

Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)

School of Government

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

BELLVILLE

7535

TEL: +27 21 959 3733

FAX: +27 21 959 3732

email: plaas@uwc.ac.za

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICATION TO MPhil RESEARCH AND PhD PROGRAMME AT PLAAS

PLAAS engages in research, training and policy development in relation to land and agrarian studies, rural governance and natural resource management. PLAAS aims for rigor in its scholarship as it strives to play a critical role in processes of social, economic and political transformation. PLAAS's research is situated within the field of applied social sciences and development fields. One of the stated aims of PLAAS since its inception has been to train a new cadre of black social sciences. This is an important and challenging task, in the light of the accumulated effects of the apartheid education system and broader policies.

PLAAS is a unit within the School of Government and forms part of the Economic and Management Science (EMS) Faculty. Applicants who wish to apply for the MPhil Research or PhD programme at PLAAS are required to write a concept note and then to find a suitable supervisor to develop a draft research proposal. The supervisor must be approved by the department and faculty to supervise your research project. Doctoral research should not be undertaken lightly and students should normally have a good research background at the masters level before being considered for admission.

PLAAS Internal Requirements for MPhil Research of Doctoral Study

The internal requirements for Masters in Research and PhD studies comprise of three stages. The first stage is the developing of a concept note of your research and then approach a potential supervisor. The second phase is working with the supervisor to develop your concept note into a draft proposal. After this process you will be advised if you can register at the University and your title with the Faculty of Higher Degrees Committee. The final phase is to develop your proposal and resubmit it to Faculty of Higher Degrees Committee within a year of registering your draft proposal.

A research proposal is a planning document that outlines your thinking about a research problem and describes what is to be studied and how. It should outline your thinking about what you will be investigating, that is, your focus, the limits, the logical development of your investigation and the methods you will be using to investigate your topic. Through your development of your proposal, you come to a clearer understanding of the literature, the main considerations, the potential pitfalls, the perspective from which to approach your research, and the ways in which you will gather information from available sources. Preparing a draft proposal should not be rushed and it is likely that you will need a few months to do the background research required to prepare such a draft.

Stage 1: Guidelines in Developing a Concept Note for your Research

In order for you to be considered for admission, you are required to find a suitable supervisor who is willing to supervise you. When approaching a suitable supervisor you are required to have a concept note of your research. The concept notes submitted to your supervisor must contain a number of key elements, such as:

1. **What is to be researched under the heading: Background**
This should include a brief statement of what is to be researched (i.e. the research problem), together with the key theoretical issues and debates that inform the research context. The scope of the research should also be clearly specified.
2. **Why it is to be researched under the heading: Rationale and Significance of Research**
The reasons why the research is being undertaken, together with the usefulness of the possible research findings for practitioners and researchers in the field of study, and the potential contribution of such findings to scientific knowledge.
3. **The research hypotheses or questions under the heading: Research Objectives**
The main objectives of the research should be listed, together with the key research questions and, where appropriate, key research assumptions, propositions and/or hypotheses.
4. **How it is to be researched under the heading: Research Methodology**
The general research method and specific analytical techniques to be used should be listed, and critical technical requirements relevant to the research should be specified.
5. **What concepts, frameworks, or theories will guide your research under the heading: Conceptual Framework**
6. **What are the key ethical issues under the heading: Ethics Statement**
Ethical issues related to the research should be listed, together with a brief statement of how these will be addressed in the study.
7. **Keywords**
Provide 10 keywords

While it is a challenge to fit all of the above into the 1-2 pages, the process of meeting this requirement is in itself a useful exercise for candidates to clarify their thinking about what are the essential elements of their research.

Stage 2: The Draft Proposal

The following step in the process is to develop the concept note into a draft proposal. The draft of a proposal is important to PLAAS so that we can consider issues such as the quality of the proposal, how doable the proposed project is, to what extent it fits into PLAAS' research areas? At this phase of the research process the candidate works with the supervisor to develop the draft proposal. This does not mean the supervisor and the candidate is in an agreement to supervise the research project.

Guidelines for the Draft Proposal:

The draft proposal (4-6 pages or 1000-1500 words for master applicants, 6-10 pages or 1500-2000 words for PhD applicants, excluding the cover page and bibliography) must be typed double-spaced using size 12 font and should include the following:

1. Cover page plus abstract, title and 10 key words
2. Aims of the research and rationale for the study
 - a. Background to the problem to be investigated
 - b. Introduction to the particular problem to be studied
3. Preliminary review of the relevant academic literature/framework for the research
4. Research problem and research hypotheses/propositions including:
 - a. The significance of the problem in relation to practice and/or the academic discipline, stressing why the specified problem is worth investigating
 - b. Where appropriate, a statement of the major and minor hypotheses/propositions

- c. Any relevant definitions, assumptions and limitations, including definitions of any unusual terms that could be misinterpreted
- d. A statement of assumptions and limitations will help to reduce the danger of over-generalization
- e. Possible conclusions and recommendations
5. Research design/methodology, stating:
 - a. Data sources – where you will get your information and data
 - b. What methods and techniques will be used for data-gathering
 - c. Justification for the chosen quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques
6. A preliminary bibliography of key books, journal articles, on-line sources, reports and other literature on the topic that has been consulted
7. Please note that the length guidelines should not be exceeded and longer proposals must be edited down to the required length

If your proposal is internally accepted by PLAAS, and a supervisor is allocated to you, we then suggest you to register your degree. Candidates are also required to host an internal seminar at PLAAS. Typically one or two semesters will be utilized to refine your draft proposal into a complete proposal for formal registration of your topic. After working through the comments and feedback we will submit your draft proposal to register your title to the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, and it would need to be approved by this committee and also by the Senate Higher Degrees Committee.

Stage 3: COMPLETE PROPOSAL for Dissertation Title Registration Purposes

After registration for the degree the next formal step is to submit a complete proposal to register your dissertation topic. The quality of the proposal will determine whether the Faculty's Higher Degrees Committee recommends to the University Senate whether or not you have clearly demonstrated that you have the requisite competencies and potential to complete a research degree measuring up to international academic standards. These requirements for the complete proposal are significantly more onerous than the draft to ensure that students who do not have the potential to complete a masters or doctoral degree do not waste many years of effort on a project for which they are not adequately prepared academically.

The complete proposal (8-10 pages or 2000-2500 words for masters' applicants, 12-15 pages or 2500-3000 words for PhD applicants, excluding the cover page, chapter outline and bibliography) must be typed double-spaced using size 12 font and should include the following:

1. Cover page plus abstract, title and 10 key words
2. Aims of the research and rationale for the study
 - a. Background to the problem to be investigated
 - b. Introduction to the particular problem to be studied
3. Review of the academic literature on the topic that clearly demonstrates
 - a. An understanding of the pertinent academic debates in the area of the research question to be studied and
 - b. Provides a theoretical framework for the research
4. Research problem and research hypotheses/propositions including:
 - a. The significance of the problem in relation to practice and/or the academic discipline, stressing why the specified problem is worth investigating.
 - b. Where appropriate, a statement of the major and minor hypotheses/propositions. A good hypothesis clearly establishes, and gives direction to the data gathering processes. It has several basic characteristics; it should be reasonable; it should be consistent with facts or theories; it should be stated so that it can be tested and found to be probably true or probably false; and it should be stated in the simplest possible terms. The hypotheses should be formulated before data are gathered.
 - c. Any relevant definitions, assumptions and limitations, including definitions of any unusual terms that could be misinterpreted.

- d. A statement of assumptions and limitations will help to reduce the danger of over-generalization.
- e. Possible conclusions and recommendations.



- 5. A careful analysis of proposed research design/methodology, detailing:
 - a. Data sources – where you will get your information and data
 - b. What methods and techniques will be used for data-gathering
 - c. Justification for the chosen quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques
 - d. How the data will be analysed and the reliability of data verified
 - e. Feasibility of the research design
- 6. Ethics statement
- 7. Chapter outline and time-line
- 8. An extensive bibliography
 - a. This bibliography should list all books, journal articles, online sources, reports and other literature that have been consulted
 - b. It should clearly demonstrate your familiarity with the relevant international academic literature in your specific area of research

Please note that the length guidelines should not be exceeded and longer proposals must be edited down to the required length.

See table below for all the possible researchers at PLAAS who can accommodate supervision of students.

PLAAS Researchers and Contact Details

RESEARCHER NAME	CONTACT NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Professor Ben Cousins	021 959 3733	bcousins@uwc.ac.za
Associate Professor Andries Du Toit	021 959 3733	presence@iafrica.com
Dr Moenieba Isaacs	021 959 3733	misaacs@uwc.ac.za
Dr Mafaniso Hara	021 959 3733	mhara@uwc.ac.za
Dr Michael Aliber	021 959 3733	maliber@uwc.ac.za
Ms Ruth Hall	021 959 3733	rhall@uwc.ac.za
Ms Barbara Tapela	021 959 3733	btapela@uwc.ac.za
Ms Ritu Verma	021 959 3733	rverma@uwc.ac.za
Mr David Neves	021 959 3733	dneves@uwc.ac.za

For areas of research, refer to staff profiles on <http://www.plaas.org.za>

Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

We wish you everything of the best for your application.

Sincerely,

Carla Henry
 Postgraduate Programme Administrator
 Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)
 University of the Western Cape
 Bellville
 7535
 Cape Town, South Africa

Tel: +27 21 959 3727 / 3733

Fax: +27 21 959 3732

Email: cherry@uwc.ac.za