

University of Cape Town



GUIDELINES FOR THE EXAMINATION OF A PhD THESIS

Doctoral Degrees Board

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is a research degree, undertaken under supervision for a minimum two year registration period, although most frequently three to five years. Normally, the candidate has previously been admitted to and completed a master's degree, although there are exceptions. The PhD degree is awarded solely on the basis of the thesis (*Refer to Rule GP5.1*).

The prospective candidate's application (which must include a satisfactory research proposal) is subject to the approval of the Doctoral Degrees Board (DDB) (*Refer to Rule GP4*).

The University requires that the thesis must constitute a substantial contribution to knowledge in the chosen subject and may embody only the original work of the candidate with such acknowledged extracts from the work of others as may be pertinent (*Refer to Rule GP6.3*).

The thesis may incorporate creative work integral to the overall argument. Creative components of this nature must have been accepted by the DDB at the time of considering the candidate's proposal.

Candidates may elect to submit a PhD with the inclusion of published material (authored or co-authored by the candidate) with the prior written approval of the Doctoral Degrees Board (*Refer to Rule GP6.7*).

A candidate is not debarred from submitting their thesis for examination if their supervisor does not support the submission of the thesis (*Refer to Rule GP5.2*).

A. EXTRACTS FROM THE RULES FOR THE PhD DEGREE

(a) General

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy is awarded on the basis of supervised research (*Refer to Rule GP5.1*).

(b) Presentation and style of thesis

Literary and other data presentation must be satisfactory (*Refer to Rule GP6.5*).

A PhD thesis may not be more than 80 000 words in length. A PhD thesis incorporating creative work may not be less than 40 000 words. In certain cases the Dean may give a dispensation to this rule (*Refer to Rule GP6.8*).

For theses incorporating creative work, the creative component must lend itself, in principle, to examination, and to revision and re-submission. Where the thesis incorporates a creative component, this must be integral to the thesis and the thesis must be coherent (*Refer to Rule GP6.3*).

Where a thesis includes material that has been published or prepared for publication, the thesis must nonetheless show acceptable academic style, scholarly content and coherence as a connected account

with a satisfactory introduction (normally including a significant literature review in addition to such literature review as may be included in the published material), statement of thesis and conclusion (which includes discussion of the work as a whole). It should be made obvious to the reader, how including the publications assists in fulfilling the thesis (*Refer to Rule GP6.7*).

(c) Content

The text of the thesis must be prefaced by an abstract indicating the way in which it contributes to knowledge (*Refer to Rule GP6.4*).

A candidate may, subject to the prior written approval of the supervisor, publish a part or whole of the work done under supervision for the degree before presenting the thesis for examination (*Refer to Rule GP7*).

In presenting a thesis, a candidate shall declare the extent to which the thesis represents their work, both in concept and execution.

Where multi-authored published material is included, the contribution of the candidate should be distinguished and clearly stated. It must be apparent to what degree the candidate was involved in the published studies, in order to establish that the candidate demonstrates sufficient intellectual input to qualify for the degree as stated in section “B”, below (*Refer to Rule GP6.7*).

B. THE PHD THESIS AS A CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Examiners should be guided by the requirement that the thesis must make a substantial contribution to knowledge of the subject, and afford evidence of independent critical ability in the handling and interpretation of material either known or newly discovered (*Refer to Rule GP6.3*).

C. ABSTRACT

An abstract is sent to the examiners for their information, together with a letter of invitation to examine (*Refer to Rule GP6.4*).

D. EXAMINERS

A minimum of three examiners are appointed, all external to the University of Cape Town. ‘External’ means there can be no significant or formal association between an examiner and UCT including current or recent employment at the University in teaching and/or research in a full time, part time or honorary capacity; or through direct involvement with the thesis, the research for the thesis, or the student.

All examiners should be of high international standing with relevant and significant academic experience. Normally at least two should be international (i.e. outside South Africa). Normally two examiners from the same institution should not be appointed. In exceptional cases, no more than one examiner may be appointed who does not have a PhD themselves, in which case the supervisor must provide a strong motivation, which includes evidence of international standing and expertise. The supervisor(s) is/are excluded from examining.

All examiners should have appropriate expertise in a field closely related to the thesis topic. In the case of multi-, trans- and inter-disciplinary work, the Faculty Doctoral Committee of Assessors (DCoA) must satisfy itself that an appropriate mix of examiners in those disciplines will be capable of examining all aspects of the thesis.

Examiners who have a clear conflict of interest should not be nominated.

An examiner should preferably not have had prior contact with the candidate's work. Where there has been prior contact between a candidate and an examiner nominated by a DCoA, this must be reported by the DCoA to the DDB. The nomination of examiners should not be discussed with or disclosed to the candidate, and there may be no contact between examiners and the candidate while the thesis remains under examination.¹

Supervisors may contact prospective examiners to ask if they are available for nomination, and to establish that no conflict of interest exists. This should be done in consultation with the HoD. It is advisable that the supervisor contacts the prospective examiners before nominating them for appointment, as this avoids delays later on. Provided that three examiners have agreed to examine, only three names need be submitted. A supervisor may nominate up to two alternate examiners, if they wish to do so.

E. COMMITTEE OF ASSESSORS (DCoA)

Each Faculty has a Doctoral COA (DCoA). This body consists of permanent core members, who have proven experience as supervisors and examiners, the Dean, the Head of the relevant Department and, if required, one or two members with experience in the subject area of the thesis. The supervisor is a non-voting member. The role of the DCoA is to interpret the examiners' reports and not to act as examiners themselves.

F. EXAMINER'S REPORT ON THE THESIS

Examiners are requested:

1. To submit electronically a detailed report on the thesis. The report is an essential part of the examination process since it explains the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, and should be consistent with and provide detailed supporting evidence for the summary recommendation (2 below).
2. To complete the recommendation form by marking one of the following options:

Option	Examiner Recommendation
i	The candidate should be awarded the degree and <i>no further corrections</i> to the thesis are required.
ii	<p>The candidate should be awarded the degree <i>subject to the required corrections</i>. The corrections required are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either <i>Trivial/ Typographical</i> • Or <i>Typographical and more substantial, specified changes.</i> <p><i>My suggestions are indicated in my report. These corrections do not alter the substance of the thesis in any fundamental manner and therefore major reworking or reinterpretation of the intellectual content of the thesis is not required.</i></p>
iii	<p>The candidate should not be awarded the degree but should be invited to address my substantive concerns and <i>to revise and resubmit</i> the thesis for re-examination.</p> <p>In this case:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either <i>I am prepared to re-examine.</i> • Or <i>I am not prepared to re-examine</i>

¹ An exception is made in the case of a joint degree where the partner institution requires the candidate to know the identity of their examiners, for example in a viva voce process

G. PROCEDURE ON RECEIPT OF EXAMINERS' REPORTS

When the examiners' reports on a candidate's thesis are submitted to the relevant DCoA for consideration and recommendation to the DDB, the DCoA should interrogate each report and make every effort to reach a recommendation.

The DCoA must recognise that on receiving the DDB's recommendation the candidate is required to address (by correction or rebuttal) all comments and criticisms of all three examiners.

If, in applying their minds, the DCoA cannot reach consensus or needs advice on an appropriate recommendation, they may co-opt up to two additional subject experts (non-voting) to the DCoA to assist them.

Reports of the DCoA should be sufficiently comprehensive to convey to the DDB the reasons for their recommendation.

In cases of significant disagreement amongst examiners, the report of the DCoA shall include a formal record of its decision conveying their reasons for their recommendation.

If the reason for the DCoA's failure to reach consensus, after following the process and deliberation as outlined in the above paragraphs, relates to suspected bias by a dissenting examiner or to an examiner's report being insufficiently justified, the DCoA may recommend that the report be set aside and a fourth examiner appointed. Alternatively, if the reason for the DCoA's failure to reach consensus, after following the process and deliberation as outlined in the above paragraphs, relates to different assessments reflected in or outcomes proposed in well justified examiners' reports, the DCoA may recommend the appointment of an external assessor. The task of the external assessor is to read the thesis (or relevant parts thereof) together with all examiners' reports (without examiners' names) and advise the DCoA on the respective merits of the examiners' reports, their recommendations and any other aspect/s specifically requested by the DCoA.

A candidate may be required to present themselves for an oral examination in exceptional circumstances, following the approval of the Doctoral Degrees Board.

No hint of the result or of examiners' names should be given to candidates until the DDB has taken a final decision on the result.

H. REPORT TO CANDIDATES AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF EXAMINERS' REPORTS

When the examination has been completed and the DDB has decided whether or not to award the degree, it is the University's practice to make the contents of the examiners' reports available in full to the candidate. However, discretion to vary this practice rests with the Board.

If the decision of the DDB is to award the degree, it is also the University's normal practice to disclose the names of the examiners to the candidate when the result of the examination is known, on condition that the examiners agree to this being done.

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