to interrupt studies in a Master's programme will be granted once only in the course of the study and for a period of one year.

## **5 CONVERSION FROM MASTER'S TO DOCTORATE**

In deserving cases, and with due regard to the best interests of the student concerned, the conversion of a registration for the degree of Master requiring a thesis into a registration for a Doctorate may be considered and recommended by the Faculty Board, provided that:

- The student shall have shown exceptional progress with their research (registration for the doctorate after not less than one year's registration for the Master's study) and shall have applied for the conversion not later than during the third year of registration for the Master's study OR the conversion to the doctorate was recommended by the external examiner during the examination of the Master's.
- In the course of the work done for the Master's study concerned there shall have emerged new and original insights which warrant further inquiry at the doctoral level.
- The work done for the Master's study concerned shall have been such that it exceeds the conventional Master's study in scope and justifies further investigation at the doctoral level.
- The results of the work done for the Master's study concerned shall preferably already have been accepted for publication in a learned journal of high quality, although this is not a prerequisite.
- The proposal for such conversion shall be initiated by the supervisor, who shall make a request to the departmental chairperson. If the chairperson supports the request, they shall direct the request to the chairperson of the Faculty's Higher Degrees and Research Committee (HDRC). Where the supervisor is the departmental chair, they shall make the request to the chairperson of the HDRC directly.
- The supervisor, after consultation with the chairperson of the department, shall submit the names and contact details of five potential evaluators who are not affiliated with Stellenbosch University to the chairperson of the HDRC, who will appoint two evaluators.
- The student, after consultation with the supervisor, shall compile a report containing (i) a report of the progress made with the

Master's study and (ii) a submission on the proposed doctoral study, consisting of, among others, a detailed protocol containing full information on the hypothesis(es), literature review, material for and technique of the study, viability and ethical implications of the study. All documentation should be sent directly to the chairperson of the HDRC.

- The chairperson of the HDRC shall appoint a committee of three or four members whose subject expertise equips them to judge the request, including two independent evaluators. The committee shall consider the reports and make a recommendation for consideration by the Faculty Board.
- Before the doctorate may be awarded to the student, they shall have been registered for the degrees of Master and Doctor jointly for a total of not less than three years where the Master's is taken directly after an Honours or a four-year career-oriented Bachelor's, and for a total of not less than four years where the Master's is taken directly after a Bachelor's (while there may still be students registered for such two-year degrees of Master's that are being phased out), including, in both instances, not less than one year for the doctorate.
- In cases where written examinations are required for the Master's study in question, all such examinations shall have been taken and passed by the student before the doctorate may be awarded.
- The conversion shall always only take place at the start of a new academic year, that is to say in February; and
- The student's tuition fees shall not be retrospectively adjusted after the conversion.



## **PART 3: SUBMISSION AND EXAMINATION**

### **1 COMPLETING AND FORMATTING THE THESIS**

While there might be differences amongst the formatting specifications of each department, the following serve as general guidelines.

#### **LENGTH OF MASTER'S THESES**

While some disciplinary norms may differ, the general word counts for Master's theses are provided below. The word count includes in-text referencing and footnotes, but excludes the front matter (abstract and opsomming, declaration, acknowledgements, table of contents etc.), bibliography and appendices.

- Master's thesis (180 credits): 35 000 to 45 000 words
- Master's thesis (120 credits): 27 000 to 33 000 words
- Master's thesis (90 credits): 18 000 to 22 000 words

Supervisor(s) must confirm the word count in their **Supervisor Declaration**. Please note that examiners may decline to grade theses that fall below or well above the prescribed length. In these cases, a new examiner must be appointed, and the student's graduation may be delayed.

#### **STRUCTURE OF THESIS AND TYPESETTING**

All Master's theses published by Stellenbosch University should contain the following compulsory information:

- Title page: **Master's degree**
- SU Crest: The SUNScholar team will add the SU crest to the accepted PDF format.
- Declaration: **Master's degree**
- Abstract: English (maximum of 500 words)
- Opsomming: Afrikaans (maximum of 500 words)
- Acknowledgements
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures
- List of Tables
- Content (e.g., Chapter 1, Chapter 2, etc.)

- Bibliography
- Addenda (e.g., Addendum A, Addendum B, etc.)

The University also prescribes compulsory information for the first four pages of all Master's theses. These include: (1) the title page, (2) the declaration and copyright, (3) English abstract, and (4) Afrikaans opsomming. Master's students should follow the instructions as set out in the **General Calendar / Yearbook 2022** (Section 5.7 on pages 52 to 54) meticulously.

The requirements for typesetting Master's theses are as follows:

- Font: Arial or Times New Roman
- Font size: 12pt
- Font colour: Black
- Line spacing: 1.5 lines with 0 pt spacing before and after
- Border: A blank border of no less than 2cm around the whole of the typewritten portion
- Paper Size: A4

## **PLAGIARISM CHECK AND REQUIREMENTS**

Stellenbosch University has a strict no-tolerance policy towards plagiarism and ignorance of referencing rules will not constitute an excuse. For more information, please see the **Policy on Plagiarism (in support of academic integrity)** and **SU Procedure for the investigation and management of allegations of plagiarism.**

All Master's theses must be submitted to Turnitin before the work may be submitted for examination. A copy of the Turnitin summary page must be included as part of the supporting documentation when submitting a Master's thesis for examination. In addition, the supervisor must ensure, and confirm in their **Supervisor Declaration**, that the results summary of the plagiarism check on the thesis from Turnitin is satisfactory.

## **2 SUBMISSION PROTOCOLS**

The following section provides an overview of the requirements and protocols relating to the submission of a Master's thesis for examination. The Master's examination process is coordinated by the Faculty's Postgraduate Examination Office.

## **NOTICE OF INTENTION TO SUBMIT**

The submission of a Master's thesis is preceded by the submission of a **Notice of intention to submit form** by a Master's student directly to the Postgraduate Examination Office (with a CC to supervisors) via email before the relevant deadline date in their final year of study. See the Submission deadlines below for the relevant dates or the **Important dates and deadlines document**.

The purpose of the Notice of intention to submit form is for the Postgraduate Examination Office to prepare for the examination of all Master's theses. The form also prompts supervisors to nominate and appoint suitable examiners for each Master's study. No Master's thesis may be sent out for examination if the nomination of examiners has not been approved.

Due to the administrative purpose of the **Notice of intent form**, Master's students are only required to submit the form once, in their final year of study. If a Master's student fails to submit their thesis at the date indicated on their form, they will not be penalized. However, if a student fails to submit their thesis for examination in their intended final year and is required to register for an additional (final) year, then a new **Notice of intent form** must be completed and sent to the Postgraduate Examination Office (with CC to supervisors) via email.

## **SUBMISSION DEADLINES FOR 2022 ACADEMIC YEAR**

Master's students must submit their thesis and supporting documentation directly to the Postgraduate Examination Office before or on the deadline date in order to be eligible for a particular graduation cycle.

### **Deadline dates for intended December 2022 graduation:**

- Notice of intention to submit: 10 March 2022
- Submission for examination: 1 September 2022

### **Deadline dates for intended March/April 2023 graduation:**

- Notice of intention to submit: 26 May 2022
- Submission for examination: 1 November 2022

These deadline dates are strictly adhered to. In other words, theses (and supporting documentation) submitted after the relevant deadline date will be held over for the following



submission cycle, even if this requires a student to register for an additional year.

### **PERMISSION TO SUBMIT**

Supervisors are required to consent to the submission of a Master's thesis for examination. The **Supervisor Declaration form** confirms the supervisor's support for a given thesis to be examined. Supervisors must also indicate the relevant weight (credits) of the thesis, the word count (excluding front matter, bibliography and appendices), and that they have reviewed the Turnitin report and are satisfied that the thesis may be examined in its current form.

The Postgraduate Examination Office may not send a thesis out for examination without the consent of the supervisor. If the supervisor does not give permission for the thesis to be submitted for examination, but the candidate nevertheless wishes to proceed, they may appeal to the Dean. The Dean may, after consulting the supervisor and/or the chair of the department, recommend to the Higher Degrees and Research Committee that the candidate should be allowed to submit the work for examination.

### **WHAT IS REQUIRED UPON SUBMISSION?**

A Master's thesis is ready to be submitted for examination once the final draft has been approved by the supervisor AND undergone language editing AND formatted according to the prescribed technical requirements.

Students must send their thesis and supporting documentation to the Postgraduate Examination Office electronically via email in a zipped folder using their name and student number as the folder name, for example: Adam Smith (12345678) before or on the given deadline date. The thesis may only be sent for examination once the Postgraduate Examination has received all documents required.

Master's students need to submit the following documentation for examination:

- 1 A pdf and Word version of the full and collated work, including front matter (title page, declaration and copyright, abstract, opsomming etc.), bibliography, and appendices.
- 2 A copy of the Turnitin summary report page indicating the

- similarity score (not the full similarity report).
- 3 Ethical clearance information:  
A copy of the approval from the Departmental Ethics Screening Committee (DESC) or the Research Ethics Committee (REC) if ethical clearance was required.  
OR  
A copy of the **Ethics Exemption Declaration** if ethical clearance was not required; and
  - 4 The declaration by the supervisor in which they indicate the weight of the thesis, the word count of the thesis, confirm that they have reviewed the Turnitin report, and agree that the thesis may be submitted in for examination.

It is the responsibility of the Master's student to ensure that the correct version of the thesis and all supporting documentation is submitted to the Postgraduate Examination Office in time. The examination process formally commences once the thesis has been sent to examiners. Under no circumstance may revised versions of theses or additional documentation may be sent to examiners once the examination process has commenced.

The Postgraduate Examination Office will confirm receipt of each submission. Please note that the PEO will be inundated with submissions on the deadline date and thus confirmation of receipt may take two to three working days.

### **3 THE MASTER'S EXAMINATION PROCESS**

The following section provides an overview of the examination process for all Master's theses as well as a description of the role and responsibilities of supervisors, departments and examiners in the process.

#### **3.1 SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS**

The steps below outline the appointment process for examiners of Master's studies.

- Supervisor(s) approach suitable examiners.
- Supervisors submit a nomination form to the Principal Faculty Administrative Officer before the deadline to be included on the agenda for the Higher Degrees and Research Committee (HDRC).
- The HDRC reviews and recommends the appointment to the Faculty Board.

- The Faculty Board approves the appointment and makes the necessary recommendation to Senate.

#### **WHO MAY EXAMINE MASTER'S THESES?**

- A Master's thesis must be examined by two examiners; both of whom are unconnected to the study.
- Both examiners must have a Master's degree.
- The independent internal examiner must be appointed at Stellenbosch University. Extraordinary lecturers or professors as well as current teaching and/or research fellows to SU are considered internal examiners.
- The independent external examiner should be appointed at any other University or research institution in South Africa. In both cases, their professional affiliation must be stated.
- A person who was previously associated with or appointed at SU must have not been in service of this University for a period of at least three years before that person can be appointed as an external examiner.
- In exceptional cases, an independent international examiner may be considered; however, supervisors must provide a thorough academic motivation for such an appointment.

#### **HOW TO APPOINT MA EXAMINERS**

Early in the final year of study, the supervisor approaches examiners to find out if they are prepared to undertake the examination of a Master's thesis. Supervisors should provide prospective examiners with the title of the study and inform them of the following: (1) approximate date which they should expect to receive the thesis (early September or early November); (2) they will be given 6 weeks to examine the thesis and submit their report; (3) they will only receive an electronic copy of the thesis from the Postgraduate Examination Office; and (4) external examiners will be remunerated for their service upon completion and finalization of the study.

Once supervisors have secured suitably qualified examiners who have agreed to examine the thesis, supervisors must complete the **Nomination of MA examiners form**. The nomination form must be undersigned by the chair of the department and reach the Principal Faculty Administrative

Officer electronically before the deadline date.

For the examination to be completed in time for a particular graduation ceremony, it is vital that the prescribed deadlines for the appointment of the examiners be met; missing the deadline will result in the graduation being delayed to the next graduation event.

**Deadline dates for the nomination of MA examiners:**

- 5 April 2022 (for December 2022 graduation)
- 12 July 2022 (for March/April 2023 graduation)

These fixed dates coincide with the closing dates for the agendas of the Faculty's standing committee system and with the deadlines of University Administration. The nomination of MA examiners will serve at the Faculty's Higher Degrees and Research Committee, who refers the nominations to the Faculty Board for approval by Senate. Once Senate has approved the nomination, the Postgraduate Examination Office sends an appointment letter to the external examiners for their written acceptance.

**HOW TO CHANGE APPROVED MA EXAMINERS?**

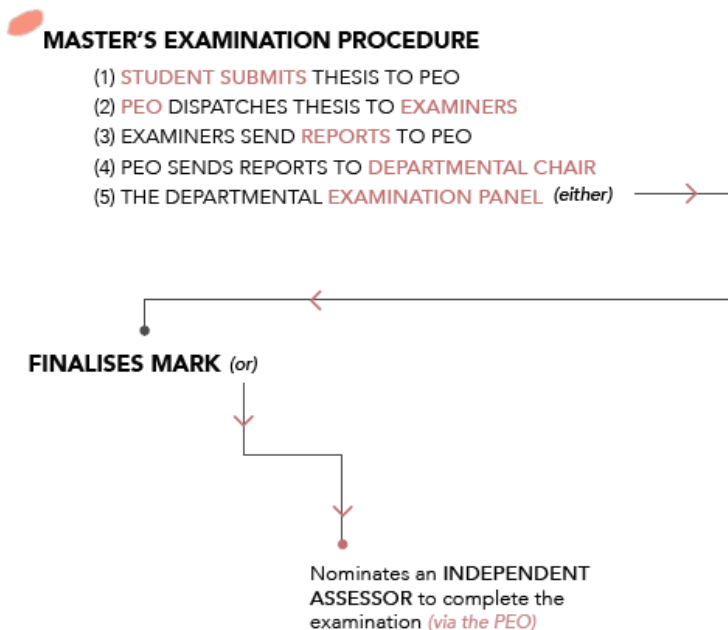
In cases where an approved (internal or external) examiner must withdraw their service, supervisors must find a suitable alternative that meets the requirements set out above and complete the **Amendment of MA examiners form**. The nomination form must be undersigned by the chair of the department and reach the Principal Faculty Administrative Officer electronically before the deadline date. The approval of the nomination follows the same process as outlined above.

**3.2 THE EXAMINATION PROCEDURE**

The examination process is coordinated by the Postgraduate Examination Office (PEO). The PEO is responsible for sending Master's theses to examiners for examination, communicating with examiners and collating the examiners reports before sending the relevant documentation to each department for consideration and review by each departmental examination panel.

Once a thesis is ready for examination, the student must send the thesis and supporting documentation to the PEO electronically via email in a zipped folder using their name and student number as the folder name, for example: Adam Smith (12345678). The PEO may only send the thesis out for examination if examiners have been approved for the study AND all required documents have been received AND the thesis and supporting documentation were received on or before a given deadline date.

The figure below illustrates the EXAMINATION PROCESS for Master's studies.



### COMMUNICATION WITH EXAMINERS

Master's students should not be informed who their examiners are nor may they communicate with the examiners about the exam in the period between submitting the work for examination and the announcement of the final result. In the interest of a fair and unbiased evaluation, the supervisor should likewise not have contact with the examiners (and vice versa) regarding the examination until such time as the departmental examination panel has

reached consensus and informed the supervisor that a final result has been obtained.

### **SUPERVISOR'S REPORT**

Supervisors of Master's theses are required to submit a report on the supervision of the thesis which can provide the examination panel with information necessary for assessing the student's work. Although the report is submitted to the Postgraduate Examination Office, it is not sent to examiners. The Supervisor's report is for the use of the departmental examination panel after the examination reports have been received and included in the supporting documentation to assessors in the case of disputes.

The report (approximately 300-500 words) should include the following:

- The contribution of the study to the field of research;
- The appropriateness of the methodological framework;
- How independently the student worked;
- Difficulties experienced by the student;
- Reflection on the use and correct quotation of published and unpublished works.

In the case of co-supervision, only one report per Master's student is required. A template for the **Supervisor report** is available on the Higher Degree and Research Committee webpage.

### **EXAMINATION CRITERIA FOR MASTER'S STUDIES**

In addition to the electronic version of the thesis, the ethical clearance approval or exemption, Turnitin summary report, and confirmation from the supervisor regarding the weight (credits) of the thesis, all examiners receive a standard set of instructions for the assessment of Master's theses.

Examiners are required to assess a Master's thesis in terms of the following general criteria:

- Adequate delimitation and conceptualisation of the field and subject of research;
- Adequate command of the relevant research method;
- Adequate familiarity with the relevant literature;
- Clear and systematic presentation of the material and logical

- Exposition of the argument;
- Proper documentation and support of the results of the research;
- The contribution of the study to the field of research;
- Acceptable linguistic and stylistic presentation;
- List of improvements and corrections that should be made; and
- Acceptable ethical standards.

### **EXAMINERS REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Examiners are required to submit an assessment of the thesis, in the form of a written report, based on the examination criteria outline above. The report should be thoroughly substantiated. The acceptable length of a report on a Master's thesis is about 1 000 words. The Postgraduate Examination Office may return reports that do not fulfil these requirements.

In addition to the written report, each examiner must complete the Standard Report Form for MA studies indicating their specific recommendation. The final recommendation on the report form must be expressed as a mark out of 100. The minimum pass mark for a Master's degree is 50. For a degree to be awarded with distinction a minimum mark of 75 is required.

These general guidelines for awarding a mark may be used:

<b>% MARK</b>	<b>GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR AWARDING MARKS</b>
85-100	Outstanding thesis. Large parts can be published.
75-84	Deserves distinction. Meets all requirements excellently and shows extraordinary potential. Parts can be published.
65-74	A good thesis, showing a convincing grasp of what is required in the particular field of study.
55-64	Meets the requirements well.
50-54	Meets the minimum requirements.
40-49	Does not meet the minimum requirements but can be improved in order to pass.
30-39	Does not meet or understand the minimum requirements at all.

Examiners are also required to select one of the following recommendations on the Standard Report Form for MA studies:

- (a) The degree be awarded to the candidate
- (b) The degree may be conferred upon the candidate, provided that the revision, in accordance with the recommendations of the examiners, is completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor (i.e., the examiners do not receive the thesis again)
- (c) The degree may be conferred upon the candidate, provided that a material revision is completed to the satisfaction of the examiners, as agreed upon by the examination panel (i.e., the examiners must approve the revisions)
- (d) The degree may not be conferred on the thesis in its current form; the candidate must revise and resubmit the thesis
- (e) The degree may not be conferred upon the candidate and the work may not be resubmitted for examination.

Examiners are given six weeks in which to examine the thesis. The written report and the Standard Report Form with the final mark and recommendation must be submitted electronically to the Postgraduate Examination Office for further processing.

#### **UNDERSTANDING THE VARIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS RECOMMENDATION (A) OR (B)**

If the examiners award a pass mark (50% or more) and recommend options (a) or (b), students will be required to complete the revisions in accordance with the examiners' recommendations to the satisfaction of their supervisor. If the revisions are completed and the thesis is uploaded on SUNScholar by the given deadline date, then they will be able to graduate at the following graduation ceremony.

In other words, if a Master's student submits their thesis for examination in September (for December graduation) and the examiners award the study 50% or more and recommend options (a) or (b), then the student must complete the revisions to the satisfaction of their supervisor and upload their thesis on SUNScholar by the deadline in



order to be eligible for December graduation.

#### RECOMMENDATION (C)

If the examiners award a pass mark (50% or more) and recommend option (c), students will be required to complete the revisions in accordance with the examiners' recommendations. Students must **highlight the revisions** throughout the revised thesis and also complete the **schedule of revisions template** for examiners in which they explain how each revision was addressed and make reference to the page number of each specific revision in their revised thesis.

Once the supervisor is satisfied with the revised thesis, the student must resubmit (1) the revised thesis, and (2) the completed schedule of revisions form electronically to the Postgraduate Examination Office. The PEO will send the documents back to the examiners, who will review the revisions and select one of the following options on the Standard Report Form for the Resubmission of a Master's Thesis:

- (a) The candidate has satisfactorily revised the thesis in accordance with the recommendations of the examiners during the first round of examination. The degree may now be conferred.
- (b) The candidate has not satisfactorily revised the thesis in accordance with the recommendations of the examiners during the first round of examination. The degree may not be conferred.

If both examiners select option (a) during the second round of examination, then the student must finalise their thesis and upload the final version on SUNScholar. Since the thesis has undergone two rounds of examination, it will not be possible for the student to graduate at their initial intended graduation ceremony. In other words, if a Master's student submits their thesis for examination in September (for December graduation) and the examiners award the study 50% or more and recommend option (c), then the student will only be eligible for graduation at the March/April ceremony, at the earliest. Similarly, if a Master's student submits their thesis for examination in November (for

March/April graduation) and the examiners award the study 50% or more and recommend option (c), then the student will only be eligible for graduation at the next December ceremony. While this would require an additional year of registration, the Faculty will grant the student a tuition fee waiver by means of a request from the supervisor via the departmental chairperson in which the student is registered to the Dean.

If both examiners select option (b) during the second round of examination, then the student will not have another opportunity to resubmit their thesis and they will not pass their degree. If the examiners are unable to reach consensus during the second round of examination, then a dispute will be called [see section 3.3 below for more information].

Examiners are given four weeks in which to review the revised thesis. The written report and the Standard Report Form for the Resubmission of a Master's thesis with the recommendation are submitted electronically to the Postgraduate Examination Office for further processing.

#### RECOMMENDATION (D)

If the examiners recommend option (d) then they are of the opinion that the thesis cannot pass in its current form and that the candidate must make substantial revisions before they resubmit their thesis for examination. In such cases, an additional year of registration is required in order to revise the thesis accordingly. Once the supervisor is satisfied with the revised thesis, the student must resubmit their thesis and all supporting documentation to the PEO as required during the first submission.

The revised thesis is examined by the same examiners as during the first round of examination. If the examiners pass the study during the second round of examination, then the student will be awarded 50% for their thesis. If the examiners do not pass the study during the second round of examination, then the student will not pass their degree. If the examiners are unable to reach consensus during the second round of examination, then a dispute will be called [see section 3.3 below for more information].

#### RECOMMENDATION (E)

If the examiners recommend option (e) then they are of the opinion that no amount of revision would enable the study to meet the minimum requirements and thus the work may not be resubmitted for examination. The student will not pass their degree.

### **3.3 MANAGEMENT OF MA EXAMINATION RESULTS**

The examiners' written reports and Standard Report forms are submitted directly to the Postgraduate Examination Office (PEO). Once all the reports are received and collated, the PEO sends the following documents electronically to the chairperson of the department in which the Master's student is registered: (1) written reports of both examiners; (2) Standard Report form of both examiners; and (3) the Supervisor's report.

#### **COMPOSITION OF DEPARTMENTAL EXAMINATION PANEL**

The departmental chair convenes an examination panel consisting of themselves and the internal examiner. If the departmental chair is either the supervisor, co-supervisor or internal examiner of the thesis, a senior member of the department or of a related department must act as chair of the panel. The supervisor (and co-supervisor) is invited to attend the meeting of the panel to provide information about the thesis but takes no part in deciding the result.

#### **ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENTAL EXAMINATION PANEL**

The primary function of the examination panel is to review the examiners' reports and to decide on the final mark to be awarded. The written report by the supervisor may also be taken into account.

#### **1. NO SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE IN MARKS**

Where there is no substantial difference between the marks awarded by the external and internal examiners (i.e., less than 15% difference and no category difference: pass / fail or distinction / no distinction), the examination panel must consider the reports by the examiners and supervisor and reach consensus on a final mark. This is usually the average of both marks awarded.

Once consensus is reached, it is the responsibility of the chair of the examination panel to inform the candidate of the final mark and recommendation by the examination panel (i.e., revisions required to the satisfaction of the supervisor or revisions to the satisfaction of the examiners) and subsequent timeline for revisions. Master's students will be informed of the final mark awarded only. Under no circumstances may the Standard Report forms and/or individual marks of the examiners be disclosed to a student.

The chair of the examination panel must also complete the Departmental Examination Panel report form (provided by the Postgraduate Examination Office). It is important that the original marks awarded by the examiners be reported, followed by a description of how the final mark was reached. The chair must also address any discrepancies in examiners' reports and explain the considerations and consultative processes which eventually led to consensus.

## **2. SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE IN MARKS**

Where there is a substantial difference between the marks of the external and internal examiners, the chair invites a senior faculty member from another department to participate in the examination panel, who serves as an independent observer. The chair enters into a discussion with the external and internal examiners in an attempt to reach a consensus on the final mark.

A "substantial difference" may be: (i) a difference of 15% or more between the marks; (ii) where the examiners disagree as to whether or not the thesis should be passed; and (iii) where the examiners differ on whether or not a distinction should be awarded to the candidate. At no time should pressure be placed on examiners to change their views. If consensus can be reached by the expanded examination panel despite the substantial difference, then the chair must follow the same procedure outlined above. Where no consensus can be reached, the chair of the examination panel must inform the student and oversee the appointment of an independent assessor.

A dispute may only be declared by the examination panel where consensus cannot be reached and not on request by

supervisors and / or students.

### **2.1 APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR**

An independent assessor must be a senior academic from another institution in the discipline in question and be an expert in the specific area/ field/topic raised by the thesis.

An independent assessor is appointed by the chair of the examination panel in consultation with the supervisor on an ad hoc basis for each dispute case. A written justification for the appointment of the specific assessor (i.e., the completed Departmental Examination Panel report form) as well as a **Nomination of MA assessor form** must be submitted to the Principal Faculty Administrative Officer as part of the documentation for the assessor's nomination and appointment. These documents must also be sent to the Postgraduate Examination Office.

The nomination of all independent assessors must be approved by the Faculty's Higher Degrees and Research Committee, Faculty Board and Senate. The independent assessor is paid 1.5 times the remuneration of an external examiner and payment is arranged by the Postgraduate Examination Office upon finalization of the examination process.

### **2.2 ROLE OF AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSOR**

The instruction to the independent assessor is, in all cases, to take into account the anonymous reports of the examiners and supervisor(s) and the thesis itself in their evaluation, and to come to a decision with regard to the specific dispute and award a final mark.

The Postgraduate Examination Office (PEO) is responsible for sending the thesis, the examiners and supervisor's reports and any other necessary documentation to the independent assessor electronically.

The assessor has six weeks to assess the thesis and documentation and is required to submit a written report to the PEO substantiating their decision. The PEO then

sends the assessor's report to the chair of the departmental examination panel. The decision / recommendation of and final mark awarded by the independent assessor is binding and final. In other words, should the independent assessor award a final mark below 50%, the student will fail and not be permitted to resubmit the study for examination. There is no further appeals process.

### **3.4 FINALISATION OF A MASTER'S STUDY**

Once the departmental examination panel process has been completed, the chair makes the reports of the examiners (and assessor, if required), with the examination results, together with other relevant documents considered by the examination panel, available to the supervisor. It is the supervisor's responsibility to inform the candidate of the requirements of the examiners and examination panel (and possibly, assessor), either for finalising the thesis or revising the work for further examination.

#### **COMMUNICATION WITH THE STUDENT**

It is the responsibility of the chair of the examination panel to inform the candidate of the final mark and recommendation by the examination panel (i.e., revisions required to the satisfaction of the supervisor or revisions to the satisfaction of the examiners) and subsequent timeline for revisions. Master's students will be informed of the final mark awarded only. Under no circumstances may the Standard Report forms and/or individual marks of the examiners be disclosed to a student.

Students may receive the examiners' written reports, or parts thereof, if such permission was expressly granted by the examiners. The reports of the examiners are to be treated confidentially and their names disclosed only with their express permission. Only those parts of the reports (unless the examiner has given express permission for the whole to be passed on) which are relevant for the candidate to make the required changes may be passed on to the candidate. It is the supervisor's responsibility to make the necessary digest of the report.

### **COMPLETION OF REVISIONS AND FINAL UPLOAD**

Once the revisions have been completed, supervisors should report to the chair of the examinations panel to inform them of the completion of all revisions and corrections indicated by the examiners (and assessor, if required). This process must take place before supervisors sign the work off to be uploaded onto **SUNScholar**. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the final version of their thesis is uploaded on the SU Library system before or on the given deadline date for graduation.

The department is responsible for loading the final mark for the examination into the administrative system of the University before the given deadline for a graduation ceremony.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

The University encourages higher degree students to publish their research as accredited articles, and to present the results of their research at academic fora. Students must mention their association with the University explicitly in these publications, otherwise the University forfeits its claim to subsidy on them.

Supervisors and Master's students should refer to the Agreement between supervisors and higher degree students with regards to co-publication of work that stems from Master's research.

## IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS AND RESOURCES

### **Postgraduate Examination Office**

Nicky Steenstra: [nicky@sun.ac.za](mailto:nicky@sun.ac.za)

### **Principal Faculty Administrative Officer**

Division of the Registrar

Cheryl Richardson: [cherylr@sun.ac.za](mailto:cherylr@sun.ac.za)

**HDRC documentation:** Faculty policy documents and forms (for higher degree students and supervisors).

**Ethical clearance:** Information, documentation, meeting dates and online application.

**SUNScholar:** Information relating to the formatting and final submission of examined Master's theses.

**Postgraduate skills development:** Information about a range of workshops and support to help postgraduate students hone their research and thesis writing skills – free of charge. The aim of the programme is to provide SU postgraduates with additional research-related tools, skills and strategies (over and above what they receive from their academic department) to ensure that they finish their degrees in good time.

**Institutional research-related policy documents:** Guidelines for responsible research conduct and plagiarism regulations.

**Institutional postgraduate studies guide:** Overview of important topics relating to the practicalities of postgraduate studies and research at SU.