

TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

Updated: 2023

Next Review Date: 2024

Responsible Committee: Yeates School of Graduate Studies Council

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

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Choice of supervisor	3
Roles and responsibilities of supervisors	4
Role and responsibilities of graduate students	5
Role and responsibilities of supervisory committees	7
Role and responsibilities of the graduate program director (GPD)	7
Role and responsibilities of the Yeates School of Graduate Studies	8
Communication Principles	8
Conflict resolution guidelines	9

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 Toronto Metropolitan 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 graduate students, faculty, and staff in a university environment governed by traditional standards of research and academic integrity, without prejudice or discrimination. Other guiding principles include: inclusiveness, open communication and responsiveness, transparency, a commitment to graduate student success and acknowledgement of shared accountabilities. These principles provide the foundation for the important shared responsibilities to create inclusive and supportive learning experience and research environments for all graduate students. Within a context of mutual respect, the graduate student, the supervisor, members of the supervisory committee, along with the program assume certain responsibilities and obligations, and should be open to being inclusive of all their graduate students, visitors and researchers in research activities, events and spaces. The guidelines provided here are neither exhaustive nor exclusive, and it is important to note that there may be special or unique circumstances that require different or additional approaches or obligations for all involved.

These guidelines should be viewed as complementary to the policies and procedures that pertain to rights and responsibilities of members of the Toronto Metropolitan University community, including the following:

[Policy 170b: Graduate Status, Enrolment, and Evaluation](#)

[Policy 60: Academic Integrity](#)

[Policy 159: Academic Accommodations of Students with Disabilities \(currently under revision\)](#)

[Student Code of Non-Academic Conduct](#)

[Policy 168: Grade and Standing Appeals](#)

[Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy](#)

[Policy 171: Scholarly, Research and Creative \(SRC\) Intellectual Property Policy](#)

Choice of supervisor

In some graduate programs a supervisor is assigned to a graduate student at (or soon after) the start of the program. In other programs a supervisor is not assigned until the topic of research is identified. In most programs the onus is on the graduate 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. This may also involve a co-supervisor, where deemed appropriate or necessary. The selection of a supervisor is a critical decision that has a direct effect upon the quality of a graduate student's experience and influences a graduate student's career path.

Academic competence is of course important, and the supervisor must also be willing to provide advice, guidance, and mentorship. A healthy graduate student-supervisor relationship is one in which there is open and effective communication and in which expectations are clearly and consistently discussed and outlined.

Graduate students are advised to obtain information about potential supervisors and the environments 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 graduate student meets with the potential supervisor of their research to determine compatibility and have an opportunity to discuss issues such as expectations, research project support, identifying a research topic and scope, graduate student funding, and strategies to ensure timely completion and quality work.

Roles 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 graduate student's program and as they plan the next stage in their career. One of the key determinants of graduate student success is the quality of mentorship provided by the supervisor.

Ensuring the success of graduate students with disabilities is a shared responsibility and a collaborative process. While graduate students are responsible for registering with the [Academic Accommodation Support \(AAS\)](#) office and following academic accommodation procedures, supervisors are expected to make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations to graduate students with disabilities in order for them to demonstrate and develop their academic, research, and scholarly potentials to the fullest.

It is the supervisor's responsibility, with the involvement and support of the graduate program, to provide an inclusive research experience for graduate students, other researchers or visitors. It also involves working to understand how to interact with and be inclusive of all individuals in that supportive environment.

Finally, with the involvement and support of the graduate program, supervisors are responsible for creating an environment that is inclusive and promotes graduate student success. This includes reasonable accommodations and considerations for the variety of challenges that graduate students may inevitably face in research activities, events and spaces.

The responsibilities of a supervisor include:

- Guiding and advising the graduate 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 start 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).
- Encouraging graduate students with disabilities who require accommodation to connect, as early as possible, with AAS in order to have an accommodation plan in place, and that the plan is discussed and revisited across all stages of the research. In cases where supervision is over a shorter period of time (e.g., one-year Masters programs), wherever

and whenever reasonably possible, efforts should be made outside of the AAS processes to provide reasonable accommodations, flexibility with processes and deadlines, through open discussion.

- Engaging with graduate students with disabilities to ensure that, in all research-related activities and any other events organized by supervisors, they are appropriately accommodated (e.g., accessing labs, writing, and examinations, as well as social or networking events).
- Responding in a timely way to a graduate student reporting changes in their abilities, situation or trajectory that may have a direct effect upon their progress in graduate studies, to a) provide accommodation and/or consideration where possible and b) ensure they are connected and/or referred to appropriate services and supports in the university, e.g., [Office of Student Care](#), [Academic Accommodations Support](#) (see Appendix A).
- 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 graduate 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 graduate student about expectations, performance, and all issues relevant to the graduate student's academic progress, in a clear and timely way.
- Ensuring that a graduate student *Progress Report* is submitted in accordance with the procedures of the graduate program and YSGS.
- Being accessible to the graduate 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 graduate student. At a minimum, meetings should be arranged in each academic term.
- Ensuring that the graduate student gains the necessary theoretical and substantive academic foundations for their research by counselling and approving course selections.
- Ensuring that the graduate 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 (typically within 2 weeks) with comments, preferably in writing, for improving and continuing the work.
- Communicating clearly and in writing to the graduate student 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 graduate student is familiar with university, department and program 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 graduate student on career options and opportunities for professional development.
- Encouraging and assisting the graduate 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 TMU (please see Appendix A).

- 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 graduate 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 graduate student registers in a graduate program, they make 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 graduate 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 their program, Yeates School of Graduate Studies and university policies, procedures and regulations.

By agreeing to work with a supervisor, graduate students enter a partnership that will succeed if it is built on mutual trust and respect. Graduate 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. Graduate 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-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research](#).
- 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.
- If accommodation is required, connecting with [Academic Accommodations Support](#), providing the supervisor with an official accommodation plan, and discussing required accommodations within the context of all phases of the research.
- Notifying the supervisor as soon as possible, should any situation arise that has a potential effect on research progress and working with the supervisor to put a plan in place for appropriate support, accommodation or consideration.
- 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, the department and program.

- Maintaining regular communication with the supervisor and supervisory committee (where appropriate) regarding progress and research findings, or other relevant matters such as life circumstances that may affect your progress.
- Providing reasonable evidence of satisfactory research progress, as requested by the supervisor; informing the supervisor *as soon as reasonably possible* of any changes that might affect progress.
- Ensuring that contact information is up to date with the supervisor, and on [MyServiceHub](#).
- 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 examination.
- Providing copies of the thesis, MRP or dissertation to the examining committee.
- Seeking advice and support from university services and resources as needed (see Appendix A).
- Ensuring that all records, files, and documents are stored appropriately and a plan for dissemination has been agreed on by all collaborators on 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 graduate 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 graduate students.

The responsibilities of supervisory committees include:

- Meeting with the graduate student, as a committee, as required but not less than once per year to assess the graduate 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 graduate 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. Graduate students should become acquainted with the GPD and administrator and stay informed about activities and events through graduate listservs.

In some graduate programs, graduate students are assigned to Faculty Advisors who may take on some of these roles and responsibilities.

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 graduate students.
- Ensuring all incoming graduate students are aware of available resources and supports, including Academic Accommodation Support. Graduate students who identify with disabilities and/or who require accommodation should be directed to [Academic Accommodations Support](#) and provided with ongoing program support to help graduate students navigate procedures and processes, and to set the conditions for their success through all aspects of the graduate program, both in courses and in non-course requirements.
- Working with the supervisor and/or program placement/co-op staff, to ensure that graduate students with disabilities are supported and fully accommodated in any co-op, placement or experiential aspect of graduate studies.
- Working with graduate students with disabilities and supervisors to ensure that, in all research related activities, graduate students are appropriately accommodated (eg. accessing labs, writing, and examinations) and that program facilities and events are accessible.
- 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 so graduate students can be familiar with them. Informing graduate students of university, department and program safety regulations as appropriate to the discipline and field.
- Being reasonably accessible to graduate 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 graduate 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 graduate 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 graduate student as required by the program and YSGS.
- Tracking financial packages provided to graduate students and communicating the terms clearly and in writing to the graduate students (amounts, length of time, and conditions).
- Ensuring that financial support from the program is provided in a fair manner consistent with program and YSGS policies.
- Providing 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 graduate student.

- Informing graduate 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 graduate 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 studies 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 graduate students on academic issues and facilitating informal solutions as appropriate.
- Liaising with graduate programs on all matters relevant to graduate education.

Communication Principles

As these guidelines demonstrate, there are a number of people and units who have varied roles and responsibilities in supporting graduate students. This implies that there should also be a principled approach to effective communication on all types of graduate student matters.

Communications regarding graduate student matters, such as, but not limited to, sensitive graduate student situations or disclosure of personal information, should be shared only on a “need to know” basis. Sensitive or personal graduate student information should only be shared or forwarded with others when they are being brought into a situation to help navigate resources or provide direct support, and with involvement and permission of the graduate student.

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 graduate 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 [Grade and Standing Appeal Policy \(Policy 168\)](#), 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 graduate 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.

Appendix A: Links to relevant university resources and services

Academic Accommodations Support

- [Academic Accommodations Support website](#)
- Email: aasadmin@torontomu.ca
- Service for any undergraduate or graduate student enrolled at TMU, who requires academic accommodation (in any program, and with any course load) to create and implement individual academic accommodation plans.

The Centre for Student Development and Counselling

- [The Centre for Student Development and Counselling \(CSDC\)](#)
- Email: csdc@torontomu.ca
- Phone: 416-979-5195
- Location: Jorgenson Hall, 07C, Lower Ground Floor.
- Counselling services available to all TMU full and part-time undergraduate and graduate students who are eligible to proceed in their program.
- Faculty and staff information can be found [here, including information on referring a student](#).
- *New: Graduate students who are on academic leave, and who require counselling, will now be able to access or continue counselling services during their leave. This can be arranged through the AD, Student Affairs, YSGS.

Office of Student Care

- [Office of Student Care website](#)
- Email: studentcare@torontomu.ca
- Offers consultation support; receives direct referrals of undergraduate or graduate students with multiple, complex needs; coordinates care plans for graduate students reintegrating into community after LOA, suspension, hospitalization or other time away from the program

- Facilitates Student Case Management Team, a multi-pronged team of campus partners engaged in risk assessment, risk management and care plans.
- Will work with GPDs, supervisors, faculty and staff to help support graduate students in complex or challenging situations.

Consent Comes First Office

- [Consent Comes First Toronto Metropolitan website](#)
- Email: osvse@torontomu.ca
- Offers holistic support for staff, faculty and undergraduate or graduate student survivors of sexual violence; offers education on sexual violence prevention and topics

Human Rights Services

- [Human Rights Services website](#)
- Email: humanrights@torontomu.ca
- Administers formal processes under the Sexual Violence Policy (SVP) and the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy (DHPP); offers education and consultation around issues that fall under the protected grounds of the Human Rights Code

Office of the Ombudsperson

- [Office of the Ombudsperson website](#)
- Email: ombuds@torontomu.ca
- Provides advice and support for undergraduate or graduate students who feel they have been treated unfairly, who have questions about their available options or their rights, and who need to discuss how a TMU policy or procedure has affected them.

Campus Safety and Security

- 416-979-5040, security@torontomu.ca
- [TMU Campus Safety and Security website](#)
- Offers 24/7 consultation and intervention support
- Has expertise in risk management around risk of harm to self and others
- Has a direct link to police intervention if needed/appropriate – e.g., wellness checks.