



Service Level Agreement

Statistical Consultation Services

Potchefstroom Campus

North-West University

January 2025

Introduction

The Statistical Consultation Services of the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University (SCS) has been in existence since 1980. SCS provides assistance to:

- North-West University post graduate students and personnel.
- Other universities' post graduate students and personnel.
- Any private sector clients (persons and institutions not affiliated with any university).

SCS renders the following services:

- Assistance with the planning of research projects. This may include statistical planning of clinical trials and surveys by means of experimental and random sampling designs.
- The review and sign-off of ethics applications.
- Questionnaire review in terms of face validity.
- Guidance with regards to data collection.
- Statistical analysis and data mining by means of suitable computer packages, including SPSS and STATISTICA.
- Assistance with the interpretation of processed results.
- Assistance with regards to publications.
- Review of the final report or article.

Parties to the agreement

The following definitions apply to the different parties when entering into an agreement with SCS to make use of their services:

- The Client: the individual or group to whom SCS agrees to provide a service, including the primary client (e.g., the student) as well as the project supervisor.
- The Consultant: the SCS team member assigned to the project.
- The Project/Study: the work package agreed upon between the client and SCS.
- The Project/Study Supervisor: the individual or group ultimately responsible for the successful completion of the project.

Roles and responsibilities

As members of The South African Statistical Association (SASA), SCS consultants strive to adhere to the constitution and code of conduct of the association. The roles and responsibilities outlined below help ensure that SCS operates within the guidelines provided by SASA, as well as the ethical principles of the North-West University.

		SCS	The Client
Consultations	General	<i>The consultant is not allowed to render any services until a signed client registration form is received.</i>	
		Consultations will be scheduled on a first-come-first-serve basis, subject to the consultant's availability.	The client and project supervisor must be present at the initial consultation to ensure that the purpose of the project and the subsequent statistical requirements are clearly and sufficiently communicated to the consultant.
		The consultant cannot agree to any terms (e.g. payment for services or co-authorship granted to the consultant) which depend upon a particular result from a proposed statistical inquiry or project.	It is the responsibility of the client and/or project supervisor to ensure that the academic and other requirements of the project are met, as agreed to by the applicable research or other committee.
		The consultant will ensure that the correct statistical techniques are performed.	If the client and/or supervisor is not satisfied with the services provided, the client must inform the consultant within one month after the analysis was completed. Thereafter it will be assumed that the client is satisfied and the client and/or supervisor will be responsible for any costs incurred in further data editing and/or analyses.
		SCS prefers that a project does not move between consultants to avoid rework. That said, the client and/or supervisor has the right to ask that a project be transferred to another consultant. However, depending on the circumstances, the client may be asked to cover any additional costs associated with such a move.	
	Timely Feedback	The consultant should provide the client and/or supervisor with the appropriate feedback within 10 working days after having received the data or information required to perform the requested analysis. Should the consultant be experiencing high client inflows, particularly during September to December, the consultant reserves the right to process requests on a first-come-	The client and/or supervisor must ensure that the data and/or information required to perform the analyses requested, reach the consultant more than 10 working days before the result of the analyses is due. If corrections to the data and/or information are necessary, the client may not insist on the agreed deadline, except in the event that SCS is in some way responsible for the error.

		<p>first-serve basis to a maximum response time of 15 working days. The consultant must, however, inform the client and/or supervisor of delays exceeding 10 working days.</p>	
	Costs	<p>The section to follow describes the SCS fee structure in greater detail, however, the client and/or supervisor may request a cost estimate before work commences. All estimates are based on the historical costs of similar projects and are thus subject to fluctuation due to changes in the scope of the project, cost escalation, data corrections required, etc. Alternatively, the client may request that a hold be placed on the project's account. This implies that the consultant only proceeds with analyses that could result in the costs exceeding the estimated amount, after obtaining approval from the client.</p>	<p>The client and/or supervisor ultimately remains responsible for account settlement. SCS reserves the right to withhold further analyses on accounts more than 30 days overdue (as per NWU policy all outstanding debtors should be collected within 30 days) or final sign-off pending account settlement.</p>
	Co-Authorship	<p>If in the opinion of the consultant and subject group chair, a significant contribution was made to the project, co-authorship must be negotiated. In that event, the client must ensure that the final publication is received and reviewed by the consultant. Similarly, SCS adheres to Section A, Paragraph A.4.5.2 of the SASA Constitution which states: "Members of the Association acknowledge all contributors to journal publications, and where appropriate contributions warrant co-authorship, invite colleagues, mentors or students to accept that status".</p>	
Planning	General	<p>SCS provides assistance with the selection of the appropriate sampling methodology; experimental design; determining the adequate sample size and establishing whether research aims associated with statistical analyses are achievable. Therefore, to enhance the quality and usability of the statistical analyses, the consultant should be involved in the project from the planning phase.</p>	
	Ethics	<p>According to Section A.4, paragraph A.4.1.3 of the SASA Constitution: "Members of the Association consider and explore any likely consequences of collecting and disseminating various types of data". Therefore, SCS will not perform any analyses on data associated with a project that does not have the necessary ethical approval. Also, SCS reserves the right to refuse service to projects that the SCS team deems unethical.</p>	<p>It is the client and/or supervisor's responsibility to ensure that the project is ethical with regard to the validity of research objectives and ethically responsible with regard to the research question.</p>

Data Collection & Storage	Ethical Considerations	SCS reserves the right to refuse to analyse unclear or insufficient data. Consultants have the responsibility of ensuring confidentiality, according to Section A Paragraph A.4.4.2 of the SASA Constitution: “Members of the Association do not disclose, nor authorise to be disclosed, nor use for personal gain nor to benefit a third party, any confidential information acquired in the course of professional practice”. However, the statistical methods and procedures used will not be kept confidential, in adherence to Section A, Paragraph A.4.1.5 of the SASA Constitution: “Adequate information is provided to permit a wider public to assess the methods, procedures, techniques, and findings independently”.	Clients and/or supervisor are advised to conduct research in a manner that will not hinder the continued cooperation of the public. SCS cannot be held responsible for not meeting the client’s requirements due to lack of data or insufficient sample size
	Instrument	SCS should be consulted to help establish face and construct validity, however, SCS cannot be held responsible for unexpected results due to unclear or insufficient information.	As subject matter expert , it is the client’s , and specifically the project supervisor’s responsibility to establish the content validity of the questionnaire and / or the accuracy and appropriateness of the measurement instrument.
	Electronic questionnaires	The consultant is responsible to set-up the electronic questionnaire in a functional way on SCS’s chosen platform. The consultant will not take responsibility for technical difficulties (e.g. opening, viewing, and submitting) with the electronic questionnaire across different platforms.	The client and/or supervisor take full responsibility to test the electronic questionnaire’s functionality across different platforms.
	Data Quality	SCS offers a data capturing service which will ensure the accurate transfer of data from the measurement instrument or questionnaire into the required format. Should the client make use of this service, SCS will be held responsible for correcting data and analyses due to erroneously captured data.	If the client and/or supervisor provides electronic copies of their data, they must ensure that the data provided is accurate and in the correct electronic format, compliant with SCS standards. The client should consult SCS for guidance in this regard. Additional costs may also be incurred if corrections are required.

	Data Storage	Questionnaires are stored in the SCS storeroom for a maximum of 12 months. Questionnaires that have not been collected after 12 months will be destroyed. It is important to note that the SCS storeroom is not a secure facility. Electronic data is stored on a NWU server; however, data is not retained indefinitely after completion of a project.	The client and/or supervisor must ensure that the appropriate storage arrangements are made for the archiving of data and, if applicable, for the storing of questionnaires. It is the responsibility of the client to collect questionnaires and other data from SCS and place such items into secure storage for the required time period (usually a minimum of 7 years).
Statistical Analysis	Ethical Considerations	Section A, Paragraph A.4.3.1 of the SASA Constitution states that: "Members of the Association uphold their professional integrity without fear or favour, only selecting and using methods designed to produce the most pertinent correct and precise results". Therefore, consultants may refuse to perform analyses that could be misleading. Also, to achieve the best result the consultant is permitted to seek the advice of colleagues.	The client and/or supervisor may not manipulate data to achieve a desired result and may not insist on an analysis if the consultant deems it inappropriate or irresponsible.
	General	The consultant should inform the client of the scope of the analyses possible for the project at hand. According to Section A, Paragraph 4.4.6 of the SASA Constitution: "Members of the Association will consider available methods and procedures for addressing a proposed inquiry and provide an impartial assessment to the employer, client, or funder of the respective merits and limitations of alternatives, along with the proposed method".	The project supervisor should ensure that the data collected is directed at a specific research question.

Reporting Findings	Ethical Considerations	SCS adheres to Section A, Paragraph A.4.4.4 of the SASA Constitution: “Members of the Association do not allow any misleading summary of data to be issued in their name” and goes on to state that: “Views or opinions based on general knowledge or belief are clearly distinguished from views or opinions derived from the statistical analyses being reported”.	It remains the responsibility of the client and/or supervisor to ensure the accurate reporting of results as supplied by SCS. SCS absolves itself from any errors resulting from the reporting of results. It is the client and/or supervisor’s responsibility to clarify the assumptions, aim and interpretation of statistical methods employed by SCS. Therefore, SCS can also not be held responsible for conceptual misrepresentations. The client and/or supervisor is ultimately accountable for the accurate and ethical representation of findings unless the consultant is made co-author in which case the responsibility is shared.
	General	SCS reserves the right to withhold final sign-off pending review and acceptance of the final report. It is, however, not the role of the consultant to perform a language review. SCS reserves the right to distance itself from the research in the event that sign-off is rejected or neglected.	The client and/or supervisor must obtain the necessary sign-off from the consultant prior to final reporting or publication of the results of the project. The project supervisor must review and approve the write-up of the results prior to the final review by SCS and also review and approve any subsequent changes. In the final report or representation of the project, reference must be made to all resources used, including: all statistical consulting service providers, as well as software packages employed, and authors quoted. A list of frequently used statistical references will be made available on request.

Constitution of the South African Statistical Association (Accessed on 31 January 2013): http://www.sastat.org.za/sites/default/files/documents/SASA_Constitution_2010.pdf

Payment categories, billing methods and fee structures

The five different payment categories and their associated billing methods tabled below are available when making use of SCS's services.

Payment Stream	Payment Category	Description	Billing Method
1	A	NWU Post Graduate Students	Student Account
2	B	Students from Other Universities	Formal Billing
3	C	NWU Department with outside funding (e.g., NRF, Industry etc.)	Internal Claim
3	D	Private Sector Clients	Formal Billing
1	E	NWU Staff/ Supervisor paying for student	Internal Claim

The following fee structures apply:

Description of Fee	Rate per Category (Excluding VAT)		
	A & E	B & C	D
Planning and Questionnaire Review	R500 per hour	R 1260 per hour	R 2180 per hour
Statistical Analysis and Data Mining	R500 per hour	R 1260 per hour	R 2180 per hour
Assistance with Interpretation of Results	R500 per hour	R 1260 per hour	R 2180 per hour
Review of Final Report	R500 per hour	R 1260 per hour	R 2180 per hour
Assistance with Publications	R500 per hour	R 1260 per hour	R 2180 per hour
Data Capturing	R 0.14 per character*		
Data Coding and Transcribing	R630 per hour		
Printing	R1.70 per page		

* Subject to additional cost of R500 per hour if questionnaires need to be numbered and an additional handling fee of R3.00 per questionnaire if SCS will not be analysing the data.

Note:

- The above rates are charged per half an hour (e.g., a 30-minute analysis for Category B clients will cost R 630).
- All fees are subject to change.
- All fees are subject to an annual increase.
- Categories A, B and D are subject to 15% VAT.

Account settlement

The client ultimately remains responsible for account settlement. SCS reserves the right to withhold further analyses on accounts more than 30 days overdue (as per NWU policy all outstanding debtors should be collected within 30 days) or final sign-off pending account settlement.

Guidelines for NWU Statistical Consultation Services

Data Submission

- Use modern tools (e.g., Microsoft Forms) for data capture. Note that assistance with data capture or cleaning is not provided.
- Submit datasets as Microsoft Excel workbooks or agreed formats (e.g., comma/tab-delimited, SPSS, Statistica).
- Ensure data is presented in a single table, where each row represents a unique observation (e.g., a patient or student) with a unique identifier and each column denotes a unique variable.

Data Preparation

- Remove all confidential identifying information (e.g., patient names) prior to submission.
- Delete hidden rows and columns as well as unnecessary blank rows and columns
- Data cleaning should not be performed unless specified by the consultant.

Project Documentation

- Any changes in methodology or data sourcing (e.g., changes in exclusion criteria) must be communicated timeously to the consultant.
- Provide and refer to the latest version of the research proposal when submitting data.
- Provide the version of the questionnaire that was used to source the submitted data. If using an electronic form, download the questionnaire in PDF format for submission.
- For ethics applications, supply the application as well as the research proposal.

Consultation Scheduling

- Submit requests for assistance at least 6 to 8 weeks prior to any deadlines to ensure timely support.
- Consultations are by appointment only. Responsibility lies with the student/researcher to plan ahead and inform the consultant of any deadlines.

Deadline Awareness

- Avoid last-minute requests, particularly before significant deadlines such as thesis examinations or conference abstract submissions.

Acknowledgement

I hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand the contents of this document.

Signed on this _____ day of _____ at _____

Student/ Client/ Researcher:

Supervisor:

Name & Surname

Signature

Name & Surname

Signature