



Comments: Development of an early career academic supervisor in Statistics - a discussion on a guiding rubric

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We thank the authors for the well thought out and interesting paper; one can clearly see that a great deal of research, diligence, and time went into this atypically non-mathematical exploration of the world of post-graduate supervision in the Mathematical Sciences.

The authors mention that funding is a challenge, especially for young academics. In this respect, we would like to point out that the university capacity development programme (UCDP) has gone to great lengths to provide funding for graduate academics that are busy with their PhDs (or within 5 years after completing their PhDs). Their funding extends to conference attendance, staff time buy-out, and research visits, to name but a few funding opportunities that they provide.

Another challenge that young PhD graduates experience is the pressure to almost immediately act as a post-graduate supervisor for their own students once they themselves have graduated. While this pressure to participate in post-graduate supervision is not always formally driven by institutions *per se*, it is related to the promotion requirements to senior lecturer which often stipulate some post-graduate supervision. The problem is, therefore, that these younger academics do not have the self-confidence or experience to perform this supervision by themselves. Many institutions often implement a policy where more senior academics assist these early career academics by acting as co-supervisors, but this leads to a further problem since, as pointed out by the authors, there are not always enough senior personnel to take on these responsibilities. In an attempt to address this issue, the National Graduate Academy (NGA) for Mathematical and Statistical Sciences has recently made funding available in the ‘knowledge-share’ category,

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where experienced senior academics (either international or national) can be commissioned (and compensated) to assist by acting as a co-supervisor to these younger academics. Mentorships of this nature represent a valuable opportunity to (directly and indirectly) teach a variety of skills pertaining to supervision that might otherwise require many years of trial and error to learn.

Finally, we would like to comment on the rubric suggested in the paper. To start, we must confess that we were looking forward to reading through a proposal of the rubric suggested in the title, but were somewhat disappointed that we had simply misunderstood and that the rubric would involve further discussion and research. However, we understand that this is a massive and time-consuming project and will require input and buy-in from many more stake-holders before it can be implemented.

From our own experiences, and as the authors note, there are considerable differences between how each of the South African universities evaluate theses. Some standardised method of evaluation is therefore desirable in terms of quality and consistency within the fraternity of South African universities. The development of a rubric of this nature is therefore a definite positive step towards achieving this goal.

As [1] notes, institutional policies, industry standards, and supervisor preferences continue to be the primary factors determining whether a doctoral dissertation should take the form of a full dissertation or an article-based dissertation.

Our personal preference for individuals that aim to continue in academia is the article-based approach, since it promotes the specific ability to write an academic article. Most people tend to work through their entire careers without ever being required to write another document similar to a PhD thesis, but they are *regularly* called upon to write short-form articles and conference proceedings. It is our opinion that it is critical (and often more difficult) to write in this concise manner, so the sooner a student learns this skill the better. A further skill that this format teaches is maintaining the ‘golden-thread’ of concepts that should propagate through the multiple articles to be published in this format. The rubric should therefore account for both the article-based and full thesis-based formats. In addition, the rubric for the article-based format should specifically require that students only publish papers in accredited journals, for example, journals accredited by Web of Science or Scopus. We know that this will be a contentious issue and one which will need to be thoroughly discussed with all stakeholders before it can be implemented, however it will be necessary to implement something like this to prevent publications in so-called predatory journals. As we see it, the rubric should therefore accommodate four separate and distinct types of PhD theses. Figure 1 presents these different rubric classes in a flow-chart where it is highlighted that there needs to be a clear distinction in the rubric for practically-oriented theses and theoretical ones. The further subdivision of the rubric requires that one can distinguish between the article-based format and the full thesis format.

We look forward to seeing how these rubrics will turn out, but we advise care that one should not get bogged down in the minuscule details and lose sight of the primary goal of the rubric: to ensure that the thesis provides novel and scientifically correct contributions to the literature.

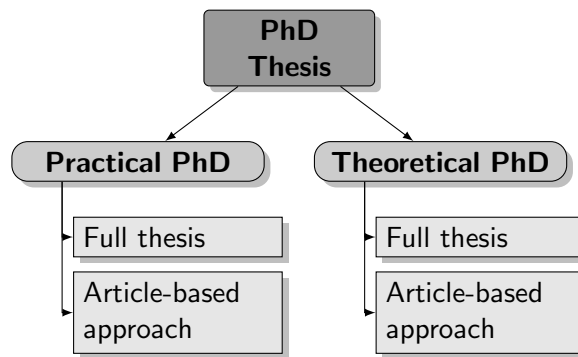


Figure 1: Breakdown of the four different versions of the rubric for PhD theses.

References

- [1] FRICK, L., 2019, *PhD by publication – panacea or paralysis?* Africa Education Review, 16(5) :47–59.