

REPORT ON STUDENT EVALUATION OF POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION PHD-PIETERMARITZBURG CAMPUS

Lecturer: Prof S Nadar

The following report is based on student evaluation questionnaire data, administered to students registered for the module. A total of about 10 students was supervised by the lecturer, 9 (90%) of whom answered the questionnaire.¹

In the questionnaire the students were presented with a number of open-ended questions. All student comments included in the report are quoted verbatim.

1. The extent to which your supervisor established clear and explicit mutual expectations of the supervision process with you.

- It is important to mention that Prof Sarojini Nadar took over my thesis supervision from Prof J Smit at the end of 2010. We prepared the supervision contract together and met to go through and sign the agreement and we held each other accountable throughout the period of supervision. I would say it was to a great extent but it was a mutual contract.
- Prof Nadar was excellent in the manner in which she detailed her expectations of her role as supervisor.
- Excellent. We set targets together; she is a very good mentor.
- The expectations of the supervision process, and the relationship between me and Prof Nadar, as supervisor, were clear from the beginning. But even beyond this, her approachable nature meant that I felt comfortable to approach her at any stage to clarify what was expected, or to ask for direction with particular issues. There was no point during my Master's degree that I was unaware of what needed to be done, or overwhelmed by knowing too much detail.
- This was agreed upon at the completion and submission of the proposal.
- Supervision expectations were clearly made at the beginning of the first semester last year. We (my supervisor and i) agreed that we would meet as regularly as possible on a one-on-one supervision as well as group supervision during the 'work in progress' seminars with other students and lecturers. Both arrangements were beneficial to me as it allowed me ample time to work on my dissertation at length before the next meeting or seminar.
- We both have been a bit fuzzy on this one as I have by choice and circumstance not been able to attend many of the seminars and we are both too busy.
- She made it clear from the beginning what a student should expect from a supervisor and what is the supervisor's responsibility.
- Our relationship was very good, she was clearly explained her role, even to the extent that she used the opportunity to teach all the relevant things in the area of the work

¹ Low response rates reduce the reliability of the feedback. It is recommended that data be treated with caution when response rates are less than 50% for classes of 100 or more, less than 66% for classes 50-100, less than 75% for classes 20-50, and less than 80% for classes less 20.

2. The extent to which your supervisor helped you work out a timeframe for the project with relevant target dates for completing various stages of the project.

- This was done and agreed upon with the supervisor during the course of proposal writing and incorporated within the proposal as well as the student-supervisor supervision agreement.
- A time frame was established for the different elements of the Master's degree, which were put in place and followed, which enabled me to complete the degree in the minimum allocated amount of time. The personal interest which Prof Nadar takes in her students means that she is well aware of our capabilities. I was most grateful for her consideration and flexibility, as we factored in a mid-year break where I would be a part of a drafting group for the World Council of Churches Unity Statement. This experience was hugely beneficial to my personal and academic development yet, because the slight interruption was catered for, it did not disturb the writing of my thesis.
- Excellent, we planned and set targets for my work.
- She clearly possesses meticulous planning skills which invariably meant that there were always collaborative realistic targets set. These targets were mutually agreed upon.
- Excellent! Right from the word goes it was a complete different experience for me. Only did we have to change a due date to Prof Nadar being out of the country, delivering a paper at an international conference. (I had had a most disappointing experience, when my first submission was rejected by two of the three examiners and the end result was that I had to start from scratch with Prof Nadar but it was worth every minute of the hard work that involved.).
- She has done her best to set a timeframe for the project with relevant target dates for completing various stages of the project.
- She did this very well with me at the outset- and has been flexible and helpful in terms of adjusting it in order to be more realistic.
- We had established that we would hold seminars on certain dates in the year and on those dates; I had to present a certain part or chapter of my dissertation. This means that I was helped to work on my dissertation in connection to the seminars which was very helpful on my part to complete the dissertation and work out the timeframes that would fit into the seminars. I knew what needed to be worked on before the next work in progress seminar hence, my target would be to finish a chapter for seminars.
- It was surprisingly perfect

3. The extent to which your supervisor established a compatible working relationship and was readily accessible and approachable for consultation or advice.

- She established and maintained a very collegial tone to the relationship that augured well for the supervision experience. She should be commended on her excellent work ethic.
- We worked out a very good system- early mornings and late afternoons. She juggled her schedule to fit in meeting times. She responded prompt to questions, messages and e-mails. I had permission to call her at any time. I valued the excellent working relationship we developed immensely.
- Very good. We always keep in touch. Even when she is away we keep in touch through email and phone.
- She was punctual, going an extra mile for the completion of the work and she was even compensating for the lost time in which she could not avail herself

- Prof Nadar has a reputation for being an approachable and patient lecturer and supervisor. I found her leadership strong, her encouragement motivating and her determination an inspiring example. The relationship which I had with Prof Nadar was an incredibly easy one, although the times when I needed to be pushed she did so.
- The working relationship with the supervisor is very good. We agreed on the times and dates to meet. This is supplemented by the cohort supervisions which she is also part.
- Whenever I needed advice, I would send e-mails, she would respond to me within a timeframe of two weeks and mostly she would call me and we would discuss over the phone, (this is because she is in Durban and I am in Pietermaritzburg). And if there was need, she would arrange and come to Pietermaritzburg and we would discuss whatever needed such attention. In fact whenever she would come to Pietermaritzburg for a meeting or anything else, she would inform and ask me beforehand to meet with her if I had any questions or just to give her an update of my work. There were also times that she would not respond in time and I knew she was busy as she had just taken up a new position as dean of research in humanities.
- She is completely accessible and approachable and we work very well together when we manage to nail down the time in which to do this.
- Sarojini is a very open person who is ever ready to assist should a students need her help. In fact we have established a good working relationship. Evidence is that I have completed my degrees on time.

4. The extent to which your supervisor has a good knowledge of the current research related to your topic and of research methods appropriate to the nature of the topic.

- She is one of the experts in the field of gender and religion and is therefore highly knowledgeable in her contributions to my research.
- I chose a field of research which was is not specific focus area of Prof Nadar, although she still displayed extensive knowledge of the field, and could direct me to researchers who have advanced the furthest in the field. Her own personal insights and creativity also helped to expand the areas which I would research. Prof Nadar was very helpful in deciding on how the research would be best being conducted and analyzed. Settling on the contextual Bible Study method, allowed me to make use of a fairly new way of collecting and interpreting data that was well suited to investigating my topic.
- Excellent. She is a competent gender and biblical scholar. She is well versed with appropriate research methods and instruments.
- Outstanding! What she didn't know she helped me to research. We delved into loads of brand new material and together we searched for the relevant gaps in the field. I believed she also encouraged me to bring my own brand of research into the field- as yet untapped and very necessary- gender justice in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa!
- She is clearly an established and respected academic on gender & religion. Her prolific writing on the subject logically afforded me as her students numerous benefits of her insight.
- I believe she is knowledgeable. This can be testified by the fact that the formulation of my topic has benefited a lot from her comments and contribution.
- We are both learning on the job so to speak in terms of current research. She has been helpful with the planning and implementing of research methods- but I am getting additional assistance with the methodology as well.

- The fact that she has written articles related to my topic of research made it so easy for me to do the work. The research methods and readings she suggested were relevant to my topic. Her articles were of great help in my research as she has written extensively on women empowerment and justice etc which was my focus.
- She is excellent because she is having a good knowledge and able to provide appropriate research method

5. The extent to which your supervisor attempted to help you find a solution to any problems encountered in your work.

- From my initial meeting with Prof Nadar she impressed on me as an eternal optimist, which became evident even when I encountered challenges in study. She would innovate around even the most difficult challenges.
- The first suggestion was always that I try to come up with solutions and/or strategies. What was different was that Prof Nadar was available and listened to me. She bounced my ideas back to me with wisdom and insight. She did not only recommend more reading material (which was my previous supervisor's answer to every question I had) but asked probing questions that helped us both find the direction or answer to some of the current challenges during the work in progress. Her own research and passion for gender justice was a huge plus in the equation. She was compassionate and stood in solidarity with me as I faced the challenges in my own denomination as a woman minister.
- She is always motivating. She always pushes me to think beyond what I am thinking; she is also good at directing me to resources that help me to move smoothly in my research.
- Prof Nadar was always helpful. I am amazed by her ingenuity, her vast knowledge-base as well as her connections with others in an array of different fields, all of which contribute to easily finding solutions to problems.
- Despite being busy, she always has leverage of her expertise in the field which she draws on to assist me progress with my work at any stage.
- In attempting to help me find solutions to encountered problems in my work, Prof Nadar would phone and we would try to find a way forward, she would bring in lectures from other disciplines to help me hear views from someone who did not know what I was working on and how they would understand my research. This was very valuable as I would hear different perspectives of my research and the insight gained was really helpful in finishing my work within stipulated academic papers.
- The real problem is finding the time.
- As I have indicated above, my former and current topics of research have benefitted a lot from her critique and suggestions.
- She was very helpful in giving direction and guidance in order to how to solve the problem which we faced during our research work

6. The extent to which your supervisor provided prompt and constructive feedback on your work.

- She is mostly prompt and cutting edge in her feedback.
- Not only did Prof Nadar spend written feedback, but there were many occasions where we would sit and read through and discuss the chapters of the thesis which had been written. These sessions were incredibly helpful, and also ensured that the work was all my own.
- I get feedback within two weeks when I submit my work in progress, when she is unwell or she is held up with some commitments she does communicate. She makes very constructive comments on my work.

- This was a breath of fresh air for me. Prof Nadar would work through the night to read through my chapters and provide feedback as soon as was humanly possible. (Previously I had to often wait for weeks and sometimes I did not receive any feedback whatsoever.) Her suggestions (sometimes very firm ones) were always constructive and often wise! She also knew what would be expected of me from an academic perspective and was able to give the kind of direction that would help me give the examiners what they were looking for. She is incredibly skillful at blending the research with the expectations-I believe the final work is proof of exactly this. Her feedback definitely helped me to produce a thesis of much finer quality.
- Her comments were always constructive within a facilitative learning environment. She maintained a record of prompt feedback.
- It is innumerable the times when she has provided and prompted constructive feedback. She is excellent at that.
- She is excellent about viewing and responding and supporting what I am doing whenever I get organized to send work to her.
- Whenever I sent my work for my supervisor's advice, she would call me and tell me when she would look at it. Most often, she would arrange for us to meet and go through the project together. This was a positive and profitable way of teaching me how to go about writing academic papers.
- It was quite satisfactory

7. The extent to which your supervisor encouraged your research and helped you to maintain enthusiasm for your work.

- Prof Nadar's enthusiasm is clearly contagious as I have noted in my acknowledgement of my thesis.
- Sarojini's sense of humor was a lifeline for me! Her passion is contagious so when, at times throughout the period of writing, I became discouraged she would crack a joke and lift my spirits. This does not mean she did not share in my frustrations or diminished my anxiety. It was just that she was able to remain objective and her view of the bigger picture was an encouraging influence. She would often say that I must remember just how important this research is! That kept me going.
- She is always motivating. She motivated me to finish my Masters within a year. She has also motivated me to finish my PhD proposal within 8 months.
- Prof Nadar has an infectious thirst for knowledge, and has a way of bringing the subject matter to life. She too is constantly reminding me, and others, of the bigger picture of the dissertation and the purpose of academia. For this I thank her.
- She is very encouraging in my research. She has motivated me to attend conferences and further my papers for subsequent publication. She has provided supporting letters for international conferences and available research funding.
- My supervisor organized "work in progress seminars" from formulating a research topic to the completion of the project, where we (students under her supervision) had to present our work at whatever level our work was. These seminars helped enhance my passion for the work as I would interact with other students and other lecturers too and engage constructive discussions concerning my work. The comments received during such seminars were so beneficial, useful and made it easy to go back and work on the dissertation with passion.
- Excellent. She keeps me believing that I can actually do this. It would be unfair to say she has not been helping me maintain enthusiasm for my work after all the brilliant research and publications I have done.
- She was so encouraging, in such a way that I was able to complete the work of two years in one year

8. Please identify the best aspects of the supervision you are currently receiving.

- Integrated conferences that allow for constructive criticism, Seminars that further research ideas and the cohort supervision meetings have developed my presentation skills, academic interaction, as well as research and methodological skills.
- Having submitted my thesis at the end of last year, and having completed the corrections and final process under the direction of Prof Nadar, I am no longer receiving any formal supervision.
- One on one meetings, discipline meetings and seminars which she ensures that I attend with her, Cohat supervision and postgraduate conferences which she ensures that I attended with her track comments on my work in progress.
- As mentioned before the single most salient aspect of my supervision experience was that Prof Nadar possesses excellent supervisory skills. This experience undoubted me to emulate her supervisory style even with my own students.
- I am writing about supervision that has already been completed. I celebrate one year since my graduation this week! So, the memories are still very fresh in my mind. What I appreciated most were 1. Sarojini's availability and interest in my research problem. 2. Her commitment to academic excellence. 3. Her way of making me believe that I was doing something very important. 4. The two-way street of our working relationship- she did exactly as much as that which she expected of me. 5. The way she pushed me without me feeling bullied. 6. The cherry on the top is that she encouraged me to complete the work in one year!
- Openness and will to help, constructive critique and suggestions.
- The enthusiasm for my topic and my life's work and who I am in the midst of all this. She helps me believe that I can be an academic.
- The best aspects of supervision I am receiving at the moment are those first, my supervisor is constantly encouraging me to publish articles and has explained the worth of publication. Secondly, she encourages me to attend conferences and if possible presented a paper at such conferences. Thirdly, the work in progress seminars that we had were so valuable that listening to how far have gone in their work and the constructive critics given to the work helped me in completing and valuable dissertation.
- It is teaching, giving the new insight and showing a clear direction towards the intended idea

9. Please identify aspects of the supervision you are receiving that could be improved.

- Sarojini Nadar is not perfect and I am sure that some students will find things in her supervision that might be improved. To be really honest, I struggled to find anything that she could have done differently or better in our situation- which was somewhat unique. However, may I here comment on the University's system of allocating supervisors? During my Masters' research I was living and training for the Methodist ministry in the Free State. It was a very good opportunity to do some focus group research on gender justice in the church amongst Afrikaans-speaking women in the Methodist Church. My supervisor at the time 'believes' in independent post-graduate research and I doubt if he ever read through my work at all. I received my Masters' Degree cum laude, which made me believe that I was probably on the right track as an "independent researcher" so when I registered for my PhD I did not question continuing with the same supervisor. It was a big mistake, which cost me dearly in time, lots of money and the frustration and humiliation of having my first submission rejected. (It should never have been submitted and IF my supervisor had read my work, he should have known that it was not good enough or on the right academic track.) One of the first things my original supervisor should have done was to say

whether or not he shared my passion for gender justice in the church and he should have said so if he would have preferred for someone else do take my supervision on. When, after three years of struggle, the university appointed a co-supervisor for me, I hoped that things would improve but she was based in PMBurg (I was at Howard Collage) and she seldom answered my e-mails. She was too busy and I was only able to set up one meeting with her, which she rushed through and we did not reach any agreement either. During all this time (which coincided with the merger with Durban-Westville) I had written to the Dean of Research on more than one occasion and only after I was given only one more year in which to finish my degree, did the university agree to give my supervision to Prof Nadar. All I can say in response to that is a big THANK YOU!

- None.
- I was hugely grateful for having Prof Nadar as a supervisor as I found professional, interested, available and encouraging.
- This supervision facilitates the development of papers and hence funding should be availed to us to attend conferences to present our work and to publish
- While I find my supervisor to be one of the excellent supervisors and very efficient, she has become a bit slow in responding because of her busy schedule since she took a new position in the college.
- I need more attention to methodology so that I can understand how to best use my data.
- More time for the students.
- The availability in a planned time appointment instead of compensating, even busy with other commitments

10. Additional Comments.

- In my studies so far I have received the much needed motivational advice, support letters for conferences and financial support from my supervisor, and through her support I have been able to publish some of my work. However, the school should provide financial support in form of scholarships and bursaries in support of our studies.
- I thoroughly enjoyed my Masters, and although it is not entirely dependent on your supervisor, this does play a big part in it. I had no big hitches or delays, and there was no point which I was waiting for feedback from Prof Nadar. I too am very pleased with the quality of the work which Prof Nadar helped me to achieve, as I have completed my degree *cum laude*. I am also sure, knowing some of her students and their regard for Prof Nadar, that they will also offer praise for her dedication and guidance.
- She is caring, motivating and she clarifies my thinking.
- Prof Nadar research expertise is not only expansive but very eclectic. She respectfully challenges convention within a critical save space. She is an inspiration to any novice researcher & repeatedly creates opportunities for scholarly development in her students.
- My experience during the year, when I was working with Prof Sarojini Nadar, restored my faith in UKZN; she is one of the finest academics I have met. She is diligent, committed, and passionate and sets extremely high standards-for her students as well as for herself. What made me willing to go the extra mile in my research, every day, knew that she was already one step ahead of me. I was thrilled when the university acknowledged her competence and her constant pursuit of excellence by appointing her to the position of Dean of Research. I wish her well.
- No comments.

- Professor Nadar has not just been concerned about me as her student, she takes time to know about my family and is interested to know my family is fairing. She encourages and inspires me to soar to great heights.
- She is efficient, quite good, caring and teaching

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