School of Graduate Studies

Supervising Graduate Students; GradProSkills

Fall 2021

Importance of the Student-Supervisor Relationship

- As you embark on your own academic career here at Concordia, realize that over the coming years (and hopefully decades), you will be assisting dozens of others (i.e., your grad students) in establishing their careers
- It is important to start out on the right foot, and the School of Graduate Studies is here to help you with that
- In addition to our role in formulating and enforcing academic regulations related to graduate programs, we provide numerous **resources** to help you and your students

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Resources

- **Supervision Guidelines**
  - Master's Guidelines
    - https://www.concordia.ca/sgs/resources/handbooks/masters-supervision-guidelines.html
  - PhD Guidelines
    - https://www.concordia.ca/sgs/resources/handbooks/phd-supervision-guidelines.html
- **Graduate Calendar**
  - http://www.concordia.ca/academics/graduate/calendar.html
- **GradProSkills** – offers numerous resources for students (workshops on thesis writing, time management, wellness, etc.) – more on this later

Master's Supervision Guidelines

Guidelines for the Supervision of Master's Students

These guidelines have been prepared to enhance the contribution of graduate education to the intellectual development and academic success of students and Concordia University.

Download the guidelines

Sections

A. PREAMBLE

B. CONTEXT

C. GUIDELINES

D. PROGRESS REPORTING

E. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

F. APPENDIX

PhD Supervision Guidelines

Guidelines for the Supervision of PhD Students

These guidelines have been prepared to enhance the contribution of graduate education to the intellectual development and academic success of students and Concordia University.

Download the guidelines

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A. PREAMBLE

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Graduate Calendar

Fall 2020 Graduate Calendar

The Calendar is an official University document defining academic programs and regulations. It is accurate as of August 1, 2020. It includes all items approved at Senate up until April 24, 2020.

General Information

- Disclaimer
- University Overview
- Academic Calendar
- Academic Regulations
- Admission
- Awards
- Classification of Students and Registration
- Institute for Co-operative Education
- International Program
- International Students
- Policies and Procedures
- Postdoctoral Fellows
- Student Services
- Thesis Regulations
- Program Repertoire

Application Deadlines

Application deadlines vary and depend upon the program. You must complete admission files by the deadline indicated. In most cases, however, international applicants must arrange for all required documentation to be in the appropriate office at least six months before the commencement of classes.

Visit the application deadlines page

GradProSkills

Statement of purpose:

Empower Concordia graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to engage with **community resources**, **optimize their graduate school experience** and equip themselves to realize their **professional and academic goals**.

GradProSkills

Our offerings

Workshops

Events

Records of Participation

Job Opportunities

Certificates

Volunteer Opportunities

GradProBlog

Social Media

http://www.concordia.ca/students/gradproskills.html

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GradProSkills Workshops

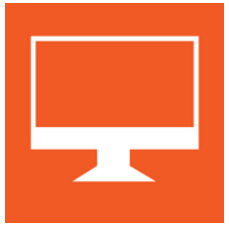
Career Building

Communication

Language Training

Leadership & Management

Success in Graduate School


Software &Web Tools

Teaching

Wellness & Life Balance

http://www.concordia.ca/students/gradproskills/workshops.html

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Supervising Graduate Students: Getting Started

- The first graduate students you select will have an enormous impact on your research productivity (positive or negative)
- Be selective! If possible, don't accept the first applicants that come across your desk – especially if their academic performance is not strong (i.e., cGPA ~ 3.0)
- Very strong academic performance does not necessarily correlate with very strong research performance; **HOWEVER**, <u>weak academic performance usually correlates with weak research performance</u>

Advice on Selecting Graduate Students for Supervision

- Review application dossiers very carefully:
  - Assess **overall academic performance**
  - Read **letters of reference** carefully (learn to read between the lines!)
  - **Undergraduate research experience** in your field is usually a big plus
  - When appropriate, pay attention to your Graduate Admissions Committee's **screening reports** (for example, the phrase "interview carefully" is commonly indicative of an extremely marginal candidate)

Advice on Selecting Graduate Students for Supervision (cont'd)

- When possible, **interview** a prospective student beforehand (in person is ideal, otherwise use Skype/Zoom for international applicants (or during COVID!))
- You may want to consider **starting with a Master's student** first – if the student is really good, they can **fast-track** to the PhD program later (usually after about a year in-program)
- PhD students are a much greater commitment on your part, especially in terms of program duration (4-6 years)

Funding

- For good students (i.e., high cGPA, research publications, etc.) there are ample opportunities for award funding to supplement the student's base stipend
  - **External funding** (Tricouncil awards (e.g., CGS-M, PGS-D, Vanier), Quebec, etc.)
  - **Internal funding** (Concordia merit, International tuition remissions (PhD only), faculty-specific awards
  - These awards typically supplement a graduate student's **base stipend** (PI contribution + TA earnings) – in the absence of a big Tricouncil award, the majority of a student's base stipend will typically come from your research grants
- The more Tricouncil grant funding brought in to Concordia, the more Tricouncil award funding allocated to Concordia

Mentoring

- Your role is to develop your graduate students into **independent researchers**; don't micromanage when possible – advise from arms' length (more so for PhD students, Masters students are usually more 'hands on')
- Guide your students through their entire grad school experience (make sure you're familiar with the degree requirements for their program): **their success reflects your success as a supervisor** (granting agencies pay attention to this as well: e.g., NSERC HQP evaluation accounts for 1/3 of a typical Discovery Grant funding decision)
- Provide guidance in **scholarly writing skills** in your field – especially important for international students who don't have English as a first language

Mentoring (cont'd)

- Establish clear expectations from the start:
  - **Funding** (especially what you'll be contributing)
  - **Authorship policies** (this can be a very sensitive topic – best to be up-front about how co-authorships will work at the start of a project)
  - **Selection of a research topic**
  - **Timeline** to completion
- Provide **feedback** on a regular basis – weekly through one-on-one or group meetings, daily on a more informal basis when possible
  - Public feedback – seminars, conference presentations, etc. – be positive and constructive
  - Private feedback – can be more critical

Difficult Situations

- Deal with problems **as soon as they arise** – don't let things fester; early confrontations (when done constructively and professionally) can save a lot of grief down the road
- When dealing with a problem, try to find a resolution that's **mutually satisfactory** to you and the student
- For especially difficult situations, it's always good practice to communicate with the student **in writing** as well as verbally; for example, an email summarizing an important conversation about expectations within a defined timeline, clearly laying out the next steps, etc.

Difficult Situations (cont'd)

- For ongoing problem cases: build a **documentation trail** (emails, supervisory committee reports, etc.) – this can be very useful later on, especially if GPD intervention is required, or if you want to declare formal withdrawal from supervision of a student
- Seek **advice** from senior colleagues, your GPD, and SGS (but first try to work with GPD)
- In some (rare) cases, resolution of problems is irreconcilable and you may need to **withdraw from supervising** a student; do not take this lightly!
  - Build a documentation trail
  - Get input from the student's supervisory committee
  - Follow the procedures laid out in the supervision guidelines
- Keep in mind that a student can also formally withdraw from your supervision (see Supervision Guidelines for procedures)

Have Fun!

One of the most rewarding aspects of our jobs is seeing our graduate students go on to their own successful careers.

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