HANDBOOK OF SUPERVISION AND EXAMINATION

Part IV: Policy Governing the Relationship between Supervisor and Student

Introduction

This document addresses the nature of supervisory relationships between graduate students and their Supervisors at the University of Calgary and clarifies the mutual obligations of all parties involved in the graduate supervision process. This document applies to supervisory relationships in both thesis and, where applicable, course-based programs.

This document is divided into two parts. Part One outlines the responsibilities of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS), the graduate program, the Supervisor, and the student. Part Two focuses upon the process that should be followed if conflicts arise between a student and Supervisor.

PART ONE

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

Specific responsibilities of the Faculty of Graduate Studies with regard to graduate supervision are as follows:

(a) to act as an advocate for graduate students and graduate programs within and outside the university, and to seek to establish and maintain a climate which promotes academic excellence and expeditious completion of graduate programs;

(b) to offer mechanisms for the resolution of graduate student/Supervisor disputes and other supervisory issues which cannot be settled at the program level;

(c) to advise regarding intellectual property, publication of materials, equity issues, scholarly integrity and other relevant policies and procedures at the University of Calgary

The Graduate Program

The role of the graduate program is to create a supportive environment within which scholarly work by graduate students can prosper, to provide available resources to support graduate students, and to resolve problems in an expeditious manner. Specific responsibilities are as follows:

(a) to make available to faculty and students a graduate student handbook or collected documents that include current course information, areas of expertise of faculty members, program requirements, funding policies, teaching assistantships, appeal mechanisms, and procedures for progress and completion of Master’s and doctoral programs;
(b) to make available to students relevant non-confidential information on potential Supervisors (e.g., number of current graduate students, funding, time to completion of previous students);

(c) to set up procedures that match students and Supervisors, with the matching to be completed as quickly as possible and in all cases within twelve months of initial registration; a student should not be admitted unless an appropriate Supervisor is available;

(d) to make available a mail delivery point and, wherever possible, desk space;

(e) to monitor progress of the student through ensuring that Annual Progress Reports are completed on time, and to ensure that the student and Supervisor understand that the Annual Progress Report is a critical component of documenting whether the student’s performance is satisfactory;

(f) to inform FGS promptly should there be unresolved concerns about either the Supervisor’s effectiveness or the student’s performance;

(g) to establish clear and fair procedures for such matters as funding, teaching assistantships, and examinations;

(h) to ensure compliance with University of Calgary policies regarding ownership and utilization of data;

(i) to ensure that supervising arrangements are made when research supervisors are absent;

(j) to ensure that the graduate program is free from harassment and discrimination, and that the program’s policies and procedures can accommodate diverse student needs and special circumstances;

(k) to ensure that international students and their Supervisors are made aware of current legislative requirements as defined by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (http://www.cic.gc.ca/) so that applicable student visas and employment authorizations are applied for in a timely fashion and maintained throughout the period of registration in the program;

(l) to ensure that current information is made available to eligible students in regard to deadlines and procedures for awarding graduate and postdoctoral fellowships, GAT’s, GTF’s, and other graduate funding;

(m) to encourage the interaction of graduate students with other students and faculty, and the development of a professional identity through research seminars, posting of conferences, and other means;

(n) to maintain an atmosphere conducive to creativity and productivity, and to provide mechanisms for resolving problems which may arise between graduate students and their Supervisors or members of Supervisory Committees;

(o) to provide an avenue whereby students can inform the program of areas where it might be improved.
The Supervisor

The role and responsibilities of the Supervisor are outlined in Article 2 of the Doctoral and Master’s Thesis-based Handbooks. Specific practices constituting good supervision include the following:

(a) to assist the student with the selection and planning of a suitable and manageable research topic with due consideration of the resources necessary for completion of the research project;
(b) to accommodate reasonable demands (e.g., teaching assistantships) or special circumstances or needs of the student that affect the student’s progress;
(c) to be accessible to the student for consultation and discussion of the student’s academic progress and research. The frequency of the meetings will vary according to the discipline and the nature and stage of the project, but normally interaction, which may be electronic, should occur at least once per month;
(d) to respond in a timely manner to written work submitted by the student with constructive suggestions for improvement. The turnaround time for comments on written work should not normally exceed three weeks;
(e) to achieve consensus and resolve differences when there is conflicting advice or when there are different expectations on the part of co-supervisors or members of the Supervisory Committee;
(f) to be familiar with the rules and procedures of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and the graduate program, including the chronological sequence of events and deadline dates in a student’s program;
(g) to assist the student to be aware of current program requirements, deadlines, sources of funding, and general expectations of examinations;
(h) to help ensure that the research environment is safe, healthy and free from harassment, discrimination and conflict;
(i) to encourage the student to make presentations of research results within the University and to outside scholarly or professional bodies as appropriate;
(j) to acknowledge the contributions of the student in presentations and in published material, including joint authorship, if appropriate;
(k) to discuss with the student the Intellectual Property Checklist (available at http://grad.ucalgary.ca/files/grad/ip_awareness_checklist.pdf) and conform to University and other policies regarding intellectual property, scholarly integrity, and other policies applicable to the research environment.

The Student

In undertaking a graduate program, graduate students make a commitment to devote the time, effort and energy necessary to engage in scholarship. Students should demonstrate initiative in their research, recognize that their Supervisors are responsible for providing guidance as well as Faculty of Graduate Studies Handbook of Supervision and Examination: Part IV – Policy Governing Relationship between Supervisor and Student
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evaluating their performance, and be receptive to suggestions and criticisms about their scholarly performance. Whether in a course-based or thesis-based program, students must comply with the rules, procedures and standards in place in the program and at the University and should be familiar with the regulations regarding academic and non-academic matters as per the University Calendars. Specific responsibilities are as follows:

(a) to gain the background knowledge and skills needed to pursue the research project successfully;

(b) to work with the Supervisor on the establishment of a realistic timetable for the completion of the various requirements of the program of study, and to adhere to the timetable and to meet deadlines;

(c) to meet with the Supervisor and Supervisory Committee when requested and to report fully and regularly on progress and on results, and to consider and respond to advice and criticisms received from the Supervisor and the other members of the Supervisory Committee. The frequency of meetings with the Supervisor will vary according to the discipline and the nature and stage of the project, but normally interaction, which may be electronic, should occur at least once per month;

(d) to work with the Supervisor to ensure that appropriate ethics approval is obtained prior to conducting research on animals or humans;

(e) to provide accurate and honest reporting of research results and to uphold ethical norms in research methodology and scholarship;

(f) to discuss with the Supervisor the Intellectual Property Checklist (available at http://grad.ucalgary.ca/files/grad/ip_awareness_checklist.pdf and conform to University, and other policies regarding intellectual property, scholarly integrity, and other policies applicable to the research environment;

(g) to discuss with the Supervisor faculty and program requirements, including those related to deadlines, thesis or dissertation style, course requirements, and conflict of interest;

(h) to discuss with the Supervisor the responsible use of resources, and to assist in obtaining additional resources for the research;

(i) to bring to the attention of the Supervisor other responsibilities and the estimated time commitment (e.g., teaching assistantships) or special circumstances or needs that affect program progress;

(j) to bring to the attention of the Supervisor any matters of conflicting advice or expectations on the part of members of the Supervisory Committee;

(k) to recognize that the Supervisor and other members of the Supervisory Committee may have other teaching, research and personal obligations which may preclude immediate responses;

(l) to work with the Supervisor to meet agreed performance standards and deadlines of the funding organization when financing has been provided under a contract or grant;
(m) to acknowledge the contributions of the Supervisor and others in presentations and in published material, including joint authorship, if appropriate;

(n) to help ensure that the research environment is safe, healthy and free from harassment, discrimination and conflict;

(o) to act responsibly upon conclusion of the project by leaving a clean work space, returning borrowed materials, and providing the Supervisor with appropriate documentation of software, data, experimental procedures so that others may continue the research.

PART TWO

Resolving Problems between Students and Supervisors

The relationship between the student and Supervisor is central to graduate education, and is normally close and long-lasting. If the relationship between a student and a Supervisor breaks down, the program has a responsibility to mediate. This is more likely to be successful if attended to as early as possible. Since it is the responsibility of the Graduate Coordinator to arrange for the necessary consultation and mediation, the Graduate Coordinator should be consulted as soon as the conflict becomes apparent. If supervision problems cannot be resolved within the graduate program, the relevant Associate Dean and/or Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies may assist.

Should no satisfactory resolution be obtained through consultation and mediation, the Graduate Coordinator may, with well documented and justifiable reasons, recommend that the Supervisor be changed.

It is the responsibility of the graduate program and the Faculty of Graduate Studies to ensure that the student receives an opportunity for an academic experience that includes the proper supervision of the student's program and thesis (if applicable). Although the graduate program delivers the academic and supervisory component, the Faculty of Graduate Studies must work closely with all parties to ensure that the responsibilities are met. If the best arrangements of the graduate program and the Faculty of Graduate Studies fail to meet the expectations of the student, then no more can be done within that graduate program and the student may decide that the supervisory arrangement is untenable. At such time, the option to apply to another graduate program should be explored or, if that fails, the student may choose to withdraw without prejudice.

It may be that the student is unwilling to accept the supervision provided, or wishes to switch topics from that which was originally indicated at the time of admission. The graduate program and the Faculty of Graduate Studies have no responsibility to agree to alternate supervisory arrangements if they cannot reasonably be accommodated. The graduate program should consult with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and then inform the student clearly about what supervisory arrangements will, or will not, be provided. The graduate program should also clarify whether changing the Supervisor requires approval of a new dissertation proposal. If the student disagrees, the option to withdraw or apply to another graduate program without prejudice remains open. If the student chooses to continue but refuses to accept the supervision provided, then the student is not fulfilling the academic requirement of having a Supervisor (or Supervisory Committee). Therefore, the student may, on academic grounds, be required to withdraw. This is
a serious action, and should not be taken unless the graduate program and the Faculty of
Graduate Studies have explored with the student all other reasonable solutions.

In some cases, there may be no academic reason for requiring a student to withdraw, but the
student's actions (e.g., disruptive or abusive behavior) may lead to the breakdown of effective
supervision. In such instances, the graduate program shall refer to the University policy on Non-
Academic Misconduct or other University policies.

Acknowledgements
This document benefitted significantly from the University of British Columbia document
entitled Guidelines for the Various Parties involved in Graduate Student Thesis Research and the
University of Alberta’s FGSR Graduate Manual.