The Wits School of Governance PhD

Information for 2018 applicants

Introduction

Are you appropriately qualified and keen to make a significant and original academic contribution to knowledge working on the frontiers of governance, power, decision-making or public policy in either public management, development management or civil society? If so, the Wits School of Governance (WSG) would like to consider your application for doctoral studies.

Students reading for the PhD are seeking to advance the state of knowledge in their particular area of interest by gathering substantial data, evaluating theory and generating original arguments regarding a significant public management/policy, development or governance issue. A doctoral thesis is a substantial project. The doctorate typically provides training for an academic or research career. It requires a candidate to develop a sophisticated conceptual framework, undertake independent research at the most advanced academic levels, read and interpret published debates in the field (and other related fields) and produce a thesis that makes a contribution to knowledge in a particular field.

Admissions criteria for the WSG PhD

The minimum criteria for consideration for acceptance are:

- A four year Bachelor’s degree (or equivalent);
- A Master’s degree with a minimum of a 65% average. This could be a Master’s degree from Wits School of Governance or a Master’s degree in a cognate (similar) discipline. Doctoral research is usually carried out in the area of specialisation from the Master’s degree or components of it. Particular
attention is paid to the marks awarded for the research component of the Master’s degree;

- An acceptable initial research proposal with a clear and reasonably well-defined area of interest, evidence of familiarity with your proposed area of study and a specific focus, problem and question you wish to pursue (please see Guidelines attached to this document);
- Availability of an appropriate supervisor. Even if you meet the minimum criteria for consideration in terms of your previous marks and an admissions proposal of PhD quality we may still not be able to offer you a place as our supervisory capacity is limited in terms of numbers and the areas of expertise in which we are able to supervise at a PhD level.

If you meet these initial screening criteria your application is deferred for further consideration and you may be requested to provide referees reports. Applicants may also be required to attend an interview or take part in a Skype interview. Applications close on the 30th September 2017 and you will be advised if your application has been deferred for further review. At this stage your documents and your proposal will be reviewed by academic staff, some of whom will be potential supervisors. If you are then accepted you will receive an offer of a place.

Please note that we will not accept any late applications. You must make sure that you have applied to the correct degree and school and submitted all required documents in time.

Please note that admissions decisions are final and there is no process for appealing admissions decisions. Unfortunately not all eligible applicants can be accepted as the final decision rests on your previous academic performance, the quality and relevance of your proposal to WSG’s expertise and the availability of a suitable supervisor who is able and available to supervise in your area of interest. You are advised to have familiarised yourself with supervisors, their areas of expertise and made contact with them prior to submitting your application.

The PhD curriculum

The degree is awarded on the basis of a thesis and compliance with an attendance requirement that may, depending upon your previous study background, include
prerequisite courses. A PhD thesis ranges from 70 000 to 100 000 words. The highest degree a University can confer is a Doctorate, and they require continuous attention, commitment, and dedicated work. The PhD is a lengthy undertaking and is currently divided into several stages.

WSG staff provide support for all aspects of the doctoral experience but we do need to be clear that this is not a taught doctoral programme i.e. we do not provide a structured, assessed coursework component as do many PhDs in the USA. We are sure you considered these factors before applying, but we stress them here because entrance to the WSG doctoral programme is contested, we have finite supervisory capacity and it is critical that all candidates understand the commitment they are making, and reach all key milestones. Accepting you onto the PhD programme depends on you meeting minimum criteria based on your previous qualifications, the nature of your proposed research and its quality, the effectiveness of your proposal in communicating your ideas, and the match between the area of focus in your proposal and our available supervisors both in terms of numbers and subject expertise.

The PhD process is divided into a number of stages outlined in this document.

**a. The enquiry and admissions stage**

This is where we see if you have the required qualifications, a suitable initial proposal, and we see if we have supervisory capacity and availability to assist you in your chosen area of study. The School receives your application on the online Student Information Management System (SIMS). Please do not submit by post. An Admissions Committee establishes whether you have the relevant qualifications (a minimum 65% average on a Master’s degree with particular attention being paid to any research marks) an acceptable initial 2500-word admissions proposal and appropriate supervision being available.

An Admissions Committee considers both your eligibility for doctoral study and whether a suitable supervisor is available with knowledge of your proposed topic. The University insists that such supervision is available before it admits a candidate, and that it continues to be available. If adequate supervision is not available the University cannot register a candidate or may have to terminate the candidate’s registration if an alternative supervisor with the necessary expertise cannot be secured.
If you meet the minimum criteria your application will be deferred for further consideration. We strongly advise that you inform yourself about the academic staff who are available in the school before you apply, their areas of research specialisation and interest and contact them for advice about whether your proposed topic area is one where we can provide support. Details of some staff and their areas of expertise are available on the Wits School of Governance website http://www.wsg.wits.ac.za/ Please contact us for up to date details. You may find it useful to consult sources on how to select an appropriate topic, for example https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/choosing-a-phd-subject/210079.article

b. The preparation stage for your short proposal

The preparation stage for your short proposal is where we provide the new PhD cohort each year with group assistance to develop a research focus and explore research methodologies to be able to conceptualise and develop a short proposal. This involves further developing, refining or sometimes reconceptualising the proposal you submitted with your application. This assistance offered is in the form of an optional, but recommended, course offered early in the year in several parts. All successful applicants are initially registered in the administrative category of occasional students on the course PADM 5123 (Social Theory) until they successfully defend their short PhD proposals whereafter they are register as PhD first year students. Your registration on this preparation phase allows you access to the university facilities that you will need to work on your short proposal and to enable you to participate in the course which is intended to provide support in working towards your short and long proposals. You will need to be based in Johannesburg for this period or able to arrange to travel and attend the course which is delivered in three one week blocks. Although we strongly encourage you to participate in the course, if you elect not to do so you will still need to be registered on it as otherwise you are not able to access to the university and its facilities, particularly the libraries and electronic resources. You can proceed directly to a short proposal defence immediately if you wish to do so.

After this unsupervised phase, you need to successfully defend a short proposal of 5000 words by the middle of the first year. The key objective here is to see what you can produce, writing without a supervisor. It is a significant but exciting challenge and you need to give it your full commitment as there is only one opportunity to defend your
short proposal. If you successfully defend your short proposal the fees you pay for the preparation phase are credited to your first year of study. You then begin working on your long proposal under the guidance of your supervisor.

c. Long proposal stage

On the basis of successfully defending your short proposal and having it accepted, you will register for the first year of the PhD programme, begin to work with a supervisor and prepare a long proposal (15 000 words) which will be assessed to then admit you to PhD candidature. On the strength of this long proposal you would be considered for formal admission to the candidate stage.

When the long proposal has been successfully defended the University will formally admit you as a PhD candidate and you begin to do your research and write your thesis. We may recommend co-supervision with colleagues from other Schools at Wits, or in exceptional circumstances at other Universities but the main supervisor must be a staff member at WSG and arrange and agree to any co-supervision arrangements.

For the long proposal, the committee will be looking for a comprehensive review of the literature, a strong research methodology strategy and schedule, further exploration of the theoretical base and a well-conceptualised research problem. You may also be required, on the basis of your admission interview, to attend and be examined in one or more of the courses at WSG in areas relevant to your proposed research topic. The purpose is to ensure that you have sufficient knowledge of key aspects of the relevant discipline(s) and/or methodology.

d. Candidate stage

During this stage you undertake the planned research, gather data, extend your reading on theory and method, analyse the material, and begin to draft successive chapters for consideration by your supervisor. In addition, if the material, your progress and funding permit, you will be encouraged to present at internal and external conferences and prepare publications. You will be required to present
progress reports to your supervisor and the Faculty Graduate Studies Committee at regular intervals.

Once you and your supervisor feel that the thesis is finished and in a form ready for final submission for examination, you present your final written thesis to a WSG PhD Committee of academic staff. This is a final quality assurance process and scholarly engagement with your study to ensure that you are submitting the work as required and doing any revisions that may be necessary. After this, you make any final changes and submit the thesis for examination.

**Examination stage**

The PhD is awarded to candidates who have critically investigated and evaluated topics resulting in an independent and original contribution to knowledge. Candidates must show general knowledge of the wider field of scholarship to which their special topics belong and knowledge of the appropriate research methodology. The originality of students’ work may be in discovering new facts or examining existing facts or ideas critically, or in devising and conducting investigations into ideas supplied by others. The thesis must be a work of substance and worthy of publication either as submitted or in a modified form. Examiners must be convinced that a standard of originality and innovation has been achieved and that aspects of your work are publishable.

Your thesis is examined by an internal Wits examiner, and two examiners external to the University, at least one of whom is of international standing. The key criterion for award of the PhD degree is that the thesis must make an original contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

**Period of Study**

The minimum period of study for a PhD is two years in the case of full-time study, and four years in the case of part-time study. The maximum period of study is four years full-time and six years part-time. You should plan to reside in or near Johannesburg in the first six months of the year so that you can take advantage of the support offered by the School in the form of research methodology courses and seminars, take any pre-requisite courses, contribute to the doctoral seminars, and
consult with supervisors in the preparation of your proposal. You should also plan to attend seminar series, student conferences and other opportunities for support and development offered by the School and the University at different times of the year. A research seminar forum of doctoral students is offered which provides an opportunity for participants to share knowledge, receive informed feedback, and practice presenting their work.

Making a Formal Application

You should apply online on https: https://www.wits.ac.za/applications/

You will be asked to provide:

- A brief letter of motivation indicating why you would like to study for your PhD at the Wits School of Governance;
- A curriculum vitae, detailing your degrees, your employment experience and any publications;
- A 2500 word outline of your proposed research;
- Official transcripts of your qualifications showing degree, courses and results (if you are still studying for a qualifying degree please provide your interim mid-year results);
- Your graduation certificates (certified copies and then originals);
- Verification and comparison of any foreign qualifications from the South Africa Qualifications Authority (SAQA);
- IELTS Language Proficiency scores (if your previous qualification was not through the medium of English).

Please make sure that your application is complete as we will not process it unless it is. You will be given a maximum of 14 days to submit any outstanding documents. If you are still waiting for results from your current degree please indicate this when you apply and upload them as soon as they are available.

Supervision
Suitable supervision must be available within the School for PhD study. This is a prerequisite for admission as a PhD candidate. It may happen that supervision ceases to be available in the course of the candidate’s PhD programme, e.g. if the supervisor takes up an appointment elsewhere. Under such circumstances, the School will do its best to arrange alternative supervision. However, the University requires candidates to accept in writing, when they first register, that in such circumstance supervision may not be available; that the School is under no obligation to arrange substitute supervision; and that the Faculty may accordingly have to cancel the candidate’s registration.

**International Students**

Applicants from outside South Africa must first contact the University’s International Office regarding the various official/legal conditions they have to meet. Most importantly, foreign students must obtain a study permit from the South African Government’s Department of Home Affairs and ensure that they are able to obtain visas in time to be present for the introduction and orientation to the PhD programme in February each year.

Contact details for this office are: the Administrative Officer, International Office, University of the Witwatersrand, Private Bag 3, 2050, South Africa. Tel +27 11 717-41054 or 717-1111 (switchboard). [https://www.wits.ac.za/internationalstudents/](https://www.wits.ac.za/internationalstudents/)

**Fees, bursaries, scholarships and financial aid**

Revised fees are announced at the beginning of each year and can be downloaded from [https://www.wits.ac.za/study-at-wits/fees-and-funding/](https://www.wits.ac.za/study-at-wits/fees-and-funding/)

Applicants must make their own arrangements regarding possible scholarships or bursaries. Details and forms are obtainable from the University's Financial Aid and Scholarships Office (Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050, South Africa).
Financial Aid & Scholarships Office
Senate House, Ground Floor
East Campus
University of the Witwatersrand
Contact details

The PhD and Masters by Dissertation Administrators, currently Zibusiso Manzini-Moyo Zibusiso.Manzini-Moyo@wits.ac.za or Phindile Tsepetsi Phindile.Tsepetsi@wits.ac.za can assist you with all administrative queries. You should contact them first so they can assist you to direct your inquiries to the appropriate person. Tel: 011 717 3855/3505, Office: Mwalimu House, Donald Gordon Building, Wits Management Campus, 2 St David’s Place, Parktown, Johannesburg

The PhD Convenor, Dr Lynn Hewlett, coordinates the research degree programmes and support. Tel: 011 717 3918, Email: Lynn.hewlett@wits.ac.za, Office: Donald Gordon Building, Wits Management Campus, 2 St David’s Place, Parktown, Johannesburg.
Guidelines for writing a PhD proposal for consideration for acceptance onto the PhD programme.

The initial proposal reflects your commitment to PhD study and your initial understanding of the topic and area that you would like to research. You should aim for it to be clear, coherent and give an indication of why it is interesting and motivating to you. The main purpose is to enable WSG to see that you are capable of critical independent thinking, can communicate your ideas clearly and that there is a match between what you want to study and our areas of available research expertise. You are not expected to be familiar with the specific details of your subject but you do need to show that you have a good level of knowledge about the subject and where and how you might be able to make a valuable contribution. If you are accepted for entry into the PhD programme you will not be expected to follow the proposal exactly as we assume that an inevitable part of the research process involves refining and clarifying your ideas and your proposal will develop through exposure to research methodology and techniques, discussions with staff and your supervisor and with other students.

You need to provide information on all of the following:

**Working title**

This will be indicative and tentative at this stage but is helpful for indicating the key words that will signal your area of interest.

**Introduction/background**

Briefly indicate the focus of your study and put your study in context. Provide any background knowledge needed to understand the reasons why this research is important. Provide any contextual and historical information necessary to frame the study.

**Literature review**
This is where you summarise and analyse what you have read on issues related to your research focus and build up an argument for why you need to do this study. How does your proposed study link to work that others have done in your proposed field of study? How does it support the need for your proposed study? What theory/theories from the literature might help in developing a conceptual or analytical framework?

**Statement of the problem, purpose and research question**

State the research problem that your research attempts to address. This should indicate the research problem, the context, the knowledge gap (where your research fits into what has been researched before and why there is a need for this research). The purpose states the broad goal of the research and how you will close the knowledge gap you have identified. Indicate your main research question clearly (in the form of a question). There is usually one main question and perhaps one or two sub-questions. Make sure this research question connects to your problem and purpose statement.

If your research is quantitative or involves mixed methods you will have a hypothesis or hypotheses indicating relations between the constructs you are investigating which you will talk about in the literature you discuss.

**Research methodology**

Explain how you will go about answering your research question (and if relevant, testing your hypothesis/es). Include statements on your proposed research strategy (qualitative, quantitative or mixed) and why it is appropriate for answering the research question you wish to ask. Comment on your research design e.g. case study, experimental, longitudinal, ethnography etc. and your research methods (interviews, questionnaires, analysis of official statistics, documentary analysis etc.) the location and availability of data and possible methods of analysis. Are there any difficulties that you might encounter in doing this research and do you think they can be overcome?

**Expected outcomes**

How does this study make an original contribution to knowledge, advance theoretical understanding and/or contribute to policy or practice.
List of references

You will need to provide a list of any sources, such as key articles or documents that you have referred to in your proposal using a common referencing style in the Social Sciences (e.g. APA, Chicago). Many university websites provide guides for students. The information provided in your in-text citations and reference list must be complete and accurate.

Layout

The proposal that you submit with your application should be approximately 2500 words in length.

Preparing your proposal

It is important to show that you have background knowledge of the area in which you wish to work, are familiar with some key literature in your field of interest, some key findings and some researchers doing work in this area. You can use Google Scholar (where you can get access to some articles and most abstracts) and cross check to see if some are available on Google to see if they are available. Articles are also available on author’s websites, the repository of their University or research organisation or places like ResearchGate. Most authors will be willing to email you copies of published research if you contact them directly. Many universities also allow their alumni access to their libraries. You should also familiarise yourself with the academic staff available in the school to supervise and their areas of expertise and research and make contact with them to see if your proposed area of research and research ideas fit with their expertise and interest.

Remember that your research proposal creates a first impression of you and your competence to undertake a PhD. Give it time and attention but remember that you are not expected to know everything at this stage.