

School of Graduate Studies and Research

Guidelines on the Roles and Responsibilities in Graduate Supervision

Preamble

Of the many metaphors - consumer, client, partner and product - that are used to describe a student's role in the university enterprise, it is that of partner which best fits graduate studies. Whether in teaching or research activities, graduate students participate as junior partners, and it is in terms of this partnership that their roles and responsibilities are defined. This partnership, however, is usually established with the parties involved having little or no prior acquaintance with one another. Yet it is a relationship in which mutual respect and trust are essential. It is through a shared enthusiasm for the pursuit of knowledge and the basic principles of personal and academic integrity, freedom of inquiry and expression and respect for others free of any form of discrimination, intimidation or harassment that trust and respect are built. But it is also through good and sensible practices that trust and respect are maintained and fostered.

The aim of this document is to promote good practices in graduate supervision by providing guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of those involved: students, supervisors, supervisory committees, graduate coordinators and departments. The document also includes mediation procedures for the resolution of disputes related specifically to issues in graduate supervision, although it is hoped that the guidelines will help anticipate and avoid potential problems.

It must be recognized, however, that some of the most serious problems in graduate supervision do not arise because of failures to meet a specific regulation or guideline. Rather, they result from actions which are - or are perceived to be - insensitive, discriminatory or abusive. To prevent problems from developing, everyone involved in graduate supervision should become familiar with Queen's University human rights policies.[1]

While it is important to acknowledge that graduate students are partners in the university enterprise, it is equally important to recognize their differential power status, in particular with respect to their supervisors. Students may feel at risk if they complain or disagree with their supervisors. Therefore, the onus is on departments and supervisors to promote an environment where expectations and concerns are discussed openly.

This document should be read in addition to the regulations and policies set forward in the Calendar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, and the division and departmental manuals.

1.0 Role and responsibilities of supervisors:

The role of supervisors is threefold: to advise, monitor and act as mentors. Supervisors not only provide guidance, instruction and encouragement in the research activities of their students but also take part in the evaluation of their progress and performance. A fundamental role of supervisors is that of senior

partner. As such, supervisors have the responsibility to foster the intellectual growth of their students so that they can become competent contributors to their field of knowledge. They also play an important role in providing assistance and advice to their students as they plan career steps after the completion of their degree. Specifically, the responsibilities of supervisors include:

Knowledge of regulations and procedures

- 1.1** To be informed of their department, School of Graduate Studies and Research and University regulations and procedures.
- 1.2** To be informed of the help lines, advisory offices and counselling services available at Queen's, in particular regarding sexual harassment, race relations and special needs.

Advice on program of study / research project

- 1.3** To advise their students on an appropriate program of study. This may include advice on the choice of courses/seminars needed to fulfil the degree requirements and on the research topic and proposal. In this context, supervisors should help their students outline a program of study and research that is challenging, at the appropriate level for the degree sought, and that builds upon the previous education of the student. In advising students on their thesis topics, supervisors should be mindful of the availability of the resources needed to pursue the research. Supervisors must clearly indicate to the student the required levels of performance, as well as the means of indicating performance, that are consistent with satisfactory progress in the research program.

Meetings / Consultation

- 1.4** To arrange for regular meetings with their students for consultation and discussion of the students' progress. Students should be notified of any perceived problems associated with academic performance as soon as problems are identified. The frequency of such meetings depends on the field of study, the type of program, the research project and the students' progress. At the minimum, though, meetings should be arranged in each academic term. Supervisors should also be reasonably accessible for meetings requested by their students.
- 1.5** To examine thoroughly all written material relevant to the thesis/research project submitted by their students and provide constructive suggestions, preferably in writing, for improving the work, when necessary. They should be informed of the standards for quality and style to which theses and papers for publication must conform and advise their students accordingly. In particular, supervisors should advise their students on whether or not a thesis or major paper, in their opinion, meets the necessary standards prior to its submission. Normally, supervisors should provide comments within two weeks of receipt of the submitted material. However, at times a longer response time may be needed because of the nature and length of the document submitted or because of other commitments of the supervisor. Students and supervisors should outline together an appropriate timetable.

Provision for leave of absence

- 1.6** To inform their students and prospective students of any anticipated extended leave. In cases when the leave is for a period of over a term, supervisors should arrange for communication and for their students to have access to supervision within the department, for example from members of supervisory committees. Supervisors should inform the Graduate Coordinator of the arrangements made for the period of leave.

Safety

- 1.7** To ensure a safe working environment, in accordance with the University and department regulations, and make sure that their students are aware of safety measures to be taken both on and off campus during field work.

Financial assistance

- 1.8** In cases where financial assistance is to be provided from research grants or contracts under their responsibility, to communicate clearly and in writing to their students the terms - amounts, length of time, conditions - of the financial commitment. The terms of the financial commitment may be communicated by the department on behalf of the supervisor. In all cases, the commitment must be honoured while the contractual relation between the student and the University is in effect.

Intellectual property and Publication

- 1.9** To discuss at the outset with their students issues related to intellectual property. It should be recognized that, in accordance with Queen's University policy, intellectual property is owned by the creators. However, the University retains a royalty-free irrevocable right to use for educational and research purposes any intellectual property created by a student in relation to her/his research activities.[2]
- 1.10** To encourage the dissemination of research results, by publication in scholarly and research journals, by presentation at conferences and seminars and, if appropriate, by protection (patent or copyright). Any significant intellectual contribution by the student must be recognized by her/his co-authorship of the work. Individual departments, Faculties or Schools may have specific ancillary guidelines with regard to dissemination of information and the student should be provided with a copy of these guidelines at the start of her/his program. Supervisors are urged to discuss disciplinary practices with regard to publications with their students at an early stage of their program. Supervisors should also make sure that their students are aware of implications and/or obligations, with regard to intellectual property, of research conducted under contracts.

Curtailed of supervisory duties

- 1.11 To inform the Graduate Coordinator and supervisory committee when, in exceptional circumstances, such as personal or professional conflicts (see Appendix), prolonged leave, etc., withdrawal from their supervisory role is necessary and in the best interest of the student. In such cases, supervisors should cooperate to help arrange for continuity of supervision.

2.0 Role and responsibilities of supervisory committees:

Students enrolled in graduate programs with a research component should have access to supervision throughout their program. The role of supervisory committees is to assist supervisors in their monitoring function and also to provide guidance and advice on the students' research, complementing the expertise of supervisors. Supervisory committees may also be called upon to take a more active role in cases where supervisors are absent for an extended period of time or in cases of disputes between supervisors and students. Depending on the degree program, discipline and the research undertaken, the form of this committee may vary. For example, a departmental supervisory committee could be appointed to oversee all Master's students and doctoral students not yet engaged in their research work. For all Ph.D. students involved in the research component of their programs, it is recommended that either individual committees (with memberships selected in consultation with the student, supervisor and graduate coordinator) be appointed or that a second reader be added to the departmental supervisory committee to share its responsibilities. Specific responsibilities of supervisory committees include:

Meetings / Consultation

- 2.1 To meet as required to review students' progress and provide advice. Meetings should be arranged at least once and preferably twice a year at which time reports on the progress of the students towards completion of the degree requirements should be submitted to the graduate coordinator. The student should be informed in writing of the results of these meetings, in terms of satisfactory/unsatisfactory levels of research progress, in a timely manner. Supervisory committees should also meet at the request of students or supervisors.
- 2.2 To be reasonably accessible to students when called upon for discussion of the students' academic progress, for consultation on issues related to the research project and for general guidance.

Curtailed of supervisory duties

- 2.3 Members of the supervisory committee should ask to be relieved of their duties by the graduate coordinator when, in exceptional circumstances, such as personal or professional conflict, prolonged leave, etc., withdrawal of the committee member is necessary and in the best interest of the student. The supervisory committee should also advise the graduate coordinator in cases where it is felt that a supervisor should withdraw in the interest of the student.

3.0 Role and responsibilities of departments and graduate coordinators:

The heart of graduate studies is in the departments. Indeed for most graduate students, the first link with the University is through their home department and it is there that they also find the information or help they need. The department, through its delegate, the Graduate Coordinator, plays a central role in the initial matching of supervisor and student and also throughout the student's program in ensuring that a healthy supervisor/student relationship is maintained. Specific responsibilities of the department and/or of its delegate, the Graduate Coordinator, include:

Information

- 3.1** To provide adequate information to all graduate students, both incoming and continuing, on all aspects of the department's program, admission requirements, funding, procedures and deadlines. The departments should ensure that their information materials convey a welcoming and inclusive message to all students.
- 3.2** To provide and post information on the help lines, advisory offices and counselling services available at Queen's regarding sexual harassment, race relations and special needs.

Procedures and Regulations

- 3.3** To ensure that all administrative procedures of the department and the School of Graduate Studies and Research with respect to graduate programs are followed.
- 3.4** To have in place departmental regulations concerning the appointment of supervisors and to inform potential supervisors and students of these regulations.

Meetings / Consultation

- 3.5** To be reasonably accessible to students when called upon for discussion and consultation of their academic progress and research problems.

Monitoring process

- 3.6** To appoint a supervisor for each student registered in a graduate degree program with a research component. It is recognized that in some programs it is desirable to appoint a supervisor as early as possible while in others it is preferable to wait for the student to be involved in the research component of his/her program. In the latter case, it is assumed that the Head or Coordinator will take on the role of supervisor until a supervisor has been appointed.
- 3.7** To ensure that each student registered in a graduate degree program with a research component has access to supervision and to receive progress reports from the supervisory committee, where appropriate.

- 3.8** In cases where a supervisor is absent for a prolonged period of time, to ensure that satisfactory arrangements have been made for the continuity of supervision.
- 3.9** To serve as a facilitator for informal dispute resolution when informal discussions between the student and supervisor/supervisory committee are not sufficient to resolve conflicts or disagreements.

Safety

- 3.10** To ensure that a safe working environment is maintained in the department and that students are informed of departmental and university safety regulations.

Financial assistance

- 3.11** In cases where financial assistance is to be provided from departmental funds, to communicate clearly and in writing to the students the terms - amounts, length of time, conditions - of the financial commitment.

Curtailed of supervisory duties

- 3.12** To respond to requests for the replacement of a supervisor or supervisory committee member. The department has a responsibility to make its best effort to ensure continuity of the student's program while the University is under contractual obligation to the student.

4.0 Role and responsibilities of graduate students:

By embarking on a program of studies at the graduate level, students make a commitment to strive for the highest levels of academic achievement and contribute fully to the intellectual life of the University. Their prime responsibility is to meet the requirements of their degree programs in a timely manner. Graduate students play a central role in the University. They contribute to the teaching and research activities to which they bring assistance, cooperation and inspiration. By agreeing to a supervisor, they embark on a partnership that can succeed only if it is built on trust and respect. Students should acknowledge the senior role that is played by their supervisors. They should seek their advice and give it serious consideration. Similarly, students should seek advice and guidance from their supervisory committee members and from their Graduate Coordinator. They should also be informed of the help lines, advisory offices and counseling services available at Queen's regarding sexual harassment, race relations and special needs. Specifically, the responsibilities of graduate students include:

Regulations / Procedures

- 4.1 To meet all appropriate deadlines and regulations associated with registration, award applications and graduation requirements as specified by their department, the School of Graduate Studies and Research and the University.
- 4.2 To comply with the Ethics Review procedures when conducting research involving human subjects or animals.
- 4.3 To provide reasonable evidence of satisfactory research progress, as requested by the supervisor or supervisory committee.

Intellectual property and Publication

- 4.4 To become aware of and adhere to the University policy on the ownership of intellectual property and the retention of any information relevant to the research program by the University for educational and research purposes. To respect any contractual terms under which thesis research is conducted.
- 4.5 Prior to the submission of a thesis or documents for publication co-authored by their supervisor, to discuss a draft of the submission with the supervisor. The student must respect a supervisor's request to review any original data associated with the submission.

Communication / Absence

- 4.6 To maintain regular communication with the supervisor or designate and interact with the supervisory committee as appropriate. Students should inform their supervisors of any prolonged absences, including absences during the spring and summer sessions, and keep their supervisors informed of where they can be contacted.
- 4.7 To communicate with the supervisor on the progress and anticipated submission dates of major papers or theses. Students must work towards meeting any agreed upon deadlines and must inform their supervisor of any anticipated delays.

Safety

- 4.8 To comply with the safety regulations of the department and University.

Financial assistance

- 4.9 If supported by financing provided through contracts, e.g. teaching assistantships, research assistantships, etc., to meet the terms and conditions of the contractual agreement with their supervisor and/or department.

Curtailment of supervisory duty

- 4.9 To request of the Graduate Coordinator when appropriate and with specific reasons, the replacement of the supervisor or member of the supervisory committee, should a personal or professional conflict occur.

5.0 Mediation Procedures

In cases of problems associated with supervision practices or conflicts between graduate students, supervisors or advisory committee members, the procedures for mediation outlined below should be followed. Note that matters of academic substance should be dealt with following the procedures outlined in the calendar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research under the section “Review of Academic Decisions”.

Departmental and School of Graduate Studies and Research Channels

- 5.1 It is advised that resolution of the issue be sought first through informal departmental and School of Graduate Studies and Research channels. Thus, discussion of the problem should occur first between the student and supervisor or supervisory committee. If the issue cannot be resolved here, one or both parties should consult the Graduate Coordinator and the Department Head to seek possible resolution. If a satisfactory resolution is not reached, assistance can be requested of the Dean or Associate Dean(s) of the School of Graduate Studies and Research.[3] In consultation with the person(s) seeking advice, the Dean may elect to appoint an advisory committee to help resolve the issue. All consultations in the Departmental and School of Graduate Studies and Research channel should be kept confidential and no direct action should be taken without the prior consent of the person(s) seeking advice. Wherever possible, formal communications should be limited to those parties directly concerned in dealing with problems.

Grievance Channels

- 5.2 Resolution of the issue can also be sought through the University’s Grievance Procedures, which include informal, administrative and formal channels. The Queen’s Senate Statement on Grievance, Discipline and Related Matters and the University’s Grievance and Appeal Procedures document should be consulted. Note that, unless warranted by unusual circumstances, no interruptions to the student’s academic program may be put into effect until all channels of appeal or grievance have been exhausted, or the time for appeal has been allowed to lapse.[7]

Appendix

Included below are excerpts regarding conflict of interest from the Calendar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, the Report of the School of Graduate Studies and Research Committee to Review

Student Perceptions of Graduate Education at Queen's and the Senate Document on Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment.

“ Fairness and objectivity may be, or be seen to be, compromised if academic evaluation is conducted, even in part, by someone to whom there is a close personal tie (for example, family member, partner in an intimate relationship, or housemate). Where such a tie does exist between students and evaluators, the parties involved therefore have the responsibility to declare a potential conflict of interest, normally to the Department Head or Dean, who shall assist without prejudice in arranging evaluation by alternative means. (For the purpose of this regulation, evaluators are understood to include professors, supervisors, lecturers, tutors, markers, teaching assistants, lab demonstrators, and members of thesis or comprehensive examination committees.)”[4]

“ In this connection we must state unequivocally that the graduate student-supervisor relationship— however friendly and supportive it may become—should always be a professional relationship. Sexual intimacy is not congruent with the supervisory relationship, and as the more powerful member of the relationship, it must be the faculty member—regardless of who makes the suggestion—who ensures that the relationship remains at the professional level. For most faculty members, this seems axiomatic. They are careful, therefore, not to reveal or discuss any feelings and engage in any behaviours that might interfere with a professional relationship with their students. We must all be careful to monitor our words and behaviours to ensure that supervisory relations are not jeopardized. It is up to the professor to make it clear to his/her student that if an intimate relationship were to develop, he/she would not be able to continue as supervisor. If there is a mutual decision to have a relationship, the supervisor should request the help of the appropriate people—whether department head or dean—in ensuring that another supervisor is found. This should be done discreetly. We are not suggesting that officers of the university become morality officers, only that supervisory and intimate relationships should not be coincident.”[5]

“2 The following situations must not be entered into:” “iv the assigning to graduate students of work in which non-academic considerations (eg, commercial potential, financial gain, etc.) are a significant factor (and the supervision of such students) without the prior agreement of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. The intention is to protect the students' rights to enquire freely and to publish the results of their studies.”[6]

Notes

[1] Information can be obtained through the Human Rights and Senate Offices or through the following documents: the Senate Statement on Grievance, Discipline and Related Matters, the Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedure document and the University's Grievance and Appeal Procedures document.

[2] Further information can be obtained in the Report of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Intellectual Property.

[3] If at any time and for any reason, this route is not appropriate, advice should be sought directly from the Department Head, the Graduate Coordinator or the Dean or Associate Dean(s) of the School of Graduate Studies and Research.

[4] Calendar of the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Section 5.5.

[5] Report of the Committee to Review Student Perceptions of Graduate Education at Queen's, School of Graduate Studies and Research.

[6] Senate Document on Conflict of Interest and Conflict of Commitment.

[7] Senate Statement on Grievance, Discipline and Related Matters (item 41).

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