



Cell Biology Graduate Program, McGill University

LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING (LOU)

Adapted from the Integrated Program in Neuroscience

This agreement¹ is designed to promote dialogue between the supervisor(s) and the student to define their expectations and to increase awareness of the rights and responsibilities governing the training program and the student-supervisor relationship. The aim is to avoid problems and to achieve a positive and mutually beneficial experience. An electronic copy will be saved in the student's departmental file.

Signing of this Agreement attests to:

- 1) **Compliance with University Regulations and Guidelines Governing Graduate Students and Supervisors**
 - Rights and responsibilities established under the [Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities \(The Green Book\)](#).
 - General Information, Regulations and Research Guidelines Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies documented in the [Graduate Studies Handbook](#), including University policies on research ethics, intellectual property, conflict of interest, leaves of absence, vacation time and holidays.
 - Supervisory Guidelines established by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and documented in section 10.1 of the [Graduate Studies Handbook](#) and the appended document describing responsibilities of graduate students, supervisors, graduate programs and the University.
 - Official [University Policies, Procedures and Guidelines](#) (including harassment policy) documented on the website of the University [Secretariat](#).
 - Unit policies and procedures: It is the responsibility of the academic unit to inform students and supervisors.
- 2) **Compliance with policies and regulations on ethical conduct of research**
If the Student is working with human subjects/animals or tissues, radioactive or biohazardous material, lasers or other hazards, the Supervisor will ensure that all ethics certifications and training will be obtained and appropriate safety protocols are followed.
- 3) **Commitment to regular performance review and completion of progress reports** in compliance with the policies of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies [[see Graduate Research Progress Tracking](#)] and the Cell Biology Graduate Program.
- 4) **Compliance with the policies of the Cell Biology Graduate Program**, including funding, academic requirements and milestones.

Financial Commitment: The Cell Biology Program has a guaranteed funding policy. The current minimum stipends established by the Cell Biology Graduate Program Committee are documented on the website. Researchers must guarantee that each student under his/her supervision receives at least the specified minimum stipend, through a combination of internal/external awards and payment from research funds. It is expected that the student will apply to all internal and external graduate studentships to which they are eligible.

INITIAL STIPEND to be paid to _____ (specify student)

Amount (total on an annual base): \$ _____

Source (Specify):

a) external award	\$ _____
b) internal award	\$ _____
c) paid from research grant	\$ _____

Start and end dates of operating grant **Start:** _____ **End:** _____

NOTE: Minimum Stipends for entering students are: \$20,000 for MSc students, and \$22,000 for Phd Students

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP

The student has discussed their interest/intent to TA during their graduate program and presented a plan to their supervisor outlining a schedule that would ensure timely progression of their thesis work:

¹Adapted from a template provided by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies



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Other Support: The supervisor is responsible for providing access to sufficient resources for the graduate student's research project. The researcher should specify his/her policy on funding of other activities such as attending conferences to present research, subject to availability of funds:

Academic Preparation: Specify any deficiencies in the student's background preparation (academic knowledge, technical or language skills, etc.) that must be addressed to avoid negative impact on research performance or course work.

Expectations re: the Supervisor's Research Environment: Specify the operational expectations, including, frequency of student-supervisor meetings, group meetings, reports, record keeping, contribution to general duties, assistance from and to other personnel/students.

Specify expected attendance at journal clubs, seminars, etc, aside from official requirements of the Graduate Program.

Roles of the Co-Supervisor:

General Other: Please add anything of importance that may not be a specific point outlined in the LOU.



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SIGNATURES:

I am aware of and understand the content of this document including the general responsibilities of graduate students, supervisors, and the University defined by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

Student:

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor:

Signature:

Date:

Joint Supervisor (if any):

Signature:

Date:

Co-Supervisor (if any):

Signature:

Date:

Unit Head:

Signature:

Date:

Graduate Program Director
or Departmental Chair



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**RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS, SUPERVISORS,
GRADUATE PROGRAM AND THE UNIVERSITY**

General Responsibilities of the Student

Be Aware of and Follow Administrative Requirements

- Maintain awareness of all policies, procedures and deadlines that affect you.
- Monitor and use your official McGill email address for official correspondence related to your program of study and registration as a student at McGill. Regularly access and read the University's Information Technology web page, including use of e-mail (<http://www.mcgill.ca/email-policy/policy/>). Consult official University documents and communicate with your program's administrators.
- Maintain your registration throughout the duration of the program, including ensuring that visas and employment authorization documents, where required, are kept up to date.
- Adhere to all deadlines and policies regarding registration, thesis submission, and if necessary, withdrawal.

Maintain Accessibility and Communication

- Contact your mentor to establish the program's milestones. The Graduate Program Coordinator will notify you at the beginning of the term who your assigned mentor is.
- Keep in touch with your supervisor, mentor and program administrators. Provide your supervisor and program administrators with your permanent and current contact information and advise the supervisor of any absences. Engage in open communication and feedback with your supervisor on all issues, including research design and results, technical difficulties, other demands of the Program (courses, etc.), personal concerns affecting research progress and meeting milestones (such as medical and family-related issues), expectations, and supervisory practices.
- Meet regularly with your supervisor, mentor and thesis advisory committee to report on progress; comply with the Research Progress Tracking Policy of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
- Identify and address problems early. Inform the Mentor and/or Graduate Program Director in a timely fashion, of any serious difficulties including illness, trouble with course work or other program milestones, and problems with supervision. Supervisory issues could include mismatch of interests, major professional academic disagreements, interpersonal conflicts, or potential conflict of interest situations. If a change of supervisor is warranted, the Program will work with the student to find a new supervisor.

Perform Academically

- Collaborate with your supervisor to select the members of your thesis advisory committee.
- Prepare a research plan and timetable in consultation with your supervisor as a basis for the program of study, including any proposed fieldwork.
- Work diligently towards your program milestones and meet them. Be aware that continuing in the Program requires satisfactory performance in course work and research. The failure policy of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies requires that a student withdraw from the University upon a second failing grade, including supplemental exams, in any course(s) required for the Program; a second unsatisfactory research progress report is also grounds for dismissal.
- Give serious consideration and timely response to comments and advice from your supervisor and/or members of your thesis advisory committee.
- Apply to all appropriate sources of funding.



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Conduct Research in a Responsible Manner

- Uphold the academic integrity of the University. Understand what constitutes plagiarism, misconduct and cheating.
- Be aware of emergency procedures in your workplace (in case of fire, etc.). Obtain specific training and certification related to occupational health and safety, as required for your workplace and to undertake the proposed research. Maintain a workplace that is safe, tidy and healthy.
- Comply with all policies on research ethics and procedures governing use of human or animal subjects.
- Follow good laboratory practices and research etiquette. Respect the work and equipment of others, and show tolerance and respect for others sharing the same facilities. Discuss potential large costs or expenses when planning the research and prior to purchase. Be aware of laboratory/office operational rules and requirements. Maintain good records of each stage of the research; ensure that records and associated experimental samples are appropriately stored and that they remain properly archived with the laboratory. Understand that experimental records and materials are the property of the laboratory, although you have a right to retain copies of these records related to your thesis research.
- Discuss with your supervisor, very early on, any expectations and policies concerning authorship of publications, and issues surrounding copyright and ownership of intellectual property. Note, your thesis research must be publishable in the public domain, although you may request withholding of your thesis for a period of up to one year.

Take Advantage of Opportunities for Professional Development

- Develop your professional skills (including presentation skills, teaching, writing reports and grant applications, preparation of your curriculum vitae, interviewing techniques, and management skills including time management) by attending workshops offered through Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Teaching and Learning Services, your Faculty and your Graduate Program.
- Attend seminars and colloquia.

General Responsibilities of the Supervisor(s)

Supervising graduate students is an important and integral part of a professor's workload and academic duty. Each professor is expected to participate in activities to improve teaching, supervisory and research skills throughout his/her career. Within the context of the role as supervisor, a professor's primary task is to guide and inspire his or her students to reach their scholarly/scientific potential. In order to maintain the quality learning environment outlined below, it is advised that supervisors not take on more than four new students per academic year.

Supervisors are expected to:

Follow Rules and Regulations

- Be aware of and conform to University's and the Program's requirements and procedures.
- Monitor the student's progress in achieving the milestones of his/her degree program. Participate in the University's mandatory progress tracking procedures, including documented Advisory Committee meetings at least once per year, to ensure that supervision and research objectives as well as a realistic timetable for meeting objectives are clear, in writing and commonly understood by both student and supervisor. Any deficiencies should be documented early and remedial action identified in consultation with the student and the Advisory Committee. Understand that dismissal of a student from the Program for lack of performance in research can be requested (to the Graduate Program Director) only after two unsatisfactory research progress reports to the Advisory Committee.
- Understand that Professors must meet qualifications and standards of performance in carrying out supervisory responsibilities.



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Maintain Accessibility and Communication

- Maintain open communication with the student on all issues, including expectations and supervisory practices. Be available for regular consultation with the student and the student's thesis advisory committee, where applicable.
- Be sensitive to other program requirements, including course work, in your expectation of the student's time management. Keep in mind that passing grades (B- or better) are required for students to maintain their good standing in the Program. Reasonable time must be available for students to attend classes, study and prepare assignments.
- Examine thoroughly all written material relevant to the thesis/research project submitted by the student and provide constructive suggestions, orally and/or in writing, for improving the work, when necessary.
- Together with the student, outline an appropriate timetable for the provision of work for review and for feedback, depending on deadlines and the nature and length of the document. In general, it would be appropriate to provide written or oral comments to the student within two to four weeks of receipt of the submitted material according to the nature of the document, but it is recognized that on occasion, a longer response time may be needed because of other commitments of the supervisor. The students and supervisor should bear in mind that relying exclusively on oral comments or summaries of discussions can be problematic in the event of a conflict.
- Inform the program administrators (i.e. Graduate Program Director, and Mentor), in a timely fashion, of any serious difficulties which may arise in supervision. These might include mismatch of interests, major professional academic disagreements, interpersonal conflicts, or potential conflict of interest situations. If a change of supervisor is warranted, the Program will assist the student in finding a new supervisor.
- Inform the student of any prolonged absences, including sabbatical leaves, and make satisfactory alternative supervisory arrangements as required.
- Be on the alert for and acknowledge any personal difficulties of the student and refer him/her to the appropriate University student services for support.

Provide and Convey Research Information

- Provide guidance, instruction, and encouragement regarding the student's research activities and professional development. Guide the student in the selection and planning of an appropriate research topic.
- Ensure that the student has information on relevant theories and the methodological and technical skills necessary for the research. Ensure that the student has access to intellectual resources and research opportunities.
- Discuss with the student, very early on, the University's policies governing copyright and intellectual property. Discuss *a priori* any specific expectations concerning authorship of publications, and issues surrounding ownership of intellectual property and disclosure (this may include patents/licenses).

Contribute to the Student's overall Professional Development

- Encourage the student to disseminate his/her research results through publications and conference presentations; to participate in departmental/university seminars and colloquia, and to attend workshops on professional skill development.
- Assist the student with applications for funding and with his/her next career step. Provide letters of reference and general advice on career development.
- Inform the student clearly and in a timely manner when academic performance is not meeting expectations. Work with the student to identify problems and find solutions, including bringing problems forward for discussion with the advisory committee.



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Provide an Appropriate Research Environment

- Advise the student on the standards for quality and style to which theses and papers for publication must conform and the rules and disciplinary convention of authorship.
- Ensure that the student is informed of the best practices for the responsible conduct of research, including respect for academic integrity. Ensure the student is informed of general emergency and safety measures in the workplace and at the University (e.g. emergency procedures and numbers), and obtains training and certification in laboratory safety, research with human subjects, animal handling, and safety in handling radioactive and hazardous materials, as relevant.
- Maintain a professional relationship with the student. The University does not permit a professor to supervise any individual with whom he or she has a personal relationship that may constitute a conflict of interest. Should such an occasion arise, the professor must resign as supervisor. The Program, in such instances, will assist the student in finding another supervisor.
- Avoid conflicts of interest in proprietary research. Declare any business relationship with the student or research being conducted by the student. A professor must not supervise a student who is employed in a company in which the professor has an interest. Research conducted by the student for his/her thesis must be publishable in the public domain.
- Ensure to the best of your ability appropriate funding to cover the operating costs incurred by the student to carry out his/her thesis research and to provide a stipend according to the Program's policies.