15 April 2020

Dear PhD Candidate

Examination and graduation in the time of Covid-19

Now that you have submitted your thesis for examination you have reached a significant milestone. We know that waiting for the outcome of the examination is an anxious time for any PhD candidate even under the best circumstances, and that the current lockdown in South Africa and elsewhere in the world may raise additional concerns while you wait. The purpose of this note is thus to explain how we are managing the examination process during lockdown, and what you can expect.

All examination of PhD theses is done electronically using PeopleSoft ‘graduate research management’ and email. This means that we can continue to receive your uploaded submissions. Once the examiners have been nominated by your Faculty and approved by the DDB, the thesis is sent to the examiners.

We have noticed however, that more examiners than usual are asking for an extension of the usual 6 weeks they have to examine. This is understandable given the extraordinary pressures academics all over the world are facing as they move their taught classes from contact to online mode. There may thus be a delay in the return of the reports from some examiners: it is unavoidable and we ask you indulgence in waiting a bit longer if one of your examiners needs an extension.

The DDB, Faculty Offices and Faculty Committees of Assessors continue to operate remotely online. The officers in the DDB are in regular contact with the examiners and monitoring progress. We continue to prioritise the finalisation of results once the reports are in. Committees of Assessors and the DDB ‘meet’ remotely and you will receive feedback as soon as a decision is made.

The PhD graduation ceremony scheduled for 10 July 2020 has been suspended as travel restrictions are still expected to be in force in July. PhD qualifiers who would have graduated in July will instead be graduating in mid-December 2020. (The dates are still to be approved by Council, but we will inform you once they’re approved.) As usual, all PhD and master’s students who are qualifiers by 31 October 2020 (i.e. results posted on system), will also graduate at the mid-December ceremonies. Students whose results are available after 31 October 2020, will be graduating in the autumn 2021 graduation.

Stay in touch with your supervisors if you have concerns, and stay safe wherever you are. We look forward to seeing you at graduation.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karen van Heerden
Deputy Registrar: Academic Administration