

Contribution of SANParks to supervision of students

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SANParks Scientific Services played a significant role in 2021/2022 in supervising post-graduate students. 12 Scientific Services scientists supervised 25 students from 11 institutions during this period. The study topics were as diverse as the institutions represented. The number of students supervised per supervisor, ranged from one to four students. 13 were PhD candidates and the others mostly MSc candidates. The students originated from various institutions, of which, the highest number (6) were registered at the University of Cape Town, with other students registered at Nelson Mandela University, Rhodes University, Stellenbosch University, University of Free State, UNISA, University of the Western Cape and University of the Witwatersrand. The research themes varied with most falling under ecosystem structure, function and process.

The opportunity to supervise students is a privilege and a responsibility. Supervision is a relationship - a two-way street - with various levels of mentoring, sharing of knowledge and nudging the student in the right direction. At the same time, the supervisor has the important duty of subtly building the student's confidence, while balancing control with allowing the student to work autonomously.

In order for both parties to appreciate each other's expectations, discussions between the supervisor and student could be most helpful to limit potential future failure, disappointment, conflict, frustration, or a break of trust in the student-supervisor relationship. This may include frequency of meetings and communication, timelines for submission of outputs, terms of availability of both parties, roles of co-supervisors, time allowed for feedback from supervisor, time allowed for revisions based on feedback received, style of thesis (paper-based or traditional), authorship in the case of publications emanating from study, size of work to be submitted to supervisor for comment,

responsibilities in terms of funding acquisition, etc.

A student may need guidance to become independent as a researcher and to pursue and discover all the aspects of post-graduate learning (e.g. study themes, methods, data sources, etc.), with the aim of developing their own professional identity. Supervisors should encourage students to develop their own academic identity and style. Supervisors can mentor students to 'discover', save time, build confidence, minimise frustration, keep interest, and think innovatively. Networking should be encouraged and the supervisor can play a key role in facilitating such networking opportunities and encouraging the student to build his/her own networks.

Students have diverse backgrounds (e.g. technical vs scientific, experience, previous qualifications) with different learning needs and skill sets. This requires investment of effort by both supervisor and student, resulting in rewarding mentor-student relationships.