

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Stellenbosch University

PhD GUIDELINES

1. Introduction

This document provides broad guidelines on the procedures that the departments/schools/centres should follow to manage their PhD students' affairs.

It is important that Departmental Chairs, Directors, and supervisors take note of the University's guidelines on the PhD process as captured in the Yearbook/Calendar (Part 1) on matters such as:

- Awarding of degree
- Thesis requirements
- Fees payable
- Publication of thesis
- Sensitive theses
- Code of conduct: supervisor(s) and student
- Continuing registrations after residential period
- Guidelines on interruption of doctoral studies
- Failure to register

Where departmental and faculty procedures vary, the yearbook takes precedent in case of uncertainty or dispute.

2. Application and Admission

A prospective PhD student will usually informally approach a lecturer or departmental chair/director for information about the degree. The next step is for the prospective student to submit a written initial study concept note to the departmental chairperson/director. The departmental chairperson/director will then evaluate whether the proposed topic/title falls within the department/school/centre's broad subject domain and also whether staff with the required expertise and experience will be available to supervise the student. It is however recommended that prospective students first discuss their initial PhD proposal with academics in the relevant field of study. When a student approaches a potential supervisor, the lecturer will discuss the proposal with the departmental chairperson/director informally, or, if the latter was approached first, the student will be referred to a lecturer who has appropriate knowledge of the subject for an assessment of the proposal and an exploratory discussion.

The provisional supervisor may at this stage draft a letter to the library to arrange access for the student to the required resources in order to prepare his/her research proposal.

After an initial proposal has been submitted and both the departmental chairperson/director and the supervisor involved are of the opinion that the student's planned study is feasible and could possibly represent a valuable contribution to the creation of new knowledge, the student is requested to start working with the supervisor on the drafting of a formal and comprehensive research proposal.

One of the supervisors has to occupy a permanent position at Stellenbosch University (SU). An emeritus professor will, for the purposes of supervision, not be regarded a permanent employee but may serve as a supervisor or co-supervisor. Supervisors may be appointed from outside the University, in which case another supervisor needs to be appointed from within SU. Individuals with extraordinary appointments may be considered as supervisors but have to be appointed in conjunction with a permanent academic staff member as supervisor or co-supervisor. In all cases the relationship will be by mutual consent and the appointment is made by the Faculty Board on recommendation of the departmental chairperson/director and the Higher Degrees and Research Committee.

In cases where the prospective student does not meet the admission requirements of the programme but does have relevant work experience and/or other academic merit, the department/school/centre may request the student to submit a portfolio of evidence to the department/school/centre's RPL/CAT (Recognition of Prior Learning/Credit Accumulation and Transfer) Committee for consideration. The prospective student may also be requested to complete additional academic modules (e.g., a research methodology module) before the application can be considered.

Once the research proposal has been approved by the supervisor the departmental chairperson/director is required to appoint an Admissions Committee to evaluate the comprehensive research proposal and determine whether the proposed study will meet the requirements of a PhD degree. At least five days prior to the Admission Committee meeting, all members of this committee should have received a written research proposal. The members of this Admission Committee will usually include at least two academics from the relevant field of study. One of the committee members will be deemed an independent panel member and has to be from outside the relevant department/school/centre and preferably from outside the University.

The Admissions Committee has to evaluate and consider the following four issues:

- Would the proposal lead to a successful PhD study?
- Is the study expected to make a sufficient original subject contribution?
- Is the candidate capable of completing the study successfully?
- Who could possibly act as supervisor and is it perhaps necessary to appoint one or more co-supervisors?

The general requirements that study proposals and PhD studies have to comply with are provided by the department/school/centre and are also to be found in the Yearbook/Calendar (Part 1) of the University.

Should the research proposal be approved by the Admission Committee, the departmental chairperson/director sends the completed PhD admission form to the secretary of the Higher Degrees and Research Committee for recommendation to the Faculty Board that the student be admitted to the PhD programme. The application and endorsement by the Faculty Board form part of the Faculty's communicate to Senate.

Should the Admissions Committee or department/school/centre's research committee and/or supervisor be of the opinion that the proposed study could possibly have ethical implications, the proposal will also have to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of Sub-Committee A (Research Committee) for evaluation.

3. Enrolment period for PhD Studies

A student may be enrolled as a PhD student for a period of three years. If the student has not completed the study during the three-year period or had not shown sufficient progress by the fourth year, he/she will then receive a letter from the supervisor/department/school/centre to inform the student that his/her

studies will be terminated unless he/she hands in the thesis by a certain date. (The date is to be determined in cooperation with, and permission of the department/school/centre where the student is registered.)

4. Duties and responsibilities of the supervisor

After the Faculty Board has approved the admission of the prospective student, the supervisor is responsible for:

- 4.1. the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the supervisor(s) and the student;
- 4.2. ongoing supervision and regular feedback;
- 4.3. correspondence about and monitoring of the progress of the study;
- 4.4. managing the research process in accordance with the University's policy on intellectual property;
- 4.5. maintaining a record of communication with the student;
- 4.6. granting permission to submit copies of the thesis to the faculty examination office for examination.

5. Examination process

5.1 Close to submitting?

If a student is planning to submit in a given year, the student should complete the *Notice of intention to submit PhD dissertation for examination form* and send it to the GEM Office by either **end of March** (if aiming for the December graduation ceremony of the same year) or **end of June** (if aiming for the March/April graduation ceremony the following year). This form primarily assists managing logistics around the dissertation submission. It helps the GEM Office to ensure that examiners are appointed in a timely manner and that their availability is confirmed. Please note that completing this form is non-binding; a student is not obliged to submit in the indicated year if unforeseen circumstances arise. In such cases, students can inform the GEM Office via email to revise the intended submission date to the next available deadline or resubmit the form should the submission stand over to the next academic year. However, failure to complete this form may result in delays in the administrative process, which could delay submission to the examiners and the process as a whole.

5.2 Nomination of examiners

It is the responsibility of the supervisory team to nominate examiners for their students. The examination panel must consist of at least three independent examiners who have not been involved in conceptualising or preparing the dissertation. The default is that external examiners must not have, or have had, any personal or professional relationship with the student or supervisor(s). Should there be a possible conflict of interest for the supervisor(s), please declare it in the nomination for examiners form for consideration by the respective committees. Precise conditions are stipulated below. A minimum of three examiners is required for each student. Supervisors are encouraged to nominate international examiners to enhance the global recognition of the student's work. While one examiner may be internal (from Stellenbosch University), supervisors are strongly encouraged to select three examiners from outside the university, and ideally from outside South Africa.

Below is a table indicating each appointment that can be held at SU, and whether a person appointed in that position may examine either internally or externally.

	Internal Examiner	External Examiner
Permanent staff	YES (unattached)	NO (YES, after a minimum of 2 years after leaving SU service)
Long-term Fixed Term Contract (>2 years)	YES (unattached)	NO (YES, after a minimum of 2 years after leaving SU service)
Short-term Fixed Term Contract (<2 years)	YES (unattached)	NO (YES, after a minimum of 2 years after leaving SU service)
Extraordinary staff	YES (unattached)	NO
Research fellow	YES (unattached)	NO
Postdocs	YES (unattached)	NO
PhD student	NO	NO

The following considerations are applied to the appointment of examiners:

- qualifications (at least a PhD);
- adequate knowledge of the study field and topic;
- national or international stature;
- appropriate practical experience;
- availability;
- academic orientation (especially in the case of external examiners who do not hold an academic position);
- deliberate strategy to prevent over utilisation of the same (internal and external) examiners within a particular environment; and
- the absence of any formal academic, professional or personal relationship between the student and the examiner (i.e., independence).

The appointment of a PhD examiner that has had a previous academic relationship with a supervisor (as evident in joint publications, co-authorship of books, research collaboration, etc.) can only be considered in exceptional circumstances. However, this exception can be considered if a period of at least five years has passed after which interaction or collaboration has ceased, or if there is a demonstrated indication that the relationship was not elaborate ('arm's length collaboration'). It is expected that such an application will be the exception rather than the rule. Such applications will be accompanied by evidence of efforts to find suitable alternative examiners.

The supervisor(s), in consultation with the environment's postgraduate administrator, submits the details of possible examiners to the secretary of the Higher Degrees and Research Committee (HDRC) by the closing date of the agenda for the next meeting of the HDRC. To this end, a *PhD nomination of examiners for doctoral students form* has to be completed. This form must contain the accurate contact details of all the examiners (contact details including e-mail and telephone numbers) and a detailed justification for the recommendation of the proposed examiners, including copies of their CV's. The nominations will serve on the HDRC for further recommendation to Faculty Board.

5.3 Joint PhD degrees

Should a student be enrolled for a joint PhD degree between SU and another international partner university (contained on the [list](#) published by SU International), the joint agreement between the universities should form the primary guideline for the PhD study, PhD administration, as well as the PhD examination process, and further supplemented further by the SU Rules and Faculty Guidelines.

It is important to note that should the process follow the examination process mainly of the partner university, that the results (i.e. documentation) must still serve on the EMS HDRC, EMS Faculty Board and Senate for ratification from Stellenbosch University's side.

5.4 Submission deadlines

PhD students are permitted to submit their dissertation at any point throughout the academic year, keeping in mind the University's closing times and holidays. The deadlines outlined below represent the latest possible submission dates to ensure that the examination process can be realistically completed on time for the intended graduation ceremony, assuming all steps proceed smoothly. These dates are designed to provide a clear timeline for those targeting specific graduation periods.

Should a student aim to graduate in **December**, the following dates apply:

Intention to submit (submit to GEM)	End of March of same year
Last opportunity to appoint examiners (submit to HDRC)	April HDRC agenda deadline of same year
Submission of PhD dissertation and supporting documentation (submit to GEM)	31 July of the same year
Oral examination	Between late September and beginning of October
Should the examiners recommend no further revisions, or revisions completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor (category A/B), your dissertation should be finalised and uploaded on the Thesis Management system by (submit via SUNStudent)	<i>Consult the SU Library's website for deadline date, but it is normally about 3 weeks before graduation week.</i>

Should a student aim to graduate in **March/April the following year**, here are the deadline dates:

Intention to submit (submit to GEM)	End June
Last opportunity to appoint examiners (submit to HDRC)	July HDRC agenda deadline
Submission of PhD dissertation and supporting documentation (submit to GEM)	30 September
Oral examination	Between end November and beginning of December
Should the examiners recommend no further revisions, or revisions completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor (category A/B), your dissertation should be finalised and uploaded on the Thesis Management system by (submit via SUNStudent)	<i>Consult the SU Library's website for deadline date, but it is normally about 3 weeks before the March graduation week.</i>

Please note that the dates are **guidelines**. Adhering to these dates does not guarantee participation in the intended graduation ceremony if unforeseen circumstances in the examination process arise.

5.5 Permission to submit for examination

In line with best practices, students are required to obtain formal approval from their supervisors before submitting their dissertations for examination. This ensures that the supervisor has reviewed the work thoroughly and is satisfied that it meets necessary academic standards. To facilitate this process, the environment's postgraduate custodian (EPC), the programme administrator (EPA), or one of the supervisors (who ensures there is consent from the supervisory team), must submit the final version of the dissertation and the supporting documents via email to the GEM Office (Tanja Malan; tanja@sun.ac.za). Submissions received directly from students will not be accepted. Should the dissertation be sent by the EPC or EPA (i.e. not the supervisor(s)), a letter/email must accompany the submission that the supervisory team gives their consent that the dissertation is ready for examination.

5.6 Submitting without the consent of the supervisor(s)

In the **exceptional** circumstance of a student being unable to obtain the permission required for submission, a student may motivate to the Chair of the HDRC for permission to submit their dissertation for examination against the advice and without the permission of their supervisor(s). The motivation of the student will serve on the HDRC for approval. Should the HDRC find sufficient reason in the student's motivation, the HDRC must establish an independent panel of at least two members to assess the readiness of the dissertation for examination. Should the HDRC find that the student's dissertation is not ready to be submitted for examination, the student must be informed that his/her request has been denied. If denied, the student may only submit their dissertation for examination once the supervisory team has given their consent.

Should the HDRC find that the dissertation is ready to be submitted for examination, then the Chair of the HDRC must:

- a) establish that the student's supervisor(s) is prepared to still act in this capacity. If the supervisor(s) refuse(s), they must do so in writing, agree to the appointment of a new supervisor and confirm that they forfeit any credit for the dissertation if it is successful;
- b) should no suitable replacement supervisor be available, the HOD of the student's home department becomes the supervisor;
- c) have suitably qualified examiners appointed (if these have not already been appointed);
- d) signs off the examination copies (if the supervisor(s) should support examination submission, they may sign off the dissertation instead of the Chair of the HDRC).
- e) inform the unattached non-examining Chairperson that the student's dissertation was submitted for examination against the advice of their supervisor(s).

The student must sign a declaration that he/she submitted the dissertation without the consent of the supervisor(s) and that he/she understands and accepts the risk in the case of failure. This declaration must be part of the examination documentation for submission to GEM. If the supervisor(s) has not been changed, the examiners must not be informed before or during the examination that a student's dissertation was submitted for examination against the advice of the supervisor(s). If the supervisor(s) has changed (as per first bullet point above) after the examiners have been appointed, the examiners must be informed and their availability for the examination under the new supervisor established. In case they are not prepared to continue, new examiners must be nominated.

5.7 Similarity reporting

The final version of the dissertation should be uploaded on one of the Turnitin repositories created on the PhD Forum on EMSLearn. Should a student not have access to the PhD Forum on EMSLearn, please contact the GEM Office.

5.8 Submission process and what is required

When the student has completed their dissertation to the satisfaction of their supervisor(s), the following documentation should be submitted via email¹ to the GEM Office by the supervisory team, EPC, or EPA:

1. final dissertation,
2. ethical clearance letter from either the DESC or the REC,
3. full Turnitin report (which was generated on the EMSLearn PhD Forum),
4. proof of language editing (or exemption thereof), (see par 6.8.1)
5. indication if the dissertation is in monograph format, by publication format, or a combination of the two.

The final dissertation and supporting documents should be sent to the Postgraduate Manager in the GEM Office, Tanja Malan (tanja@sun.ac.za), who handles the examination process. Please note that the dissertation will not be sent out for examination unless all supporting documentation has been received, and all the supervisors have written to give their consent that the dissertation version that was submitted is ready for examination (or followed the process in case of submission without the consent of the supervisor(s)).

Environments may follow their own internal process prior to submission to the GEM office. They may choose if the dissertation is approved by either an internal PhD Committee, or by their HOD. However, it is not a requirement that the HOD evaluates the dissertation.

5.8.1 Language editing

Paragraph 5.8. (item 4) stipulates that the student includes a written declaration by a professional language editor (preferably accredited by a professional body such as The Professional Editors' Guild) to confirm that both the language and technical aspects of the dissertation have been edited. Should the services of an accredited editor not be used, the supervisor has to approve the editor whose services are being used. The Faculty will not provide any funds for this purpose, but environments and/or the supervisor can make a voluntary contribution subject to availability funding. Students must be made aware of this requirement when registering so that they can make provision for such funds.

If a student demonstrates a proficient level of language quality in their dissertation, the requirement for language editing may be waived. Only the supervisor can determine whether the student meets this standard. and may submit a formal email request to the Vice-Dean: Research, Postgraduate Affairs, and Internationalisation prior to the examination process for recordkeeping. When the dissertation is submitted for examination, the supervisory team (or environment's PhD custodian or PhD coordinator) must include the email the supervisor sent to the Vice-Dean: Research, Postgraduate Affairs, and Internationalisation affirming the exemption instead of the declaration by a professional language editor. Should the examiners find that the dissertation should be edited, it will become compulsory for a professional editor to be appointed.

5.9 Examination process

5.9.1 Timeline of process

Once the final dissertation and all supporting documentation have been submitted to the satisfaction of the GEM office the dissertation will be sent to the examiners initiating "week 1" of the examination process. The examiners are given six weeks to complete their individual evaluation of the written dissertation. During this six-week period, the oral examination will be scheduled for either week 8, 9, or 10 of the examination process. Week 7 will be used to distribute the examiners' reports to all examiners, the non-examining chair

¹ Dissertations are sent to examiners electronically. Should an examiner explicitly ask for a hard copy the GEM Office will compile a hard copy pack and courier it to the said examiner.

of the panel, and supervisor(s) for reading and reviewing. The student will also receive the examiner reports, however, it will be anonymised. The student will be given instructions on the next steps only at the end of the oral examination and based on the result.

5.9.2 Communication

The GEM office manages the PhD examination process. Supervisors, students and HODs are prohibited from contacting the examiners before the conclusion of the PhD examination (specifically relating to matters regarding the examination and student's work). Should any pressing issues arise that need to be communicated to the examiners in the interim, please coordinate with the GEM office or the Vice-Dean: Research, Postgraduate Affairs, and Internationalisation. Examiners are also prohibited from contacting the student, the supervisor(s) or the other examiners under any circumstances before the conclusion of the PhD examination process.

5.9.3 Role of the Doctoral Examination Committee

The Doctoral Examination Committee (DEC) (see par 6.2) plays a crucial role in evaluating the student's dissertation and determine the outcome of the examination process. The committee is firstly responsible for conducting individual assessments of the written dissertation. After completing their evaluations, an oral examination is held, during which the examiners collectively discuss the student's work. The committee must reach a unanimous agreement on the examination outcome and provide clear recommendations as stipulated in paragraphs 6.11 and 6.12. The oral examination is facilitated by the non-examining chair of the DEC.

5.9.4 Non-examining chair

The Vice-Dean: Research, Postgraduate Affairs, and Internationalisation will either act as the non-examining chair for PhD oral examinations or appoint a delegated independent full-time Professor or Associate Professor in an EMS academic environment to fill this role. In all cases, the non-examining chair should be unaffiliated with the study and conflicts of interest should be evaluated before their appointment. If the Vice-Dean is serving as a supervisor or examiner, or has other conflicts of interest, the Dean will either act as, or oversee the appointment of an appropriate chair.

5.10 Examination criteria

5.10.1 Independent assessment by each examiner

During the first part of the examination process, examiners are required to independently report on the following criteria:

- Does the dissertation constitute a definite contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the subject chosen?
- Does it show originality?
- Does the dissertation present:
 - adequate knowledge of the relevant literature?
 - adequate control and detailed description of the relevant research methodology?
 - a material and logical exposition of the argument that is clear and systematic?
 - proper documentation, reporting, and correct interpretation of the research results?
 - acceptable use of language and stylistics?
- Does the study conform to recognised ethical standards?

Examiners are required to submit a written report providing an independent evaluation of the dissertation based on the general assessment criteria outlined above. It is expected that examiners refer extensively to these criteria in their report, offering a clear assessment of how the students satisfy the requirements. Additionally, each examiner must comment on the suitability of the dissertation as a whole. **Examiners should preferably address aspects of the dissertation not covered by the provided criteria to strengthen the quality of the research.**

The examiners' written reports serve as the initial evaluation tool in determining student's doctoral work. Examiners must also indicate if (and to what extent) their reports can be shared with the student.

In addition to the written report, each examiner is also required to select one of the following recommendations on the *Standard Report Form for Examiners*:

- A** - The degree be awarded to the student without corrections.
- B** - The degree may be awarded provided that revisions requested are completed to the satisfaction of the supervisor and endorsed by the Higher Degrees and Research Committee.
- C** - The degree may be awarded provided that revisions are completed to the satisfaction of myself as examiner.
- D** - The degree may not be awarded based on a dissertation in its current form — the student must revise and resubmit the dissertation.
- E** - The degree may not be awarded and the work may not be resubmitted for examination.

5.10.2 Oral examination

The DEC makes their joint recommendations about the dissertation at the end of a mandatory oral examination. The oral examination provides the opportunity for the examiners to clarify issues discussed in their written reports with the student or to discuss additional issues which may arise during the oral examination.

The oral examination will be closed to the public. No presentation is required by the student during the oral examination. The student, the non-examining chair, and at least one internal supervisor are required to attend **in person**. The examiners and external supervisors may attend in person if logistically possible; alternatively they may join the panel meeting electronically, usually by Microsoft Teams. Should the environment wish for an examiner(s) to fly to Cape Town for the oral examination, it will be the responsibility of the environment to cover all expenses. The Postgraduate Manager, Tanja Malan (tanja@sun.ac.za), will assist with arrangements for external examiners. Please keep in mind that the oral examination might take less than an hour, so environments need to consider the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of organising travel.

All supervisor(s) are invited to attend the closed oral examination as **non-participating observers**. They may take notes on behalf of the student during closed deliberations. The supervisor(s) take no part in the discussion, unless specifically requested by the non-examining chair.

In short, the following persons attend the oral examination:

- non-examining chair,
- all the examiners,
- supervisor(s)
- student, but they may not attend the deliberation
- GEM Postgraduate Manager (for administrative assistance)

The oral examination cannot take place if any of the written reports and Standard Report forms are outstanding. The examiner reports are shared with all the members above, however, the student will receive the examiner reports separately and anonymously. The identity of the examiners will only be disclosed to the student at the oral examination.

The general proceedings of the doctoral oral examination can be summarised as follow:

- First, before the student joins the meeting, the non-examining chair provides an overview of the process and procedure relating to the doctoral oral examination and gives the examiners the opportunity to discuss their written reports with each other privately.

- Second, the student is called into the meeting and answers several rounds of questions posed by the examiners to clarify the salient issues identified jointly by the panel in their initial discussions.
- Third, the student is excused, and the examiners deliberate on a final result based on their original recommendations and the student's performance during the oral examination. The examiners must reach unanimous consensus (and not only a majority decision) about the final result. The deliberations should deliver one outcome (A to E) as listed in par 6.10.1, and the panel should jointly decide which revisions are necessary to satisfy outcomes B or C.
- Fourth, the student is called into the meeting again, and the non-examining chair delivers the recommendation.

In exceptional cases, a doctoral oral examination may take place with a minimum of two examiners present (in person or remotely). However, under these circumstances, the procedure delineated below will be followed:

- First, the examiner that is unable to participate on the scheduled date must submit their questions to the non-examining chair in advance for the student to address during the oral examination.
- These questions will be put to the student by the non-examining chair on behalf of the examiner during the oral examination.
- Third, the outcome may not be communicated to the student until the non-examining chair has informed the examiner about the discussion during the oral and the provisional recommendation agreed upon by the other examiners, and until the absent examiner gives their consent to the recommendation.
- Fourth, the examiner that could not participate must confirm (in writing via email) that they accept or reject the provisional recommendation of the other examiners.
- Fifth, only once an outcome (consensus or dispute) is reached may the non-examining chair notify the student, the supervisor(s), and the rest of the doctoral examination committee of the final recommendation in writing.

If an examiner did not join the oral examination at the time scheduled or loses connectivity during the oral examination, the non-examining chair should continue proceedings with the remaining committee members. However, after the doctoral oral examination, the outcome may not be communicated to the student until the non-examining chair has informed all examiners about the discussion during the oral, and the provisional recommendation is endorsed by the absent examiner. The examiner that could not participate must confirm (in writing via email) that they accept or reject the provisional recommendation of the other examiners. Only once an outcome (consensus or dispute) is reached, may the non-examining chair notify the student, the supervisor(s), and the DEC of the final recommendation in writing.

If the doctoral student did not present themselves for all or part of the oral examination, the non-examining chair adjourns the meeting, and a new doctoral oral examination date must be arranged by the GEM Office. The delay from rescheduling (and completing) a doctoral oral examination may also delay the student's eligibility for graduation at the next graduation ceremony.

It is the responsibility of the non-examining chair to inform the doctoral student that the recommendation communicated at the oral examination is provisional until recommended by the HDRC and the Faculty Board, for final ratification by Senate. The official result will be communicated to the doctoral student by the Faculty Administrator (Registrar's Division) in the weeks after the relevant Senate meeting.

5.11 Understanding the various recommendations

A much details description of each recommendation is explained in Addendum A below.

5.11.1 Recommending option A

The degree can **be awarded**. No corrections are required to the dissertation in its current form. Very minor editorial changes may be recommended.

5.11.2 Recommending option B

The student **passes** the examination with a few superficial (technical, spelling, grammatical, or style) corrections required. This recommendation may also include corrections that deal with subject-specific matters, but that the examiners are comfortable that the changes can be made to the satisfaction of the supervisor(s). Only the supervisor(s) needs to check the final version of the dissertation before the student may graduate. In other words, examiners are not required to see the dissertation again.

5.11.3 Recommending option C

The student **passes** the examination, **however** before the student may graduate, all the examiners should receive the corrected version of the dissertation again, so that they can confirm that the suggested recommendation has correctly been made. The corrections are, therefore, of a significantly more substantive and serious nature than those required in category (B). The corrections are not limited to matters of style, spelling, grammar, or other technical issues; rather, they deal with subject-specific matters that may include but are not limited to key arguments, incorrect logic, erroneous methodology, misinterpreted theory, missing bodies of literature, among others. In this instance, the student may not be eligible for graduation in the current academic cycle.

5.11.4 Recommending option D

If the examiners recommend option (D), then they are of the opinion that the dissertation **cannot pass** in its current form and that the student must make **substantial revisions** before the student **may resubmit** their dissertation for examination. In such cases, at least one additional year of registration is required in order to revise the dissertation accordingly.

The dissertation, in its current form, fails the examination. However, if the student amends the dissertation and significantly rewrites large parts of it, then there is a possibility that it may pass in future. In order to judge whether such a substantive revision has taken place, the dissertation will have to be resubmitted to and re-examined by the DEC once it has been rewritten.

The student is only allowed one year (one year from the date of the initial (first) oral examination) to revise the dissertation.

5.11.5 Recommending option E

The dissertation **fails**, and it is the examiners' judgement that the errors contained in it are so substantive and serious that no revision or process of rewriting it will render it passable. The examiners do not allow revision, the fail is final, and the examination process ends.

5.12 Consensus amongst examiners

The oral examination must culminate in a joint recommendation about the final result. Only two outcomes are possible: (1) consensus is reached amongst the examiners regarding the final result or (2) no consensus can be reached by the examiners; in which case the non-examining chair declares a dispute.

The DEC will consider the examination reports and performance of the doctoral student during the oral examination to make a joint recommendation to the HDRC. Where unanimous consensus can be reached, the non-examining chair must inform the doctoral student and complete the *Standard Report Form for the Non-examining Chair of a Doctoral Examination Committee*. It is important that the written recommendation prior to the oral examination of each examiner be reported, followed by a description of how the joint recommendation was reached. The non-examining chair must also address any discrepancies in examiners' reports were viewed by the DEC and explain the considerations and consultative process which eventually led to consensus.

5.13 Finalisation of PhD results

After the completion of the oral examination, the non-examining chair must complete the *Standard Report Form of Non-Examining Chairs*. All three examiners are required to sign the Standard Report Form of Non-Examining Chairs, however, the non-examining chair may sign the form on behalf of examiners with their express permission.

The non-examining chair must submit the completed and signed copy of the Standard Report Form of Non-Examining Chairs electronically to the secretary of the HDRC before the deadlines for the HDRC agenda. The GEM Office is responsible for collating and sending all the written examiners reports, the examiners' Standard Report forms for PhD Studies, and the Standard Report Form of Non-Examining Chairs to the Faculty Administrator. The Faculty Administrator will in turn include the documentation in the Faculty Board agenda, whose recommendations are sent to Senate.

5.14 Completion of revisions and final upload

The student is responsible to ensure that the final corrected version of their dissertation is uploaded by their internal supervisor to the SUNStudent (Thesis Management) system before or on the given deadline date for graduation. The PhD coordinator for the environment may also assist in uploading the document.

5.15 In case of a dispute

Examiners are not required to change their views and cannot be placed under pressure to comply with the views of the rest of the panel. Where consensus cannot be reached, the non-examining chair must inform the student. The non-examining chair in consultation with the supervisory team will oversee the appointment of an independent assessor.

5.15.1 Dispute cases that may arise during the doctoral examination process

The non-examining chair may declare a dispute at three specific stages during the doctoral examination process if the examiners cannot reach unanimous agreement on the outcome and the way forward for the student. These stages are as follows:

- when examiners do not reach a consensus outcome during the oral of an initial (first) round of examination,
- after major revisions are submitted in line with the requirements of a consensus category (C) recommendation in an initial oral examination, but the examination panel does not unanimously approve the revisions after re-evaluation of the dissertation,
- during a second oral examination required after the examination panel's first assessment ends in re-examination (awarded in category (D)). **NOTE:** when a dissertation is re-examined, the process ends with minor revisions or rejection of the dissertation.

5.15.2 Appointment of independent assessor

The independent assessor must be a senior academic from another institution who is an expert in the specific area/field/topic raised by the dissertation. An independent assessor is appointed by the non-examining chair of the specific DEC in consultation with the supervisory team and the Dean or Vice-Dean: Research, Postgraduate Affairs and Internationalisation. A written justification for the appointment of the specific assessor (i.e., the completed Standard Report Form for Non-Examining Chairs), the CV of the assessor, as well as a *Nomination of independent PhD assessor* form must be submitted to the secretary of the HDRC as part of the documentation for the assessors' nomination and appointment.

The nomination of an independent assessor must be recommended by the Faculty's HDRC and Faculty Committee for approval at the Faculty Board and communicated to Senate. Only after the Faculty Board has approved the appointment may the dissertation and supporting documents be sent to the assessor for review.

5.15.3 Role of an independent assessor

The independent assessor's primary responsibility is to critically evaluate the examination reports, along with all related documentation. The assessor's role is to determine which of the conflicting viewpoints holds merit. While the assessor should not re-examine the dissertation itself, their guidance is essential in addressing the following:

1. the originality and contribution of the study to its subject field, and
2. the assessor's recommendation on whether the PhD degree should be awarded.

5.15.4 Process

The assessor has six weeks to assess the examiners' reports and relevant documentation and is required to submit a written report to the GEM Office substantiating their decision. The GEM Office thereafter sends the assessor report to the non-examining chair of the DEC. The decision of the independent assessors is binding and final. There is no further appeal process following the finalisation of the assessor's report.

The non-examining chair must communicate to the DEC the outcome of the assessor's report, and he/she should also let the student and supervisory team know of the outcome and way forward.

5.16 Doctoral Research Day – a voluntary public oral

During the graduation week, the Faculty will organise a Doctoral Research Day for all doctoral students that are graduating. This event will be open to the public where the graduates will have the opportunity to present their work to family, friends, and colleagues.

Addendum A: Understanding the various recommendations

A.1. Recommending option A

The student passes the examination, with no or few (only superficial: technical, spelling, grammatical, or style) corrections required. Only the supervisor needs to check the final version of the dissertation before the student may graduate. In other words, examiners are not required to see the dissertation again. If the revisions are completed and the dissertation is uploaded on SUNStudent (Thesis Management) by the given deadline date, then the student will be able to graduate at the following graduation ceremony.

For example, if a doctoral student submits their dissertation for examination at the end of July (for December graduation) and the examiners recommend option (A) during the oral examination, then the student must complete the minor revisions (if any) to the satisfaction of their supervisor(s) and upload their dissertation on SUNStudent by the given deadline (usually end November) in order to be eligible for December graduation. Similarly, if a doctoral student submits their dissertation for examination in end September (for March/April graduation the following year) and the examiners recommend option (A) during the oral examination, then the student must complete the minor revisions (if any) to the satisfaction of their supervisor and upload their dissertation on SUNStudent by the given deadline (usually mid-February) in order to be eligible for March/April graduation.

The PhD results should be recommended by the HDRC, Faculty Committee, and Faculty Board, and ratified by Senate before a student may graduate.

A.2. Recommending option B

If the examiners unanimously recommend option (B) during the deliberations at the oral examination, a student will be required to complete revisions in accordance with examiners' recommendations, but only to the satisfaction of their supervisor(s). The student passes the examination, with few (only superficial: technical, spelling, grammatical, or style) corrections required. Only the supervisor needs to check the final version of the dissertation before the student may graduate. This recommendation may also include corrections that deal with subject-specific matters, but the examiners are satisfied that the changes can be made to the satisfaction of the supervisor(s). The examiners are not required to see the dissertation again. If the revisions are completed and the dissertation is uploaded on SUNStudent (Thesis Management) by the given deadline date, then the student is eligible to graduate at the following graduation ceremony.

In other words, if a doctoral student submits their dissertation for examination at the end July (for December graduation) and the examiners recommend option (B), then the student must complete the revisions to the satisfaction of their supervisor(s) and upload their dissertation on SUNStudent by the given deadline (usually end November) in order to be eligible for December graduation. Similarly, if a doctoral student submits their dissertation for examination at the end September (for March/April graduation) and the examiners recommend option (B), then the student must complete the revisions to the satisfaction of their supervisor and upload their dissertation on SUNStudent by the given deadline (usually mid-February) in order to be eligible for March/April graduation.

The PhD results should be recommended by the HDRC, Faculty Committee, and Faculty Board, and ratified by Senate before a student may graduate.

A.3. Recommending option C

If the examiners unanimously recommend option (C) during the deliberations at the oral examination, the student will be required to complete the revisions in accordance with the examiners' recommendations. The student must **highlight the revisions throughout the revised dissertation** and also complete the schedule of revision 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 dissertation.

The student passes the examination, but before the student may graduate, all of the examiners should receive the corrected version of the dissertation again, so that each examiner can confirm that the suggested corrections have been made. The corrections are, therefore, of a significantly more substantive and serious nature than those required in category (B). The corrections are not limited to matters of style, spelling, grammar, or other technical issues; rather, they deal with subject-specific matters that may include but are not limited to key arguments, incorrect logic, erroneous methodology, misinterpreted theory, missing bodies of literature, and so on. In this instance, the student will not be eligible for graduation in the current academic year cycle.

IMPORTANT: There is a one-year time limit (one-year from the date of the initial oral examination) for the student to submit a revised version of their dissertation. In cases where the examination panel agrees to outcome (C), students must revise their dissertation in line with the recommendations of the examiners and resubmit their dissertation by the submission deadlines within the same or following academic year so that the revisions may be approved by the respective examiners and the examination concluded. Registration beyond the one-year time limit for revisions will not be permitted.

Once the supervisor(s) is satisfied with the revised dissertation, the supervisor (with consent from co-supervisors) must resubmit (1) the revised dissertation **with revisions highlighted**, (2) the completed *Schedule of revisions to a doctoral dissertation* form (template will be provided) and (3) new similarity report electronically to the GEM Office (tanja@sun.ac.za). The GEM Office will send the documents back to the same examiners, who will review the revisions and select one of the following options on the Standard Report Form for the Resubmission of a PhD dissertation:

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

If all examiners select option (a) during the second round of examination, then the student must finalise their dissertation and upload the final version on SUNStudent in time for the next graduation date. Since the dissertation has undergone two rounds of examination, it will not be possible for the student to graduate at their intended graduation ceremony. In other words, if a doctoral student submits their dissertation for examination in July (for December graduation) and the examiners recommend option (C), then the student will only be eligible for graduation at the March/April ceremony, at the earliest. Similarly, if a doctoral student submits their dissertation for examination in September (for March/April graduation) and the examiners recommend option (C), then the student will only be eligible for graduation at the next December ceremony (at the earliest).

While this would require an additional year of registration, the Faculty *may* grant the student a tuition fee waiver (or partly), should the examination process be concluded and the student can provide proof that the final dissertation has been uploaded to Thesis Management before 01 June of that year. The request must come from the supervisor(s), accompanied by a motivation with support from the HOD, and should be sent to the Faculty Director for consideration and approval.

If all three examiners select option (b) during the second round of examination, then the student will not have another opportunity to resubmit their dissertation, 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 more information below).

Examiners are given four weeks in which to review the revised dissertation. The (1) written report and the (2) *Standard report form of the PhD Examiner regarding revisions* indicating the recommendation are submitted electronically to the GEM Office (tanja@sun.ac.za) for further processing.

The PhD results should be recommended by the HDRC, Faculty Committee, and Faculty Board, and ratified by Senate before a student may graduate.

A.4. Recommending option D

If the examiners recommend option (D), then they are of the opinion that the dissertation cannot pass in its current form and that the student must make substantial revisions before the student may resubmit their dissertation for re-examination. In such cases, at least one additional year of registration is required in order to revise the dissertation accordingly.

The dissertation, in its current form, fails the examination. However, if the student amends the dissertation and significantly rewrites large parts of it, then there is a possibility that it may pass in future. In order to judge whether such a substantive revision has taken place, the dissertation will have to be resubmitted to and re-examined by the same DEC once it has been rewritten.

Once the supervisor is satisfied with the revised dissertation, the supervisor (with consent from co-supervisors) must resubmit the dissertation and all supporting documentation to the GEM Office as required during the first submission. The dissertation will be examined by the same three examiners as in the first round. The re-examination process requires, as in the case of the first round of examination, that the examiners conduct an individual assessment of the revised work. Examiners have again 6 weeks in which to re-examine the revised dissertation. There will also be a second oral examination.

If all examiners pass the study during the second round of examination (recommendation (A), (B) or (C)) then the student will have an opportunity to attend to any further revisions required by the examination committee. Please see each recommendation (A/B/C) for the process further.

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 more information below).

The PhD results should be recommended by the HDRC, Faculty Committee, and Faculty Board, and ratified by Senate before a student may graduate or not.

A.5. Recommending option 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.

The dissertation fails, and it is the examiners' judgement that the errors contained in it are so substantive and serious that no revision or process of rewriting it will render it passable. The examiners do not allow revision, the fail is final, and the examination process ends.

The PhD results should be recommended by the HDRC, Faculty Committee, and Faculty Board, and ratified by Senate although the student did not pass the degree.