

Revised recommendations on supervision
from Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS)
for the Council of GPS (CGPS)
September 2013

1. Background

In December 2012 and January 2013, following significant consultation with faculty (including MAUT), staff, and graduate students, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) together with the Post-Graduate Students' Society (PGSS) distributed a 41-question confidential survey and invited responses from all thesis students and supervisors at McGill. Of the 1,545 professors in supervisory relationships who received this survey, 424 responded (27%). A parallel survey (with similar questions) went to 4,930 graduate student supervisees, and 1,647 students responded (33%). From the results of these surveys, GPS formulated several recommendations, which we revised based on feedback at Council on 16 September 2013.

Following the analysis of the surveys, GPS also formed a Working Group on Supervision to consider this topic in the context of workload and quality. We also wanted to raise awareness about supervision and to address the results of the 2010 and 2013 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Surveys (CGPSS), which show McGill to be slightly below the very good average of the U15 universities in the area of supervision. The first meeting of the working group on supervision (18 June 2013) involved a discussion leading to the drafting of recommendations that were revised at a second meeting (15 August 2013). We present these recommendations for approval. (They have not yet been discussed, as of 20 Sept. 2013, with the Council).

2. Recommendations from the 2012-2013 Supervisory Surveys

- That mandatory progress tracking be made more efficient through simpler GPS webforms but also
 - by ensuring that it is an occasion for the student to meet with at least one additional professor supporting his/her progress (i.e., a supervisory committee) together with the supervisor(s); and
 - by satisfying the need for individual written agreements on expectations for the supervisory relationship (including, for example, workload, research goals, planned absences, frequency of meetings, timelines for return of work, support, etc.)
- That all professors who have not engaged in graduate supervision at McGill, or who have not supervised for 5 years, be required to participate in a "Supervisory Orientation" before assuming a supervisory role (in partial fulfillment of the Ombudsperson's 2010-2011 recommendations); the orientation, sponsored by GPS and Teaching and Learning Services, will be developed with the Faculties to recognize disciplinary diversity.

3. Recommendations from the Working Group on Supervision

- That, although not all professors supervise throughout their careers, supervision be understood to be an academic duty of professors at McGill
- That supervision be evaluated by the academic units, both quantitatively and qualitatively, for example:
 - i. Quantitative measures: meeting deadlines (as indicated in progress tracking reports, for example), times to completion, frequency of committee meetings, successful fellowship applications, graduations, etc.
 - ii. Qualitative measures: the chair's estimation, statements from others on a supervisory committee, a self-assessment, an external examiner's report on the quality of a dissertation written by a supervisor's student, etc.
- That academic units offer incentives to promote effective supervision (e.g., merit, course release, awards)