



Your PhD Studies – Getting Started

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“If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.”

- Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

YOUR PHD STUDIES – GETTING STARTED

- Background
- Some common problems experienced by postgraduate students
- Tips
- Postgraduate Toolkit on CD

BACKGROUND

ASSAf report (2010):

- In 2007 SA produced 1274 PhD graduates or 26 per million of population
 - (Decreased to 1182 in 2008)
 - Compared to:
 - Australia: 264 per million
 - Portugal: 569 per million
 - (Brazil: 42 per million)
- Thus a critical need to increase the number of postgraduate students;

BACKGROUND

- Ramani and Malema (Mail & Guardian, 12-19 April 2012, p. 41) cite a CHE (2007) report:
 - More female than male postgraduate students, but only 42% of PhD graduates are women;
 - Women publish between 14-37% of papers;
 - Only a third of NRF-rated researchers are women;
 - 43% of permanent academic staff at universities are women, but only 24% are at the Professor/ Associate Professor level;
 - Only 40% of Senior Lecturers are women

BACKGROUND

- Recent National Development Plan (2011):
 - “Increase the numbers of African and woman postgraduates, especially PhDs, to improve research and innovation capacity. This will help to accelerate the transformation of South Africa’s scientific and academic communities to better reflect the population”
 - “Produce more than 100 doctoral graduates per million per year by 2030”
 - “Increase the percentage of PhD qualified staff within the higher education sector from the current 34 percent level to over 75 percent over 20 years”

BACKGROUND

- National Research Foundation's mission statement (Vision 2015 document):
 - “To contribute to the knowledge economy in South Africa by attaining at least 1% of global research and development (R&D) output by 2015”
 - Recently changed to 0.5%

BACKGROUND

- Long-term target is to increase the number of PhD graduates from 1200 in 2005 to 6000 by 2025 (SA PhD Project)
- **BUT:** “ ‘The number of students enrolling for research Master’s degrees has declined steadily since 2004, as did the number of graduates since 2005’. As the pool of potential doctoral candidates decreases, it will take a special effort to produce 6000 graduates per year.” (CHE, 2009 cited in SA PhD Project Partnership Guide)

BACKGROUND

- Council for Scientific and Industrial Research's (2010/ 11) annual report:
 - Increased focus on six Research Impact Areas;
 - Mandate of the CSIR – research to improve the quality of life of people of South Africa

BACKGROUND

- So, your PhD has implications for a number of stakeholders and is important for other people, not just yourself....

SOME COMMON PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

- Student-supervisor relationship: made more complex by diversity issues
- Institutional issues (e.g. inadequate support/ postgraduate development initiatives)
- Funding and/ or other resources
- Time management
- “I don’t know how to do this [literature review, writing thesis etc.....]”
- Stress management
- Reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities?
- Studies/ family/ work/ personal time
- Health problems, risky behaviour
- Etc....

SOME TIPS

- **Career management plan:**
 - Personal and Professional Development Contract (PDC)
- By completing the PDC, identify your **learning and development needs** and develop strategies to address these
- Make use of **support services** offered by university (e.g. counselling, postgrad workshops)
- **Structured relationship** with supervisor:
 - Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations
 - Regular meetings
 - Write up your thesis as you go along and get feedback from your supervisor & others

SOME TIPS

- If there is a **problem between you and your supervisor**:
 - Meeting
 - Senior member of staff/ HoD?
 - Grievance procedure?
 - Ombud?
 - Changing supervisors?
- Try to **publish** as much as you can during your degree:
 - Gives greater credibility to thesis
 - NB to clarify authorship
- **Healthy living** (e.g. diet, exercise, sleep), optimal management of chronic conditions and pharmacotherapy
- Work consistently and have a **project management approach** to your studies – plan, plan, plan!

POSTGRADUATE TOOLKIT ON CD

- Chapter 1: How to write a research proposal
- Chapter 2: How to write a grant application or funding proposal
- Chapter 3: An overview of research design and methodology
- Chapter 4: Guidelines on how to write a thesis and research report
- Chapter 5: How to write and publish an academic paper
- Chapter 6: Tips for oral and poster presentations on your research
- Chapter 7: Key project management principles in research
- Chapter 8: Some self-empowerment tools and support systems for postgraduate success
- Chapter 9: The student, supervisor and university – enhancing postgraduate supervision
- Chapter 10: Your personal and professional development contract (PDC)

SERVICES OFFERED

- Workshops:
 - Grant application writing
 - Research proposal writing
 - Research design and methodology
 - Thesis writing
 - Academic writing and publishing
 - Mentorship in the research context
- Support services to students: feedback on and editing of assignments, research proposals, theses etc.
- Lecturing and examination services
- Guest speaker/ motivational speaker

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH & GOOD LUCK!

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