

# Student-Supervisor Relations

## Introduction

The Division of Graduate Studies and Research (DGSR) and its graduate faculty at the Royal Military College (RMC) of Canada are committed to promote a positive and thriving environment for graduate studies. To that end, an effective supervisor/student relationship is essential to a positive and rewarding graduate experience.

This document provides a framework pertaining to the responsibilities of graduate students and their supervisors to encourage a collegial, respectful and academically sound relationship when the student's programme involves thesis or dissertation supervision. This framework was inspired from policies of other universities as developed for the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) and should be viewed as complementary to RMC of Canada's existing regulations and policies.<sup>1</sup>

## The Role and Responsibilities of the Supervisor

The role of supervisor is to provide guidance and advice during a graduate student's program and to foster his/her intellectual growth, academic scholarship, and professional development. The supervisor has a unique opportunity to shape the future of their students and should approach academic supervision from the perspective of enriching the student's professional growth during their time in their care. It is the expectation of the DGS that supervisors will act in the best interest of the students and facilitate a successful and positive graduate experience at RMC of Canada during and after completion of the programme.

The primary responsibilities of the supervisor are detailed below:

- The supervisor will discuss with the student the selection of a research topic appropriate to the level of the degree sought, develop realistic research goals, and accept a work plan that can be completed within the expected time frame charted in the Graduate Studies calendar.
- The supervisor will ensure that the research topic adheres to the directives of RMC of Canada's Research Ethics Board (REB).
- The supervisor will ensure that there is a mutual understanding of research goals, research work plan, and realistic time lines and deadlines. The research goal, scope, method and timeline plan should be agreed to in writing and amended as required.
- The supervisor will develop contingency topics/plans that can facilitate the student's completion in the case the original topic becomes impaired by logistic issues outside the control of the student.
- The supervisor is expected to guide the student on the selection of graduate courses to be taken as part of the degree requirements.
- The supervisor is expected to be aware of, and to ensure their students get familiar with, all requirements, regulations, policies, and guidelines of the academic program, and the DGSR.
- The supervisor will meet with the graduate student on a regular basis to review the progress of the student and complete the Progress Review Form (Annex A). The DGSR policy details frequency by program type.
- The supervisor will meet with the graduate student on a regular basis to mentor the student in the completion of their program and research work. Initial frequency will be: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_.
- The supervisor must accommodate graduate students with disabilities, when disclosed, in accordance with RMC of Canada Policy. Supervisors must also be cognizant of the challenges associated with graduate student life and be sensitive to the specific challenges being faced by their student. Reasonable accommodation by supervisors is both encouraged and expected.
- When applicable, the supervisor is responsible for funding the student as per the Letter of Offer (LOO) or as evolving circumstances dictate. Any significant changes to a student's funding envelope need to be reviewed by the DGSR as per any changes to the LOO.

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<sup>1</sup> While every effort will be taken to keep this framework aligned with RMC of Canada's policies, if at anytime this document contradicts the RMC of Canada Graduate Studies Calendar, the Calendar shall be taken as the authority.

- The supervisor is responsible for arranging and/or funding training and educational materials that support the research program.
- The supervisor will arrange, in consultation with the academic department, for the student to have access to the infrastructure, facilities, and workspace required to undertake his/her scholarly activities.
- Supervisors will work with academic departments to ensure their students receive appropriate training in compliance with all Health and Safety Policies. Supervisors have an obligation to ensure compliance with all safety regulations of their academic unit.
- Supervisors who undertake a research leave or extended absences are expected to inform their students and make arrangements during such absences for the continuity of supervision.
- The supervisor is required to thoroughly examine all written documents that are part of the thesis or dissertation prepared by the student and to provide constructive recommendations for improving the work in a timely manner.
- The supervisor is responsible for organizing the comprehensive exams, thesis proposal, and the oral examination of the thesis or dissertation. The supervisor will propose possible examiners to the Program Chair who will then recommend the composition of the examining committee to the DGSR for approval.
- The supervisor is required to help the student prepare for the thesis or dissertation defence by discussing the format of the defence and presentation guidelines.
- When delegated by the Examining Committee, the supervisor is required to ensure that final corrections of the thesis or dissertation are satisfactorily completed and reported in a timely manner.
- The supervisor is required to recognize the contributions of the students to scholarly activity and to respect the intellectual property rights of the graduate student within the context of RMC of Canada's policies, the Department of National Defence (DND) and the law of Canada.

## The Student's Responsibilities

The primary responsibilities of the student are detailed below:

- The student's primary role is to, under the guidance of their supervisor, learn and grow as an ethical scholar, researcher and professional. They must commit the necessary time and effort to progress and achieve success in their courses and research project(s). They are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. While the supervisor will facilitate the student's development, ultimately the effort and responsibility for success must come from the student who they are expected to be proactive and engaged with respect to all aspects of their programme.

Further:

- The student is responsible to get acquainted with and understand the requirements, regulations, and policies of their academic department/programme, the DGSR, and RMC of Canada.
- The student will seek the advice of the supervisor on the appropriate graduate courses to be taken as part of the program requirements.
- The student will ensure that there is an open and frank communication with a view to a mutual understanding of research goals, research work plan, and realistic time lines and deadlines. The research goal, scope, method and timeline plan should be agreed to in writing and amended if required.
- Upon advice of their supervisor, the student is solely responsible for initiating course changes and withdrawals, and any other changes in his/her academic status. Failure to complete the necessary paperwork can compromise a student's academic standing.
- The student is required to inform the Registrar's office of any changes in contact information. The student is responsible for any correspondence sent to their @rmc.ca email address.
- The student must follow safe practices when carrying out research work in accordance with Health and Safety Policies of the academic programme and of RMC of Canada.
- The student must report his/her research results in an honest and accurate manner, to uphold the highest ethics in research methods and academic endeavours. The student must adhere to the principles of academic and research integrity as per Academic Regulation 5.17 of the Graduate Studies calendar and RMC of Canada's Research Policies.
- The student will keep the supervisor informed on progress and research findings and any circumstances that may affect the expected progress. Because supervisors are experts in the field and experienced academics, the student should give

serious considerations to the supervisor's recommendations and advice to mitigate problems that can impact graduate work progress.

- If the research cannot be continued for unforeseen circumstances, the graduate student must inform the supervisor and develop, with the supervisor, a revised research plan with goals/objectives/timelines as soon as possible. Early intervention should avoid or minimize delay in completion.
- A student must balance their work/life obligations so as to ensure success within the agreed upon timelines. If changes in a student's life impinge on their academic progress, it is their obligation to discuss it with their supervisor, keep their status at the university up-to-date (i.e. full-time/part-time) and renegotiate timelines if feasible. Significant changes may mandate a renewed Academic Plan which may or may not be possible to accommodate.
- The student will advise the supervisor of extended absences such as vacation, leave for medical or personal reasons, etc. Supervisors may choose to withhold financial support during these absences.
- When the research work is completed and if requested, the student must ensure that the supervisor has access to all records and files of the original research materials, and any other document related to the research work.
- The student must ensure that all necessary documentation required for graduation has been completed and submitted, all library material has been returned, and all outstanding fees have been paid.
- The student must acknowledge the contributions and assistance of the supervisor, co-supervisors, fellow students, industry partners, and technical staff.
- The student, with the supervisor guidance, is strongly encouraged to submit their research findings to journals, conferences, and workshops, etc.

## Responsibilities of Program Chairs

In academic matters, the graduate student is responsible directly to the Head of the academic department/programme Chair and thence to the Dean of Graduate Studies. In fact, in most cases, information pertaining to the student's academic programme is administered by the academic programme. All student requests are submitted to the Head of the academic department/ Programme Chair.

- For military students, the academic program chair is responsible for guiding the student on the selection/appointment of a supervisor as early in the student's programme as possible, normally prior to the start of the first term, so that the supervisor can guide the student in selection of courses.
- For PhD students, the Head of the academic department/programme Chair is responsible for appointing an advisory committee consisting of the supervisor, as chair, and normally two other members who will help guide the student and evaluate progress. The Head of the academic department/Programme Chair will assign examining committees for comprehensive and thesis proposal examinations.
- It is the responsibility of the Head of the academic department/Programme Chair to propose a thesis examining committee to the DGSR for approval. The Chair of the examining committee shall be appointed by the DGSR.
- It is the responsibility of the Head of the academic department/programme Chair to coordinate with the supervisor and or suitable department Heads and staff to ensure the graduate student acquires all required safety training prior to accessing and using the facilities.
- The Programme Chair must ensure the completion of student progress reports, review them and forward a copy to the DGSR. The Programme Chair will monitor any concerns raised in the progress reports and discuss them with the supervisor and/or Dean as appropriate.

## Responsibilities of Advisory Committees

Although the primary supervisory responsibility is borne by the academic supervisor/co-supervisors, PhD students must have an advisory committee appointed by the Head of the academic department/Programme Chair well in advance of the candidate's comprehensive examination. The advisory committee's role is to support both students and supervisors, and to assist with progress tracking and research project development. More specifically,

- It is the responsibility of the advisory committee to assist supervisors in providing guidance and advice on the student's research. It is expected that the areas of expertise of the committee members to complement that of the supervisor and co-supervisors.

- The advisory committee should be accessible for consultation and discussion with the student, the supervisor and other members of the advisory committee.
- Members of the advisory committee should normally attend all formal presentations or other events required by the student's programme.
- Members of the advisory committee may be called on to take on the role of supervisor if that individual is temporarily or permanently unable to fulfill those responsibilities or in cases of disputes between supervisors and students.

## Role of the Division of Graduate Studies and Research

The role of the DGSR is to administer the running of all graduate programmes at RMC of Canada, and to support the academic departments/programmes to offer degrees and scholarly research of the highest quality that will sustain their degree programmes. The DGSR will encourage academic departments/programmes to offer graduate degrees and to promote research interests that are relevant to the needs of the Canadian Forces.

Specific responsibilities are:

- It is the responsibility of the DGSR to ensure that RMC of Canada offers only graduate programs that fully meet the appraisal standards of the Council of Ontario Universities' Quality Assurance Programme.
- It is the responsibility of DGSR for ensuring that graduate academic regulations and policies are clearly delineated and updated in the Graduate Studies Calendar. Also, it is the DGSR's responsibility to ensure that academic departments/programmes policies and procedures relevant to the graduate programme are consistent with those of the DGSR.
- It is the responsibility of the DGSR to coordinate the review of graduate applications, maintain academic records, and monitor students' progress. In consultation with the academic departments/programmes, the DGSR is responsible of advising graduate students on academic issues relevant to graduate studies, and interpret academic policies established by the Faculty Council.
- The DGSR will encourage the highest standards in academic supervision throughout all graduate programs at RMC of Canada.
- The DGSR ensures that fair and transparent procedures for mediating disputes between graduate students and their supervisors are implemented and are consistent with existing dispute resolution procedure outlined herein.

## Dispute Resolution

As the senior in the student - supervisor partnership, supervisors are strongly recommended to promote a culture of respect and collaboration and to encourage timely conflict resolution when disputes arise. In determining courses of action in complicated circumstances, supervisors are encouraged to seek the advice of colleagues in the department in particular those who have recognized supervisory credentials.

- Supervisors must keep their Head of the academic department/Programme Chair apprised of any conflicts that may impede a student's satisfactory progress.
- If the student disagrees with the supervisor on aspects of their program or feels they are being mistreated in any way, the student should discuss their concerns with the supervisor as soon as possible without fear of retribution.
- Students and supervisors are recommended to take advantage of the advice of their Head of the academic department/Programme Chair or the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies; they may request their presence during discussions. Their role is to facilitate the discussion and to help forge a resolution to any dispute.
- In the event the differences between the supervisor and the student cannot be reconciled, either of them may request dissolution of the student-supervisor partnership. Dissolution of student-supervisor relationship is a complicated issue and is rarely advantageous to either the student or the supervisor; it is in everyone's best interests to resolve disputes whenever possible. If, after early intervention, dissolution is sought, a meeting will be arranged with the DGS, Program Chair, supervisor and student. Meetings may be held separately as required at the discretion of the Dean. The DGS has the sole authority to dissolve a student-supervisor relationship. Every effort will be made to find a suitable supervisor for the student to complete their studies.

- In the event of a change in supervisor, the Head of the academic department/Programme Chair must ensure a new Academic Plan is completed for the student considering their change in circumstances. The Head of the academic department/programme Chair must complete a report summarising the discussions and final decision of the Dean for the file. Copies of the report will be provided to the former supervisor and student.
- The student must be aware that he/she is will bear the consequences resulting from changing supervisors such as time delays, change in the research topics, funding, etc.

## Progress Reporting

To ensure timely degree completion and to better assess the research progress of the graduate student, both the student and supervisor are required to complete and submit regular progress reports to the Division of Graduate Studies and Research. In the progress report, previously established goals, milestones, and timelines are evaluated and new ones are outlined for the new reporting period.

Normally students are expected to graduate on time and all members of the RMC of Canada team need to be vigilant against slippage in timelines that will unnecessarily delay a student's completion. Flexibility in method, scope and deliverables may be required to ensure a student is afforded every legitimate opportunity to complete on time. That said, satisfactory progress is ultimately the responsibility of the student, failure to progress may result in the student being withdrawn from the programme.

The progress reporting process will be initiated when a new student arrives with the completion of the academic plan which outlines their requirements and expected timelines. This is followed by periodic reporting as noted below.

For Master students, the first periodic progress report must be submitted at the end of their first semester and each semester thereafter. For PhD students, a first progress report must be submitted at the end of their second semester and every academic year thereafter. Note: if a graduate student is granted a programme extension, she/he shall submit a progress report each term.

The graduate student must submit a progress report to the supervisor who will comment and respond to the student's report by completing his/her parts of the report. The report will be reviewed by the Head of the academic department/programme Chair who will sign the report and forward a copy to the DGSR.

In the event the supervisor judges the student has not achieved the expected progress considering the mutual objectives and milestones previously established and thus the progress report is unsatisfactory, the student will be informed in writing with one of the following recommendations:

- Submit a detailed study plan, detailed goals with timelines for the supervisor's review and approval.
- Submit another progress report (normally in a 4 month-period, but the supervisor may request a different reporting period).
- If the student does not successively make satisfactory progress, the Dean of Graduate Studies may invoke Academic Regulation 5.6 to withdraw the student from the programme.

## Signatures

By signing below, I acknowledge having read this document.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's full name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor's full name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date