



Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
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CST

Centre for
Sustainability Transitions



Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Sustainable Development

PROSPECTUS

forward together · sonke siya phambili · saam vorentoe



Programme overview

The Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Sustainable Development is an interdisciplinary programme designed to develop theoretical and practical skills to prepare students with problem-solving abilities to address pressing social, environmental, and governance challenges to advance a more just and sustainable future. The programme is tailored for students from various academic backgrounds who share an interest in sustainability transitions. Challenges related to sustainability transitions are multifaceted, and applicants with diverse expertise in natural and social sciences are strongly encouraged to apply. This degree aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to contribute to transformative change in a world facing diverse and rapid challenges.

Purpose of the qualification

There is an urgent need for researchers and practitioners proficient in inter- and transdisciplinary, problem-focused methods that address knowledge gaps in research and practice related to the sustainability of human-nature interactions. Students will engage in place-based inter- and trans-disciplinary research, contributing to a growing body of evidence that aims to inform transformative change and decision-making processes in support of sustainability transitions in South Africa, Africa, and globally. The programme is committed to cultivating a new generation of scholars and professionals who possess a deep understanding of complex and multi-dimensional sustainability challenges, coupled with the ability to address these priorities through rigorous, ethical, and reflective inter- and trans-disciplinary research.

Programme learning outcomes

The programme will develop specific research competencies. These include:

- Understanding the key drivers and complex nature of social, ecological, and economic sustainability challenges and their interconnections.
- Demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the key perspectives, core concepts and theoretical frameworks in the field of sustainability transitions.
- Reviewing and analysing academic literature in the field of sustainability transitions and deploying this in the context of an applied thesis.
- Applying systems thinking competencies for an in-depth and applied exploration of complex dynamics of multi-level change in support of sustainability transitions.
- Cultivating inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration skills as part of knowledge coproduction processes.
- Producing academic research outputs suitable for dissemination and publication, contributing to the academic and policy discourse in the field of sustainability transitions.
- Fostering an awareness of justice, equity, and power in contested processes of transitions towards sustainable futures.



Programme structure

Assessment in the MPhil programme consists of a combination of independent research for a 90-credit thesis and coursework totalling 90 credits that directly informs and supports the thesis work. The components and structure of the two-year programme include a literature review, research proposal, practical research, journal article, and reflective essay or knowledge product.

The thesis involves independent research, using available resources and support services to deepen understanding in sustainability transitions and the appropriate research methods and skills. In line with a growing number of leading international sustainability programmes, the thesis takes the form of an academic journal article with the aim of submitting the article on completion of the degree. Students work with an academic supervisor, ensuring their research is guided by a knowledge expert with extensive experience in their focal area.

The 90 credits of coursework are divided into three modules, each worth 30 credits. These modules are designed to directly support the thesis process through the development of an in-depth literature review, a research proposal, and communication products directly linked to the thesis. In-person attendance of one core component of each module is compulsory.

Students complete the taught component of the programme during three in-person sessions of one week each: The first in-person session will take place in January or February 2025, the second in-person session will be in April/May in year one and the third contact session will be in the second half of year two. It is not necessary to reside in Stellenbosch to enrol for this programme but is compulsory to attend the in-person sessions.

Proposed MPhil programme structure (180 credits)

Thesis: Sustainability transitions (90 credits)

Sustainability transitions foundation concepts (30 credits)

Research design & methods (30 credits)

Research reflection & outreach (30 credits)

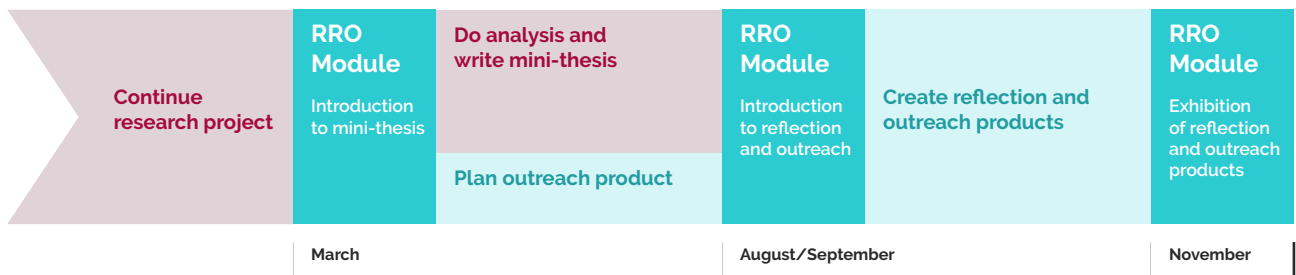


Coursework and research component timeline

Year 1



Year 2



Module structure

Module 1: Sustainability transitions foundational concepts (year one)

Modules provide a global perspective on sustainability transitions and transformations while delving into the dynamics and trends across biodiversity and climate change, just energy transitions, water and food nexus, and sustainable urbanisms. The programme emphasises complexity literacy, governance and institutional change, and leadership and ethics to support just and sustainable futures.

Students will explore fundamental concepts and principles of sustainability transitions research, with an emphasis on the global South. Through lectures and practical exercises, they will delve into key theoretical frameworks and their application across disciplines. Students will engage with established and cutting-edge literature, receiving practical guidance on conducting literature reviews, framing critiques, identifying research gaps, and developing coherent academic arguments. Interactive projects and group discussions will enhance their ability to analyse various formats of academic literature. The module will assist students to refine their research focus and understanding of the wider literature within research.

Students are expected to conduct a comprehensive literature review on critical sustainability concepts and theories, developing their research and analytical skills. Each student will select a specific sustainability aspect of interest, formulate a research question, and explore relevant scholarly articles, books, and reports. The literature review will emphasise historical evolution, key contributors, contemporary relevance, and research gaps. Students will synthesise their findings into a well-structured literature review, including an introduction, synthesis, discussion, critique, and proper citations linked to their proposed area of study. This module fosters a rigorous understanding of sustainability transitions while strengthening research and critical thinking skills, equipping students to write their thesis, and for academic and professional growth in the field.



Module 2: Research design and methods (year one)

This module aims to develop students' knowledge of research design, methods, and practices in sustainability transitions and transformations research. Students will engage in designing a research project on which their thesis will focus, exploring innovative methodologies and applying both qualitative and quantitative techniques to address complex sustainability challenges. Students will leverage inter- and transdisciplinary methods, culminating in the development of a detailed research proposal that lays the foundation for their thesis.

The module focuses on practical exercises through case studies, group discussions, and reflections, offering a broad overview of research methods in diverse contexts. Students will receive guidance on crafting rigorous research proposals and develop their academic writing and argumentation skills with support from the University's Writing Lab. Ethical clearance criteria will be addressed to ensure research is conducted responsibly, adhering to established ethical standards and Stellenbosch University research ethics guidelines.

Module 3: Research reflection and outreach (year two)

This module equips students with the knowledge and skills to write a thesis in the form of an academic journal article to reflect critically on fieldwork and practical experiences and distil clear messages for policy and practice. It focuses on effective dissemination of research findings on complex sustainability issues through diverse science communication strategies, including academic and non-academic formats. Students will examine, compare, and evaluate multiple dissemination options and design and implement strategic outreach plans.

Students will develop a comprehensive understanding of various dissemination channels, including journal articles, conferences, and community engagement, tailored to their specific research projects. They will learn to evaluate the impact and reach of each channel aligning them with research objectives. The output from the module includes a reflective essay and one or more outreach products such as a media article, video, report, or other appropriate format. The module emphasizes practical application, originality, and creativity in outreach strategies, while maintaining professional and ethical standards. Critical self-reflection on fieldwork and research experiences is encouraged, fostering personal and academic growth in research and outreach skills.

Thesis information (90 credits)

Students will identify, scope, and investigate particular issues related to sustainable development, and sustainability transitions and transformations, presenting their findings in an academic thesis. The thesis should be grounded in specific contexts and responsive to societal challenges, reflecting engagement with the complexity of sustainability transitions. Insights and recommendations should propose innovative solutions and demonstrate the potential for real-world impact through collaborative efforts with diverse societal actors.

The thesis aims to develop scholars capable of addressing complex social, ecological, and governance issues through academic and practice-oriented research. With an inter- and transdisciplinary approach, students from diverse backgrounds are empowered to harness expertise for problem-driven and solution-oriented research.



Programme information

Supervisor requirements

Students need to have a confirmed supervisor for admission to the programme. Students should consider the research interests of our pool of available supervisors and research topics available at the CST. If one of our supervisors is knowledgeable on, and interested in, your research topic, the match will be well suited. Consult the CST [website](#) for a list of research topics and possible supervisors and list your preferred supervisor on your application form.

Continuation and termination of studies

If MPhil students have not successfully completed 60 credits of coursework in the first year of study, they will not be permitted to register for the second year of study.

Programme's mode of delivery

In-person sessions are compulsory. Students will not be permitted to continue with the programme if you have not attended the in-person sessions. This means students must plan to be on campus for the first and second modules during year one, and the third module at the end of year two.

Starting date

New students will be registered by 31 March of your first year of study. However, in February, you must attend the compulsory orientation programme which coincides with the first foundational module (see module one details).





Admission requirements

A Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development (NQF level 8) from Stellenbosch University or an appropriate qualification equivalent to an Honours degree (NQF level 8).

Selection

Matters like staff capacity and the availability of resources within the Centre, as well as academic merit and University transformation objectives can influence how many students are selected each year. Since staff capacity and resources can fluctuate, the number of students who are selected can differ from year-to-year.

If there are more applicants who meet the admission requirements than the Centre has capacity for, the criteria in the admission will be used to rank the applicants in order of suitability to finalise the selection list.

Preference will be given to applicants who have earned an average of 65% or higher in the Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development (NQF level 8) or an equivalent previous qualification at the level of an Honours degree (NQF level 8).

How to apply

More information on the application process can be found at the Postgraduate Studies webpage [here](#).

To apply for the MPhil in Sustainable Development, click [here](#) and follow the application instructions:

- Choose the following when applying for the programme:
- For the faculty, choose **Economic Management Sciences - Stellenbosch**
- For the programme type, choose **Postgraduate**
- For the programme, choose **MPhil (Sust develop and manag)**

Application deadline: 30 September 2024



Studying in Stellenbosch

International students

Information on visas, fees, language requirements and long-term accommodation can be found on the website of the SU International Office at www.sun.ac.za/international.

Where to live

Students are responsible for their own accommodation. Students typically find university or private rented accommodation in Stellenbosch or surrounds. Click on this [link](#) for more information.

Access on campus

Postgraduate students at Stellenbosch University will have access to first-class research environments and a wide range of institutional

support and expertise. For all postgraduate students there is workspace available at the CST office hub. We regularly meet during the week with lively seminars and networking sessions. Students who do not stay near Stellenbosch can take part in these meetings in hybrid format as well as at the CST, which is well resourced with online webinar and meeting requirements.

General information

Postgraduate Officer:

<https://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/postgraduate-office>

Information on funding options can be found at the following links:

- www.sun.ac.za/calendar
- www.sun.ac.za/pgo/funding

Contact information


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