

GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISORS AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

Approved by the Council of the School of Graduate Studies
May 6, 1996

Preamble

The purpose of this document is to provide graduate programs, research faculty and graduate students with operating principles for, and examples of, guidelines which will contribute to good working relationships between supervisors and graduate students. What follows is an attempt to outline clear guidelines for all the various participants in the graduate enterprise with a view to helping supervisors and students continue to meet high standards, and in a cordial, supportive and productive atmosphere.

Words such as 'supervisor', 'thesis supervisory committee', 'graduate program director' and other related terms, are given fuller meaning through departmental and discipline based traditions at the university, as well as in two reports drafted by the School of Graduate Studies for these purposes. The "SGS Report on University-Wide Standards and Procedures for Ph.D. Programs" and the "SGS Report on University-Wide Standards and Procedures for Master's/Magisteriate Programs" outline the general roles of these positions and the criteria for faculty in these positions, as well as general minimum conditions for admission, academic good standing and graduation for graduate students.

Given that research degrees are offered in areas as divergent as engineering, social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, fine arts, and interdisciplinary studies, and that there are Ph.D. programs as well as different types of master's/magisteriate programs, it is not surprising that there exists considerable variation in terms of the kinds of supervision one might find, and which students would require. There are, of course, many different, valid models of student supervision. For this reason, what follows should be seen not a regulatory but rather as counsel.

Broadly speaking, the models range from one which sees students as apprentices who receive close supervision on a continuous basis from supervisors, to one which sees students as essentially independent researchers who receive only periodic guidance from supervisors, but who otherwise assume most of the responsibility for making use of the resources at their disposal. These diverse contexts provide frameworks which set out how ownership and authorship are viewed, how discoveries or imaginative viewpoints fit into the working academic relationship, how independently students work or how much emphasis is placed on team efforts, etc. In all cases, however, it is expected that there will be growth and development on the part of students. Students become increasingly independent over the course of the research program. Agreement and regular exchange on these matters is important for supervisors and graduate students to maximize the benefits of their undertaking and to minimize misunderstandings.

In some programs students are supervised by only one faculty member, while in others, a thesis supervisory committee is the standard. In what follows, the word 'supervisor' refers to the single faculty member who is the supervisor, or to the principal supervisor if there is a thesis supervisory committee. When reference is made to other members of a thesis supervisory committee, this will be noted.

While it is generally important to acknowledge the leadership role which supervisors should undertake in the overall relationship with graduate students, it is paramount for graduate students to understand that they have a shared responsibility in maintaining open channels of communication, and finding out for themselves what may be needful to their success, and acting accordingly. The prudence of open and timely communication between supervisor and student is paramount.

There are four subsections to this report, each one directed to a distinct but related issue: the first touches on the matters of the student's right to have a supervisor and the changing of

supervisors; the second on the nature of the general academic expectations of master's/magisteriate and Ph.D. students; the third is on intellectual property; and the fourth outlines guidelines for supervisors, thesis supervisory committees and students to take into consideration.

1. Establishing Student Supervisor Partnerships

Although programs differ as to the precise time at which students begin their work with a supervisor, it is university practice that all research students have a supervisor while they prepare their theses, and having a supervisor is a condition for remaining in the program.

Prospective students are advised to study the areas of specialization of faculty to ensure themselves that expertise exists within the department for their own areas of academic interest. For programs in which supervisors are designated in the admission process, each student will have a supervisor with registration. For programs in which this is not the case, the program should admit only students for whom they can reasonably expect to have the appropriate faculty member as supervisor when needed.

There is no ensured right for a student to have some particular individual as supervisor, and it should be recognized that there may occasionally exist unfortunate circumstances when it may prove difficult or impossible for a supervisor to be found for a student. For example, a student may decide to change research topics or wish to terminate work with a given supervisor, or the supervisor may permanently leave the university. It should also be recognized that no faculty member may be forced to supervise a student and that no student may be forced to work with any particular supervisor. Because of these conditions, it is not possible to articulate precise rules for resolving situations where students have lost their supervisors. Under such circumstances, the supervisor, the thesis supervisory committee members, the student and the graduate program director should do what they can to ensure continuous supervision for students.

2. Expectations Regarding Research at the Doctoral and Masters Levels

A frequent concern of both students and their supervisors is the differences that are expected to characterize work at the masters versus the doctoral levels. One useful distinction to keep in mind is that the Ph.D. degree, unlike most master's degrees, is a prerequisite to teach in a university as a member of a faculty, to be listened to as an authority in the chosen field of work by peers worldwide, and to examine other Ph.D. theses. While, in general, it is difficult to give a precise definition as to what differentiates study at these two levels, the following may prove helpful.

- a) Intellectual scope. The purpose of a master's/magisteriate thesis is to demonstrate that the student can competently design and execute a substantial piece of research. The purpose of a Ph.D. thesis is to make a significant contribution of a scholarly nature which is recognized as such by peers in the discipline in general.
- b) Originality of thesis topic. Ph.D. theses, and to a lesser degree Master's/Magisteriate theses, are expected to be original contributions within the discipline concerned.
- c) Background skills of the incoming student. Incoming master's students are expected to have the appropriate background skills to enable them to learn how to design and execute research in their chosen field. Incoming Ph.D. students should have successfully demonstrated that they are able to carry out substantial, original research and that they have the appropriate background to enable them to make a significant contribution to knowledge and become independent researchers in their own right.

- d) **Nature of Supervision.** The diversity of discipline traditions and the differences between master's/magisteriate and Ph.D. programs set out orientations for supervision which can be addressed only in a very general way. Thesis supervision for master's/magisteriate students tends to provide more in terms of the definition and design of the undertaking than in Ph.D. programs. Ph.D. supervision tends to expect more self-direction and critical thought in research undertakings than does the master's/magisteriate program.
- e) **Research Topics and Specialization.** Topics of research which students undertake are in keeping with the expertise of supervisors and faculty available in the program.

3. Intellectual Property

The issue of intellectual property varies in importance depending on the discipline, the nature of group or individual relations, types of funding, and other such matters. In general the issue is: "to whom does what belong in a research undertaking, who is permitted to do what with the results of research and how should the individual contributions be acknowledged?" The diversity of settings precludes one specific rule which could govern all proprietary issues, concerns about joint authorship, copyrights, etc. In establishing the nature of the research relationship with students, supervisors should outline from the beginning, the policies and practices of the program with respect to proprietary matters and students should inquire concerning such policies. Programs and departments should spell out in written form their orientation and put this into the program or departmental guidelines for students. There are settings in which the research funding from agencies sets out in advance the nature of the proprietary relationship and whenever this is the case, it should be clarified for students from early on in the process.

The overall guiding principle which should be considered in matters of intellectual property is that ownership and recognition of contribution, should be commensurate with intellectual leadership, actual and active involvement, self-reliance and innovation in the research undertaking.

Such a principle accords with, for example, the principles and responsibilities outlined on page 1, in the tri-council policy statement "Integrity in Research and Scholarship" as articulated by the Medical Research Council, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

In university settings, all published works, including dissertations which are copyrighted by students, become part of the scholarly domain and governed by the general rules of copyright. This applies to theses written in the context of contract research as in other areas. It is of considerable importance that members of the community be acquainted with the copyright provision of fair dealing which allows for use of public works for personal use, research, criticism, etc., as outlined in the policy sent out to the university by the office of the Secretary General.

4. Supervisors, Supervisory Committees and Students

4.1 Supervisors

1. Supervisors oversee the research undertakings of graduate students in a manner generally set out through the practices and traditions of their disciplines and academic departments. To ensure mutually compatible expectations, supervisors should discuss with students the general nature of their working relationship early in the developmental stages of their collaboration.
2. Supervisors should be available to students on a reasonable basis for consultation and discussion of academic progress and issues related to research. They should provide timely comments on written material submitted by students and this would include comments on the advisability of submitting theses for examination.

3. Supervisors should make appropriate arrangements for students when they go on sabbatical leave or are on extended absence.
4. In those departments in which the supervisor is responsible for providing a "funding package" to support the student, such support should be made clear from the beginning of the student's tenure at the university, and it should not be withdrawn without good reason and appropriate prior notice. In addition, the supervisor should play an active role in seeking to ensure the availability of basic resources required for the research, and for discussing such support funding issues with the student.
5. In cases in which research is done in a context of contract research, the supervisor should keep all parties aware of the fact that theses are public documents, defended in a public setting and copyrighted by the student and that the academic requirements of the student's program take precedence over contractual obligations.
6. If supervisors withdraw from supervising a student, this should be documented to the GPD and the student in writing.
7. The supervisor has the responsibility to act in a manner which conforms to basic principles of natural justice, academic integrity and professionalism and to manage in a similar manner, conflict situations which may arise in the relationship with the student.

4.2 Thesis Supervisory Committees

1. Committee members provide timely comments on submitted material.
2. Although students have the right to submit material for examination without approval of the principal supervisor or committee members, the committee should ensure that the student receives their assessment of the readiness of the work for examination.
3. The committee members have the responsibility to act in a manner which conforms to basic principles of natural justice, academic integrity and professionalism and to manage in a similar manner, conflict situations which may arise in the relationship with the student.

4.3 Graduate Students

1. Students should inform themselves concerning regulations and standards as specified in the graduate calendar and in the relevant documents produced by the program offering the degree and by the School of Graduate Studies.
2. Students are responsible for presenting ongoing work and meeting contractual obligations in a timely fashion and for maintaining regular contact and meeting with supervisors.
3. Students should submit theses, or draft publication materials, based on collaborative research, to supervisors before submission for final examination or publication.
4. Should students have a reasoned ground for changing supervisors or members of examining committees, they should submit a written request outlining these reasons, directly to the Graduate Program Director who will respond in a timely fashion.
5. Students have the responsibility to act in a manner which conforms to basic principles of natural justice, academic integrity and professionalism and to manage in a similar manner, conflict situations which may arise in the relationship with supervisors.

Membership of the task force on student supervisor relations:

Dr. S. McDonough (Chair), Dr. A. Fairchild, Dr. M. Jamal,
Dr. L. Landsberger, Dr. N. Segalowitz, Dr. G. Vatistas