

McGill

McGill University Graduate Program in Experimental Surgery Letter of Understanding for Graduate Education

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.

General Responsibilities of the Student:

1. 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 email. 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, meeting your program's requirements, thesis submission and, if necessary, withdrawal.

2. Maintain Accessibility and Communication

- Keep in touch with your supervisor and program administrators. Provide your supervisor and program administrators with your permanent and current contact information and advise the supervisor and department well in advance of any intended absences.
- Agree in advance expectations as to how much time should be spent performing research when not attending required courses and whether full time research is expected over the summer semester, whether internships or other employment are permitted, what vacations are permitted etc.
- 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 the program milestones (such as medical and family-related issues), expectations, and supervisory practices.
- Meet regularly with your supervisor and Research Advisory Committee (RAC) to report on progress; comply with the Research Progress Tracking Policy of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.
- Identify and address problems early.
- Be aware of the guidelines for conflict resolution. Inform the Graduate Program Coordinator 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 in supervisor is warranted, the Program will work to find the student a new supervisor.

3. Perform Academically

- Collaborate with your supervisor to select the members of your RAC.
- 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 students withdraw from the University upon second failing grade, including supplemental exams, in any course(s) required for the Program; second unsatisfactory research progress reports is also grounds for dismissal.
- Give serious consideration and timely response to comments and advice from your supervisor and/or members of the RAC.
- If receiving departmental funds students are required to apply for at least two studentships per year in order to receive subsequent installments.

4. 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 expense when planning the research and prior to purchase. Be aware of the laboratory/office operational rules and requirements. Maintain good records of each stage of research; ensure that records and associated experimental samples are appropriately stored and that they remain properly archived in 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.**
- 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.

¹ Adapted from a template provided by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies April 2013

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Letter of Understanding for Graduate Education

5. Take Advantage of Opportunities for Professional Development

- Develop professional skills (including presentation skills, 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 and your Faculty and Graduate Program
- Attend seminars and colloquia. Attendance at Experimental Surgery Research Seminars is mandatory. Failure to attend at least 70% will result in withdrawal of any departmental support towards fees.

General responsibilities of the Supervisor(s):

Supervising graduate students is an important and integral part of a professor/researcher's workload and academic duty. Each professor/researcher is expected to participate in activities to improve teaching, supervisory and research skills throughout his/her career. Within the context of the role of supervisor, a professor/researcher's primary task is to guide and inspire their 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 five new students per academic year.

Supervisors are expected to:

1. Follow rules and Regulations

- Be aware of the University's and the Program's requirements and procedures.
- Monitor the student's progress in achieving the milestones of their degree program. Participate in the University's mandatory progress tracking procedures, including documented RAC meetings at least once a year, to ensure that supervision and research objectives as well as realistic timetable for meeting objectives are clear, in writing and commonly understood by both the student and the supervisor. Any deficiencies should be documented early and remedial action identified in consultation with the student's RAC. Understand that dismissal of a student from the Program for lack of performance in research can be requested (to the Program Coordinator) only after two unsatisfactory research progress reports to the RAC.
- Understand that the professor/researcher must meet the qualifications and standards of performance in carrying out supervisory responsibilities. The Program Director, in consultation with the Graduate Program Executive Committee determines and regularly reviews supervisory privileges of each supervisor in the Graduate Program according to experience, performance, availability of resources and number of students supervised. Limitations on supervisory privileges may be imposed on supervisors who demonstrate a pattern of problems in their relationship with graduate students. These limitations may include requiring a co-supervisor, limiting the number of students (or their program level), requiring actions to improve supervisory skills, or suspending privileges.

2. 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 RAC, 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.
- Be explicit as to whether full time research includes the summer (May-August) period, what vacation is permitted within full time research, what fulltime research means in terms of hours per week keeping in mind the previous point, whether physical presence is required.
- 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 and appropriate timetable for the provision of work for review and for feedback, depending on the 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 event of conflict.
- Inform the Program administrators (Coordinator or Director) in a timely fashion, of any serious difficulties that may arise in supervision. These include mismatch of interests, major professional academic disagreements, interpersonal conflicts, or potential conflict of interest situations. If a change in 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 alert for and acknowledge any personal difficulties of the student and refer them to the appropriate University student services for support.

3. 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).

McGill

McGill University Graduate Program in Experimental Surgery
Letter of Understanding for Graduate Education

4. Contribute to the Student's overall Professional Development

- Encourage the student to disseminate their research results through publications and conference presentations; to participate in the departmental/university seminars and colloquia, and to attend workshops on the professional skill development.
- Assist the student with applications for funding and with their 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 RAC.

5. 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 handling radioactive and hazardous materials, as relevant.
- Maintain a professional relationship with the student. The University does not permit a professor/researcher to supervise any individual with whom they have a personal relationship that may constitute a conflict of interest. Should such an occasion arise, the professor/researcher must resign as supervisor. The Program, in such instances, will assist the student in finding a new supervisor.
- Avoid conflicts of interest in proprietary research. Declare any business relationship with the student or research being conducted by the student. A professor /researcher must not supervise a student who is employed in a company in which the professor has an interest. Research conducted by the student for their thesis must be publishable in the public domain.
- Ensure to the best of your ability appropriate funding to cover operating costs incurred by the student to carry out their thesis research and to provide a stipend according to the Program's policies.

McGill University Expectations for Graduate Supervision

Supervising graduate students and postdocs at McGill University is a critical part of academic duties for faculty, as indicated in section 4.1 of the [Regulations Relating to the Employment of Tenure Track and Tenured Academic Staff](#), henceforth referred to as “the Regulations”.

In order to supervise graduate students and postdocs, faculty must complete an [orientation](#).

Supervisors are accountable to the Chair or leader of their academic unit, who is responsible for the allocation of academic duties (section 4.3 of the Regulations). To ensure all graduate students have the opportunity to succeed in obtaining their degree, the University expects all supervisors to meet the university-wide standards delineated below.

Creating a respectful, inclusive, and professional research environment while also being present, providing regular feedback, recognizing limits, and knowing relevant policies helps faculty better support supervisees and prevent potential misunderstandings down the road.

Supervisors have a responsibility to:

1) **Build and maintain a respectful, inclusive, professional research environment for their supervisees.**

- a) McGill University expects supervisors to maintain a **research environment free from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination.**

Policy Resources:

- [Policy on Harassment and Discrimination](#)
- [Policy against Sexual Violence](#)

- b) If a supervisor observes behaviour that might constitute sexual violence, harassment, or discrimination, **they must consult the [Office for Mediation and Reporting](#) or the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) to determine how to proceed.**

- Faculty should not assume that problems between supervisees in a lab setting will resolve on their own. Faculty and staff have a shared responsibility to ensure supervisees can learn in environments where they are respected and free from pejorative or

offensive acts and comments. Trained professionals in the OMR and Office of the Dean of Students are available to support faculty and staff as well as students.

- c) Supervisors, as representatives of McGill University acting in an official capacity, **have a responsibility to uphold students' rights**, as explained in [Charter of Students' Rights, Article 3:](#)
- “Every student has a right to the safeguard of [their] dignity and a right to be protected by the University against vexatious conduct displayed by a representative of the University acting in an official capacity”.
 - Supervisors have a duty to accommodate on the grounds of disability and religious belief. In some cases, there might also be a duty to accommodate on the basis of dependent care responsibilities. If you have any uncertainty about what constitutes a reasonable accommodation in a given situation you may contact the Office of the Dean of Students (in all cases) or Student Accessibility & Achievement (in situations involving students with disabilities)

Policy Resources:

- [Policy Concerning the Rights of Students with Disabilities](#)
 - [Policy on Holy Days](#)
- d) Supervisors' words carry weight for supervisees. Offhand comments spoken in moments of frustration can leave supervisees doubting whether they can trust a supervisor to assess work fairly and equitably support supervisees' research and wellbeing. It is important for supervisors to keep the power differential in mind when speaking with supervisees and refrain from mocking, insulting, or undermining language.
- e) **Supervisors, as members of the University, have the right to work in a respectful and professional research environment.** [The Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures](#) holds that no student shall in a university context:
- “Knowingly create a condition that unnecessarily endangers or threatens or undermines the health, safety, well-being, or dignity of another person or persons, threatens to cause humiliation, or threatens the damage or destruction of property”

Resources:

- **Office of the Dean of Students:** Supervisors are encouraged to talk to the Dean of Students' office when a student or supervisee [exhibits worrisome behaviour](#), including dangerous, threatening, disruptive, or uncharacteristic behaviour. See the [Red File](#) for guidance.
- f) **Supervisors and supervisees must avoid conflicts of interest**, and if one should arise, speak to a department chair or director to implement measures to properly address the conflict of interest. For supervisors, this means ensuring that supervisees are equitably treated (i.e., avoid steps or measures that might be perceived as partiality, favoritism, or bias) and that relationships with supervisees are professional and centred on academic wellness.
- g) Following major conflicts, the best resolution may be to dissolve the supervisory relationship and have the graduate student continue under the supervision of another faculty member. It is critical for faculty to speak to both the Graduate Program Director and the Department Chair when considering whether this presents the best solution for all parties. When approached with a request for a transfer, faculty are expected to collaborate to ensure as smooth a transition as possible, clarifying what will happen to ongoing research, lab access, etc.
- 2) **Be present for and accountable to supervisees by maintaining clear communication channels.**
- a) Supervisors should meet regularly with supervisees, honouring the schedules agreed to in Letters of Understanding.
- b) Supervisors and supervisees should keep shared written records when it comes to important decisions about research projects, funding, authorship, graduation timelines, etc.
- Annual Progress reports provide a framework to give feedback on a student's progress in writing and objectives for the following year in writing and represent a critical opportunity to indicate to students if their work is unsatisfactory.
- c) Supervisors must plan to ensure that graduate supervisees have appropriate supervision during prolonged absences (e.g., sabbatical leaves).

- Supervisors who are not planning to maintain regular communication with supervised students during a sabbatical or other leave should ensure supervisees have an appropriate interim supervisor (e.g., a committee member) who will stay in regular communication with the supervisee and ensure they progress.

3) Provide supervisees with regular, timely feedback that clearly indicates how to meet their program requirements for graduation.

- Uphold the commitments made in Letters of Understanding regarding how long it will take to return student work with feedback. Providing regular updates for students on when to expect feedback is also helpful for ensuring accountability and on-time degree completion.
- Clarify expectations ahead of major milestones (e.g., proposals, qualifying examinations, thesis submission, oral defences). **Supervisees should understand how they will be assessed, what is required to pass major milestones**, and the departmental standards for thesis research and other evaluated graduate work.
 - Feedback on submitted work should be clear, substantial, and provide specific, actionable recommendations for improvement. Evaluations of student work must be made principally on the basis of the demonstrated quality of the student's research, and not comparisons with other students or supervisor opinions of the student's readiness to graduate or ability to succeed in a specific subsequent profession.
 - Supervisors must not prevent students from seeking to graduate if they have completed all the degree requirements and their work meets departmental standards.

4) Respect their limits in supporting supervisee wellbeing.

- Supervisors are often among the first to notice when a graduate student or postdoc is unwell. **Supervisors should offer a supportive ear while respecting their limits when it comes to addressing student mental health.** The [Student Wellness Hub](#) connects students with help from trained clinicians.

Resource:

- [Tips for talking to a student in difficulty](#)

- Supervisors and supervisees alike benefit from flexibility and understanding** when it comes to balancing work responsibilities and personal wellbeing.
 - Supervisors should encourage supervisees to maintain reasonable working hours and clarify expectations that supervisees will take time to rest, recharge, and connect with friends and family.
 - Supervisors and supervisees should communicate their availability limits in Letters of Understanding (e.g., unavailable to meet after 3pm, will respond to emails within 48 hours, etc.). Supervisees should respect these limits and make use of available supports to maintain their wellbeing (e.g., Local Wellness Advisors, the Student Wellness Hub, etc.).
- Supervisors must respect their supervisee's autonomy when it comes decisions that impact the supervisee's future.** Supervisees should be able to freely choose to pursue a particular career path, take advantage of professional development opportunities, start a family, take a leave of absence, etc., without fear that their supervisor will withdraw support.

Policy Resources:

- Parental Leave: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/policies-and-guidelines/parental-leave>
- Leave of Absence and Vacation Policy: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/registration/progress/leave-vacation>

5) Know policies relevant to graduate studies well enough to advise supervisees. If unsure, ask for clarification.

Resources:

- [Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#)
- [Secretariat](#)
- A Graduate Program Director or Department Chair

McGill

McGill University Graduate Program in Experimental Surgery
Letter of Agreement For Graduate Education

Signing of this Letter of Understanding Attests to:

- 1. Compliance with University Regulations and Guidelines Governing Graduate Students and Supervisors:** Programs, Courses and University Regulations can be found via <https://www.mcgill.ca/study>; Official University Policies, Procedures and Guidelines (including harassment policy): documented on the website of the University Secretariat; McGill University Expectations for Graduate Supervision are included above; Unit policies and procedures: It is the responsibility of 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 ethical certifications and training will be obtained and appropriate safety protocols are followed. <https://www.mcgill.ca/study>
- 3. Commitment to regular performance review and completion of progress tracking reports :** In compliance with the policies of the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (see Graduate Research Progress Tracking <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/research-tracking>) and the Graduate Program of Experimental Surgery, all students are required to meet a minimum of once a year with their Supervisor(s) in order to ensure positive progression of the thesis.
- 4. Compliance with the policies of the Graduate Program:** Compliance of the Experimental Surgery Program in regards to the funding, academic requirements and milestones. <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/>
- 5. Financial Commitment:** In compliance with the Experimental Surgery funding policy, Researchers must guarantee that each student under his/her supervision receive a minimum living allowance stipend of **\$20,000 per year for MSc or \$22,000 per year for PhD**, and have fees, registration and insurance covered in full either by supervisor alone or with departmental contribution through payment from research funds or combination of internal/external awards. An agreement between the student and supervisor in which full-time research activities will occur for less than 12 months or a year in which studies are complete in less than a full year, may result in a prorated reduction in the annual stipend. Payment of the minimum stipend cannot be terminated without demonstrating a just cause, reasonable notice and informing the student's Research Advisory Committee.

(A) AMOUNT OF ANNUAL STIPEND: minimum payment of \$20,000 for MSc or \$22,000 for PhD

to be paid to (specify the student): _____

Number of months of graduate research (funding may be prorated accordingly):

4 (1 semester) 8 (2 semester) 12 (2 semesters and summer)

Source (specify):

1. External Award: \$ _____
2. Internal Award: \$ _____
3. Research Grant: \$ _____
4. Other: \$ _____

ANNUAL AMOUNT OF FEES _____

If fees paid partially or in full from source other than supervisor's accounts, (self-funding is not permitted), specify the source and duration, (supporting documents should be supplied).

Student Type	MSc QC	MSc Cdn	MSc Intl	PhD QC/Cdn	PhD Intl
Supervisor Contribution	100%	55%	56%	70%	18.2%

(B) Amount paid by supervisor _____

Source (specify):

1. External Award: \$ _____
2. Internal Award: \$ _____
3. Research Grant: \$ _____
4. Other: \$ _____

TOTAL PAID BY SUPERVISOR (A+B) _____

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 the research performance or course work:

Expectations Regarding the Supervisor's Research Environment: Specify:

- Operational expectations, including working hours, frequency of the student- supervisor meeting, as well as the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) Meetings, group meetings , reports, record keeping, contribution to general duties, assistance from and to other personnel/students:

Role and Responsibilities of Co-Supervisor: Specify

- Expected attendance at seminars, conferences, etc, aside from official requirements of the Graduate Program:

- Policies on authorship (within the norms of the discipline and McGill's Policy on Research Ethics):

- Policies on review or written work (extent of supervisor's involvement with student's presentations, thesis preparation, time frame for return of comments, etc):

General/Other:

Signatures:

** I am aware of and understand the content of this document including the appended program milestones and general responsibilities of the graduate student and supervisors as defined by the Graduate Program, and the University defined by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.*

Student (Print name): _____ Signature: _____ Date _____

Supervisor (Print name): _____ Signature: _____ Date _____

Co-Supervisor (Print name): _____ Signature: _____ Date _____

Graduate Program Director(Print): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please note that the student is responsible for paying their own fees by the deadlines that are provided. These tuition fees are available at: <https://www.mcgill.ca/student-accounts/tuition-charges/fallwinter-term-tuition-and-fees/graduate-fees>

It is recommended that a signed copy is retained by the student, supervisor and Experimental Surgery Graduate Program. It is the student's responsibility to upload a copy to their MyProgress record.