GUIDELINES FOR THE SUPERVISION OF MASTER'S STUDENTS
Last Updated – October 3, 2024

These Guidelines replace the
Guidelines for Supervisors and Graduate Students
Approved by the Council of the School of Graduate Studies
May 6, 1996

A. PREAMBLE

These guidelines have been prepared to enhance the contribution of graduate education to the intellectual development and academic success of students and Concordia University ("the University"). The specific roles and responsibilities of all partners in graduate education are congruent with all relevant University policies pertaining to responsible conduct and integrity in research and scholarship.

While it is important to acknowledge that students are partners in the University enterprise, it is equally important to recognize their differential power status, especially as it relates to their supervisors. Some students may feel at risk if they complain or disagree with their supervisors. At the same time, faculty members who are new in their role as advisors need support and mentoring by their peers at the departmental level. Therefore, the onus rests with the department, the supervisors and the student to promote an environment where expectations and concerns are discussed openly.

In addition, the guidelines are meant to encourage units to examine their graduate programs and to specify their own policies and procedures, all while upholding academic excellence. Each academic unit should have explicitly stated policies and procedures regarding the advising and supervising of students, as well as established means for informing students of procedures and deadlines (e.g., orientation sessions, handbooks) and mechanisms for addressing complaints that are consistent with their practices and disciplines. For their part, students are responsible for informing themselves of these policies and procedures.

Finally, these Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Thesis Preparation Guide, and the Thesis Regulations in the Graduate Calendar.

B. CONTEXT

Due to the wide range of research degrees and areas of research, there is considerable variation in the kinds of supervision students require. Broadly speaking, models can range from apprenticeships, in which students receive close supervision on a continuous basis from supervisors, to more autonomous situations in which students are essentially independent researchers, receiving only periodic guidance from supervisors but otherwise assuming most of the responsibility for advancing a program of research. In all cases, students should become increasingly independent over the course of the program of study. Regular consultations and assessments, both formal and informal, between students and supervisors are essential for maximizing the benefits of their collaboration and minimizing misunderstandings.

While it is important to acknowledge the leadership role of supervisors, it is expected that students will share responsibility in maintaining open channels of communication and articulating and realizing their own goals as students and researchers.

C. GUIDELINES

Graduate supervision should support students in:

- fostering academic integrity and professional standards and ethics;
- navigating the journey through their program with a clear understanding of the appropriate requirements, rules, and procedures, and with any emerging problems handled in a timely fashion;
- learning the essential methodologies, concepts, and culture of their discipline, and performing research of high quality and significance;
- engaging with the wider context of the discipline and the relevant communities of scholars, and preparing for future careers both within and outside academia;
- realizing their full scholarly potential by providing an environment that is supportive and intellectually stimulating.

1. Definition of Supervision

Supervision is a professional relationship between one or more professors and a student with the purpose of enhancing the academic abilities of the student, leading to a university degree for him/her. The ultimate purpose of supervision is to transfer the knowledge and experience of the professor(s) in their particular areas of expertise to the student in a pre-specified period of time, making him/her ready for a profession in the field. It is important to maintain an arm-length relationship between the student and supervisor during the period of supervision.

In some programs, the supervisors are designated in the admission process and each student will have a supervisor upon registration. For programs in which supervisors are not designated in the admission process, the department should be responsible for providing supervision within a subject area in which it has competent supervisors, and in which the student has expressed an interest. Thus, departments should admit only students for whom they can reasonably expect to have the appropriate faculty member as supervisor when needed. That being said, there is no ensured right for a student to have a particular individual as supervisor. Supervisors should be appointed within the first 12 months of the student's program. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that there may be circumstances when it may prove difficult or impossible for a supervisor to be found for a student. However, it is expected that every reasonable effort will be made to arrive at a mutually agreeable arrangement for supervision between the student and the department.

1.1. Who can Supervise Students?

Normally full-time permanent faculty members holding a terminal degree at Concordia University and who hold the rank of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Professor are eligible to supervise students. Other faculty members who meet the criteria established by the department with which they are affiliated, which usually entail substantial and relevant research accomplishments, may be nominated by the Graduate Program Director to the School of Graduate Studies for approval.

A co-supervisor from another university or from a non-academic sector (such as industry) can be considered provided that a request (with the proposed co-supervisor's CV) is put forward to the Graduate Program Director, who may approve the appointment as a special case. There should be an

indication of the means by which meaningful interaction can be maintained. External co-supervisors are expected to follow these supervision guidelines. Concordia Emeritus professors, LTA, ETA, and Affiliate Faculty may also co-supervise pending approval from the departments. Co-supervisors must also meet the criteria outlined above, and there should normally be no more than one co-supervisor.

For cases of co-supervision that pertains to Cotutelle and ALGANT agreements, please refer to their respective guidelines.

1.2. Establishing a Supervisory Committee[*]

In addition to having a supervisor, all students should also have a Supervisory Committee to assist them through their program. The Committee should be established early in the student's program with the assistance of the supervisor and the Graduate Program Director. Every effort should be made to maintain the committee throughout student's progress within the program. However, occasions may arise which require changes to be made.

Committee members may continue as members upon retirement provided they are approved by their disciplinary program (or functional equivalent) and continue to meet the criteria established by their graduate program for graduate supervision.

The 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 discussions of ideas emerging in the research. Should problems arise with the supervisor, the committee can provide advice, mentoring, and, if necessary, mediation in problem solving. Consequently, thesis supervisory committees are most valuable if they are established as early as feasible in the student's program, provided that the members are chosen carefully, and that both student and committee members are able and willing to interact more frequently than the necessary annual meeting.

Relationships between committee members and students should be Academic. Any personal relationships that alter or affect this academic relationship may constitute a conflict of interest (e.g., familial or intimate relationship, business relationship). Committee members should also strive to recognize and manage potential conflicts of interest amongst themselves. The Graduate Program Director and/or Chair should be informed of potential conflicts of interest. Whenever a conflict of interest arises, examining members should withdraw from the committee. Further information on the roles of the School of Graduate Studies, thesis committee chairs, and thesis examination committees can be found in the Thesis Preparation Guide and the Thesis Regulations in the Graduate Calendar.

2. Summary of Procedures and Responsibilities

With regards to the supervision guidelines, roles for the School of Graduate Studies, Faculties, Departments, Graduate Program Directors, Mentor(s)/Supervisor(s) and Students are as follows:

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[*] **Sections 1.2 only apply to those Masters programs that currently use Supervisory Committees**

2.1. School of Graduate Studies

The School of Graduate Studies is expected to:

- create, revise and implement guidelines, policies and regulations concerning thesis supervision and examinations, as established by the Council of the School of Graduate Studies;
- mediate and arbitrate conflicts arising from the interpretation of the School of Graduate Studies regulations, guidelines, and policies;
- provide counsel on all aspects of the program and any conflict situations that may arise;
- follow the progress of students and stay informed of the student's research activities (Annual Progress Report);
- oversee the thesis examination process (the School Graduate Studies may attend any of the proceedings).

2.2. Faculties

It is recommended that Faculties:

- assess and improve the quality of supervision, and help support new supervisors, e.g., through workshops or mentoring models. Procedures for monitoring the quality of student supervision and for providing constructive feedback for supervisors should be developed;
- recognize that graduate supervision is an integral part of the academic responsibility of an academic unit, and consider it in the allocation of workload along with the teaching of graduate courses;
- establish criteria of excellence in supervision and graduate teaching appropriate to their disciplines, and suitably reward those who meet these criteria, e.g., in decisions concerning tenure and promotion, or merit pay awards.

2.3. Departments and Graduate Program Directors

The Department, through its Graduate Program Director, plays a central role in the initial matching of supervisor and student. The Department along with the Graduate Program Director are committed to working with students to achieve their program and academic goals and can guide the student in the establishing and maintaining of a productive supervisor relationship. Students who are not able to establish and/or maintain such a relationship with an appropriate supervisor may be withdrawn from the program.

Each Department and Faculty should have written guidelines on the roles, composition and duties of the supervisor and the Supervisory Committee. In programs without supervisory committees, the responsibilities should be included in those of the supervisor.

Departments and Graduate Program Directors are expected to:

- ensure that department regulations concerning the selection of supervisors are consistent with University requirements, and communicate these regulations to potential supervisors and students;

- monitor the relationship between supervisor and student to help ensure that it remains stable, and refer the student to the Graduate Program Director should problems arise;
- establish procedures ensuring continuity in supervision when a student is separated from a supervisor – for example, when the supervisor takes a sabbatical leave, retires, or changes universities or when the student leaves to complete field work or takes a job before submitting a thesis. No student should be left without supervision for more than two months;
- respond promptly to requests for the replacement of a supervisor or Thesis Supervisory Committee member. The department has a responsibility to review the case in order to secure alternative supervision where appropriate;
- keep all parties aware of the fact that in cases in which research is done in a context of contract research, there may be limitations to public access.

2.4. Graduate Mentor(s)/Supervisor(s)

Graduate Mentor(s)/Supervisor(s) is/are expected to:

- be knowledgeable in the student's proposed area of research;
- evaluate their student's progress over the course of the graduate program;
- oversee the research undertakings of students by mentoring and directing them on the craft of research scholarship in a manner generally set out through the practices and traditions of their disciplines and academic departments;
- discuss with students the general nature of their working relationship early in the developmental stages of their collaboration to ensure mutually compatible expectations concerning things such as the frequency of meetings, the time lapse between the submission and evaluation of written work, etc.;
- establish an appropriate Thesis/Supervisory Committee. If the student is not comfortable with any of the members, he/she should inform the supervisor with his/her justification for that. The supervisor can then suggest an alternate member;
- establish a realistic timetable for completion of various phases of the program;
- provide timely comments on written material submitted by students, including comments on the advisability of submitting theses for examination;
- be open, honest, and fair with the student when academic performance is not meeting expectations. Although dealing with inadequate academic performance can be difficult, it is in no one's best interests to prolong a program of study when success is unlikely;
- play an active role in seeking to ensure the availability of basic resources required for the research, and for discussing such support/funding issues with the student;
- assist and encourage the wider professional development of the student by means such as: participation in seminars and colloquia attendance and presentation of work at local, national, or international conferences; publication of work in appropriate venues; taking advantage of the numerous offerings provided by the University for professional development, including GradProSkills; helping the student in the transition from degree program to employment, for example, by providing advice on career options, including those outside academe, the state of the job market, how to prepare a CV, and strategies for launching an academic or other professional career; introducing professional colleagues; and assisting in establishing a network of contacts and being willing to write letters of reference and communicate with relevant contacts;
- ensure that the research environment is safe, equitable, and free from harassment and discrimination;

- make appropriate arrangements for students when they go on sabbatical leave or are on extended absence;
- in the event of a conflict in the supervisor-student relationship, to discuss the issues with the student and Graduate Program Director in a timely fashion (see Section E on Conflict Resolution for further information);
- act in a manner that conforms to the basic principles of natural justice, academic integrity and professionalism and to manage, in a similar manner, conflict situations which may arise in the relationship with the student;
- discuss issues regarding publication (including authorship) with their students at an early stage of their program and are encouraged to have a written agreement to protect their own interests and the interests of the student;
- document in writing to the student and Graduate Program Director if they withdraw from supervising a student;
- recognize the unique challenges that international students may encounter upon arrival at Concordia. International students may benefit from additional support, especially in the early stages of their program, as they adjust to a new academic and cultural environment and in some cases to an English-speaking university. Clear and supportive discussion in the initial weeks and months on such issues as supervisor-student expectations and communication, cultural differences in values and expectations, differing styles of feedback, laboratory protocols, and/or academic integrity may be required;
- encourage international students to ask questions to prevent misunderstandings from arising or escalating into significant challenges or conflict. In particular, to ensure that situational and cross cultural factors have been considered in assessing competence and progress, supervisors should encourage students to identify and work on areas that could be a barrier to academic success (for example, issues relating to English as an additional language, academic writing, essential foundational knowledge required for the research program). Effective supervision of international students, in particular students from different cultures, requires attentive and pragmatic mentorship: for example, helping your student establish a social network, encouraging an inclusive environment in your lab/program, and bridging cultural differences in communication and interaction between supervisor and student. International students should be encouraged to reach out to Concordia's International Students Office;
- be attentive to the distinctive needs and challenges of students with care-giving responsibilities. Flexibility and understanding with respect to availability can enable these students to successfully manage their multiple responsibilities;
- encourage and refer students to Office of Rights and Responsibilities, Counselling & Psychological Services, and Health Services should a mental health issue be of a concern;
- work with the student to ensure that all research is conducted in accordance with the Policy on Intellectual Property (VPRGS-9).

2.5. Students

Students are expected to:

- inform themselves concerning regulations and standards as specified in the Graduate Calendar and in the relevant documents produced by the program offering the degree and by the School of Graduate Studies;

- be responsible for presenting ongoing work and meeting contractual obligations in a timely fashion and for maintaining regular contact with the supervisor;
- prepare a research plan and timetable for the program of study. A good approach is to work with supervisors or advisors to formulate a timeline for the whole program, noting important milestones and deadlines, such as: establishing a thesis topic; completing a literature review; achieving intermediate research goals; attending conferences; doing seasonal fieldwork; publishing papers; completing the research; analyzing data; and completing drafts of the thesis. Students can usefully revisit this plan at annual committee meetings or more often, and revise it as appropriate;
- inform the supervisor with a proper justification if he/she is not comfortable with the choice of member(s) for the Thesis/Supervisory Committee;
- let the supervisor know how the student can be contacted when they will be unavoidably absent (e.g., due to illness or to attend to family obligations), and inform the supervisor of anything significant that may affect their academic progress or that of others;
- submit draft publication materials based on collaborative research to supervisors before submission for publication;
- maintain open communication with their supervisor or advisor and Graduate Program Director concerning any problem; and in the event of a conflict in the supervisor-student or advisor-student relationship, follow-up with the supervisor and/or Graduate Program Director in a timely fashion;
- seek advice from the supervisor about possible scholarships, workshops, and other professional development opportunities;
- keep the supervisor informed in advance of research collaborations, teaching assistantships and research assistantships.

In circumstances in which a supervisory relationship cannot continue, students may request either an alternate supervisor or an administrative supervisor for purposes of the defence. Said request should be submitted to the Graduate Program Director, who will make a recommendation to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. Notwithstanding possible delays in time to completion, every effort should be made by the program, supervisor, etc. so that a student is not penalized if a change in supervisor becomes necessary. Please refer to the Thesis Preparation Guide for full procedures.

Students who do not have a supervisor when required by their program will be withdrawn from that program. Students may request to be allowed to remain registered in the program after this point for a maximum of four months in order to secure a new supervisor.

D. PROGRESS REPORTING

All students and their supervisors are responsible for filling out and submitting Annual Progress Reports (APRs) through the Student Information System. APRs are the institutional basis for evaluating a student's progress and are thus invaluable to the Program and the School of Graduate Studies when decisions affecting a student's status are required. Students who fail to submit their APRs will be blocked from registering for courses the following term. Graduate Program Directors are responsible for monitoring all APRs and following up on problems/issues that come to light, as well as communicating with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs in the School of Graduate Studies

when more serious issues arise. Finally, it is highly recommended that Faculties ensure that supervisors submit their reports in a timely manner.

In addition to filling out the annual progress report, it is recommended that the following steps be followed for each student:

1. Students should meet annually with their supervisor(s) in the context of the Annual Progress Report. At the first such meeting, written objectives/expectations for the year should be recorded and documented.
2. Approximately one year later, and every year thereafter, the student and supervisor(s) should meet again to review the progress that has been achieved toward the recorded objectives. Prior to the meeting, the student should record his/her accomplishments and progress for the year. All parties should sign the written objectives/expectations. The Graduate Program Directors may decide to attend the annual meeting, if they think that having a third point of view is necessary or useful. At this same meeting, objectives for the following year should be recorded.
3. In the event that recorded research progress is unsatisfactory, a new set of objectives should be developed for the student at the meeting and recorded. These new, or interim, objectives apply only to the next semester. Evaluation of progress should take place after that semester has concluded.
4. In the case where the student disagrees with the expectations/objectives and/or assessment presented at the meeting, it is his/her responsibility to document the nature of the disagreement and communicate with the Graduate Program Director in order to pursue the matter.
5. Annual Progress Reports are archived in the Student Information System (SIS). All documents pertaining to the annual meetings with the supervisor should be kept in the student's departmental file and uploaded to the SIS.

E. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The well-being of students and harmonious relationships with their supervisors and thesis/supervisory committees are important to the University. However, there are occasions in which conflicts arise between a student and the supervisor and/or the Thesis/Supervisory Committee. Problems can arise in many ways, though most involve academic, personal, and/or financial issues. In such cases, the first step must be to try to resolve the conflict or misunderstanding informally. This is more likely to be successful if attended to as early as possible. The supervisor, Graduate Program Director, and student should discuss the problem together. The supervisor should document the discussions and keep a record of any agreements made. In the event of a conflict, the Graduate Program Director should be notified as early as possible. Should the supervisor also be the Graduate Program Director, then the Chair of the Department should be notified.

It is the responsibility of the Graduate Program Director to arrange for consultation and mediation. The Graduate Program Director or the parties involved may request advice and/or mediation assistance from the Faculty Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Studies and/or other appropriate services, such as the School of Graduate Studies and the Ombudsman's Office. The student and supervisor shall not be required to participate in informal resolution against their wishes,

especially if either party's behaviour towards the other warrants a complaint under the Code of Rights and Responsibilities.

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, and the Graduate Program Director determines that the student-supervisor relationship is beyond repair, s/he must make a recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Studies to terminate the relationship. The Program/ Graduate Program Director must then attempt in good faith to work with the student to find alternative supervision within the department, and will keep the Faculty Associate Dean of Research and the School of Graduate Studies appraised of these efforts.

Where the supervisor has been providing funding to the student, the funding should continue for a period of 30 days (or to the end of the contract if it is within the 30 days) from the date on which the Graduate Program Director informs the School of Graduate Studies that the supervisor-student relationship is beyond repair. Within this 30-day period, students should avoid receiving funding from another supervisor.

F. APPENDIX

References made within the Supervision Guidelines:

Report of The School of Graduate Studies on the Common Standards and Procedures for Master's Programs

Thesis Preparation Guide

Thesis Regulations

Code of Rights and Responsibilities

Policy on Intellectual Property (VPRGS-9)

School of Graduate Studies

Ombuds Office

International Students Office

Counselling & Psychological Services

Health Services