

**RYERSON UNIVERSITY**

**GRADUATE SUPERVISION GUIDELINES**

**Updated:** August 2018

**Next Review Date:** September 2018

**Responsible Committee:** Yeates School of Graduate Studies Council

**Contact Office:** Office of the Vice-Provost and Dean, YSGS

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## **Introduction**

This document was developed by the Yeates School of Graduate Studies (YSGS) to provide a guide to the roles and responsibilities of graduate students, supervisors, program directors, and others involved in graduate supervision at Ryerson University. It is modeled on policies and guidelines in use at many other Canadian universities, and draws in particular on the policies and procedures of other Ontario universities.

The underlying principle is one of mutual respect for students, faculty, and staff in a university environment governed by traditional standards of research and academic integrity, without prejudice or discrimination. Within this context, the graduate student, the supervisor, and members of the supervisory committee (where appropriate) assume certain responsibilities and obligations. The guidelines are neither exhaustive nor exclusive and should be viewed in the context of normal circumstances in each program.

These guidelines should be viewed as complementary to the policies and procedures that pertain to rights and responsibilities of members of the Ryerson community, including the *Student Code of Conduct*, the *Graduate Appeals Policy*, the *Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy*, the *Policy on Ownership in Student Work in Research*, the *Graduate Status, Enrolment, and Evaluation Policy*, and the *Faculty and Staff Ownership of Research Results Policy*. A list of Policies and where they can be found on the YSGS website.

## **Choice of supervisor**

In some graduate programs a supervisor is assigned to a student at (or soon after) the start of the program. In other programs a faculty advisor is assigned until the topic of research is identified. In most programs the onus is on the student to find a faculty member who agrees to supervise the graduate research work; a process that often takes place prior to an offer of admission. The selection of a supervisor is a critical decision that impacts the quality of a student's graduate experience and influences a student's career path. Academic competence is of course important, but the supervisor must also be willing to provide advice, guidance, and mentorship. A healthy

student-supervisor relationship is one in which there is open and effective communication and expectations are clearly laid out.

Students are advised to obtain information about potential supervisors and the environment in which they will be working. Program websites generally provide profiles of faculty members and descriptions of ongoing research and research facilities. It is important that whenever possible the student meet with the potential supervisor of their graduate research to determine compatibility and have an opportunity to discuss issues such as expectations, research project support, identifying a research topic and scope, student funding, and strategies to ensure timely completion and quality work.

## **Role and responsibilities of supervisors**

The primary role of a supervisor is to provide guidance to allow for the graduate student's professional development and intellectual growth. They also play an important role in providing assistance and advice during a student's program and as the student plans the next stage in their career. One of the key determinants of graduate student success is the quality of mentorship provided by the supervisor.

### **The responsibilities of a supervisor include:**

- Guiding and advising the student on the selection and development of a research topic that is challenging, at the appropriate level for the degree sought and can be completed within the expected time frame of the degree program.
- Ensuring that the research receives approval from the Research Ethics Board if required prior to commencement of the project.
- Making reasonable arrangements to ensure that the research resources necessary for execution of the dissertation, thesis or major project, within the norms appropriate to the graduate program and within the limits of the material and human resources of the university, are planned for or budgeted for so the graduate student can complete the project without undue delay (this includes assisting the graduate student in gaining access to facilities or research materials).
- Helping to define a program of study that will challenge the graduate student and allow the graduate student the satisfaction of making a contribution to the field.
- Communicating to the student the required levels of performance, as well as the performance indicators that are consistent with satisfactory and timely progress in the degree program.
- Clearly informing the student about expectations, performance, and all issues relevant to the student's academic progress.
- Ensuring that a graduate student *Progress Report* is submitted in accordance with the procedures of the graduate program and YSGS.
- Being accessible to the student to consult and discuss their progress. The frequency of such meetings depends on the field of study, the type of program, the stage of the research project and the independence of the student. At a minimum, meetings should be arranged in each academic term.
- Ensuring that the student gains the necessary theoretical and substantive academic foundations for their research by counseling and approving course selections.

- Ensuring that the student acquires the skills required to conduct research in a manner consistent with the highest standards of ethical, scientific and safe practice.
- Thoroughly examining written material submitted by the graduate student in a timely fashion, making constructive suggestions for improvement, and informing the graduate student at the time of submission when the material will be returned (usually within 2 weeks) with comments, preferably in writing, for improving and continuing the work.
- Communicating clearly and in writing to their students the terms (e.g. amounts, length of time, conditions) in cases where financial assistance is to be provided from research grants or contracts under their direction.
- Knowing the program and university regulations and standards for a dissertation, thesis or MRP, and ensuring that the graduate student is aware of them.
- Ensuring that the student is familiar with University and department policies including safety requirements and practices.
- Making satisfactory arrangements for supervision and informing the graduate program director/associate chair (GPD) when the supervisor or members of the supervisory committee are on leave or on extended absence from the campus.
- Providing guidance to the student on career options and opportunities for professional development.
- Encouraging and assisting the student to disseminate the research findings through appropriate channels (conference, meetings, journals, etc.).
- Being informed of the regulations and procedures of their program, the Yeates School of Graduate Studies and the University and being knowledgeable about services and resources available to graduate students at Ryerson.
- Appropriately acknowledging in published material the contributions of the graduate student, and including consideration of joint authorship of publications.
- Conforming to the principles of academic integrity in the development of a professional and objective relationship with the graduate student.
- Attempting to resolve conflicts, should they arise between themselves and/or the supervisory committee and the graduate student, informally, being mindful of the power differential in the student-supervisor relationship.
- Seeking consultation with GPDs and Associate Deans if informal methods do not lead to a resolution of conflict with a graduate student.

## **Role and responsibilities of graduate students**

When a student registers in a graduate program, the student makes a commitment to strive for the highest levels of academic achievement and contribute fully to the intellectual life of the University. The primary responsibility of the student is to devote the time and energy required to complete all academic requirements including the SRC requirements within the expected time frame. It is also the responsibility of the graduate student to follow program, Yeates School of Graduate Studies and University policies, procedures and regulations.

By agreeing to work with a supervisor, students enter a partnership that will succeed if it is built on mutual trust and respect. Students should acknowledge the senior role that is played by their supervisors who are experienced researchers and academics. It is expected that students should seek their supervisor's advice and give it serious consideration. Students should also seek advice and guidance from their supervisory committee members (if applicable) and from their GPD as needed.

### **The responsibilities of a graduate student include:**

- Becoming familiar with and complying with the policies, procedures and regulations of the program, the Yeates School of Graduate Studies and the university.
- Adhering to the University's policy on the ownership of intellectual property and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Integrity in Research and Scholarship
- Meeting program requirements and conducting research that will contribute to, and reflect a capacity of independent scholarship in the chosen field of study.
- Conforming to all appropriate deadlines and policies as specified by the graduate calendar, with respect to enrollment, fees, award applications, and degree requirements.
- Defining, in conjunction with the supervisor, a program of study which fits within the scope of the program and for which human, physical and financial resources exist.
- Preparing a research plan and timeline in consultation with the supervisor as a basis for monitoring progress and completing all stages of the research.
- Conducting research with the highest standard of ethical and scientific practice and acquiring Research Ethics Board approval if required.
- Familiarizing themselves with the safety regulations of the University and the Department.
- Maintaining regular communication with the supervisor and supervisory committee (where appropriate) regarding progress and research findings.
- Providing reasonable evidence of satisfactory research progress, as requested by the supervisor; informing the supervisor immediately of any changes that might affect progress.
- Ensuring that contact information is up to date with the supervisor, and on RAMSS.
- Making drafts of the dissertation, thesis, MRP or materials available, with a copy of the raw data if requested, to the supervisor prior to submission for publication.
- Providing copies of the thesis, MRP or dissertation to the examining committee.
- Seeking advice and support from university services and resources as needed.
- Ensuring that all records, files, and documents are stored appropriately and a plan for dissemination has been agreed upon by all collaborators upon completion of the research work.
- Attempting to resolve any conflict with a supervisor or supervisory committee informally.
- Seeking consultation with GPDs and Associate Deans if informal methods do not lead to a resolution of conflict with a supervisor or supervisory committee.

### **Role and responsibilities of supervisory committees**

The role of the supervisory committee is to assist supervisors in providing guidance, consultation and advice on a student's research. The composition of the supervisory committee may vary by program; however, the members' areas of expertise generally complement that of the supervisor. The supervisory committee 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.

### **The responsibilities of supervisory committees include:**

- Meeting with the student, as a committee, as required but not less than once per year to assess the student's progress in the program and advise on future work required for completion of the degree requirements.

- Working with the supervisor to complete and ensure that a graduate student *Progress Report* is submitted in accordance with the procedures of the graduate program and YSGS.
- Being reasonably accessible to students when called upon for discussion of academic progress, for consultation on issues related to the research project and for general guidance.

## **Role and responsibilities of the graduate program director (GPD)**

The GPD plays a central role in creating a positive environment in which graduate students can pursue their scholarly work and intellectual growth. Students should become acquainted with the GPD and administrator and stay informed about activities and events through graduate listservs.

### **The responsibilities of the graduate program director include:**

- Providing current information to all graduate students, both incoming and continuing, on all aspects of the graduate program, admission requirements, financial support, procedures and deadlines. The departments should ensure that their information materials convey a welcoming and inclusive message and are readily accessible to all students.
- Ensuring that all graduate administrative procedures are followed.
- Ensuring that policies relevant to the graduate program such as the appointment of supervisors, dispute resolution, and monitoring progress are current and published (e.g. on program or YSGS websites or in student guides) so students can be familiar with them. Informing students of University and department safety regulations as appropriate to the discipline and field.
- Being reasonably accessible to students when called upon for discussion and consultation of their academic progress and research.
- Establishing a means of communicating with graduate students about matters of importance to their program (e.g. events, seminars, funding opportunities)
- Ensuring that a supervisor is appointed 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 their program. In the latter case, it is assumed that the GPD or delegate will take on the role of academic adviser until a supervisor has been appointed.
- Ensuring that a progress report is submitted by the supervisor and student as required by the program and YSGS.
- Tracking financial packages provided to students and communicating the terms clearly and in writing to the students (amounts, length of time, and conditions).
- Ensuring that financial support from the program is provided in a fair and equitable manner consistent with program and YSGS policies.
- Providing a guidance for resolving problems which may arise between graduate students, instructors, supervisors and/or members of the supervisory committee.
- Responding promptly to requests for the replacement of a supervisor or supervisory committee member. Review the case in order to secure alternative supervision where appropriate. If the program director has reason to believe that adequate supervision is not being provided, they should investigate the situation and take appropriate action.
- Ensuring that recommended members of an examining committee have a sufficiently “arms length” relationship to the student.

- Informing students of resources and services available to them for assistance, consultation and advice on academic and non-academic matters.

## **Role and responsibilities of the Yeates School of Graduate Studies**

The Yeates School of Graduate Studies oversees the conduct of all graduate programs within the university and supports the achievement of the highest possible academic standards in graduate degree programs. The School works closely with students, graduate programs, and faculties to promote excellence and foster an enriched and collegial environment for the pursuit of graduate education.

### **The responsibilities in relation to graduate supervision include:**

- Ensuring that University and Graduate policies and procedures are followed.
- Providing support for new and continuing faculty on graduate supervision (eg. workshops).
- Providing professional development opportunities for graduate students.
- Advising students on academic issues and facilitating informal solutions as appropriate.
- Liaising with graduate programs on all matters relevant to graduate education.

## **Conflict resolution guidelines**

In resolving a conflict that involves a graduate student, parties must in all cases be mindful of the power differential in the student/supervisor relationship. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that research by nature requires that ideas, assumptions and interpretations are challenged – this can inadvertently create an environment that is perceived as threatening or adverse. Sensitivity to the power differential, recognition of differences in cultural experiences, and clear understanding of expectations can help maintain a healthy and productive relationship that fosters intellectual growth.

In cases where conflict arises, the procedure below is recommended. Note that academic issues should be dealt with following the procedures in the Graduate Appeals Policy, which can be found on the YSGS website.

Resolution of an issue should initially be sought first through informal program channels. 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 GPD to seek possible resolution. If this does not result in a resolution, one or both parties is invited to seek the support of the Associate Dean with graduate responsibilities within their Faculty.

If the supervisor is the program director, then both parties should consult with the Associate Dean with graduate responsibilities within their Faculty

If a satisfactory resolution is not reached, assistance can be requested from YSGS. In consultation with the person(s) seeking advice, YSGS may elect to appoint an advisory committee to help resolve the issue.

All consultations in the Program, Faculty and School of Graduate Studies 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.

A change in supervisor should be made only for strong and compelling reasons such as a mutually agreed major shift in academic direction of the research, major academic disagreements and/or irreconcilable interpersonal conflicts.