

Principles for Graduate Supervision at Ontario's Universities

Ontario Council on Graduate Studies

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Introduction

High quality academic supervision is a key driver of graduate research-based education and is central to ensuring a positive and successful graduate student experience. Respectful and productive relationships between supervisors and graduate students promote a thriving university research culture where students are supported to make meaningful contributions to their fields of specialization.

A good working relationship between supervisors and graduate students is built on common expectations and trust, and incorporates principles of academic integrity, freedom of inquiry, and expression free of any form of discrimination, intimidation, or harassment.

While it is important to acknowledge that graduate students are partners in the university research enterprise, it is equally important to recognize that the supervisor is the senior partner. Both the graduate supervisor and the graduate student have certain rights and responsibilities within the context of the supervisor–student working relationship. The best student outcomes occur when supervisors provide leadership and guidance that is respectful of the student's personal and professional goals.

Although the graduate student bears the primary responsibility for their program success and intellectual growth, the onus is on the department, program, supervisor, supervisory committee, school/faculty of graduate studies and the university to foster an environment that is supportive of the inherent dignity and value of the supervisor and student, and supports student success. This document outlines the responsibilities and standards of conduct for individuals and groups involved with graduate student supervision in research-oriented programs.

Values

All parties responsible for graduate supervision are expected to adhere to the core values of graduate education, including:

- **Integrity:** All parties should hold themselves accountable to the highest standards of intellectual and personal integrity.
- **Inclusion:** Diversity is a driving force for academic excellence, and all parties should commit to fostering inclusive environments that respect diverse perspectives and backgrounds.
- **Collaboration:** Working collaboratively helps everyone remember that they are united in a common purpose.

Responsibilities & Standards of Conduct

Responsibilities of the Supervisor

Supervising a graduate student is an opportunity to support and train the next generation of scholars and industry, global, and community leaders. Graduate students support and enhance the research enterprise at our universities. It is recognized that with the privilege of supervising a graduate student come certain responsibilities.¹

The primary role of a supervisor is to provide guidance to allow for the student's professional and career development, intellectual growth, and contribution to their discipline. A key determinant of graduate student success is the quality of mentorship provided by the supervisor.

The responsibilities of a supervisor include:

1. Facilitating the graduate student's intellectual growth and contribution to a field of knowledge.
2. Meeting with the graduate student regularly throughout the supervisory relationship to discuss, clarify and document (as appropriate) mutually agreed upon expectations and the graduate student's research and career goals.
3. Assisting in the development and execution of a reasonable schedule for the completion of each portion and milestone of the graduate student's program – a program that is challenging at the appropriate level, and that can be accomplished within appropriate time and resource expectations.
4. Informing the graduate student (and department, faculty, and/or school/faculty of graduate studies, as appropriate) of any anticipated extended absences and making suitable arrangements for alternative modes of communication or supervision during the absence.
5. Mentoring the graduate student in all phases of the research endeavor as relevant to the discipline including, but not limited to: proposal development; data collection, analysis and interpretation; writing and preparing manuscripts for publication; research dissemination; and collaboration.
6. Providing timely, thorough, and constructive feedback and being reasonably accessible for meetings requested by the graduate student in order to ensure that the student makes progress toward the timely completion of their program requirements.
7. Discussing with the graduate student relevant university and external (e.g., Tri-Council) policies, guidelines, and deadlines.

¹ It is recognized that, depending on a university's appointment structure, supervision of a graduate student may be a term of appointment for faculty.

8. Providing and supporting a safe, inclusive and healthy work environment in their labs and/or research spaces, as well as encouraging work-life balance and providing vacation time for graduate students.
9. Discussing with the student authorship practices within their discipline, and documenting in writing any agreements or arrangements pertaining to intellectual property and joint authorship, with special sensitivity to any potential differential practices and experiences of international students.
10. Assisting the student in navigating, and directing them to appropriate resources, regarding the financials of graduate studies.
11. Understanding and discussing with the student any financial commitments they have agreed to regarding funding support throughout their period of time as a graduate student.
12. Following university policy in providing students with appropriate time to read and understand any agreements that they wish the student to sign, and providing the student with a signed copy.
13. Considering issues of equity and the differential individual circumstances of graduate students in providing supervision. This includes working to support students who, due to personal or social circumstances, may face obstacles or historical challenges to their graduate student success (e.g., considering accommodations for family responsibilities such as child or elder care, mental health, cultural challenges as a newly arrived international student, historical oppression of Indigenous communities, as well as other forms of discrimination in their many forms).
14. Providing support to the graduate student, including writing letters of recommendation (where appropriate and meritorious) and supporting the student's participation in research dissemination and professional development opportunities.
15. Chairing and convening meetings of the advisory committee, and completing all necessary records and reports for program progression.
16. Being aware of university policies, particularly those that directly impact the day-to-day supervisory relationship, including immediately disclosing any conflict of interest with the student, and adhering to policies on research ethics, civility, workplace safety, and sexual harassment.

Responsibilities of the Graduate Student

When a student registers in a graduate program, they make a commitment to strive for the highest levels of academic achievement and to contribute fully to the intellectual life of the program, faculty, and university. The primary responsibility of the graduate student is to devote the time and energy necessary to meet the academic requirements of their degree program in a manner consistent with their registration status.

By agreeing to work with a supervisor, the graduate student enters a partnership that will have a greater likelihood of success if it is built on common expectations and mutual respect. All aspects of the research endeavor should be openly and regularly discussed between the

graduate student and supervisor, with due consideration given to the interests, expectations, and expertise of both parties.

Graduate students in research-based programs are ultimately responsible for producing a thesis or major research paper which is the student's own work, meets the standards for academic quality of the graduate program and university, and reflects a capacity for independent scholarship in the discipline.

The responsibilities of the graduate student include:

1. Learning about and adhering to appropriate policies, guidelines, and deadlines, including those of the program, faculty, university, Research Ethics Board, and Tri-Council agencies.
2. Recognizing that the research project must be within scope of the approved program.
3. Selecting a topic of research, in collaboration with their supervisor, for which adequate resources (including financial and material resources) are available.
4. Keeping a record of their research, being fully accountable for demonstrating the authenticity of their work, and producing a project or thesis that is their own work.
5. Recognizing that the supervisor and supervisory committee have other teaching, research, and service obligations.
6. Maintaining progress in their research that is consistent with their status as either a full-time or part-time graduate student.
7. Acting in the spirit of collegiality with the supervisor, supervisory committee, professors, departmental administrators, and fellow graduate students.
8. Considering and responding to the constructive feedback of the supervisor and supervisory committee.
9. Meeting and communicating regularly with the supervisor.
10. Attending to administrative responsibilities in a timely manner.
11. Recognizing that changing supervisors may have consequences on the nature and focus of the research topic, funding, and time to completion.
12. Informing the supervisor, in a timely manner, of any extended periods of absence or other factors that may prevent maintaining progress on their research consistent with their status as a full-time or part-time graduate student.
13. Where appropriate, advocating for themselves in order to resolve any issues.
14. Disclosing all of their graduate education-related external (including government, public and private sector) funding to the supervisor.
15. Immediately disclosing to the department or program director any conflict of interest with the supervisor, supervisory committee, or other party involved in graduate supervision.

Responsibilities of the Supervisory Committee

The role of the supervisory committee, if one is required by a program, is to assist supervisors in guiding the graduate student. The composition of the supervisory committee may vary by program. The supervisory committee members' areas of expertise generally complement that of the supervisor. Responsibilities of the supervisory committee include:

1. Facilitating the graduate student's intellectual growth and contribution to a field of knowledge.
2. Assisting and supporting the supervisor in providing guidance, consultation, and advice on a student's research.
3. Meeting with the graduate student, as a committee, as required by the program and school of graduate studies policies, and completing an annual progress report.
4. Providing timely feedback on the thesis proposal and chapters (or other research output) once mutually agreed upon expectations for feedback and the best methods of communication have been determined.
5. Working together to provide the student with clear and consistent advice when their own opinions conflict or diverge from the direction of the research.
6. Approving when the thesis is ready for examination.
7. Being prepared to potentially take on a more active role should the primary supervisor not be in a position to continue in their role.
8. Immediately disclosing to the supervisor, department and/or program director any conflict of interest with the student.

Responsibilities of Departments/Centers or Teaching Faculties, Graduate Offices and Graduate Coordinators/Directors

Departments, graduate offices, and graduate coordinators/directors play a central role in creating a positive environment for graduate students to pursue their scholarly work and intellectual growth. For most graduate students, their department is their first link to the university and their primary source of information.

The responsibilities of departments, graduate offices, and graduate coordinators/directors include:

1. Ensuring that members of the supervisory committee are aware of their responsibilities and fulfill any established requirements needed to serve at the required level.
2. Communicating their role and availability to graduate students and supervisors, and encouraging the foregoing to connect with them at the first instance in the event of any concerns with respect to the supervisory relationship.
3. Establishing procedures for matching students to supervisors (if this occurs after enrolment) and monitoring graduate student progress.

4. Helping the graduate student to understand the financials of graduate studies.
5. Facilitating the identification of a new supervisor, or co-supervisors, in the event that the supervisor leaves the university, goes on an extended leave of absence for health or other reasons, or is unable to continue to supervise because of a breakdown in the student–supervisor relationship.
6. Providing reasonable accommodation in supporting the student to secure alternative options should a supervisory committee member leave the university or be otherwise unable to continue their duties during the student's program.
7. Facilitating and/or providing reasonable support to graduate students to change supervisors should the student wish to pursue a shift in research direction that is not supported by the supervisor.

Responsibilities of the School or Faculty of Graduate Studies

The school or faculty of graduate studies oversees the conduct of all graduate programs within the university and supports the achievement of the highest possible academic standards in graduate degree programs. The school works closely with graduate students, graduate programs, and faculties to promote excellence and foster an enriched and collegial environment for the pursuit of graduate education.

Responsibilities of the school or faculty of graduate studies include:

1. Granting graduate supervision membership to faculty members with appropriate experience and/or credentials, and working with divisions and/or the university in the event that graduate supervisors no longer meet the qualifications for graduate supervision.
2. Setting appropriate graduate policies, regulations and deadlines, and ensuring that university and graduate policies and procedures are followed.
3. Providing resources and education on graduate student supervision, mentorship, and the student–supervisor relationship. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - Guidance for all supervisors
 - Guidance on who can supervise graduate students
 - Guidance on timelines, funding, external permitted hours of work, leaves of absence, and other potential interruptions to graduate studies
 - Additional guidelines that may only be applicable to some programs (e.g., lab spaces)
 - Conflict of interest mitigation plans
 - Guidance on remote supervision
 - Guidance on selecting external examiners

- Guidance on addressing student–supervisory breakdowns and conflict resolution
- 4. Guidance on leaves of absence, vacation, and other time away that students and supervisors should discuss and negotiate as part of the supervisory relationship.
- 5. Providing support for new and continuing faculty on graduate supervision.
- 6. Providing professional development opportunities for graduate students and supervisors.
- 7. Advising graduate students on academic issues and facilitating solutions as appropriate.
- 8. Working with programs to promote an awareness of academic integrity policies.
- 9. Adjudicating appeals of unsatisfactory progress or dismissals.
- 10. Liaising with graduate programs on all matters relevant to graduate education.
- 11. Ensuring, as a best practice, that students are aware of the OCGS Principles for Graduate Supervision at Ontario's Universities at the time of offer or admission.

Responsibilities of the University

The university has the responsibility to provide an environment that supports all students' intellectual, social and personal development, and to ensure that inclusivity, health, and safety are a top priority for all students, faculty, and staff.

It should be noted that, depending on the individual institutional structure, some of these responsibilities may be more relevant at other levels.

Responsibilities of the university toward graduate supervision include:

1. Promoting an awareness and understanding of the Ontario Human Rights Code and ensuring that all parties responsible for graduate education and supervision are aware of legislative and institutional policies related to providing safe, inclusive, and healthy learning and work environments.
2. Providing adequate wraparound supports for students, including supports for family obligations, mental health supports, supports for students identifying with equity-deserving groups, and supports for international students.
3. Ensuring that graduate student supervision and related professional development are appropriately recognized and rewarded in faculty tenure and promotion.



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