The Wits School of Governance Master’s degree by research and dissertation

Information for 2018 applicants

Introduction

The primary purpose of a master’s degree by research and dissertation is to educate and train researchers who can contribute to the development of knowledge at an advanced level. A research master’s degree is a degree where you learn the majority of your content through doing your own research. The dissertation ranges from 50,000 – 60,000 words. In terms of the university’s rules, the key criterion for awarding the MM Research degree is appropriate scholarship in the area under study. How long this will take depends on the area of research you have selected and your previous knowledge, your expertise in this field and your prior knowledge of research methodology. The minimum period of study for the degree is one year in the case of full-time study, and two years in the case of part-time study (unless special permission is given to complete the degree in three years for part-time study). The maximum periods of study are three years (FT) and four years (PT).

Admissions criteria

The minimum criteria for consideration for acceptance are:

- A three year Bachelor’s degree (or equivalent);
- An honours degree or post-graduate diploma with a minimum of a 65% average. This could be a degree from Wits School of Governance or a
Master’s degree in a cognate (similar) discipline. Particular attention is paid to the marks awarded for the research component/long paper of the 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 suitable for a research master’s degree 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 research degree level.

If you meet the minimum 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 you 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.

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.
The curriculum for the Master’s degree by research

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 that you must attend and pass. You will be required to attend research methodology and proposal writing courses.

WSG staff provide support for all aspects of the degree but we do need to be clear that this is not a taught master’s degree programme. Accepting you onto the 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.

What is the difference between a coursework Master’s degree and research Master’s degree by dissertation?

Candidates undertaking a research Master’s degree typically have an interest in, and some experience of conducting research, are considering possible progression to a PhD and an academic career. The aim of a research degree is to provide a thorough training in a particular topic or disciplinary area through original investigation and experiment. The precise focus of research is agreed between you and your supervisor.

A research-based master’s degree requires the student to carry out advanced research project in a specialised field of study. In contrast to a Master’s degree by coursework and research, this typically involves developing a conceptual or theoretical framework and a more wide ranging literature review. The research methodology is larger in scope and often includes a theoretical aspect. A publication is often expected from the dissertation.

If you choose to do your Master’s by research and dissertation rather than by the more supported coursework and mini-dissertation route, we assume that you drive
this process and take responsibility for developing and improving your knowledge in the specialist area that you are researching. It is not a quicker alternative to a Master’s degree by coursework and research. It requires the self-motivation to drive your own learning process. When considering your application we pay greater attention to your evidence of writing and critical thinking in the selection process. A research Master’s degree is not a quicker completion option than a Master’s degree by coursework and mini-dissertation or a quick way of finishing off the research component of an incomplete Master’s by coursework degree.

The WSG Master’s by dissertation has been broken into a number of stages.

- **Preparation stage.** In this stage, you begin to explore your topic in detail while completing a 5 000 word proposal for consideration by a committee. You will also attend orientation and a compulsory methodology course beginning in February. You will complete such core courses as may be specified to assist you with your proposal and research and attend research seminars organised for students on the masters by research and PhD programmes. At the end of this stage, no later than six months after you have registered, you present and defend your 5 000 word written proposal to a committee of academic staff. The Committee is made up of a minimum of three senior academic staff, an external reviewer from Wits or elsewhere and your supervisor.

- If you successfully defend your proposal this will be approved by the Faculty Graduate Studies Committee and you will begin the research phase of your studies. During this time you may be attending required courses, seminars and student conferences organised by WSG and elsewhere in the university.

- **The examination phase.** The degree is awarded to candidates who have critically investigated and evaluated topics resulting in an independent research investigation and mastery of a particular field of knowledge. Each dissertation is assessed by two examiners who have appropriate academic qualifications, relevant expertise in the field of research and a suitable level of experience in examining research degree submissions. The research is allocated a mark which is approved at the Graduate Studies Committee.
Making a Formal Application

You should apply online on 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 Master’s degree by dissertation at the Wits School of Governance;
- A curriculum vitae, detailing your degrees, your employment experience and any publications;
- A 2000 word outline of your proposed research (see Guidelines attached);
- 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;
- Verification and comparison of any foreign qualifications from the South Africa Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (if your undergraduate and previous qualification was not through the medium of English);
- IELTS Language Proficiency scores (if required).

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. This is not only a prerequisite for admission as a 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 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
Johannesburg

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 and Masters by Dissertation 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 proposal for consideration for acceptance onto the Masters programme.

The initial proposal reflects your commitment to 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 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.

Structure of the proposal

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/ies 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 2000 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 postgraduate study. Give it time and attention but remember that you are not expected to know everything at this stage.