



# Service Level Agreement

Statistical Consultation Services

Potchefstroom Campus

North-West University

January 2026

## 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 postgraduate students
- North-West University staff members

### 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 regard to data collection.
- Statistical analysis and data mining by means of suitable computer packages, including SPSS, STATISTICA, and R.
- Assistance with the interpretation of processed results.
- Assistance with the statistical analysis needed for publications.
- Assistance with publications (as co-author).
- Review of the statistical section of the final report.

## 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
<b>Consultations</b>	<b>General</b>	<b><i>The consultant is not allowed to render any services until a signed client registration form is received.</i></b>	
		Consultations will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the consultant's availability and capacity. The consultant reserves the right to decline engagement with any prospective client at their sole discretion. Provision of assistance is not guaranteed to all applicants; support will be extended subject to availability and suitability as determined by the consultant.	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) that 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 are 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 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, provided that another consultant with capacity is available. However, depending on the circumstances, the client may be asked to cover any additional costs associated with such a move.		
<b>Timely Feedback</b>	Once all required data is received, the consultant must provide feedback within <b>10–15 working days</b> . During high-volume periods (September–December), requests may be handled on a <b>first-come, first-serve basis</b> , with a maximum turnaround of <b>15 working days</b> . The consultant must inform the client or supervisor of any delays <b>exceeding 10 working days</b> .	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 if SCS is in some way responsible for the error.	

<b>Consultations (contd.)</b>	<b>Costs</b>	<p>The client and/or supervisor can 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>
	<b>Co-Authorship</b>	<p>If the consultant and SCS Management determine that a significant contribution was made to the project, <b>co-authorship shall be insisted</b> upon. 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>	
<b>Ethics Application</b>	<b>Review</b>		
<b>Planning</b>	<b>General</b>	<p>SCS assists with the selection of the appropriate sampling methodology, experimental design, and determining the adequate sample size. Therefore, to enhance the quality and usability of the statistical analyses, the consultant should be involved in the project from the planning phase.</p>	
	<b>Ethics</b>	<p>According to Section A.4, paragraph A.4.1.3 of the SASA Constitution: "<i>Members of the Association consider and explore any likely consequences of collecting and disseminating various types of data</i>". Therefore, SCS will not perform any analyses on data associated with a project that does not have the necessary ethical approval (i.e., <b>ethics number</b>). 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. It is the responsibility of the research team to ensure that the project receives ethical clearance.</p>

<b>Data Collection &amp; Storage</b>	<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	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 supervisors 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 a lack of data or an insufficient sample size. The client and/or supervisor are responsible for ensuring that any personal or sensitive data is removed.
	<b>Instrument</b>	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 <b>subject matter expert</b> , it is the clients', and specifically the project supervisor’s, responsibility to establish the <b>content validity</b> of the questionnaire and/or the <b>accuracy and appropriateness</b> of the measurement instrument.
	<b>Electronic questionnaires</b>	If the SCS consultant is contracted to set up the electronic questionnaire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it will be done in a functional way on SCS’s chosen platform;</li> <li>• the consultant <b>will not take responsibility</b> for technical difficulties (e.g., opening, viewing, and submitting) with the electronic questionnaire across different platforms.</li> </ul>	The client and/or supervisor take full responsibility for testing the electronic questionnaire’s functionality across different platforms.
	<b>Data Quality</b>	SCS will not be held responsible for the quality of data or 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.
	<b>Data Storage</b>	All SCS project data must be stored electronically in line with NWU’s Data and Information Security Policy, which requires secure, classified, and access-controlled storage on approved NWU systems. SCS retains electronic data only for the operational period needed to complete a project, after which it is securely removed from SCS systems	Clients and/or supervisors are responsible for ensuring long-term archiving of all project data on secure NWU-approved platforms that meet Records Management Policy requirements for confidentiality, retention, and compliant disposal. Data must be stored securely for the required minimum retention period (typically seven years or more, depending on applicable obligations).

<b>Statistical Analysis</b>	<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	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.
	<b>General</b>	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 and suitable for a specific research question.
<b>Reporting Findings</b>	<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	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 a co-author, in which case the responsibility is shared.
	<b>General</b>	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.
<p>Constitution of the South African Statistical Association (Accessed on 31 January 2013): <a href="http://www.sastat.org.za/sites/default/files/documents/SASA_Constitution_2010.pdf">http://www.sastat.org.za/sites/default/files/documents/SASA_Constitution_2010.pdf</a></p> <p>Constitution of the South African Statistical Association (Accessed on 29 January 2026): <a href="#">South African Statistical Association - About SASA</a></p> <p>NWU Research Data Management Policy (Accessed on 29 January 2026): <a href="#">NWU Research Data Management Policy</a></p>			

## Payment categories, billing methods and fee structures

The 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
1	E	NWU Staff/ Supervisor paying for student	Internal Claim

The following fee structures apply:

Description of Fee	A-TARIFF (Subject to 15% VAT)	E-TARIFF (Excludes VAT)
Planning and Questionnaire Review	R1500 per hour	R1500 per hour
Statistical Analysis and Data Mining	R1500 per hour	R1500 per hour
Assistance with Interpretation of Results	R1500 per hour	R1500 per hour
Review of Final Report	R1500 per hour	R1500 per hour
Assistance with Publications	R1500 per hour	R1500 per hour

### Note:

- The above rates are charged per unit/ 15 minutes (e.g., a 15-minute analysis for Category E clients will cost R 375.00).
- All fees are subject to change.
- All fees are subject to an annual increase.

## 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, Excel, etc.) for data capture.
- Note that SCS does not provide assistance with data capture or cleaning.
- 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) before submission.
- Delete hidden rows and columns, as well as unnecessary blank rows and columns
- Further 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 with 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.