GRADUATE SUPERVISION GUIDELINES - FACULTY EDITION

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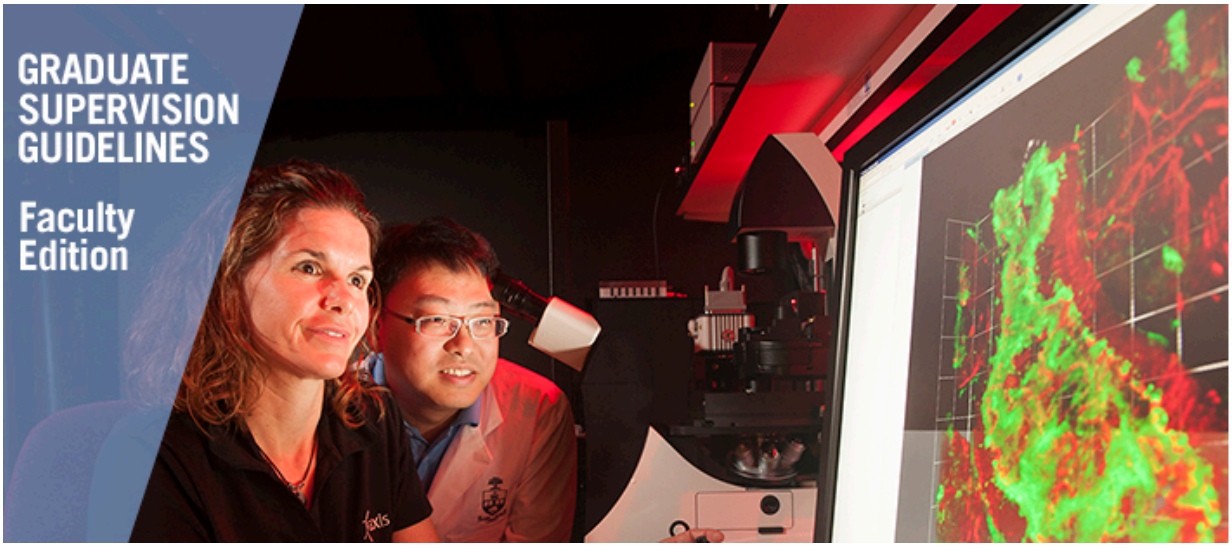


Section 1: Introduction

How can these guidelines help you?

As one of the most research-intensive universities in the world, the University of Toronto prides itself on providing graduate students with the opportunity for a deep engagement with scholarly work within their given discipline. Most research-stream doctoral students have a requirement to produce original research, complete a written thesis, and defend it at a Final Oral Examination. Similarly, research-stream master's students normally have to write and defend a thesis based on original research. Additionally, a number of professional doctoral and master's programs require that their students be engaged in scholarly activities under the supervision of a faculty member.

Fundamental to the idea of "supervision" is that a graduate faculty member (or occasionally more than one) takes primary responsibility for assisting a student in learning the science and art of the scientific or scholarly investigative process as well as guiding them through the processes necessary for successful completion of the degree. In addition, a good supervisor will not only provide research guidance, but also act as a mentor for the student, helping them explore career opportunities, introducing them to the scholarly and professional culture in their discipline, helping them navigate the University, and pointing them to the many resources available at the University to assist students during their program, especially if and when they encounter obstacles that may affect their academic work.

The goal of these best practice guidelines is to assist you in creating a rewarding graduate experience for both your students and yourself.

SGS honours active faculty members who, over at least 15 years, have demonstrated excellence in graduate supervision.

Learn about the JJ Berry Smith Doctoral Supervision Award

Supervision can take many forms, depending on, for instance, the program the student is enrolled in, the nature of the research or scholarly project, the faculty member's personal supervision style, the student's personal needs and their learning style, the standards of the discipline, and more. **These Guidelines are intended to help supervisors better understand their roles within this process and to ensure that the supervision of graduate students at the University of Toronto is of the highest quality.**

While these guidelines are written primarily for faculty members supervising graduate students in research-stream programs, many of these guidelines can also be applied to those advising students in graduate professional programs. Indeed, **most of the principles underlying best practices in supervision apply to all faculty working with students on scholarly projects.**

In addition to these general guidelines, we recognize that there may also be discipline-specific best practices, and both supervisors and graduate units should identify and adopt those as well.

Acknowledgements

These guidelines are based on the 2012 publication entitled, "Graduate Supervision: Guidelines for Students, Faculty, and Administrators." The existing guidelines were reviewed and revised by a working group at the School of Graduate Studies (SGS), which involved representatives from across the University, including SGS, the University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU), the Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre, Accessibility Services, First Nations House, and faculty members and students from various disciplines. Additionally, many sections within this document have benefitted significantly from the input and comments obtained from various experts across the University.

A companion publication provides guidelines for graduate students. Together, these guidelines outline the best practices for graduate supervision at the University of Toronto and assist all participants in the supervisory process to have a clear understanding of responsibilities and expectations in order to optimize the graduate experience and prevent potential problems or conflicts.

Our special thanks also go to Megan McIntosh and Caroline Cormier, without whose expert research, writing, and editorial skills the preparation of these documents would not have been possible.

Notes

1. Adapted from School of Graduate Studies, "Graduate Supervision Guidelines: Student Edition," University of Toronto, 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/Documents/Graduate-Supervision-Guidelines_Students.pdf, 1.

2. Ibid., 3-4.

Section 2: Supervision and Mentoring

A combined approach

Broadly defined, the role of a "supervisor" is to oversee an individual (or group) engaged in a particular task with the express goal of ensuring that they perform it correctly. In the context of graduate studies, a supervisor's role is to successfully guide a student through the requirements of their academic program.

Mentorship also plays an important role in the student-supervisor relationship. Generally speaking, a "mentor" is someone who is more experienced in a particular field and agrees to advise or counsel a less experienced mentee. In most cases, this relationship tends to be focused on broader scholarly and career development. However, it can also lead to the formation of a more personal relationship.

The difference between supervision and mentorship is not always clearly defined and good supervisors often adopt both roles, although the focus may differ depending on the stage the student is in their program.[1]

Effectively combining the role of mentor and supervisor can have a positive impact on the overall graduate student experience.[2]

In these guidelines, we have opted to continue using the term "supervisor" primarily because the term is widely used across the University of Toronto and is embedded in many policy and procedural documents. However, it should be understood that good supervision should combine both the supervisor and mentor role.

SUPERVISION tends to be task-oriented

MENTORSHIP tends to be focused on broader scholarly and career development

General characteristics of good supervisory practice

Good graduate supervision can be identified by a number of characteristics. A good supervisor should:

- Aim to **inspire and guide** their student to reach their full scholarly potential.
- **Guide a student through the various requirements** of the doctoral program
- Help the student **navigate the relevant policies and procedures** established by the graduate unit, the faculty and the University.
- Seek to provide a work environment that is **supportive yet stimulating**, enabling students to learn the essential methodologies, concepts, and culture of their disciplines.
- Provide a student with **clear, fair and honest feedback** on their progress through the program.
- **Allow the student the opportunity** to conduct research of high quality and significance, and **receive appropriate recognition** in publications, presentations, etc.
- Introduce the student to the **wider context of the discipline** and the relevant communities of scholars and professionals, positioning them for successful careers within or outside of academia (or both).
- Foster a sense of **academic integrity**.
- Handle any emerging or unanticipated problems in a **timely** fashion with both **compassion and clarity**.[3]

Graduate supervision as a shared responsibility

Good supervision depends on communicating well, being tolerant and understanding, and each holding the other to high standards. The graduate unit (department, centre, or institute) also plays an important role, providing clarity and consistency of expectations, upholding academic standards, administering the program fairly, effectively, and intervening where necessary to help resolve problems.

Good supervision is a shared responsibility between the supervisor and student.

The need for mutual respect

Regardless of their respective roles or positions, all parties (student, supervisor, members of the supervisory committee) should treat each other with dignity and respect and make every effort possible to manage conflicts in a respectful manner. The Human Resources Guideline on Civil Conduct published by the University of Toronto, available online, provides a useful guide to appropriate behaviour and respectful responses.[4]

What is my role as a supervisor?

As the supervisor of a graduate student, a faculty member's role is to guide a student through the requirements of their academic program, set out expectations, provide evaluations and assessments of their work, and generally assist their students in meeting and completing in a timely manner the various milestones and tasks that are part of the degree program. The student-supervisor relationship is critical to a student's success in graduate school and should be established early in a student's program and, barring graduate unit policies or unanticipated circumstances, remain intact until the student has successfully submitted and defended their thesis.

As a supervisor, the faculty member should provide support to their graduate students at every stage of their degree. Such support includes the following:

Planning

A supervisor should assist their students with the selection and planning of a meaningful and appropriate research topic that can be successfully completed within the normal time limit for the degree program. This includes helping develop a realistic timeline for completion of the student's program, preferably including a number of milestones to measure the student's progress along the way.

SUPERVISORS . . .

- Provide guidance
- Clearly set out expectations
- Provide feedback
- Are accessible
- Assist with setting up a supervisory committee
- Help students understand policies and regulations
- Promote academic integrity
- Provide supportive environment
- Avoid conflict of interest

Offering Guidance

A supervisor should provide their graduate students with support and resources throughout their program to help them contemplate relevant theories, knowledge, and background literature, as well as the methodological and technical skills necessary for the research. A supervisor should also provide adequate opportunity and a positive environment for discussion and constructive criticism of ideas, research plans, research results, and a timely review of thesis drafts as the research progresses. This includes being accessible to the student for consultation throughout the research process, as well as helping the student establish a supervisory committee that will meet on at least an annual basis (see section **Establishing a supervisory committee** below as well as **Section 4** of these guidelines for further information about committees).

Providing Feedback

A supervisor is responsible for providing sufficient and appropriate guidance and commentary on the student's progress to support successful completion of the program. The supervisor should keep track of progress and investigate any concerns; and be open, honest, and fair with the student about their academic performance. This includes providing positive feedback on successful achievements and contributions; when appropriate, fairly recognizing a student's contributions in written materials, teaching, presentations, publication, etc.; being clear with students when they are not making sufficient progress; and indicating what is required for them to get back on track. Please refer to **Section 8** of these guidelines for more tips about dealing with conflict.

Being Accessible

A supervisor should establish regular meeting times for discussion and review of progress with their graduate students; be reasonably accessible for unscheduled meetings; and make arrangements to ensure continuity of supervision during leaves or extended periods of absence.

Establishing a supervisory committee (for doctoral students)

In addition, a supervisor should also assist students in establishing a supervisory committee with a minimum of three members for the duration of their degree. This should be done as early as possible in the program, and no later than the end of the second year. Supervisors should ensure that there is an annual meeting held with all members of the committee involved, the results of which should be included in a written report that is added to the student's academic file. The student should be given the opportunity to add comments to the report. Supervisors must be aware of all relevant departmental and University-wide policies and requirements for the student's academic program and research.[5]

What is my role as a mentor?

As a mentor, a supervisor should be focused on the student's long-term development and on providing personal support, not just with regard to the academic requirements of the program, but also regarding their development as a researcher and a scholar. The supervisor should provide support in all aspects relevant to the academic process, including but not limited to time management, conflict resolution, gaining familiarity with the scholarly or research culture in the particular discipline, exploring career options, and providing advice on how to prepare for a future career. In many ways, the mentorship relationship often is more personal than a supervisory one.

Some positive impacts of this approach to graduate student supervision include: raising student achievement, lowering attrition rates, reducing stress on all parties involved, and making it more likely that both students and supervisors will be satisfied with their progress both during and after the completion of their degrees.[6]

Multiple Mentors

There are many different kinds of mentors and it is important to recognize that each faculty member may have different areas of expertise, a somewhat unique interpersonal style, and pedagogical methods. For this reason, while a research student must have one primary supervisor, it may be beneficial for some students to have multiple mentors. Different mentors can offer different kinds of expertise and support as a student progresses through their graduate degree. For instance, while all supervisors are very familiar with the academic world, some mentors may have additional expertise in other employment areas such as industry, non-profit organizations, etc. In some cases, additional mentors may be found among the members on the student's supervisory committee, but mentors may also consist of alumni, or others not associated with the student's program.[8]

MENTORS . . .

- Allow students to develop a new set of knowledge and skills related to their field of study
- Provide students with the opportunity to hone their collaborative skills
- Give students the tools necessary to deal confidently with intellectual challenges
- Allow students to become contributing members of a wider community of scholars[7]

Effective supervision and mentorship strategies

To be an effective supervisor/mentor, faculty members should strive to achieve the following in their relationships with their graduate students:

- **Effective communication:** Be sure to communicate and discuss your expectations with your students in advance. Putting expectations on the table from the outset ensures that there is little room for misunderstandings.
- **Lead by example:** As a mentor, you should aim to set a good example for your student in all activities related to your field, including research, collaborating, teaching, writing, and presenting.
- **Inspire confidence:** By providing constructive feedback in a timely manner, as a mentor you can help your student acquire the tools necessary to engage within their field with greater confidence.
- **Respect diversity:** Be aware of differences in ability, gender, culture, or life circumstances that may require special accommodations. It is also important in your role as a supervisor to be aware of campus and local support groups that can help your student in varying situations, as well as being aware of your own limits in dealing with such issues.
- **Be accessible:** Be willing to take the time to get to know your student and to build a strong mentoring relationship with them. This includes establishing a mutual respect where both parties respect each other's time, effort, and qualifications.

Notes

1. Gardner, S.K. and Barnes, B.J., *Advising and Mentoring Doctoral Students: A Handbook*. Faculty and Staff Monograph Publications, 210: 2014). Retrieved from: http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/fac_monographs/210; Knox, S., Schlosser, L.Z., Pruitt, N. T. and Hill, C.E. (2006), "A qualitative examination of graduate advising relationships: The adviser perspective," *The Counseling Psychologist*, 34(4), 489-518; Laverick, D., *Mentoring Processes in Higher Education* (London: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

2. Studies have shown that good supervision practices have had a significant impact on graduate student retention and completion. See, for example, Baird, L.L, "Helping graduate students: A graduate adviser's view." In *Student services for the changing graduate student population,* eds. A.S Pruitt-Logan & P.D. Isaac (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 25-32; Barnes, B. "The nature of exemplary doctoral advisor's expectations and the way they may influence doctoral persistence," *Journal of College Student Retention*, 11.3 (2010), 323-343; Barnes, B.J. & Austin, A.E., "The role of doctoral advisors: A look at advising from the advisor's perspective," *Innovative Higher Education* 33.1 (2009), 297-315; Council of Graduate Schools, "Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Findings from exit surveys of Ph.D. completers" (Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). Retrieved from: http://cgsnet.org/phd-completion-and-attrition-findings-exit-surveys-phd-completers-0; among others. In other studies, a lack of strong supervisory relationship has been demonstrated to correlate with attrition. See, for example, Golde, C.M., "The role of the department and discipline in doctoral student attrition: Lessons from four departments," *Journal of Higher Education*, 76.6 (2005), 669-700; Lovitts, B., *Leaving the Ivory Tower: The Causes and Consequences of Departure from Doctoral Study* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

3. Adapted from School of Graduate Studies, "Graduate Supervision Guidelines: Student Edition." University of Toronto, 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/Documents/Graduate-Supervision-Guidelines_Students.pdf, 3-4.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 13-15.

6. Chao, G.T., "Mentoring phases and outcomes" in *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 51 (1997), 15-28; Tenenbaum, H.R., Crosby, F.J., & Gliner, M.D., "Mentoring relationships in graduate school," *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59.3 (2001), 326-341; Wunsch, M.A.,"Mentoring revisited: Making an impact on individuals and institutions," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 57 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

7. Adapted from "The Benefits of Mentoring," Northwestern University, The Graduate School. Retrieved from: http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/resources-for/faculty/excellence-in-mentoring/the-benefits-of-mentoring.html

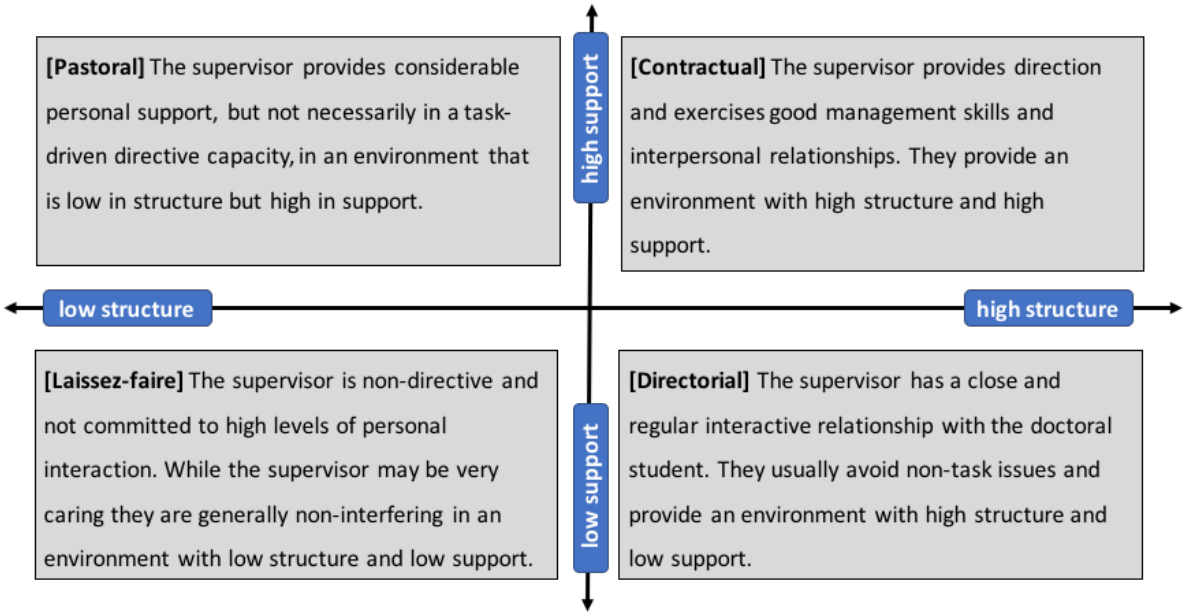
8. Wright-Harp, W. and Cole. P., "A Mentoring Model for Enhancing Success in Graduate Education," *Contemporary Issues in Communication Sciences and Disorders* 35.1 (2008), 9-11.

Section 3: Supervisory Styles

While some aspects of good supervision can be considered universal, and should be adopted by everyone, supervision styles may vary across graduate units and disciplines. In addition, as a supervisor you may have your own unique style of supervising your graduate students. As long as this style respects the more general best practices, this is a good thing. It is important, however, that faculty members are cognizant of their own strengths and weaknesses as a supervisor in order to find the best way to support their graduate students.[1] Indeed, **the process of evaluating one's own supervisory style can make faculty more effective supervisors**.

There is no one-size-fits-all model for supervision.

Figure 1 The following figure is adapted from Figure 1 in Gatfield (2005). We believe it may be helpful as a starting point for reflecting on one's supervision style.[2]



The model proposed by Terry Gatfield in 2005 provides an overview of supervisory styles ranging from **laissez-faire** to **pastoral** (both of which necessitate greater student independence), to **contractual** and **directorial** (which provide greater supervisor direction to students). The "**structure" axis** reflects those components in the supervisory relationship that are provided primarily by the supervisor(s) in negotiation with the candidate. They reflect the management process of graduate supervision, and include such elements as topic selection, meeting schedules, setting of milestones, feedback turn-around time, and writing support. The **"support" axis** includes the components supplied by the institution and supervisors that are non-directive and optional. This axis includes such elements as sensitivity to student's needs, confidence building, exposure to academic discipline, office and lab space, policy manuals, funding, and statistics support.

The model also provides a helpful way to understand reasons why a supervisory relationship may become unsatisfying for both the supervisor and the student. For instance, a student seeking higher levels of support and structure may feel unsupported and neglected by a supervisor who has a more laissez-faire approach to supervision. Alternatively, a supervisor who takes a more directorial approach may lead some students to feel a lack of autonomy and trust in the supervisory relationship.[3]

An important feature of Gatfield's model is that it places supervisors and students on a spectrum, using descriptors to identify what he refers to as "preferred operating styles." This means that although a supervisor might have a propensity toward one particular style over another, it allows for movement between styles as necessary. Individuals may find themselves on different parts of the spectrum at different times during the degree or supervision process. For instance, a supervisor may allow the student lots of flexibility early in the doctoral program as the student tries to identify a suitable topic (more pastoral), but become more directive and contractual as the student is actively pursuing the project. Later in the program, the supervisor again may become less directive or prescriptive as the student is focused on writing the thesis.

Gatfield stressed that **none of the four styles should be considered inherently undesirable or wrong.** Supervision strategies are only ineffective if they do not match the needs and expectations of the supervisor and student.

Supervision across Different Disciplines

Ben is in his second-year as a PhD student the Department of History. He has been asked by his supervisor to come back in six months with a proposal for his research project. He usually meets his supervisor once every six months, but is welcome to request earlier meetings, if helpful.

Elizabeth is doing her PhD in a chemistry lab as part of a funded project. She is expected to attend biweekly lab seminars with her supervisors, other students in the lab, and post-doctoral fellows to discuss her research progress. In addition, she often meets with her supervisor informally throughout the week to discuss her work.

The University of Toronto offers many graduate degree programs, spanning the various fields and disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, engineering, and life sciences. All research-degree programs and a number of professional programs require that students engage in some form of research under the supervision of a faculty member.

Given the variety of programs and disciplines, it is not surprising that one can find considerable variation in supervision across the University. For instance, **in some research-stream programs graduate students are expected to develop their research project quite independently from the supervisor, while in other programs or research groups, a student is expected to develop a project that fits within ongoing research projects in the supervisor's laboratory or research group.**

The nature of the interaction between the supervisor and student also may change throughout a student's program. For instance, some supervisors may interact and give guidance to students fairly regularly (e.g., daily or weekly) during the first stages of the program but expect students to work very independently on their project, receiving only occasional guidance towards the end of the program. Furthermore, in some programs, faculty members may agree to supervisor a student prior to admission (and indeed, this may be an admission requirement of the program). In other programs, a student may be admitted and asked to identify a supervisor within the first year of the program. In yet other programs, students initially may have an advisor but a supervisor is only identified or assigned upon the student's completion of their qualifying exams.

Research across North America has consistently shown that effective supervision and mentorship are the most important features of a student's graduate school experience, and indeed are major factors in driving program completion or attrition.[4]

The research has shown that students across every discipline value supervisors who are:

- **Accessible:** Supervisor meets with students frequently in both individual and group settings.
- **Approachable:** Supervisor creates a comfortable environment where students could discuss concerns.
- **Encouraging:** Supervisor provides research support, guidance, and motivation.
- **Interested:** Supervisor is interested in the student and wants to know them as individuals.
- **Open and flexible:** Supervisor discusses expectations and conflicts openly and honestly and adjusts to students' needs over time.
- **Professional:** Supervisor facilitates the student's socialization into the program and discipline, encourages participation in conferences, and introduces students to people in the field.
- **Supportive:** Supervisor provides professional and career development support.[5]

Notes

1. McIntosh, M., "Promising Practices in Graduate Supervision in a Canadian Context: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of Existing Research," Unpublished report (University of Toronto, 2016), 4-7.

2. Gatfield, T., "An Investigation into PhD Supervisory Management Styles: Development of a dynamic conceptual model and its managerial implications," *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 27.3 (2005), 311.

3. McIntosh, 4-7.

4. Council of Graduate Schools, "Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Findings from exit surveys of Ph.D. completers," (Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). Retrieved from: http://cgsnet.org/phd-completion-and-attrition-findings-exit-surveys-phd-completers-0

5. McIntosh, 9.

GRADUATE SUPERVISION GUIDELINES
Faculty Edition

Section 4: Effective Supervision in Practice: From the Initial Stage to Finishing Up

Completing a graduate degree program requires a combination of goodwill, collegiality, flexibility, and rational decision-making on the part of both student and supervisor.

Problems sometimes arise when the expectations of both parties differ, which can have a particularly significant impact if discovered later on in the program. Also, problems may arise when shortcuts are taken and the proper University or SGS policies and procedures are not followed. This section offers strategies for helping students get off to a good start.

Getting Started

Agreeing to supervise a student

Establishing a positive student-supervisor relationship needs to start on day one. While there are many factors that can impact the success of a graduate supervision relationship, a good place to start is to make sure that the student and supervisor are a good fit.

Here are some suggestions for what you can do as a supervisor when deciding whether or not to supervise a student:

- Have a conversation (in-person, where possible) with the student to ensure that your expectations of a graduate student meet those of the candidate.

FIRST STEPS
Supervisors should:

- Establish positive communication with their student from the very beginning
- Help in setting up a supervisory committee as soon as possible
- Be aware of rules, policies, and procedures of both the Department and SGS
- Help plan their student's academic program, from start to finish
- Be knowledgeable about program funding structures
- Provide guidance, support, and feedback on student work in a timely manner

- Does their research interest fit with your work? Are you willing to supervise a student on a self-selected research topic that may fall somewhat outside your immediate area of expertise or current scholarly activities?
- If applicable, invite the students to see the research facilities.
- Consider how many students you already have -- will you have the appropriate time available for this new student? Discuss with the student what you expect in terms of independent work, frequency of meetings, deadlines, etc.
- Be aware of the graduate unit's policy on funding doctoral (or research master's) students. If you are expected to provide funding, do you have the funding available now? For how long will you be able to have access to funding? What are the funding mechanisms to support the student if your funding runs out?
- To what extent do you expect students to teach or work as a research assistant to generate the funding?
- Will the student report to you or is there another senior member of the lab who will work with the student?

Of course, you may not find complete answers for all of your questions during a first conversation, but asking them may help you and your student anticipate and minimize problems down the road. Setting up a personal meeting with your (potential) student will often give you a good sense of whether this is a person who fits with your supervisory style and, more importantly, if it is someone you can see yourself working with.

Setting up a Supervisory Committee

Doctoral graduate students must have not only a supervisor, but also a supervisory committee. This is a formal requirement for all doctoral programs at the University of Toronto. A similar requirement exists in some master's degree programs.

Supervisory committees are most valuable if they are established as early as possible in the student's program, if the members are chosen carefully, and if both student and committee members are able and willing to interact more frequently than the necessary annual meeting.

While the primary supervisor is intended to be the first point of contact for students, the supervisory committee can add additional value to a student's degree program. They help ensure academic standards in the discipline through their evaluative role

Though it is ultimately the responsibility of the graduate unit to ensure a committee is appointed, committee members are best selected through consultation between the student and their supervisor.

The supervisory committee should:

- Meet regularly (at least once a year)
- Provide guidance during the student's research
- Add complementary value to your supervision
- Provide meaningful written feedback

in the required annual meetings.

In addition, the committee can and should provide considerable additional value. Committee members should be able to provide expertise that complements and expands on that of the supervisor. They can act as a valuable sounding board for discussion of ideas emerging in the research. In cases where the relationship between the student and their primary supervisor is less than ideal, they can provide advice, mentoring, and, if necessary, intervene in order to assist in problem solving.

The key components and roles of the supervisory committee are as follows:

- **A supervisory committee should consist of the supervisor and at least two graduate faculty members**, which are usually, but do not have to be, from the graduate unit responsible for the program. Interdisciplinary topics often benefit from the presence of a committee member drawn from another graduate unit.
- **The supervisory committee must meet with the student, as a committee, at least once per year** (some graduate units require more frequent meetings, a practice that should be considered good practice for most students) to assess the student's progress in the program and to provide advice on future work. This meeting should be substantive and rigorous, not a brief, casual one only held to satisfy regulations. Meetings should be more frequent if there are significant questions concerning progress and performance.
- **The committee must prepare a formal report** of its assessment, detailing its observations of the student's progress, and its recommendations.
- **The student must be given the opportunity to respond to the committee's report and recommendations**, and to append this response to the committee's report.
- **Copies of the report** must be given to the student and filed with the graduate unit.
- The supervisory committee is also responsible for **advising the graduate unit that a doctoral thesis is ready to proceed to examination**. This means that the committee should be involved in advising when and if the research is complete and adequate, reading and giving feedback on drafts of the thesis, and approving the final draft as ready for examination.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- Do members add value (e.g. field-specific advice) to the student's research program?
- Will they be around and available for consultation and meetings throughout the time that the student is in the program?
- Will they be approachable and offer constructive advice?
- Can they be objective enough to help if problems arise?
- Will they be able and willing to offer their opinion even if contrary to that of yourself or other committee members?
- Is there a good balance? Do their areas of expertise cover a sufficient range?

Program Timelines, Good Progress, and Academic Standing

Key responsibilities of supervisors

- All supervisors should **be aware of, and adhere to, the rules, policies, and procedures in place** in the graduate unit, SGS, and the University as outlined in resources such as graduate unit websites or handbooks, the SGS Calendar and SGS website, and the University's website. This includes being familiar with the timelines and deadlines associated with the various parts of the program, such as registration, committee meetings, candidacy (for doctoral programs), and thesis submission.
- Supervisors should also work with their students to **prepare a research plan and timeline for the program of study**. This exercise should include the creation of a timeline for the entire program, noting important milestones and deadlines: establishing a thesis topic, completing a proposal, applying for funding; achieving intermediate research goals; attending conferences; doing seasonal fieldwork, publishing papers; completing the research; analyzing the data; and completing drafts of the thesis. This plan should be reviewed regularly (ideally at the supervisory committee meetings) and revised as necessary.[1]
- **Formal written feedback is necessary for the student's success.** Therefore, SGS requires that the committee must prepare a formal report of its assessment of the student's progress after each committee meeting, detailing its observations of your progress, and its recommendations, including whether the student is making satisfactory progress and is considered to be in good academic standing. Students must be given the opportunity to respond to the committee's report and recommendations, and to append this response to the committee's report. Copies of the report must be given to the supervisor and the student, and filed with the graduate unit.

Funding

Student funding is a critical factor in allowing a graduate student in a doctoral-stream program to make good progress in their program.

Graduate Administrators are a key resource on policies and procedures for supervisors and students.

While funding arrangements vary across discipline and program, supervisors should be aware of some of the additional funding resources that are available to their students. This includes being familiar with how the tri-council research awards (SSHRC, CIHR, and NSERC) operate. Supervisors should also find out what the graduate unit's policy is on funding doctoral (or research master's) students.

Supervisors, in collaboration with departmental administrators, should also discuss with their students the level and duration of research-related funding that will be provided to the student including support for conferences and travel for research. Supervisors should assist with the review of grant applications, wherever appropriate.

Additionally, supervisors should be aware of the financial aid programs and advising services available to their graduate students. Specifically, the emergency grant and loan programs, accessibility bursaries, and master's tuition fee bursary offered through the School of Graduate Studies. Supervisors may also want to direct their students to the Financial Advisor available through SGS.

Timely Feedback

Timely and constructive feedback on thesis drafts is an important responsibility of the supervisor; ideally, the supervisory committee should also be available to read and comment on later drafts of the thesis. How drafts are handled should be discussed well in advance. Supervisors should clearly explain to their students what their expectations are regarding the submission of written material for review. For instance, does the supervisor expect students to submit only completed sections of a thesis or other written work, or can the student submit outlines or drafts of parts of the material for review? Should the material be submitted in electronic or hard copy?

Students also should provide sufficient warning that a draft is about to be submitted, and allow sufficient time for reading and comments, which can depend on the supervisor's other commitments, how lengthy the draft is, and how much it has changed from previous versions.

Generally speaking, a reasonable turnaround time for drafts needs to be determined by both parties in advance. Expecting a thorough reading and commentary for a lengthy chapter in less than a week would probably be unreasonable. Equally unreasonable would be for a student not to hear back for more than a month, unless the supervisor has provided notice to the student that the review may take longer. The supervisor being away on research leave should not preclude timely reading of drafts or sign off on the final version in these days of electronic communication; if it does produce a problem, an alternate acting supervisor, often a member of the supervisory committee, should be found. If drafts have been read, and comments acted upon, reading of the final version should also be possible within two or three weeks of submission.

Submitting the thesis for the Final Oral Examination

When the thesis is ready for examination, the graduate unit is responsible for notifying SGS and nominating both an external appraiser and the membership of the Final Oral Examination committee (see the SGS Calendar for details). However, the supervisor and student are usually expected to provide suggestions for both. SGS regulations require external appraisers, whose function is to assure quality control and the application of international standards, to be appropriately experienced, to be sufficiently knowledgeable in the field, and to be "at arm's length" from both student and supervisor.

Notes

1. School of Graduate Studies, "Graduate Supervision Guidelines: Student Edition," 11-12.

2. School of Graduate Studies, "Financing Your Graduate Education." University of Toronto, 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Financing-Your-Graduate-Education.aspx

GRADUATE SUPERVISION GUIDELINES
Faculty Edition

Section 5: Supporting Students to Completion and Beyond

When a student has met all of the program requirements and the research phrase has been completed, they are then confronted with the task of writing the dissertation. For some students (and supervisors) this can be a stressful time, particularly if expectations have not been clarified earlier on. Below are some general guidelines that may assist both students and supervisors through the final phases of the research degree.

Completing the first draft of a thesis is challenging for many students. The typical experience of "writer's block" may be compounded with a fear of failure, a reluctance to share their work with others, a lack of experience in writing, through apparently excessive and sometimes contradictory demands of supervisory committee members, or a host of other reasons.

Much has been written on the writing process (and this is by no means a comprehensive list); however, here are a few guiding principles that may help your student through the final stages of their PhD:

- Supervisors should help their students understand that the thesis is a transient stage in scholarly development. While it is required for the degree, it is not (nor should it be) the culmination of an academic career. Optimally, it should be of a quality and quantity sufficient for a clear acceptance at the Final Oral Examination so the student can earn the degree and move on to the next stage(s) of their career.

- Help your students understand that the thesis is a transient stage in scholarly development.
- Encourage your students to start writing early and often.
- Be aware of and encourage your students to make use of the numerous resources available on and off campus to help with writing.
- Let your student know when to expect feedback and alert them as soon as possible if circumstances require the need for more time.

- Supervisors should encourage their students to start writing early and often. Writing a thesis is much easier if started early and if writing is a regular part of the student's academic work. Particularly in the sciences, much of the work may have been written up and published during the program as scholarly articles. Due to the fact that these publications are usually briefer and more constrained, and frequently multi-authored, they may be less intimidating to produce and provide valuable learning experiences for the student. Indeed, more and more, theses are becoming compilations of published material with added introductory and concluding chapters.
- Supervisors should be aware of and encourage their students to make use of the numerous resources available on and off campus to help with writing. The Graduate Centre for Academic Communication (GCAC) programs operated by SGS can be a particularly helpful resource. Academic Success on St. George campus, UTSC's Academic Advising & Career Centre and UTM's Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre provide useful workshops and assistance for graduate students on campus, including regular writing groups that students can take part in.

Constructive feedback on thesis drafts is an important role the supervisor has in promoting timely completion of the degree. Ideally, the supervisory committee should also be available to read and comment on later drafts of the thesis. It is best if the supervisor and student have a discussion early on in the program about what the student can expect in terms of turn-around time so that everyone's expectations are met. Students should provide the supervisor with sufficient warning before drafts are submitted and allow sufficient time for the supervisor to read it and provide comments.

Supervisors have a responsibility to provide feedback within a reasonable amount of time. What is a "reasonable amount of time" is difficult to define, but normally should be defined in days or weeks and not in months. It will depend on the supervisor's other commitments, how lengthy the draft is, and how much it has changed from previous versions.

Being away on research leave should not prevent a supervisor from reading drafts or signing off on the final version of the dissertation. These documents can be sent electronically. In those cases where it does produce a problem, an alternate acting supervisor should be found. Additionally, if drafts have been read and comments acted upon, reading of the final version should be possible within two or three weeks of submission at most.

Graduate Professional Development and career preparation

As a supervisor, you have many opportunities to support your students in their professional and career development. Beyond assisting your graduate students with networking opportunities, conference presentations and preparing their research for publication, supervisors can play an important role in helping to shape the future of their graduate students.

The many graduate professional skills offerings at the University, including the Graduate Professional Skills program at SGS, offer many learning opportunities throughout the year. GPS focuses on building skills beyond those conventionally learned within a disciplinary program, skills that may be critical to success in the wide range of careers that graduates enter, both

within and outside of academia. The program can help students to communicate better, plan and manage their time, learn entrepreneurial skills, understand and apply ethical practices, and work effectively in teams and as leaders.[1]

Career Centres on all three campuses (St. George | UTM | UTSC) provide a wealth of services for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. In helping your students prepare for their future, supervisors should encourage graduate students to attend the events and programs offered by Career Exploration & Education, including the Flexible Futures series designed specifically for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. The Flexible Futures program includes support for faculty work searches, as well as non-academic career options. In addition to the services that are offered to graduate students while they are enrolled at the University, the services (events, programs, workshops, and appointments) at career centres are available to alumni for two years after their convocation.

Supervisors and graduate units can also work with tricampus career centres to create customized programming for groups of students, alumni, and postdocs. This partnership can include co-creating and co-delivering tailored content. For instance, Career Exploration & Education has partnered with several departments and faculties to deliver academic dossier creation and review sessions, as well as developing and delivering transition panels or sessions.

Teaching Development

For those looking to pursue careers within the academia, the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (St. George Campus) and the Centre for Teaching & Learning (Scarborough Campus) can help prepare your students for an academic career, and provides many opportunities for graduate students to share teaching resources with their peers. The Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation is home to the Teaching Assistants' Training Program (TATP). Through the TATP program, graduate students can take part in a number of workshops related to teaching or register in the two certificate programs in undergraduate teaching preparation. These certificate programs include an introductory-level certificate in Teaching Fundamentals (TF), as well as a certificate in Advanced University Teaching Preparation (AUTP).

Not all students will end up pursuing an academic career, nor would they necessarily want to. Supervisors should actively encourage students to explore the broad range of career options available to them and encourage them to obtain the skills and knowledge that will optimize their opportunities to enter those careers that the student is interested in.

Notes

1. School of Graduate Studies, "Professional Development: Graduate Professional Skills Program." University of Toronto, 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Professional-Development.aspx

Section 6: Creating Equality and Equity When Working with Students

Students and faculty at the University of Toronto come from a diversity of backgrounds, abilities, and life experiences, and these differences can impact the graduate student-supervisor relationship. Effective supervision requires faculty to learn to work across differences and help students integrate into the social and academic culture of their department and program. In doing so, faculty supervisors must consider issues of both **equality** and **equity** when supervising their graduate students and find the right balance.

Equality means that all students are given equal opportunities to succeed. At the same time, supervisors must recognize that each student is unique and thus must also work to treat their students equitably. Equity means that a student's personal or social circumstances, as well as gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic background, should not stand as roadblocks to the student achieving their educational potential.[1] For instance, while the supervisor should give all students equal opportunities to meet, early morning meetings may be difficult or impossible for students who also have childcare obligations. Similarly, a student with disabilities may require unique accommodations with meeting deadlines or completion of certain writing or research tasks. Maintaining equity will allow *all* students the opportunity to work towards successful completion of their program of choice.

While every student will have their own specific needs, the key to building an effective relationship with the student is to be empathetic and to build a relationship of trust and respect through patience, time, careful listening, and honesty.[2]

Maintaining equity will allow all students the opportunity to work towards successful completion of their program of choice.

Creating a space where open conversations are possible will allow students to feel comfortable with expressing any successes and/or challenges they might encounter during their studies. However, supervisors should also recognize their limits in understanding the experiences of graduate students with different life experiences, which is why encouraging multiple mentors as well as opportunities to participate in peer communities (on or off-campus) is important.[3]

Different Experiences in Graduate School

Supervisors should be aware of how a student's experience might be different from their own experience and from the experience of their peers.

A student's experience in graduate school can be shaped by a number of factors. For example, studies examining graduate-level programs across North America have demonstrated that **older students tend to feel more connected to faculty members than to their peers**.[4] This experience can lead to the students feeling isolated, and productive approaches should be taken by the supervisor to help the student integrate into departmental and peer groups.[5]

Other studies show that **racialized students often face discrimination yet do not have the mentors to help them cope, and this lack of support can contribute to a lack of confidence among students**.[6] Supervisors must understand culturally appropriate ways to work with these students or they are less likely to be successful in graduate school and future careers.[7]

Student-supervisor relationships can also be defined along gendered lines. For example, research has shown that women are more likely to choose other women as mentors.[8] Women students also report that they are more likely to receive psychosocial support (acceptance, confirmation, role modelling, and counselling) from their mentors, while men report that their mentors are more likely to provide support for work-related tasks such as networking.[9]

It is important to recognize that all students are different and that these guidelines cannot possibly provide a comprehensive list of those differences. For example, **supervisors may also encounter students from different religious backgrounds, sexual orientations, ability status, ideological stances, etc.** Being aware of the ways in which such differences can shape a graduate student's relationship to their studies, their department, and their overall experience within academia is integral to creating a solid framework for a successful supervisor/student relationship.

Supervisors should also be aware of any implicit or hidden biases that they may hold. These biases can originate from past experiences and, in many cases, the individual who possesses them may not be aware of their presence.[10]

For example, you may think that you do not maintain a bias regarding age and ability; however, you may discover that you have innate preferences with regard to your students. One way to measure and begin considering these implicit or hidden biases is to participate in an online test offered as part of Project Implicit by Harvard University. Being open and willing to examine your own possible biases is important in being able to provide appropriate support to your graduate students.

The following sections address some challenges or issues that graduate students might encounter during the course of their studies.

Life Stages

Graduate students enter their programs at different life stages and, as a result, it is necessary for supervisors to try to accommodate a reasonable academic plan for the student's degree that meets the needs of the program but also suits the student's individual schedules and time constraints.

Some graduate students may begin graduate school directly after their undergraduate degree and may be more willing and able to work long hours in a lab or travel extensively for archival research to finish their degree more quickly. Others, however, may be returning to their studies later in life or they may have family responsibilities that require additional consideration when mapping out their degrees. In either case, clarifying expectations from the outset of the student-supervisor relationship will be useful for all parties involved.

Enrolment Status

Enrolment status must be taken into consideration by a graduate student's supervisor, particularly as students may choose to pursue their master's or doctoral degrees as part-time students. One way that faculty members can assist students who are part-time or have external responsibilities is by encouraging them to take part in programs or opportunities that have proven to help students complete their degrees, such as time management workshops or writing support groups, as well as maintaining good communication with these students so that they feel they are associated and active in the program.[11]

There are also situations that may arise as a result of a change in a student's personal circumstances, which might impact enrolment status. For example, an illness or loss in a student's family may require a student to take some time away from their studies. Supervisors should create an environment where a student feels safe to bring these issues to the supervisor's attention so that they can be discussed and options explored. Supervisors should know the appropriate contacts within the department, as well as appropriate processes, such as that a student can request a leave of absence. They should also be prepared to assist the student in resuming their degree when they return from their leave.

Graduate students who are enrolled on a part-time basis may feel less connected to their peers or their department.

Students with Family Responsibilities

Family responsibilities can impact the way students engage in their studies, and may occur at any stage during the program. For example, students who have young children may require more flexibility in regard to their work schedules and meeting deadlines.[12] Childcare issues also cannot always be anticipated or planned for in advance. Some students also may encounter illnesses or emergencies among family members that require their attention.

Because such circumstances may well affect academic progress or a student's involvement in their studies, they may not feel comfortable bringing such childcare or family issues up in discussion with their supervisor. Some students may feel that these are personal issues and that they should not "bother" their supervisor with them. Other students may be concerned that they will make the supervisor think less of them or that it may be interpreted as if they are not as committed to their academic work.

Nevertheless, "life happens," and situations like this will occur in everyone's life at some point. It is important for the supervisor to create an environment in which the student can open up about these pressures and where the student feels that the supervisor is there to help them explore various options for dealing with these situations, and if necessary locate resources at the University that can provide advice and support.

First-Generation Students

In some cases, graduate students will experience unique pressures because they are the first in their families to enrol in higher education.[13] Studies have shown that doctoral students who are the first in their families to enrol in graduate studies are more likely to be women and racialized individuals and, in many cases, they carry significant levels of financial stress (e.g. debt) for pursuing higher education.[14]

Taken together, these characteristics can make the process of completing graduate school more stressful for these students. They often do not have the support in their immediate family to help them navigate the complex system of higher education, and supervisors should take this into consideration in their approach to supervision. Students in this category might require explicit support with expectations and more information on University processes.[15]

A supervisor should be open to considering a student's unique circumstances.

First Nations Students

Many Indigenous students will have a cultural background that is different from that of their non-Indigenous supervisor, which may affect their approach to academic and scholarly work. For instance, Indigenous students may take different approaches to their writing and how they intend to convey their story. Feedback and directions provided by the supervisor may conflict with this approach and be perceived as changing the meaning of the Indigenous student's intent and writing. Indigenous students also may experience discomfort competing with peers. They may be uncomfortable with specific hierarchical relationships and may benefit not only from academic support, but also from emotional and spiritual support, as well as words of encouragement that values the students' respective Indigenous cultural attributes.

Supervisors should be aware of such cultural differences and be acquainted with specific resources, such as the First Nations House, that are available at the University of Toronto. For instance, at the First Nations House, Indigenous students have access to the services of Traditional Elders and an Aboriginal Learning Strategist, can get help with academic planning, seek advocacy for academic issues, and access a resource centre and computer lab. In addition, Indigenous support services may be available within the student and supervisor's Faculty, such as the Office of Indigenous Medical Education in the Faculty of Medicine, the services and programming for Aboriginal students in the Faculty of Law, or the Indigenous Education Network at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Indigenous support services are also available at each of the UTM and UTSC campuses. Other support services include the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) initiative, which is a student-driven initiative focused on enhancing the academic experiences of Indigenous/Aboriginal graduate students at the University of Toronto across the three campuses.[16]

International Students

Students come from around the world to attend the University of Toronto, bringing with them a wealth of expertise and experiences that enrich the overall academic contributions of the University. At the same time, students who come from abroad may have difficulty and may experience high levels of stress in dealing with the cultural differences they encounter during their time in Canada, especially differences in the academic environment, such as how to interact with faculty members,

Many Indigenous students will have a cultural background that is different from that of their non-Indigenous supervisor, which may affect their approach to academic and scholarly work.

when and how to ask for support, and how to deal with the University administration.

Often for these students, English may not be their first language, so accessing the resources that they need and engaging in the academic community in their departments, and at the University at large, may be more challenging.

Funding can be an added stress for these students, placing pressure on them to do well in their program in order to meet visa requirements to stay in the country or completion pressures imposed by their scholarship.

Cross-cultural communication can also be a challenge for international students. For example, cultures can vary in expected behaviour associated with power differences. This can lead to students appearing overly formal or deferential, or the supervisor expecting an informality the student is not used to. Students from cultures with a high deference to and respect of authority sometimes may seem to treat administrative staff, technicians, and more junior students less respectfully than their supervisor because of an ingrained need to differentiate.

Additionally, in cultures where there are high power differences, students may be reluctant to question their supervisors or other faculty, whereas in cultures with low power differences, frequent challenges and constructive criticisms may be the norm. Cultural norms may also create a relationship where students may be unwilling to ask questions lest it reveal a lack of knowledge on their part, academic weakness, or because asking questions might infer that their supervisor might not have explained something adequately. Additionally, it is important to note that communication styles may differ: some cultures value indirectness, others directness.

Students arriving in graduate studies from different cultures may face challenges their peers do not, including deciphering the expectations of the program and/or discipline while at the same time getting used to both a new university and a new living environment. Supervisors should mentor their students during this transition. In these situations, it is important to work toward avoiding potential misunderstandings by employing strategies such as depersonalizing and anticipating the issue.

Supervisors can provide support to international students to help them succeed in their graduate education. One of the most important steps supervisors can take is to help their students

Asking students to address you by your first name or to "drop by" with questions may be uncomfortable for some students who are used to more formality in an academic setting.

A supervisor might say that they know some students may be uncomfortable asking questions, but that questions are expected and welcome.

identify resources on campus that can be helpful to them during their studies. Examples of resources are as follows:

- the Centre of International Experience,
- the University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union,
- peer support programs, and
- immigration advising

This list is not an exhaustive listing of resources; the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI) at the University of Toronto has published a useful online resource entitled, "Recommendations and Resources for Supporting International Students and Teaching Assistants at the University of Toronto." Faculty members are encouraged to consult this publication to familiarize themselves with programming and resources available on campus for international students.

Finally, supervisors should be able to help alleviate feelings of isolation that may be experienced by international students.[17] One way to do this is by being able to help their students connect with financial, social, language, and cultural support resources on campus.[18]

Supervisors also may be able to help international students who are new to the city to find ethnic neighbourhoods that the student may be able to relate to.

Writing support

Faculty might also recommend the programs offered by the Graduate Centre for Academic Communication at SGS for students whose first language is not English or for students who may have received different academic training during their previous studies. GCAC also offers classes for graduate students on presentation skills and other communication methods that all graduate students may find helpful. Being aware of campus resources can help faculty and students identify the resources that might be useful to them at any given time.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

While some students thrive within the context of graduate studies, others may experience mental health challenges that may put them at risk.[20] While supervisors should not take on the role of therapist, it is important that they have an active role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their students

Mental health and wellbeing have been identified as priorities at the University of Toronto.[19]

during the course of their studies. Supervisors should be aware of campus programs and resources—including the offerings of University of Toronto's Health & Wellness Centre, Academic Success, the Community Safety Office, and the resources and services listed on the student-facing Feeling Distressed web page—that students can access during their studies and be able to direct these students to these places where it is appropriate.

Notes

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12. Ibid., 48.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

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19. Provostial Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health, "Report of the Provostial Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health," University of Toronto, 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.mentalhealth.utoronto.ca/

20. Ibid.

Section 7: When a Student May Need Accommodations

The University of Toronto has committed to **"provide support for, and facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community"** (Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities, 2004).

In addition, as members of the University, supervisors and their graduate units have an obligation to provide accommodations to persons with disabilities under the Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act of the Government of Ontario.

But more than the legal obligations, graduate supervisors have to make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations to students with disabilities to provide them the opportunity to demonstrate and develop their academic, research, and scholarly potentials to the fullest.

Accommodations vs. time-limited academic adjustments

Many, if not all, students may experience temporary obstacles during their academic career. Often such obstacles can be accommodated easily by the supervisor or the supervisory committee by one-off measures such as extending a submission deadline, relocating a meeting to a different room, providing additional temporary assistance in the lab, etc.

Graduate supervisors have to make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations to students with disabilities to provide them the opportunity to demonstrate and develop their academic, research, and scholarly potentials to the fullest.

Some students, however, may experience disabilities that require longer-term or permanent accommodations in response to physical or sensory disabilities; chronic health or mental health issues; a learning disability or an injury. In that case, more permanent accommodations may be required based on a thorough assessment of the student's functional limitations and academic needs. In those cases, graduate supervisors should encourage their student to contact Accessibility Services for an assessment and recommended accommodations. This will ensure that the student's functional limitations are properly identified based on an individual assessment by a disability expert, that appropriate accommodations are recommended, and that the dignity and privacy of the student are respected.

Not all problems that a student may run into will require accommodations. For instance, many students will experience stress or anxiety prior to a thesis exam. This is not a disability if most people can be expected to have such experiences in similar situations. In that case, there is no need to provide accommodations. If it can be established, however, that a student experiences higher and more frequent stress- or anxiety-related issues than can normally be expected, reasonable accommodations may be appropriate.

What are accommodations?

An accommodation is any change that enables a student with disabilities to participate equally in the environment and activities of either a particular academic program or University life in general. Academic accommodations are provided when students experience disability-related barriers that prohibit demonstration of their knowledge and skills. They are provided to level the playing field upon which students can establish their success.

Accommodations are specific to the specific needs of the individual student and their program or research project. They may include making changes to course delivery, assessment methods, the types of resources provided, and physical access to a class, as well as providing lab assistants or note takers. They also may involve removing barriers of all kinds, including physical or architectural barriers, information or communication barriers, barriers caused by attitudes, as well as policies or practices. If necessary, Accessibility Services can coordinate the availability of specialized equipment or furniture.

An accommodation is any change that enables a student with disabilities to participate equally in the environment and activities of either a particular academic program or University life in general.

Not all students with disabilities need accommodations. For instance, a student in a wheelchair who has access to classrooms and washrooms and can listen and take notes in the classroom may not require an academic accommodation at that particular time in their program.

How does it work?

Students should be encouraged to approach their supervisor with accommodation needs.

This presumes of course that as a supervisor you have created an environment in which the student feels safe to discuss such often highly personal matters.

If a student identifies longer-term accommodation needs, or if the supervisor becomes aware of a potential disability that may require accommodations, the student should be encouraged to contact Accessibility Services for an assessment. Recognizing that such an assessment and obtaining necessary medical and other assessment information may take time, initial accommodations may be recommended until a full assessment has been completed. It is expected that the student and their supervisor will be active participants and problem solvers in this whole process.

Student-specific accommodations are determined based on available information regarding functional limitations and their impact on the student's academic work, as applied to the academic demands of the student's program. Such an assessment is based on information provided by the student and their healthcare practitioner, as well as information provided by supervisor and graduate unit regarding what a student must know and demonstrate in order to progress through the program. This process is also informed by provincial guidelines and knowledge of best practices that exist within the disability community and the wider academic environment.

Following the assessment, the disability counsellor will determine whether accommodations are appropriate and what recommended accommodations would be. Such accommodations are finalized in consultation with the student and the supervisor to make sure that they meet the student's needs and the program requirements and to make sure that academic standards are maintained.

Ultimately, the goal of providing accommodations is to make sure that we provide a student with the tools to be successful regardless of their disability.

Disclosure and Confidentiality

A student's specific type of disability is private medical information. Some students can openly talk about their disability, but many students experience fear and anxiety with disclosing a disability. They may be reluctant to do so because of concerns that they will jeopardize the support they receive from their supervisor and peers. They may fear being denied opportunities or creating unwanted curiosity or concern. Students are never required to disclose their disability, and under no circumstances should you ask a student to disclose this information. Instead, if you suspect a disability you should make sure that the student has access to information on resources available on campus, including Accessibility Services.

Never disclose information to other staff or faculty without receiving a student's permission. Do not ask a student direct questions or use their name when discussing general disabilities in a group setting (e.g. discussing academic accommodations in your lecture).

Ensure that written information about a student's disability, such as their Letter of Accommodation or an email from a student, is never in plain view in public spaces.

Resources available to help support a student with disabilities

The University has many resources available to assist a supervisor in supporting a student with disability needs.

The main support is available through Accessibility Services, where a student can seek advice and support from a Disability Counsellor, Learning Strategist or Adaptive Technologist. Similar services are available at each of the UTM (AccessAbility Resource Centre) and UTSC (AccessAbility Services) campuses.

In addition to Accessibility Services, supervisors can also contact the **Office of Student Academic Progress** at 416.946.0424 to seek confidential advice about how to handle student-specific situations.

Be open to students who choose to discuss with you their disability or the functional limitations that are a result of their disability.

Section 8: When Problems Arise

Despite the best intentions and preparations, the path from start to finish of a successful graduate supervisory relationship can at times be difficult. Some of the most challenging issues to resolve on university campuses are graduate supervision disputes.[1] While student-supervisor interpersonal issues are perhaps the most common, issues can also arise between students and committee members as a result of the following[2]:

Personality factors

- Lack of contact or discussion
- Personality clashes
- Communication barriers that may be a result of age, gender, class, race differences
- Different working styles

Professional factors

- Supervisor does not feel sufficiently qualified to supervise the topic because interests are different
- Unrealistic expectations related to level of guidance from the student
- Student ignoring guidance
- Student struggling with research process

Organizational factors

- Supervisor has too many students
- Supervisor is too busy
- Isolating department
- Inadequate supports beyond the supervisor

Students are encouraged to seek out support and advice and to try to resolve supervisory issues as early as possible and directly with the supervisor, committee, or department. In recognition of the fact that problems are rarely completely one-sided and implementing workable solutions will often require compromise and flexibility, here are some strategies to help you to navigate conflict in the supervisory relationship:

- **Start earlier rather than later.** Solutions are often simpler and easier to implement **before** a problem escalates and positions harden. Start with the goal of managing a conflict with tolerance and understanding.

- **Anticipate.** Look out for emerging issues and handle them in a timely fashion with compassion and clarity. Discuss expectations about respective roles, responsibilities and important graduate skills as early as possible to prevent future possible misunderstandings.

- **Be clear.** Challenging situations can be emotionally charged, and it is important to acknowledge feelings and emotions (your own and the other person's) when tackling a problem respectfully and with an open mind. Try to remain calm, objective, and rational, even if you think the other party is not.

- **Be open.** Different problems require different solutions and different people have different perspectives. Differences push us to think creatively and demand that we avoid assumptions, generalizations and personal attacks. The root cause of the issue may not be the same as the stated issue, so it is important to ask questions and listen to understand the "why" behind a position or demand.

- **Acknowledge the power imbalance.** There is a real power imbalance in the supervisory relationship: students may be reluctant to speak freely and worry about recriminations. Committee members or the graduate coordinator may be able to help but may also be perceived as part of the "power group." A discussion early in the supervisory relationship about appropriate ways and processes for bringing concerns or issues forward can give clarity and structure in anticipation of having to manage a difficult situation.

- **Get support.** Supervisory committee members can provide advice, mentoring, and, if necessary, intervene in order to assist in problem solving. If you are unable to resolve an issue with a student, you can consult with committee members, the graduate coordinator, the chair or director of the graduate unit, and SGS staff including the Vice-Dean of Students, as well as the Ombudsperson, Graduate Centre for Conflict Resolution and Office of Academic Progress (416.946.0424). See the Feeling Distressed web page for additional supports.

- **Understand what happens next.** The University has both informal and formal processes and pathways for resolving problems that cannot be resolved directly between a student and their supervisor. Review relevant policies and guidelines and connect with staff at SGS (including Student Services and the Vice-Dean of Students) to get more information and advice on informal intervention and formal appeal processes. The SGS website also provides links to many other support services for graduate students.

Students and supervisors share responsibility for preventing and resolving conflict. Understanding the importance of managing conflict early and effectively can set the tone for how you and the student approach future issues or disagreements.

Who can you talk to?

The University has both informal and formal processes and pathways for resolving problems. SGS encourages and supports the efforts of supervisors to try to address their concerns as early as possible. Some of the people and offices you can connect with include:

- **Your graduate unit.** As a supervisor, you can talk to your student directly, other faculty members, supervisor committees, the graduate coordinator, chair or director of the graduate unit. It is important to start by addressing an issue at as low a level as possible.

- **Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre (CRC).** Faculty can refer students to the G2G Peer Advisors and/or contact the CRC directly to discuss early and effective conflict resolution strategies and opportunities for skills development and training. All discussions remain confidential.

- **School of Graduate Studies.** Supervisors can also connect with staff at SGS, including Student Services and the Vice-Dean of Students, to get information about policies, guidelines, advice on informal intervention, and formal appeal processes. The SGS website provides a helpful starting point for many issues, including the following: Graduate funding, Health & Wellness (workshops and appointments); Accessibility Services (including known/possible disability; temporary disability/injury; chronic medical conditions that affect learning); and Information for international students.

- **Office of the Ombudsperson.** This office is independent of all administrative offices and is accountable only to the Governing Council. Matters that are brought to the Ombudsperson remain confidential and are not discussed with anyone without written consent. This office is available to provide confidential advice and assistance to faculty, students, and staff on all three campuses.

Vignette 1

Sam is developing his thesis proposal. After submitting a recent draft, his supervisor responded over email, "Your writing is unclear; please re-submit." Sam is discouraged and he doesn't feel comfortable approaching his supervisor for clarification because he thinks that that will simply reinforce his supervisor's perception of him as incompetent and inadequate. Sam wishes that he and his supervisor had had an opportunity to meet earlier to talk through expectations for the proposal and the revision process so that there was an agreed plan they could be following.

Comments and Possible Strategies: Sam's situation not only underscores the power dynamic within the supervisor-student relationship, but also demonstrates that discussions about academic expectations, supports, and processes early on in the program can be helpful in the long-term. Sam worked with the G2G Peer Advisors at the Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre to create a plan for requesting help from his supervisor, understanding that a supervisor should be providing feedback and guidance to their students throughout the duration of the program.

Vignette 2

Mina wants to submit her thesis and defend her PhD. She is reaching the end of her time limit for the PhD and is under a lot of pressure. Recently, one of her committee members told her that he would not support her thesis submission and gave her what she feels is unfair criticism about her project. She feels lost and uncertain about how to proceed.

Comments and Possible Strategies: The role of Mina's supervisor in this situation is to assist her in navigating the different expectations of the supervisory committee, as well as preparing her adequately for the written submission of her dissertation and Final Oral Defence.

Notes

1. Jacobson, R. "Managing Conflicts and Resolving Disputes Involving Students on University Campuses: The Present and the Future" (2012, Dissertation Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy, York University).

2. These factors are adapted from Wisker, Gina, *The Good Supervisor: Supervising Postgraduate and Undergraduate Research for Doctoral Theses and Dissertations*. London, U.K.: Palgrave, 2012, 107-108.

Section 9: Appendix 1 – Resources

People and Facilities

Academic and Student Services and Support

Accessibility Services: If you require academic accommodations for a documented disability (ongoing or temporary), Accessibility Services offers a number of resources to support you.

Centre for International Experience: CIE provides information, events, and resources for international students studying at the University of Toronto, as well as workshops and resources for domestic students planning to travel abroad.

Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre (CRC): The CRC provides resources to prevent and address conflict for students and faculty. One-on-one meetings with graduate peer advisors are available by appointment or during scheduled drop-in hours.

Graduate Centre for Academic Communication (GCAC): If you are looking to enhance your writing and speaking skills, consider the non-credit courses, workshops, and resources offered by GCAC. Individual consultations are also available by appointment.

SGS Student Services: graduate.information@utoronto.ca

SGS Vice-Dean, Students: sgs.vdeanstudents@utoronto.ca

SGS website

Health, Wellness, and Safety

Family Care Office: If you are seeking guidance, support, or advice with family care needs, this office provides support and hosts a number of events and discussion groups open to all members of the University community.

Health and Wellness Centre: If you require physical health services (similar to those of a General Practitioner), mental health care, travel medicine, immunizations, nutritional care, family planning, or first aid, the Health and Wellness Centre provides a single point of entry. It also provides workshops and resources for student well-being.

SGS Counselling: If you are looking to access counselling support, SGS offers individual sessions that are tailored to the concerns of graduate students.

Equity and Diversity

Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office: Access this office for programs, workshops, and resources on equity, anti-racism, and racism and its intersections. Services available to students, faculty, and staff.

Community Safety Office (CSO): If you feel unsafe or are experiencing unwanted attention, please connect with the CSO.

Equity Offices: A number of equity offices are available to provide guidance, raise awareness, and develop programming to support diversity, equity, and human rights for all members of the University of Toronto community.

First Nations House (FNH): Graduate students can meet with an Aboriginal Learning Strategist, seek academic support and advocacy, and access the Resource Centre and a computer lab at the FHN.

University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU): The UTGSU provides academic advocacy services and can assist students through the provision of advice, information, and representation.

Office of the Ombudsperson: If you are concerned that you are not being treated fairly (e.g. a decision or process within the University is unfair), you can reach out to the Ombudsperson for advice. The Ombuds office is confidential, impartial, and independent.

Sexual and Gender Diversity Office: Provides programs, education, and resources on sexual and gender diversity to all members of the University community.

Sexual Violence Prevention & Support Centre: This tricampus Centre "supports members of the University community who have been affected by sexual violence. The Centre has a mandate to conduct intake, accept disclosures and reports of sexual violence, and to provide support to individual members of the University community who have experienced sexual violence."

Policies

SGS Calendar
Grading Practices Policy
Conflict of Interest
Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters
Code of Student Conduct
Policy on Ethical Conduct in Research
AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act)

Other

The SGS Intellectual Property Guidelines
Graduate Professional Skills (GPS) Program at U of T
The Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research, adopted in 2011 by the three federal granting agencies (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC)

Section 10: Checklist for Supervisors

☐ **To establish a collegial environment, I will:**

- ☐ Create a positive work and learning environment free from discrimination and harassment.
- ☐ Provide advice on professional development and both academic and non-academic career opportunities.
- ☐ Be available to my student as the first point of contact for conflict resolution or during moments of transition.

☐ **I will undertake the following academic mentoring activities:**

- ☐ Assist the student in navigating their program of study and the University community.
- ☐ Assist the student where needed about the requirements for their degree, policies of the University (such as the Policy on Ethical Conduct in Research and Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters) and School of Graduate Studies Intellectual Property Guidelines for Graduate Students & Supervisors as well as resources and referrals to campus services.
- ☐ Advise and approve, if appropriate, all aspects of the student's academic program including courses, comprehensive/qualifying/field examinations, language, seminars, internship/practicum, thesis proposal requirements, etc.
- ☐ Help the student formulate an appropriate research project. Discuss the required knowledge and skills to undertake the desired research program, the expected time to completion as well as the level of independence that is expected.
- ☐ Meet regularly to provide constructive input into the student's research project and provide an assessment of the student's progress.

☐ Discuss issues of authorship and intellectual property early in the student's program referring to the School of Graduate Studies' Intellectual Property Guidelines for Graduate Students and Supervisors at U of T and the SGS Intellectual Property Awareness Form.

☐ **I have discussed funding issues with my graduate student, including:**

- ☐ Level and duration of research-related funding that will be provided to the student including support for conferences and travel for research. Assist with review of grant applications, as appropriate.
- ☐ Availability of research and study space as well as the protocol for requesting additional resources or equipment.

☐ **I have discussed academic program issues with my graduate student, including:**

- ☐ How and when the supervisory committee will be formed, the role of the supervisory committee as well as my role as supervisor in selecting appropriate and eligible members.
- ☐ Ensuring that the supervisory committee meets a minimum of once per year to assess the progress of the graduate student.
- ☐ Frequency, length, and format of individual and/or group meetings including the preferred method of communication and timelines for feedback.
- ☐ Roles and responsibilities of others involved in the student's research program (e.g., postdoctoral fellows, lab managers, fellow students, etc.) and lab etiquette.
- ☐ Expectations for student work hours and vacation.
- ☐ Any extended absences (i.e., sabbatical, research leave, conference travel, etc.) for myself or others critically involved in the student's research and a plan for continuity of supervision.
- ☐ Advising and approving, if appropriate, all aspects of the student's academic program including courses, comprehensive/qualifying/field examinations, language, seminars, internship/practicum, thesis proposal requirements, etc.
- ☐ How an external appraiser will be selected for the student's Final Oral Examination.