

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES, CAVE HILL CAMPUS
The School for Graduate Studies and Research

GUIDELINES FOR THE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH SEMINARS

A practical guide for Departments, Supervisors and Research Students
MPhil • PhD • MD • Professional Doctorates

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Introduction to guidelines

These Guidelines seek to explain how mandatory research seminars for postgraduate research degree students are to be organised, delivered, assessed and reported at the Cave Hill Campus.

They serve to offer only practical guidance for Heads of Department, Graduate Coordinators, Supervisors, seminar assessors and students.

They do not replace the BGSR Regulations for Graduate Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees (2018), the Manual of Procedures, or Faculty and Programme Regulations; where anything here differs from those documents, those documents should take precedence.

Regulations and research seminars

Regulation 1.68 requires MPhil students to satisfactorily complete at least two research seminars, convened by the relevant Head of Department, before submitting the thesis. PhD and MD students must complete a minimum of three (3) seminars. Professional Doctorate students complete seminars as specified in Programme requirements (*UWI/BGSR regulations governing professional doctorates indicate a minimum of one research seminar unless otherwise prescribed by programme requirements*). The assessment of every seminar must be included in successive student's progress reports.

Regulation 3.15 makes these seminars a precondition of examination: the required seminars must be satisfactorily completed before the student applies to enter for the examination of the thesis - which itself must be not less than three months before the expected date of submission (Reg. 3.16). Seminars are therefore a matter of scheduling from the first year of candidature, not a formality to be arranged at the end.

Seminars are mandatory and non-credit. A course code is assigned and students register for each seminar.

Timing and Spacing of Research Seminars¹

- Normally one seminar per semester. Where two are held in the same semester, the content must be substantially different.
- Departments are advised, where possible or appropriate, to publish a seminar calendar each semester and hold seminar slots in advance, so students are not delayed by timetabling.
- The student and supervisor should agree on the date. The assessment tool for the seminar must reach the student and the assessors 5-7 days before the seminar.
- The final seminar should be completed **at least one semester before the intended submission date**, to leave room for a repeat if the outcome is unsatisfactory.

Degree	Suggested Schedule (full-time; double for part-time)
MPhil	Seminar 1 by the end of Year 1. Seminar 2 in Year 2 or early Year 3, and before applying to enter for examination.
PhD / MD	Seminar 1 by the end of Year 1. Seminar 2 in Year 2–3. Seminar 3 in Year 4, and before applying to enter for examination. Where an upgrade seminar is counted, it takes the place of Seminar 1 or 2 - never as the last seminar.

¹ These are only recommendations; different Faculties/Departments/Programmes may have different arrangements.

What counts as a research seminar

Faculties/Departments have discretion over format and structure of seminars, but a presentation only counts towards the requirement if it meets all five of the following tests. This is a checklist of questions to apply when a student asks whether something they have already done can be counted.

- Does it present the student's own research at a defined stage of the candidature?
- Was it announced in advance and/or normally open to the University and the wider community? (unless there is a clear need to have the seminar in a closed, in camera, format)
- Was it supported by a written paper submitted beforehand?
- Was it assessed by a convened panel, including at least one assessor independent of the supervisor(s)?
- Was it recorded/assessed using a seminar evaluation assessment tool (e.g. one found on the School for Graduate Studies and Research's website or one approved in the department/programme for use)?

What counts as a seminar (whether online or in-person)	What does not count on its own
• The standard departmental research seminar. • The MPhil-to-PhD upgrade seminar. • A paper at a Faculty or Campus research day, research week or postgraduate conference - provided it is set up as an assessed seminar in advance. • A seminar delivered while on exchange, attachment or fieldwork at another institution - subject to a prior request, with a grade and comments submitted by the Department or Supervisor to the Chair, Campus Committee for Graduate Studies and Research for final agreement. • A closed (in camera) session seminar where the Supervisor and student agree that intellectual property or participant confidentiality requires it.	• A conference paper, poster or publication with no panel, no written submission and no completed assessment form. • A meeting of the Supervisor or the Committee of Advisors. • A laboratory or work-in-progress meeting. • A proposal defence run purely for internal departmental clearance, unless it is convened and assessed as a seminar.

Retrospective recognition is possible but is not automatic: the Head of Department must write to the Chair, Campus Committee, with the evidence. Students should not rely on it.

Composition of the seminar assessment panel

This section applies to the ordinary research seminars. Upgrade seminars are assessed by a differently constituted committee - see later section.

- The assessment committee is convened by the Deputy Dean (Graduate Studies and Research) or equivalent (e.g., Head/Dean, graduate programme coordinate). Assessors are identified by the Head of Department or Graduate Coordinator in consultation with the Supervisor(s). Approval from the School for Graduate Studies and Research is not required for the selection of assessors.
- The minimum membership requirement for a research seminar is the Supervisor(s) together with at least one assessor independent of the supervision of that student. Co-Supervisors and members of the Committee of Advisors may serve as assessors.
- A Chair is appointed for each seminar to guide the proceedings. The Chair need not be an assessor.

- Assessors may be drawn from beyond the Department, and a suitably qualified external person may be invited, where the discipline or the topic requires it. This is at the Department's discretion and is not expected as a matter of course.
- Anyone related to the student within the meaning of Regulation 1.16, or otherwise in a conflict of interest, must not assess.

Preparing for and delivering the seminar

What the student submits beforehand

- A properly edited written paper with full referencing, footnotes or endnotes, and a bibliography.
- A plagiarism-detection report, submitted with the written paper.
- A title and short abstract for the Department to advertise the seminar.

On the day

- The Chair opens, introduces the student and the panel, and keeps time.
- The presentation time is set by the Chair and/or other members responsible for planning the seminar but should carry enough time for adequate coverage of the work, with additional time for questions. The first round of questions is put by the assessors.
- Students should speak to their slides as a guide for the audience rather than read from them verbatim.
- The Department records attendance and retains the notice, the written paper and the completed evaluation form.

Suggested content of each seminar

The following is a cross-disciplinary guide, not a prescription, of possible content requirements of seminars. Supervisors may direct a different emphasis where the discipline, the methodology or the student's progress warrants it. For example, a laboratory-based FST student may present instrumentation and pilot data at Seminar 2, while a humanities student presents a developed conceptual argument.

Seminar	May contain the following (but these may vary)
Seminar 1 (proposal stage)	Presentation and justification of the topic; background to the problem and its importance; preliminary review of the literature; delineation of the research problem; research questions, objectives or hypotheses; theoretical or conceptual framework; anticipated methodology and ethics considerations; definition of terms; scope and delimitations. A well-developed research proposal will normally contain all of this.
Seminar 2 (design and fieldwork stage)	Overview of the topic; a more intensive grasp of the literature informing the conceptual approach; enhanced description of the methodology, defined research design and tightened hypotheses; pilot studies, including instrumentation, selection of subjects, field, classroom or laboratory procedures, data collection, recording, processing and analysis; methodological strengths and limitations; early insights and research dilemmas.
Seminar 3 (findings stage; PhD and MD)	Any aspect of the project, for example a full research chapter. Findings presented in tables, charts or narrative and reported against each research question or hypothesis; discussion, interpretation or evaluation tying findings to theory and literature; contribution to knowledge; limitations; recommendations for policy and further research.

Assessment, outcome and reporting on seminars

Assessors are advised to use the *Seminar Evaluation Tool for MPhil/PhD Students* (available on the School for Graduate Studies and Research website) or any other assessment device approved or recognised by the Department or programme area. For each criterion, the assessor ticks the performance level and enters the actual mark; an overall average is computed (using the online format of the tool). The criteria are: appropriateness of introduction; review of literature; methodology; discussion of results and findings; structure of presentation; communication; and responsiveness to the audience.

- Not all criteria apply to Seminars 1 and 2. **Discussion of results and findings does not apply to Seminar 1;** the Supervisor(s) and advisory committee decide whether it applies to Seminar 2 or only to Seminar 3.
- Seminar 1 is passed at **Performance Level 2 (Satisfactory, 10–12) and above; Seminars 2 and 3 require Level 3 (Good, 13–15) and above.**
- The overall result is recorded as Satisfactory/Pass or Unsatisfactory/Fail, with the assessor's comments.
- Where assessors differ, individual reports are submitted to the School for Graduate Studies and Research for the decision of the Chair, Campus Committee.
- An unsatisfactory seminar must be repeated until a satisfactory result is achieved. The Supervisor should give the student written feedback and an agreed plan, and the repeat should normally be held in the following semester.
- The completed form is signed by the Chair or Head of Department, the Supervisor and the Co-Supervisor (if applicable) and submitted to the School for Graduate Studies and Research. The result is carried into the student's progress reports and documented on the final transcript.

Upgrade seminars: MPhil to PhD

An MPhil candidate may apply to upgrade after **one year full-time or two years part-time** from initial registration, and should complete the upgrade by the end of **three years full-time or five years part-time** (Reg. 1.40). It is important to allow for about three (3) months for the whole process to be completed.

- The student consults the Supervisor, completes Sections A to C of [the Request Form for Upgrade from MPhil to PhD](#) (available on the School for Graduate Studies and Research website), and writes to the Senior/Assistant Registrar, Graduate Studies and Research, copying the Supervisor and the Head of Department. The Supervisor completes Section D and the Head of Department Section E.
- Once eligibility is confirmed, the Head of Department arranges an **Upgrade Assessment Committee, comprising the Chief Supervisor(s), at least two independent assessors, and an independent Chairperson (as expressed in the UWI BGSR Manual of Procedures, 2016)**. This is more formally constituted than an ordinary seminar panel. Assessors are selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience at the appropriate level in the area of the research, and a Chair of the Committee is appointed who requests the upgrade documents for each assessor and agrees the presentation date with the student. If the Head of Department does not agree in principle, the matter goes to the Campus Committee for a decision.
- The upgrade documents should be no more than 100 pages and cover: an introduction giving the context; a literature review; the research question and hypothesis; methodology; a substantial piece of work towards the thesis objectives; a plan and timetable for the remaining work; and a bibliography.
- The student presents the work (within a prescribed time period) and then responds to the assessors' questions.
- Assessors judge the following criteria (subject to vary by discipline or Department): commitment to pursuing PhD-level research at The UWI; satisfactory progress to date; awareness of the context and completion of a literature review and bibliography/references; ability to formulate a viable hypothesis or research question completable within the normal PhD timeframe; technical and generic skills development; a viable plan for the work; consideration of research ethics and application for ethics approval where appropriate; and English language proficiency, written and spoken.

Outcome	What follows
Pass	Upgrade of registration to PhD.
Adequate	Upgrade subject to revision of the Upgrade Proposal within two months, to the satisfaction of the Supervisor.
Inadequate	Revise and resubmit the Upgrade Proposal within six months, for a second and final attempt.
Fail	The MPhil must be completed and submitted within a specified time.

The Committee's written recommendation goes to the School for Graduate Studies and Research; the final decision is made by the Chair of the Board for Graduate Studies and Research, and the student receives a letter with the decision. Under Regulation 1.68 the upgrade seminar counts as one of the three PhD seminars provided it is not the last - so at least one further seminar must follow it. Whether it is counted is at the discretion of the Supervisor and Department, based on the student's progress and performance, with the final decision resting with the Chair, Campus Committee.

Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Student	Agrees the date with the Supervisor; registers for the seminar; submits the written paper and plagiarism report on time; presents; keeps a copy of the signed evaluation form.
Supervisor	Guides what is presented; confirms readiness; attends; ensures written feedback after an unsatisfactory outcome; carries the seminar assessment into the Progress Reports.
Head of Department / Graduate Coordinator	Convenes the seminars; publishes the departmental seminar calendar; advertises each seminar; retains records; signs and forwards the evaluation form; makes the case to the Campus Committee where retrospective recognition is sought.
Deputy Dean (Research) or equivalent	Convenes the assessment committee and ensures at least one independent assessor.
Chair of the seminar	Guides the proceedings, keeps time and manages questions.
School for Graduate Studies and Research	Receives completed evaluation forms; maintains the record; refers divided assessments to the Chair, Campus Committee.

Relevant graduate forms/documents for seminars (available online)

- Seminar Evaluation Tool for MPhil/PhD Students and Chair Report Template for Upgrade Seminars - available on the Faculty resources page: <https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/gradstudies/resources-en/faculty/>
- Request Form for Upgrade from MPhil to PhD, and Upgrade from MPhil to PhD Guidelines, Supervisor's Progress Report form and other related thesis examination forms - available on the student resources page: <https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/gradstudies/resources-en/students/>

Issued by the School for Graduate Studies and Research, Cave Hill Campus. To be read with the BGSR Regulations for Graduate Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees (2018), the Manual of Procedures, the Thesis Guide and the relevant Faculty and Programme Regulations.

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