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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

SGS 047

GUIDANCE ON DOCTORAL SUPERVISION

INTRODUCTION

The success of doctoral students depends largely on the quality of supervision they receive and the nature of interactions they have with the intellectual life of their schools. The American University of Nigeria (AUN) has an obligation to provide doctoral supervision of the highest quality. The Graduate School is committed to working with relevant schools to maintain appropriate oversight and accountability mechanisms to ensure high-quality supervision of all doctoral research. This note provides guidance on the roles, responsibilities, and conduct of doctoral supervisors at AUN.

While this guidance is designed primarily for main supervisors, all co-supervisors and members of the supervision committee are expected to be equally guided by its contents.

THE DOCTORAL SUPERVISOR

To supervise doctoral research, supervisors should have received training in dissertation supervision. They must have a strong awareness of their responsibilities to both the student and the university.

The main supervisor must be a senior academic staff member of the University in a continuing or fixed-term role, must hold a doctoral degree in a relevant discipline from a recognized academic institution and must have demonstrated expertise and research experience in a field relevant to the research. The supervisor should normally be an active researcher in the field s/he is supervising. S/he should be able to advise the research student on all aspects of their development.

APPOINTMENT OF SUPERVISORS

The PhD candidate will nominate academic staff who meet the supervision criteria above for consideration and approval by the Doctoral Dissertation Board. The approval of the Doctoral Dissertation Board will be formally communicated to the PhD candidate and the supervisor(s).

The main supervisor may invite another faculty member with relevant expertise and academic background as a co-supervisor in consultation with the PhD candidate and subject to the approval of the Doctoral Dissertation Board.

THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE

Supervising doctoral students involves a long-term and substantive commitment to the students. It is therefore important that all doctoral supervisors and students at AUN take their roles, duties, and responsibilities to each other extremely seriously.

Supervisors actively contribute to the progress, performance, and navigation of their students through their doctoral program. They support their students to complete their programs in time. Supervisors have the important role of fostering the scholarly, intellectual, and professional development of their students. It is a role that comes with enormous responsibility and must never be taken for granted.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Doctoral supervisors have three cardinal responsibilities:

1) **Advise** doctoral students on their research and dissertation.
2) **Monitor** their student's academic progress.
3) **Mentor** their students to become well-rounded scholars.

1) Advise students on their research and dissertation

The supervisor will provide guidance on key areas such as research methodology and techniques, theories, literature review, ethical/safety considerations, research timelines, etc.

The supervisor will thoroughly review and provide constructive and timely feedback on all written materials relevant to the research and dissertation submitted by the student.

It is the responsibility of the student to *do* the work, while the supervisor *guides*. The supervisor and the student will mutually establish (preferably in writing) the expectations on what constitutes *doing* and *guiding*. They should also jointly establish the expected feedback time for submitted work. The Graduate School recommends a timeframe of two to three weeks depending on the complexity of materials submitted. However, this can vary depending on various circumstances such as illness, travel or vacation. These circumstances should be discussed between the supervisor and the student.

Providing effective advice requires knowledge of the University's requirements and expectations. Therefore,

a) Supervisors and their students must stay up to date on departmental, Graduate School, and university regulations, policies, and procedures as it pertains to doctoral research. It is the responsibility of both the student and the supervisor to keep themselves well-informed on university policies and procedures.

b) Supervisors and their students must stay updated on the range of support services available to research students such as library resources, psychological support, medical care, Writing Center support, research seminars/tutorials, etc.
c) Supervisors and their students must be informed about AUN's policies on academic integrity. The Graduate School will check for plagiarism and other forms of academic infractions on *every* written work submitted for evaluation. Students found liable for academic misconduct may face expulsion.
d) Supervisors and their students must be informed about AUN's policies on the ethical conduct of research involving human and animal subjects. Every research involving human or animal subjects must obtain the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). To request more information on the IRB approval process or to enquire whether a research project requires IRB review, contact irb@aun.edu.ng.

Additionally, main supervisors should, in all cases, encourage students to draw on the range of expertise available to them by working with all members of their supervisory committee.

2) Monitor their student's academic progress

The main supervisor will evaluate the student's progress every semester and communicate the evaluation to both the Graduate School and their school's Graduate Program Coordinator. The evaluation must indicate the status of the student's progress – specifying whether it is satisfactory or unsatisfactory based on mutually defined milestones. In case of unsatisfactory progress, the report should include a clearly outlined set of actions or steps that will help restore the student to satisfactory status.

If, after assessing the student's progress, the supervisors doubt the ability of the student to complete the program, the supervisory committee should formally inform the Graduate Support Coordinator at the Graduate School. The Graduate Support Coordinator will work with the student to explore remedies; and where none is feasible, may recommend to the Dean of Graduate School that the student be advised to withdraw from the program.

To ensure effective monitoring of their student's progress, main supervisors must ensure that:
a) The student completes and follows the Doctoral Plan of Study (DPS). Contact the Graduate School for a copy of the DPS.
b) The student develops a research plan that is sufficient in depth, breadth, duration and milestones.
c) The student has regular review meetings with the supervisory committee and the Graduate Support Coordinator at the Graduate School to ensure steady progress. At least two (preferably more) review meetings should be arranged in each semester.

3) Mentor their students to become well-rounded scholars

We expect supervisors to also mentor. Supervisors should :
a) Guide their students to select the courses, seminars, resources, workshops, and conferences that they need to meet their research objectives.
b) Work with their students to develop a viable dissemination plan for their research.

c) Guide students to develop a communication plan with the Graduate School and other university departments on the assessment of their progress (particularly during the dissertation writing and completion phases)
d) Support students to find relevant internships, scholarships, research, and teaching opportunities and resources that enhance their learning and academic careers.
e) Provide references for their students in job or fellowship applications.
f) Guide students to publish in credible outlets most relevant to their disciplines.
g) Help students develop their confidence as scholars and independent and critical thinkers.
h) Encourage students to actively participate in the intellectual lives of their schools and the university by attending research seminars, colloquia, and various university activities.

SUPERVISION MEETINGS

Supervisors must, as early as possible, establish and communicate common expectations on supervision meeting methods and frequency with their students. Main supervisors must have regular meetings/consultations with their students and their supervision committee. It is the responsibility of the student to schedule these meetings/consultations which ***must be at least once a month***. Supervisors must be available and reasonably accessible for meetings requested by their students. There should be no one-size-fits-all approach. Meetings should be arranged to meet the needs of both the student and the supervisors. Some students, for example, may need more support, while others may need less. ***Research students must submit a log of their supervision meetings/hours to the Graduate School at the end of every semester.***

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Supervisors should note that the university's policy on sexual harassment applies in all supervision cases. For more information, please refer to AUN's Safeguarding and Sexual Harassment policy.

Doctoral students can use the AUN's whistleblowing portal, whistle.aun.edu.ng to report sexual harassment and advances, or any inappropriate behaviors by their supervisors or instructors. For the avoidance of doubt, intimate or sexual relationships between supervisors and students is strictly prohibited. For additional information consult the AUN faculty and personnel manuals.

DISCRIMINATION

On no account should supervisors discriminate against their students on the grounds of religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or association. Supervisors should relate professionally with their students at all times.

GIFTS AND FAVORS

Supervisors are prohibited from seeking or receiving favors or financial rewards of any kind from their students. They must never accept gifts (in cash or kind) from their students. Note carefully that AUN's Policy on Gifts applies to doctoral supervision. For more information, see the AUN Faculty Manual.

VERBAL BULLYING AND INTIMIDATION

Verbal bullying is strictly prohibited. Verbal bullying involves insults, taunts, name-calling, sarcasm, ridicule, and other types of verbal abuse. Supervisors must be aware that verbal abuse can seriously harm the self-confidence, academic performance, and in some cases mental health of their students. Supervisors must never use insults, name-calling, ridicule, or sarcasm against their students – in spoken or written communication. Abusive behavior or bullying can lead to serious action from the university against the perpetrator. Consult the Faculty Manual for more information on AUN's policy on bullying and intimidation.

Feedback on students' work must always be constructive and expressed in an upbuilding and supportive language.

Where there are disputes between the supervisor and the student, they should, at the first instance, try to resolve the issues amicably between themselves. If such resolution fails, they should both write to their dean and/or the Dean of Graduate School providing details of the disputes and their attempts to resolve them.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Supervisors should ensure a safe working environment for their students. They should ensure proper risk assessment (including security and travel risks) associated with their student's research. If in doubt please seek clearance from AUN's Safety and Security department.

ABSENCE

Supervisors may have reasons to be away from the university for an extended period. Being physically away from the university should not prevent a supervisor from continuing to work with their students (electronically). However, in cases of extended absence, or in situations where the supervisor is unavailable electronically, s/he must inform the student and the Graduate School in writing. The Graduate School will work with the Dean of the relevant school to make arrangements for interim supervision if necessary. This will thus ensure that a supervisor's absence does not negatively affect the student's progress.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

It is critical for supervisors to inform the Graduate School, in writing, of intellectual property matters (such as patents, software, copyright, and income from sales and royalties) from

graduate research at AUN. AUN is currently rethinking its policy on Intellectual Property. Contact the Graduate School or the Provost's Office if there are questions or concerns.

CO-AUTHORED PUBLICATIONS

Co-authored publication between supervisors and their research students is strongly encouraged. However, there should be clarity on who should be the lead author. It is expected that the student should be the lead author in the publication of their research. Supervisors must never compel their students to include them as co-authors. For a supervisor to co-author a paper with their student, the supervisor should normally have contributed to the written work.

CHANGE OF SUPERVISION OR WITHDRAWAL

There may be situations in which a supervisor may determine that s/he is not prepared or in a position to continue their supervision duties. When such is the case, the supervisor must write to the Doctoral Dissertation Board in copy of their Dean and the Dean of Graduate School stating reasons for the withdrawal.

If the student wants to change their supervisor, they must complete a Change of Supervision Form. Every change of supervision must be approved by the AUN Doctoral Dissertation Board.

OBLIGATIONS OF DOCTORAL CANDIDATES

The doctoral candidate is expected to, *inter alia*:

- Work with their supervisor and the Graduate Support Coordinator to complete their DPS and be committed to the plan.
- Demonstrate commitment to completing their work within the specified timeframe of the doctoral program.
- Submit reports or chapter drafts (in whole or parts) of the dissertation to their supervisors as agreed.
- Treat their supervisors with the dignity and respect they deserve as senior colleagues.
- Abide by the agreements made with their supervisor concerning submission, supervision, publication, participation in conferences and seminars, etc.
- Live up to such principles of research ethics as applied to their field of study.
- Abide by university rules and regulations and student code of conduct.