

# TRU

A Faculty Guide

to

# GRADUATE STUDENT SUPERVISION

27 May 2010

Prepared or compiled for Faculty reference based on the references at the end of the document by N. Van Wagoner, AVP Research and Graduate Studies

## **The Supervisor and Supervisory Responsibilities**

The graduate supervisor is an academic mentor and evaluator of the student's performance, providing professional guidance and insights into the discipline.

Student success and satisfaction in a graduate program is largely related to the relationship that is developed between the student and their graduate supervisor. The responsibility for completing the thesis, project, invention or creative work is shared between the supervisor and the student.

The educational and intellectual experience should be satisfying to all parties involved; the student, the supervisor, the faculty members and the academic unit/s.

### **Responsibilities**

#### **Identify an Expert Supervisor Early**

A supervisor must be identified in a timely fashion. At the graduate level, the supervisor must have expertise in that part of the student's graduate program that encompasses the Graduate Work, be familiar with the state-of-the-art, recent literature and context of the research, or be able to connect the student with such an expert (for example, through joint supervision). The supervisor must also be qualified according to the TRU Criteria for Faculty Participation in Graduate Studies. The ability to identify an appropriate graduate student supervisor may be part of the student acceptance process within the Graduate Program Committee.

#### **The Commitment**

In agreeing to be a graduate student supervisor the faculty member agrees to be accessible to the student throughout his or her program, provide timely feedback, create a supportive and intellectually stimulating environment, and work in a collegial and professional manner to resolve any frustrations or conflicts.

#### **Establish the Supervisory Committee Early**

Make sure the graduate student is introduced to the committee, understands the role of the committee, and expectations for communicating with and reporting to the committee.

#### **Communicate Requirements**

As a supervision, familiarize yourself with program regulations and requirements related to coursework, funding, the Graduate Work and its examination, and discuss these with your student at the start of, or at least early on in, their program.

Explain the role, responsibilities and expectations of the student, and make sure your student understands the program and how they will proceed through the program.

Help the student remain focused, and set milestones.

Be clear about what your student can expect from you.

Periodically review program expectations with your student and work with your student to facilitate the timely and successful completion of all aspects of the program.

### **Communicate, Monitor Progress and Give Feedback**

As much as possible, hold regular meetings with your student and the supervisory committee, as applicable. Give timely feedback and constructive critique. Ensure your student knows how you wish to receive material and reports, and how you wish to review the Graduate Work, and parts thereof.

Be sure Graduate Program Plans are updated and that the appropriate offices are informed.

If you are going to be away, you retain the obligation to be accessible to your student, or you must make other arrangements to ensure your student's progress is not compromised.

### **Keep the Relationship Professional**

Anything but an arm's length relationship with your student is unacceptable, including such relationships as family connections, romantic, sexual, business or financial relationships, or any other relationship that could cause a conflict of interest. Should such a relationship arise it must be identified to the Dean, and the Dean should work with the Graduate Program Committee Chair to identify a change in supervisor.

Help ensure a research environment free from harassment, discrimination and conflict.

### **Planning**

In consultation with the student, establish a realistic work schedule for the program. Help ensure that there are sufficient financial and material resources to perform the research and support the student.

### **Research Environment**

Encourage your student to participate in seminars and workshops.

Provide ideas, challenges, and insights that create an academically stimulating environment. Stimulate intellectual growth, debate, and challenge.

### **Academic Integrity**

It is your responsibility to promote the highest standards of integrity and ethics in research, scholarship and the production of creative works. You must inform the graduate student about all relevant policies and practices of academic and research integrity, including human and animal ethics policies, policies regarding academic integrity, and expectations of funding agencies for integrity in research.

It is also your responsibility to ensure that your student is aware of and properly trained to conform to all relevant policies and practices relating to workplace, laboratory and field safety, including the biohazard policy.

### **Be a Mentor**

The graduate program can be a transforming experience for your student. As part of this experience a student may discover that they can do, be and understand more than they thought they could when they started. Pushing the comfort zone can create discomfort, and it is important for students to feel supported through this process.

Graduate study is also a time of professional growth. Depending upon the objectives and career goals of the student, help the student to network, apply for funding, write publications or other documents that will further their careers, provide opportunities for presentations and conferences, and support other forms of career development.

### **Discuss all Issues Related to Intellectual Property, Copyright and Ownership**

Ensure that your student understands any policies, contractual obligations or other requirements that may define ownership including those related to ownership of intellectual property, equipment, data, and samples. Be sure students are aware of all applicable policies, including any contractual obligations that may necessitate the delay of disclosure or publication of data or information. Make sure your student agrees to these obligations.

Many graduate theses result in jointly published work with the supervisor, and also other students who may be part of the research team. Make sure these are discussed upfront, including authorship and responsibilities to the publication. In your own dissemination of research be sure to acknowledge the student's contributions to presentations and publications, including joint authorship if appropriate.

Make sure your student also understands obligations to acknowledge funding agencies, and others who supported the work.

## **Conflicts**

Students and supervisors must make every effort to maintain a collegial and supportive student/supervisor relationship, and resolve any conflicts among themselves. Should a conflict arise that jeopardizes the student/supervisor relationship and impedes the progress of the student, and that cannot be resolved by discussion between both parties, then the student or faculty member should contact the Dean of the Faculty. The TRU Office of Graduate Studies can provide advice and support as needed.

## **Need for an Alternative Supervisor**

In rare instances it may be necessary to identify an alternate supervisor for the graduate student. This may occur if the supervisor is unable to continue due to absence, the student wishes to change their research focus and it is possible to identify another supervisor who can support the student, if there is a conflict of interest, or if a serious conflict occurs that cannot be resolved in a timely manner. The student should not be penalized for delays caused by this transition.

# Guiding Your Graduate Student Through the Stages of Research and Scholarship in the Production of the Graduate Work

The following is a description of the stages of the graduate student research or scholarship experience, and the role the supervisor can play in guiding and mentoring the student through each of these stages. The student experience will vary depending on the program, the expectations of the Graduate Work, and the personality and prior experience of the student and the supervisor.

## STAGE 1: THE EARLY STAGE

### A. Establish the Intellectual Partnership

Before you go TOO FAR make sure there is a good match between the student and the supervisor. The following can help:

- Communicate with the student in advance if possible,
- Give students the opportunity to meet all of the faculty, and
- Have a trial period to determine whether the match will work, or whether there should be a change in topic and/or supervisor.

Provide an intellectually stimulating environment

- Be creative, and have a steady stream of interesting inquiries,
- Know the field and be able to engage the student with probing questions and critique that inspire exploration and push the student beyond the capabilities they thought they had.

Try to understand and be interested in your student

- Know their interests and needs,
- Encourage collaboration with other students,
- Make sure they know the intellectual opportunities that are available to them,
- Help them establish a professional network, and learn about networking,
- Promote the student's graduate program, and be there to assist them in getting established and moving upward in their career.

Understand and be respectful of your student's goals and sacrifices

- Goals: There is a combination
  - Career development and meaningful employment
  - Intellectual growth, curiosity, and a passion for research
- Sacrifices
  - Time
  - Money
  - Personal commitments (family, job, delay in career)

Make sure your student knows that you are there to help them be successful in their program. You want them to succeed.

### **B. Establish the Framework**

Make sure your student knows what is expected of them and the time frames, and that part of their training is learning to manage their time, organize their activities, and set priorities.

The following information should be provided in writing and reviewed with your student early on in the program:

- Length and structure of formal coursework
- Any qualifying exams or courses
- Method of assessing coursework and its relationship to the rest of the graduate program
- Financial awards, scholarships, and funding available to the student
- Expectations for the thesis, project, or creative work, deadlines, format and how it will be assessed
- Any other assessments
- Timetable and format for submission of various written work and reports such as the thesis proposal, progress reports, thesis chapters, etc.
- A complete program plan with dates and deadlines, including the anticipated completion date: make sure the student knows the big picture
- Opportunities and expectations for publication: format, journal, authorship, etc.

## **STAGE 2: THE MIDDLE STAGE**

### **A. Review the Framework**

Pay close attention to refining and clarifying the inquiry to ensure the work is original, of an appropriate intellectual level, and feasibility within the funding and time period available:

- Review the submission schedule, for your consideration and that of the External Examiner/Reviewer
- Establish milestones, lay out a clear path, and monitor the project as it evolves
- Review submission, presentation, and examination requirements

### **B. Understand and Mitigate Factors that can cause delays**

- Culture shock: There is a significant difference between undergraduate and graduate study and it is important to help your student overcome culture shock by engaging them early on in the process of inquiry. The following may cause students to get off to a slow start:
  - The student is not familiar with the requirement for self-discipline, self-study and exploration

- The student has not been exposed to the critical and questioning role of a scholar.
- The student comes from a highly structured undergraduate program.
- Perfectionism: This delay can be caused by student and/or the supervisor never being satisfied.
  - Hold yourself and your student to deadlines
  - Review and clarify standards
  - Develop a good rapport so the student is comfortable with critique
- Distraction and Diversion: Graduate students tend to be interested in many aspects of a discipline, its methodologies and inquiries and there is the potential to spend too long on a particular part of the project, or expand the scope to something massive.
  - Help the students stay focused on the problem
  - Embrace enthusiasm for a bigger and bigger picture, while focusing on the main inquiry
- Faculty Accessibility
  - Respond to students promptly
  - If you are going to be away from campus make sure you are accessible some other way
- Writers Block
  - Writing workshops
  - Sticking to deadlines

### STAGE 3: THE FINAL STAGE

- The Details and Finishing Up: Tending to the final details can be frustrating for some students. Make sure your student is aware of the requirements for completion.
  - Be Accessible
  - Monitor Causes of Delay above
- Final Examinations/Presentations/Revisions
  - Make sure your student is aware of any oral presentations or examinations
  - Encourage your student: By now they are an expert in their area of inquiry, and have also developed considerable depth in their discipline
  - Work through any required revisions with your student and help them to view this process in a positive light



- Publication: Dissemination of research results beyond the thesis is an important outcome and contribution of a graduate program. The appropriate form of publication helps the student, the faculty member, and the program.
  - With electronic submission of final projects and thesis, the work is available to others as soon as the thesis is published. So, it is important to have a game plan for early publication.

**Additional References:**

Guiding Principles for Graduate Student Supervision, Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS) 2008

<http://www.cags.ca/pages/en/publications/cags-publications.php>

Research Student and Supervisor, 2009, Council of Graduate Schools. 44p. (provided to faculty to Full Graduate Instructors/Supervisors by the Office of Graduate Studies).