
	UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES	
MMed/MPhil Part III (minor dissertation) Guidelines for candidates, supervisors and examiners		

The MMed minor dissertation (or the MPhil dissertation in the case of sub-specialities) is one of three examination components of the MMed/MPhil degree. This minor dissertation carries one third of the weight of a full master’s dissertation in terms of its credit weighting.

The dissertation must be a study containing the results of an analytical, quantitative, or epidemiological study carried out by the candidate (for certain disciplines, the candidate may chose instead to do a qualitative study, an audit cycle or a formal systemic review). A case report is not acceptable for the dissertation.

The dissertation must be the result of independent work of the candidate conducted under the guidance and direction of a supervisor(s) and should demonstrate evidence of an ability to undertake research, to adequately interpret results and to comprehensively and critically review the relevant literature. Although the findings of the research need not necessarily be original, they must be seen to advance scientific understanding. The topic and scope of research will depend on the particular disciplines and must be agreed upon in consultation with the supervisor(s).

Research protocol

Candidates intending to register for the MMed/MPhil Part III are required to submit a full research protocol for approval to their respective Departmental Research Committee (DRC). The candidate must also obtain FHS UCT Ethics approval prior to conducting their research. This full research protocol (together with a copy of the ethics approval letter) must be submitted to the postgraduate administration for approval by the Board of the Faculty of Health Sciences, prior to commencement of the research. For most disciplines, submission of the research protocol should be made no later than the end of year 2.

The research protocol should outline the scope and content of the dissertation and must include the title of the proposed dissertation, name of the supervisor(s) and their brief curriculum vitae.

Submission of dissertations

On completion, the dissertation should be submitted to the Faculty Postgraduate Officer. The candidate should inform the Faculty Officer one month in advance of the intention to submit.

Submission deadlines:

1. March 15th for June graduation
2. August 15th for December graduation

Supervisors will be requested by the Faculty Postgraduate Officer to submit a letter supporting submission. This letter should be supplied by the primary supervisor. If this supervisor is external, the internal supervisor must be kept informed at every stage of the process. Specific submission requirements may be set by individual disciplines.²

Note on fees: To avoid attracting fees, dissertations need to be submitted before the beginning of the first quarter (first day of academic year), and before the start of the second semester (mid July) to qualify for a 50% fee rebate.

Supervisors

One cannot overemphasize the importance of identifying a dissertation supervisor as early as possible. The supervisor should be an individual who can relate to the candidate’s research project, be available for frequent and regular discussion and advice, and someone with whom the candidate can develop a good working relationship. Where specialised equipment and/or laboratory work is required for the study, the supervisor should assist in facilitating such access to such facilities. Supervisors may assist candidates in developing scientific communication skills but they are not required to do detailed editing or correction of spelling, grammar, or style. They may refer candidates to the UCT Writing Centre for this purpose.

The primary supervisor may be based outside the candidate’s home department, faculty or university. In such a case, an internal (or secondary) supervisor will be required in addition to the primary supervisor, to serve as a guide and link to discipline-specific procedures. Primary supervisors retain responsibilities to the candidate and the university until the dissertation process is complete.

Please note: in order to assist a candidate with a master’s research topic the supervisor needs to hold a master’s degree or higher, or have relevant research experience. If the primary supervisor does not hold a higher degree or equivalent (such as a Fellowship of The College of Medicine of South Africa), then a secondary supervisor who has a higher degree will need to be appointed in addition to the primary supervisor.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to publish the study with the supervisor(s) as co-author(s). This may require work beyond the graduation date. Such arrangements should be discussed and documented in advance.

- 2 For Public Health Medicine and Occupational Medicine the dissertation must be submitted for examination at least *4 months* prior to the deadline for registration for the examinations of the relevant College. This is in order to ensure that a final examination mark for the dissertation can be submitted by the candidate to the College of Medicine of South Africa (CMSA) at the time of registration as required by CMSA examination regulations.

The dissertation

Submission of the dissertation should satisfy the following criteria:

1. The title page should contain the candidate’s name, dissertation title and the name of the university. It must also state the degree, e.g. Master of Medicine (MMed) in Public Health Medicine, Occupational Medicine, Family Medicine, Surgery, etc. The title page should also include a statement to the effect that the research report is based on independent work performed by the candidate and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree to any other university. It must also state that this work has not been published *prior to registration* for the abovementioned degree.
2. The body of the dissertation, which must be structured in 4 parts, should include the following:

Part A: The *protocol* (as approved by the Departmental Research Committee and Faculty Research Ethics Committee). The protocol should not exceed 4000 words.

Part B: A *structured literature review* appropriate to the subject matter and methods of the dissertation. The literature review must, amongst other things, show that the student is sufficiently acquainted with the relevant literature and is able to perform a critical appraisal and, if appropriate for the topic, show a good understanding of evidence-based medicine.

The review should be between 3 000 and 4 000 words.

A suggested structure for the literature review is as follows:

- a) Objectives of literature review
- b) Literature search strategy, including inclusion and exclusion criteria

- c) Quality criteria - some leeway will be allowed here, as candidates will vary in their ability to appraise studies. This will also vary with the nature of the dissertation.
- d) Summary or interpretation of literature
- e) Identification of gaps or needs for further research
- f) References (which will overlap with but will not be the same lists as in the journal article and protocol)

Part C: The results of the study must be presented in the form of a *manuscript* of an article for a named peer reviewed journal, meeting all the requirements set out in the “Instructions for Authors” of that journal, including the word count and referencing style. (Unless specially motivated, the journal chosen will need to allow for *at least* 3000 words excluding abstract, tables, figures and references). The “Instructions to Authors” of the journal must be appended. The journal chosen for publication must be appropriate to the subject matter of the dissertation and accredited by the Department of Education or listed in the citation index of the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI).

Important note: the candidate need not have submitted the article, nor is the acceptance of the article and requirement for passing the degree. The norm of practise is to publish the study with the supervisor(s) as co-author(s) and candidates are strongly encouraged to submit their manuscript either before or after examination of the mini-dissertation.

Part D: All *supporting documents* including:

- Questionnaire/data capture instrument
 - Consent forms and any related participant information sheets
 - Technical appendices, including, if considered necessary, any additional tables not included in the main manuscript for the examiner to have available. These should be accompanied by a brief narrative.
 - Official Ethics approval letter from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee
3. The article does *not* have to be submitted to the journal in order to meet academic requirements.
 4. A candidate must submit 2 copies of the dissertation in temporary binding, and an electronic copy on compact disc in a universally readable format (e.g. pdf).

Examiners

The full dissertation will be submitted for examination through the Postgraduate office of our Faculty to two external examiners (nominated by the supervisors and HOD). Three examiners will be nominated, two of which are invited to examine, and one held as an alternate. All examiners must be external to UCT. These nominations are circulated to the Faculty Dissertation Committee. It is the *supervisor’s (or co-supervisor’s)* responsibility to submit names of potential examiners to the Faculty Officer when the candidate is ready to submit.

The examiners will be well briefed regarding the specific requirements and criteria for submission and examination of the mini-dissertation. Such criteria will clearly explain the difference between the mini-dissertation and a Master’s degree by dissertation alone.

Details required for each examiner are: academic qualifications, postal and/or physical address, telephone and fax numbers and e-mail address, and one paragraph description of their standing in the relevant field (drawn from their CV if need be.)

The candidate may not be informed of the identity of the examiners. After the outcome of the mini-dissertation has been finalised, the examiners’ identities are made known if the examiners have indicated that they do not object to this.