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# Models for supervision of postgraduate students at Wits University

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# Supervisor Development project

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To establish:

What is currently being done with respect to supervisor development at Wits university:

- in CLTD
- in different faculties and schools

What models of supervision are currently being used at Wits





# Apprenticeship model

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Used by the majority of supervisors – one on one – supervisor has to be all things to the student:

Up to the supervisor to produce a student with all the desired graduate attributes – i.e. develop the student to become an independent researcher, critical thinker and creator of new knowledge – and be at a stage to be able to supervise and mentor postgraduate students

Modifications: Some schools have doctoral committees for each student – committee meets a couple of times a year and the student presents their work which is discussed. Members of the committee have pointed out how much they have learned from other supervisors. The student obviously benefits from the extra input and discussion.

Another modification is to have an advisor for each student – someone other than the supervisor or co-supervisors who is available to help resolve problems.

# Co-supervision and issues experienced

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Co-supervision has been proposed as one means of developing new supervisors.

The idea is that emerging supervisors will be paired with experienced supervisors.

Very ambitious young staff may use this as a tick-box exercise to increase their list of supervisees without actually doing much of the work involved.

The workload distribution has to be agreed on.



# Group supervision

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One instance in the School of Molecular and Cell Biology

All students have one supervisor who has hired a post-doctoral research fellow to join her team. There is currently one honours student, 2 masters students (2 others have recently completed their work and are graduating) and 3 doctoral students.

Students are not seen one-on-one unless they really feel the need to talk to the supervisor individually.

There are formal meetings every 2 weeks. Students present their work and a discussion around progress follows – as well as a discussion around problems encountered, and group attempts to help solve them.

All projects dove-tail – so that all members of the group are in a position to comment on the other students' work.

The post-doctoral research fellow assists with day-to-day problems encountered in the laboratory.

# Team/cohort supervision

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Proposed by the Faculty of Humanities

Thought it would be desirable to have a team which includes the student, senior academics and new supervisors and even other students

This is in fact implemented in a form in the School of Education:

PhD weekends – students present, other students respond to the presentation. The session is chaired by an academic. The supervisor/s and other academics and students attend and give input. Very useful.

There are 4 PhD weekends per year. Not only doctoral students presenting. Also used for the purpose of defending proposals before they are submitted to the critical readers.

# Research Degree weekends

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## Purpose

The PhD seminar weekends provide a space for PhD and M Diss students to learn from invited speakers, from methodology workshops, and from their student colleagues. The weekends also offer a community of practice which extends beyond their supervisor: a community to whom students can present their work and receive feedback. The purpose of the presentations is for students to benefit from receiving diverse and supportive responses from discussants, other PhD / M Diss students and academic staff. Furthermore, presenters learn how to be open to competing epistemological views, to listen to constructive criticism and to defend their stance if needed. Other students benefit by gaining new insights, getting to know the topics being researched at WSoE, being introduced to different conceptual and methodological frameworks being used, and experiencing the challenges, anxieties, joys and pains that are integral to the PhD / M Diss. journey. Lastly, it is a strong aim of the Research Degrees Committee that a greater diversity of voices and views are given exposure.

# Cohort supervision

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School of education: Taught module (research design) for every MEd. Guides a cohort of students into producing a proposal at the end of the module.

Crucial to have the supervisors involved

Students present at various stages – e.g. present their research questions – these are discussed and there is input from the facilitator of the module, the group of supervisors present and the students in the cohort.

PhD students are invited to take this module as a stand-alone (if they come from outside the university and haven't completed the module previously) but it is not mandatory

# Cohort supervision and modifications – PSFRU (Protein Structure and Function Research Unit)

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Started by Prof Heini Dirr - SARChI chair – retired - now interim chair Dr Ikechukwu Achilonu

Individual supervision – 1 formal face-to-face meeting per month

Journal club every Friday morning – students present their work to the other students, their main supervisor and the other supervisors in the group. There is discussion around methodology, critical evaluation of results.

Provides an opportunity to grow the less inexperienced supervisors as well as the students. Also had an LMS site to post resources.



# “Cohort” supervision through more formal groups

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Example: NEST – Narrative Enquiry for social Transformation

Supported by the Mellon Foundation

Prof Bheki Peterson and Prof Jill Bradbury

Interdisciplinary – using narrative – community of young scholars – rigorous and structured

Reading group discussions

# Other informal groupings providing team supervision

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Prof Yael Shalem

Monthly meetings with all students and co-supervisors as well as other students and their supervisors who researched in similar areas. Group size was about 12.

Still had one-on-one meetings with the students but at these monthly meetings students could present their work to the group – this led to discussion and feedback.

Other supervisors – build up teams of students doing similar work and have weekly meetings.