

CALL FOR TOPIC PROPOSALS FOR FULLY FUNDED (4 YEAR) PHD FELLOWSHIPS

DOCTORAL TRAINING PROGRAMME IN CLIMATE AND DEVELOPMENT

12 X 4-YEAR PhD FELLOWSHIPS

VALUE: R390,000 PER ANNUM

CLOSING DATE: 19 AUGUST 2026

OUTCOME NOTIFICATION: 26 AUGUST 2026

The Africa Climate Collaborative

The University of Cape Town (UCT) is a founding partner in the Africa Climate Collaborative, a partnership between the universities of Cape Town, Cambridge, Ghana and Makerere, and the Mastercard Foundation. The Collaborative aims to create a critical mass of African thought leaders, researchers, scientists and entrepreneurs and develop the human capital needed to power green climate resilient development and green economies on the continent. At UCT, the Africa Climate Collaborative is hosted by the [African Climate & Development Initiative \(ACDI\)](#).

Doctoral training programme in climate and development

Starting in 2027, the Africa Climate Collaborative at UCT is convening a Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) in Climate and Development (see attached brochure and programme summary). The DTP follows the European/UK model, where students enrol for one year of pre-doctoral coursework alongside development of their PhD proposal, and proceed to the second year of their PhD once they have successfully passed the coursework and defended their proposal. The Africa Climate Collaborative will award up to twelve 4-year fellowships per year, for students to participate in the DTP. The value of the fellowship for 2027 is R390,000 (R315,000 for stipend and fees; and up to R75,000 for relocation, medical insurance, research and other costs). The award value increases by between 2-4% per year, depending on exchange rates and inflation.

Topic selection and subsequent student recruitment processes

To ensure that students can apply for PhD positions with committed and engaged supervisory teams, the DTP fellowship awards will follow a three-stage recruitment process. First, interested supervisors propose topic areas they would be interested in supervising. Second, topics that are best aligned with the mission of the Africa Climate Collaborative will be advertised, and prospective students apply for a PhD fellowship in their preferred topic area(s). Third, successful applicants are supported to apply for admission to undertake a PhD at UCT, through the academic department in which the lead supervisor of a topic is based.

Call for topic proposals from prospective supervisors

We are requesting interested prospective supervisors to submit PhD topic proposals for consideration by the DTP fellowship committee. The proposals should satisfy the following criteria:

- At least two supervisors are required, one of whom will be the nominated primary-supervisor in the department in which the PhD student will be registered. The primary supervisor must

therefore be eligible to be a PhD supervisor in a UCT academic department (as per departmental and/or faculty rules) for the duration of the PhD (2027-2030).

- Co-supervisors who are postdoctoral fellows or soft-funded researchers whose terms overlap significantly with the duration of the PhD are especially welcome.
- Topics should (i) be relevant to climate and development scholarship in Africa and (ii) be needs- and/or problem-driven (the research question must have direct application to one or more non-academic audiences).
- A non-academic partner who collaborates in the research is highly desirable; this partner could be a co-supervisor, or simply a collaborator who contributes in a meaningful way to the PhD project.
- Interdisciplinary topics, with supervisors from different disciplines, are preferred.
- Topics can be anchored in any discipline, for example social sciences and humanities, natural and physical sciences, economics, finance and business, law, health sciences or engineering
- If a topic is selected for advertisement, the lead supervisor must have obtained agreement, in principle, from their Head of Department that a successful student can register for the newly accredited PhD specialising in Climate and Development, with coursework.
- Supervisors must commit to being members of the DTP PhD Committee pool, which serves to assess progress of PhD students through the DTP¹, and participate in a small number of DTP events per year, such as proposal presentations and training seminars.

Topic submission process

Topics should be submitted using Microsoft Forms ([Africa Climate Collaborative PhD Topic Proposal Form](#)). The following information is required and can be prepared in advance.

- Lead supervisor details (name, department)
- Topic title
- Head of department (name, confirmation department agrees to conditions of PhD fellowship)
- Co supervisor details (name, department/organisation, role in the project)
- Collaborator details (name, department/organisation, role in the project)
- Topic details (background/rationale, broad research aims / questions that could be explored, relevance to climate and development evidence needs in Africa, explanation of the problem-based or needs-driven nature of the topic)

Further questions?

If you have questions about this topic submission process or any other questions about the this call for topics, or the DTP more generally, please first have a look at the [Frequently Asked Questions page](#). If that doesn't give you the answer you are looking for, the feel free to email brandon.perumaul@uct.ac.za with your query.

¹ Members of the PhD Committee will typically assess progress of two PhD students they are not supervising, on a semi-annual basis (June and November of each year).

THINKING ABOUT PURSUING A PHD IN CLIMATE CHANGE?

The PhD in Climate and Development is designed for aspiring researchers and leaders seeking to advance knowledge and drive action on climate and development challenges. The programme is a four-year degree, comprising one year of pre-doctoral coursework and three years of research offered through UCT's Doctoral Training Programme in Climate and Development. Working under expert supervision, candidates undertake original, independent research on an advanced topic, culminating in a thesis that makes a substantial contribution to knowledge in the field. The programme equips graduates to operate at the forefront of climate and development research, generating evidence and insights that can inform policy, practice and sustainable futures.

PRE-DOCTORAL PHASE

Students register for the PhD and complete three credit-bearing courses

DATA COLLECTION

DATA ANALYSIS AND INITIAL WRITING

WRITING AND EXAMINATION

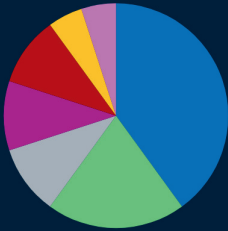
Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

Year 4

The PhD in Climate and Development wheel shows the skills and competencies you will develop during the PhD programme.



Mapped competency area and assigned weight

- Research knowledge skills & techniques (40%)
- Research environment (20%)
- Research management (10%)
- Personal effectiveness (10%)
- Communication skills & impact (10%)
- Networking & teamwork (5%)
- Career management (5%)



African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI) © African Doctoral Academy, 2026 Versic

HOW TO APPLY

Selected PhD topics will be advertised externally on an annual basis, via a single call for applications. Potential candidates must apply to be considered (a maximum of three topics may be applied for). Successful candidates, who will have had to meet UCT PhD admission requirements, will then be supported by the Doctoral Training Program to apply for admission to study for a PhD.



Rationale and Outline: PhD in Climate and Development by Coursework and Thesis

Motivation

UCT has been awarded a large grant (USD35M), spanning 2026 to 2032, from the Mastercard Foundation, to support an expansion of its postgraduate training and research on climate and development. An important component of this new grant is a Doctoral Training Programme (DTP) in climate and development, with funding for six cohorts of 12 PhD students, each with full scholarship for 4 years of study.

The DTP aims to address a long-standing challenge at UCT, namely, timely completion of PhD studies. Many PhD students at UCT take more than 4 years to successfully submit their thesis, and a significant number fail to complete their studies.

The Climate and Development DTP at UCT is inspired by UK and EU Doctoral Training Centres a, which have been in operation since approximately 2010. These are highly regarded for improving PhD completion rates (with roughly 80.5% success rates) by providing structured, cohort-based training and funding. They enhance the research experience through interdisciplinary training and professional development, aiming to produce well-rounded, industry-ready researchers.

In a DTC, admitted students undertake one year of pre-doctoral coursework to prepare them for their doctoral research, after which – upon satisfactorily completing their coursework and defending their PhD proposal – the progress into their thesis research and writing in year two, completing the thesis by the end of year four, complemented by additional training aligned to their progress through their PhD journey, including topics such as science communication, paper writing, knowledge brokering for impact, culminating in preparation for post-doctoral career options and work placement.

The need for a new PhD specialisation: “Climate and Development, with Coursework”

This new PhD specialisation is needed for two reasons. First, to align with the subject area of the new DTP, Climate and Development. PhD specialisations in the Faculty of Science currently align with academic departments, such as Physics, Oceanography, Chemistry, Environmental and Geographical Science. A new specialisation in Climate and Development aligns specifically with the focus on the DTP, providing graduates with a PhD specialisation that reflects the field-specific research knowledge, skills and expertise acquired in the DTP. Students from any department in UCT where they have their main supervisor (see section on recruitment below), will be eligible to register for this specialisation.

Second, as the DTP follows the model of UK DTCs, where there is a one-year pre-doctoral coursework component, the PhD specialisation will need to reflect this different structure to distinguish it from “research only” PhD specialisations.

This type of PhD specialisation has precedent at UCT. The School of Economics offers a [PhD in Economics by Coursework and Dissertation](#), with funding from the African Economic Research

Consortium (AERC). Students enrolled in this degree programme are required to undertake a portfolio of pre-doctoral courses in economic theory, method, tools, and African economic perspectives, prior to advancing to begin their thesis research. The coursework component does not count towards the PhD degree itself, which is awarded as a 360-credit research PhD, but courses are reflected on the student transcripts.

Design and structure of the DTP in Climate and Development

ACDI has worked with the African Doctoral Academy at Stellenbosch University to design the DTP. The structure of the programme is summarised in Table 1, below. Students accumulate a points record reflecting their completion of different components of the programme, in line with VITAE and SAQA competency frameworks. Note that the structure described below has flexibility for Years 2, 3 and 4 to accommodate variations in student research topics, but can be considered indicative of a typical student's journey through the DTP.

In Year 1, students register for the PhD for their pre-doctoral year, undertaking three credit bearing courses: (i) Foundations of Doctoral Research and Practice provides the research skills and competencies needed to successfully undertake a PhD; (ii) Climate and Development: Theory, Evidence, and Debates provides the transversal academic knowledge to develop a research proposal in Climate and Development; (iii) a elective course provides in-depth knowledge that is relevant to the specific focus of their PhD, from a range of NQF level 9 courses offered in Master's programmes participating in the Climate Collaborative. Students also undertake a range of programmatic activities that build the competencies and outcomes required for SAQA and international PhD qualification frameworks. Progression to Year 2 requires successful completion of courses, successful defence of their PhD proposal, and accumulation of a minima (90) of required coursework credits.

Year 2 of the programme is focused on data generation/collection for the PhD, supplemented by a portfolio of short courses that develop the skills needed for the specific data generation and data analysis they will undertake in their research. Programmatic activities continue, such as journal clubs, mid-year and end-year progress assessment, and the option to present at a conference. Progression to Year 3 is dependent on approval of their end-year progress report and completion of a preset minima of programmatic and short course activities.

Year 3 of the DTP is concentrated on data analysis and preliminary writing of methods and results. A structured training programme supports this process, along with training that develops transferrable and transversal competencies, such as science communication and writing a scientific paper. Student-specific training courses to support their data analysis are offered on a case-by-case basis. Progression to Year 4 is dependent on approval of their end-year progress report and completion of a preset minima of programmatic and short course activities.

Year 4 of the programme is focused on completion of the thesis the completion year, concentrating on writing the thesis, examination and, while waiting for examination results,

producing one or more journal article drafts, as well as preparing the student to transition out of their PhD to obtain a job, either in academia or industry. The programme aims for students to have submitted their PhD by July-August of Year 4, so that they will still be supported by their scholarship during the examination and revision correction phase.

Recruitment of PhD students onto the DTP

The DTP will run an annual call for PhD topics, open to all potential supervisors at UCT. Topic proposals that meet the criteria¹ of the climate programme will be short-listed for consideration by a selection committee. Selected topics will then be advertised externally via a single call for applications. Potential candidates will apply to be considered for one or more (a maximum of three) topics. Successful candidates, who will have had to meet UCT PhD admission requirements, will then be supported by the DTP to apply for admission to study for a PhD. If a topic area does not get matched with a successful candidate, the topic can be held over for readvertisement the following year.

Course Outline for Faculty Handbook

EGS6000W² PHD IN CLIMATE AND DEVELOPMENT by COURSEWORK AND THESIS 360 NQF credits at NQF level 10

Course outline: The PhD is a research degree, supported by a coursework one-year pre-doctoral training programme, offered through the Doctoral Training Programme in Climate and Development. Examination is by thesis alone. The thesis is on an advanced topic under supervision which can be taken in any of the departments in the Faculty and, subject to appropriate approval, in departments in other Faculties. A candidate shall undertake doctoral research and advanced study under the guidance of a supervisor(s) appointed by Senate. The thesis must constitute a substantial contribution to knowledge in the chosen subject, must show evidence of original investigation and give a full statement of the literature on the subject. The PhD degree demands that the candidate can conduct independent research on his/her own initiative. Through the thesis the candidate must be able to demonstrate that he/she is at the academic forefront in the topic selected, that the work is original and that it advances our knowledge in the relevant field. Prospective candidates are referred to the rules for this degree as set out in Book 3, General Rules and Policies.

¹ Criteria for inclusion as a PhD topic include factors such as needs-driven research, a topic relevant to climate and development in Africa, a strong co-supervisory team, and ideally, non-academic partners.

² Exact course code to be confirmed

Table 1. Programmatic structure of the DTP in Climate and Development.

Year 1: Pre-doctoral	Year 2: Data Generation	Year 3: Analysis	Year 4: Write-up
<i>Courses</i> - Climate and Development: Theory, Evidence, and Debates (23 credits) [Semester 1] - Foundations of Doctoral Research and Practice (45 credits) [Semester 1 & 2] - Specilisation Elective(s) (23 credits) [Semester 1 or 2]	<i>Courses</i> - Methods and techniques courses³, chosen according to student needs - Preparation for field research - Other courses¹ as required per personal development plan	<i>Courses</i> - Science communication and knowledge brokering - Analysis methods and techniques courses¹, chosen according to student needs - Writing your thesis - Publishing your results in a journal paper - Other courses¹ as required per personal development plan	<i>Courses</i> - Career development/post-PhD preparation/industry readiness - Fellowship/grant proposal writing - Other courses¹ as required per personal development plan
<i>Programmatic</i> - Develop personal development plan - Quarterly PhD committee meetings - Fortnightly research group meetings - Monthly journal club - Seminar/webinar attendance - Mid-year & end-year progress reports	<i>Programmatic</i> - Develop personal development plan - Quarterly PhD committee meetings - Fortnightly research group meetings - Monthly journal club - Seminar/webinar attendance - Mid-year & end-year progress reports - Optional: presentation at a national or local conference	<i>Programmatic</i> - Develop personal development plan - Quarterly PhD committee meetings - Fortnightly research group meetings - Monthly journal club - Seminar/webinar attendance - Writing retreat - Optional: presentation at a national or international conference - Mid-year & end-year progress reports	<i>Programmatic</i> - Develop personal development plan - Quarterly PhD committee meetings - Fortnightly research group meetings - Monthly research journal club - Seminar/webinar attendance - Build your CV and digital presence (linked to courses) - Writing retreat - Optional: presentation at a national or international conference - Optional: submit a postdoc proposal
<i>PhD Research</i> - PhD concept presentation - PhD proposal development - PhD proposal defence - Ethics application - Data management plan	<i>PhD Research</i> - Piloting of data collection/surveys - Data collection/generation (e.g. field work, lab experiments, dataset acquisition, etc.) - Doctoral research presentation (linked to end-year progress report)	<i>PhD Research</i> - First draft of methods section - Update of literature review - Data analysis and initial results - First drafts of one or more results chapters - Doctoral research presentation (linked to end-year progress report)	<i>PhD Research</i> - First drafts of all results chapters - Final drafts of all results chapters - Finalise introduction, lit review, methods, conclusions - Submit thesis (Jul-Aug) - Paper writing - Trial defence - Thesis examination/defence (Sep-Nov) - Thesis corrections

³ These student-specific courses will be selected from techniques courses available within UCT and offered by other entities, including the African Doctoral Academy; there is a budget allocated for attendance of such supplementary courses within the grant.